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EDINBURGH

Seeing the Unseen (2 Kings 6: 8-23)

The great composer Beethoven suffered acute hearing loss in his late twenties, progressing to complete deafness over the next 10 years. During this later period of his life, he wrote what many regard as his finest works. Amazingly he could “hear” music, without the use of his ears. As humans we are so much more than our 5 senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch. As Jesus said the sinful heart’s greatest danger is that, *“Though seeing they do not see, though hearing they do not understand.”* (Matt 13: 27)

This passage in **2 Kings 6** is all about **seeing**: An aggressive invading foreign king (The king of Aram) keeps getting his plans thwarted because someone (Elisha) keeps **seeing** his plans and tipping off Israel. That king then goes after Elisha and surrounds him with any army to try to capture him. Elisha’s servant is worried so Elisha prays for the servant’s **eyes** to see the hosts of heavens armies that were protecting them. He then prays for the invading army to be temporarily **blinded**, he leads them to the heart of Samaria and then prays for them to **see** again. They open their eyes and see their impending doom, but instead receive mercy and a feast! They **see** a God who deals with them in grace and get so transformed that the conflict completely stops.

The story teaches us about a God who sees everything and who also shows his love and mercy through opening our eyes to see as well.

A God Who Sees

Verse 12 doesn’t hold back: *“but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king the very words you speak in your bedroom”*. Where does Elisha get his information from?

Is he under the bed?! As a prophet he hears it from God. God hears the very words spoken in the king's bedroom.

The God we worship is a God who hears, who sees, who knows, who is aware. You may look at your life and wonder sometimes, is God seeing this?

When Israel was oppressed in Egypt, "The Lord said – indeed I have **seen** the misery of my people in Egypt. I have **heard** them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am **concerned** about their suffering." (*Exodus 3:7*)

A lady named Hannah, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, finds herself childless in a world where that seemed to be the only thing that mattered. She's distraught, her mascara's running, her hair's a mess, she struggles to even whisper her prayers. But God answers her prayer for a child. And she names him Samuel meaning "God hears." Every time a prayer is answered remind yourself of this truth: God hears.

Jesus shows us God's watchful, hearing heart. In a bustling crowd he feels a woman touching him for healing (*Luke 8:45*). He's aware, he knows, he hears, he sees.

In John 11, Jesus is at Lazarus tomb, about to raise him from death. He prays, "*Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me.*" Just as Jesus knew the Father heard him, we can too, because as Christians we pray all our prayers "in Christ".

Jesus knew that about God. Do you?

What a comfort it should bring us to know that God hears. He always hears even if his answer is not immediate. God only gives three answers to prayer:

1. Yes!
2. Not yet.
3. I have something better in mind.

It should also cause sobering reflection! He also hears those private conversations you have in your bedroom. He even knows your words before you speak them (*Psalms 139:4*) and your thoughts before you think them. What we think in secret He knows and can reveal if he chooses.

God opening our eyes to see is an act of mercy.

A God Who Helps His People See (in 3 ways)

1. Eyes to see beyond yourself to the needs of others

God gives the gift of the Prophet to His people. They are sometimes called “seers” because they see things God shows them. God gave Elisha in this passage supernatural knowledge of the King of Aram’s whereabouts and plans. Whilst Old and New Testament prophets are different they both reflect Jesus, the ultimate Prophet. (*Hebrews 1:1*)

In the New Testament era, all Christians can prophesy (*1 Cor 14:31, Acts 2:18*), but some are especially gifted in this area (*Rom 12:6*)

Some observations of Elisha which are also true for prophetic people today:

- It’s a lonely job being a prophet. Because not everyone sees what you see. That can be frustrating. It can produce a danger of withdrawing of finding fellowship exclusively with other “prophet types”. The correct response for Elisha is to use God’s gift to serve a king without that gift.
- You need to use your gift constructively. Use your gift to “*strengthen, encourage and comfort*” (*1 Cor 14:3*) Elisha saw what was good for Israel and the King and he encouraged the king to take different routes, comforted that God wanted to save his life. He strengthened Israel. Bring your gift, submit it to godly leadership in the church, and share what you see.
- The enemy will try to isolate you and prevent your gift operating. Elisha got surrounded. Deep relationship with God is vital to weather such experiences.

2. Eyes to see beyond fear to trust in God

“When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?’ the servant asked.” (verse 15-16)

This servant finds himself in an “oh no” situation. An army with horses and chariots has surrounded them - you might call him a Realist! But he was actually ignorant of greater reality.

"Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all round Elisha." (verse 16-17)

We don't know if Elisha could see them but he knew of horses and fiery chariots all around.

Eyes of faith understand the nearness of God's presence. Eyes of faith trust even when they don't see. In the Gospels, Jesus' disciple Thomas missed church one week and missed Jesus resurrected appearance! In response to Thomas' subsequent doubt, Jesus said *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"*(John 20:29)

3. Eyes to see beyond judgment to a God of grace

"After they entered the city, Elisha said, 'Lord, open the eyes of these men so that they can see.' Then the Lord opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, 'Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?'

'Do not kill them,' he answered. 'Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.' So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory." (verse 20-22)

Elisha leads them into the heart of Samaria. Their **eyes** are opened. The horror! They're trapped! The King says "Justice! Kill them!" But Elisha stands in the way and says, "let's show grace." Grace is always more powerful than justice.

God wants to open your eyes today to his grace. Many people have a view of God that he's fault-finding. The truth is so much harder to hear: our sins are much bigger than we could ever imagine. But wonderfully his grace is bigger still and much more powerful than we could ever imagine. He forgives, He reconciles, He heals, He loves. Don't settle for a view of God as just the Judge. He's a Father who loves you. Let God open your eyes to his grace.

Questions

- God sees.
We tend to default to a view that God isn't very interested in the details of our lives. Do you agree? How does this story show us he is? Are there other examples in Scripture you can think of?
- God answers in his own way and time: "Yes", "Not yet", or "I have something better in mind".
This story would have been much simpler if God had sorted the enemy king out at the start! What does this story teach us about God's methods in answering our prayers?
- The prophetic.
The enemy in the story tried to silence the prophetic voice of Elisha. How does the enemy do that in the church at large today? How can we ensure we encourage and nurture the gift of prophecy?
- Seeing the unseen.
Elisha lived not just by what his five senses informed him, but by what God showed him. How as Christians can we see the world, our lives, and our battles with correct vision? How does God show us things?
- Seeing grace.
The enemy ultimately received grace in the story. How does knowing God's grace give us confidence in our relationship with him?



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