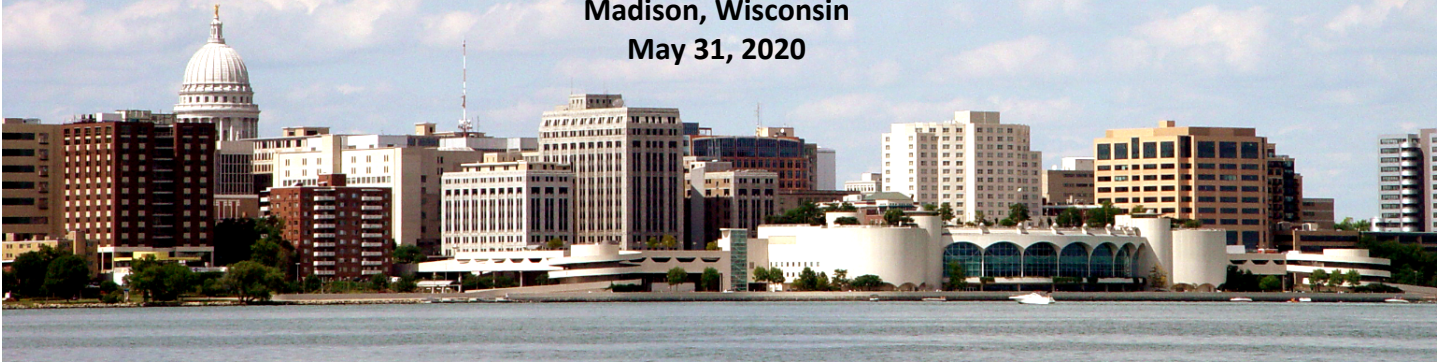


# Open Our Eyes, Lord!

2 KINGS 6:8-23

Baxter T. Exum (#1548)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
May 31, 2020



**\*\*COVID-19 LIVESTREAM\*\***

It is good to be with you again this morning! As our tradition has been over the past two months, we are starting this morning with a summary of God's plan of salvation, and the picture up here comes from the South Anchorage Church of Christ in Anchorage, Alaska. We worshiped with this group almost two years ago, we had a man from this congregation come here to Madison for some specialized medical treatment at UW Hospital a few years ago, and my wife went to high school in Anchorage, I follow an excellent blog by the preacher's wife up there, so we keep up with this congregation on Facebook, and we got this notice that Sam was baptized last Sunday. So, we are thankful for the good news from Anchorage.

In summary, our response to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is that we believe the message, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions, if you are interested in studying together, we hope you will get in touch using the contact information on the screen. If you are joining us on the phone this morning, we hope you will give us a call send a text to 608-224-0274. And speaking of the phone situation, we've heard from two of you that the phone was especially choppy this past Wednesday. We appreciate the feedback. We've made some adjustments, but we need to hear from you again if you have any issues, and even if it goes well. It is hard for us to know how it's going on your end, so it helps if we can hear from you.

And as a reminder, we are together in this format today for a Bible lesson and to pray together. The rest of worship is up to all of us individually. So, we hope you can sing, and give, and partake of the Lord's Supper on your own or with your family. We have made resources available for giving online, for getting songs online, and we've also sent out several recipes for making unleavened bread. We can worship on our own, but we are looking forward to being back together.

And speaking of being back together, we are one week away! We could have done this sooner, but we have waited to try to learn more from how it's going elsewhere and also to be able to communicate more clearly to all of you. We are limiting our numbers to a maximum of 25 people at each of two services. If you are sick, if you have a fever or a cough, stay home. If you are at risk due to age or medical concern (like diabetes, asthma, high

blood pressure, heart or lung issues), we are asking you to also stay home for now as we see how this goes. We will continue streaming the service online and on the phone. But, we do plan on meeting in person next Sunday morning at 9 o'clock and at 10:30. To make sure we only have 25, we need everybody to basically RSVP. We need you to let us know which service you are attending, and you can do that on our website, you can do it through the link in our bulletin and in the email I sent out last night, you can also do it by having somebody with internet access sign up on your behalf, and you can also save a spot by giving me a call. I think this is limited to accepting only people with an email address in our church directory. But if you don't have an email address in our church directory, somebody who has one can reserve a spot for you. Give me or Kenna a call if you need any help with this.

Next week we will be spread out – not just every other pew, but every third pew – we only have three pews available on each side of the auditorium. The service will be short – a shorter Bible lesson and prayer, followed by the Lord's Supper (you can bring your own or pick up a disposable kit in the entryway on your way in), and we will close with one song, and then we will very quickly leave and do any long-distance socializing outside. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

This morning, on what will possibly be our last exclusively on-line service for now, I would invite you to turn with me to an interesting account from 2 Kings 6 in the Old Testament. It's a lesson about being able to see. Again, the passage is found in 2 Kings 6. I would invite you to be turning with me to 2 Kings 6, and as we study, hopefully all of us will find something that'll help us grow through this coming week.

In 2 Kings 6, we are in the mid-800's BC, and Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria (or Aram) is waging a kind of guerilla warfare against the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He launches a series of surprise attacks. However, whenever he attacks, Israel always seems to be prepared. Ben-Hadad thinks he has a mole, a traitor. In a sense, then, Ben Hadad is blind to what God is doing. What he doesn't know is that God is communicating those secret plans to Jehoram, king of Israel, through the prophet Elisha. And that's how this account starts. To put this in context, this comes right after the healing of Naaman, the Syrian army officer (in the previous chapter). Jehoram, by the way, is the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Let's look together at 2 Kings 6, but let's take it section by section, starting with verses 8-15, and let's notice...

I. ...that **BY ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCES, GOD'S PEOPLE ARE COMPLETELY OUTNUMBERED.**

2 Kings 6:8-15

***<sup>8</sup> Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp." <sup>9</sup> The man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." <sup>10</sup> The king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice. <sup>11</sup> Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" <sup>12</sup> One of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." <sup>13</sup> So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." <sup>14</sup> He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. <sup>15</sup> Now when the attendant of the man***

***of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"***

So, the king of Aram (or Syria) sends this ***"great army"*** to go get Elisha, and when Elisha's servant wakes up that morning, he goes outside and finds that he and Elisha are completely surrounded. Their city is completely encircled by an army with horses and chariots. By all outward appearances, this is it! And notice, the servant seems to panic, ***"Alas, my master! What shall we do?"*** In other words, based on what he could see with his eyes, there is no way out of this. He and Elisha are completely outnumbered.

I don't know whether any of you have ever gone outside in the morning to find your home surrounded by hordes of enemy soldiers with horses or chariots, but most of us have probably felt a bit overwhelmed at times. Maybe we are doing the best we can, but we find ourselves surrounded. We are living in an evil world, surrounded by sin, and hate, and pain, and violence, and disease, and death, and injustice. And maybe we have various sins or temptations pressing in on us personally – drug and alcohol addiction, the constant temptation to not be content with what we have, always wanting more. Or maybe we are surrounded by the consequences of sin – the devastating results of physical or sexual abuse, guilt over something we've done in the past. Any number of things. Sometimes life itself is overwhelming. By all outward appearances, we are outnumbered. By all outward appearances, sin seems to be winning.

As I was preparing for today's lesson, I found that my dad preached on this passage back in April 1984. At the end of the lesson I saw that he wrote the lesson on April 3, 1984, and he noted that there was snow falling outside. So, that was interesting! This snow thing runs in the family. But I want to read a few lines and see if it's still accurate. See if this doesn't sound familiar. Back in April 1984 he said, "We see the breakup of families today; we see that people are more interested in appearance than in substance. Political candidates today are more interested in making a good appearance on TV than in trying to reform the evils in the country." 36 years ago! Is it still true? Absolutely! From a purely human point of view, it doesn't look good.

And this is what Elisha's servant is seeing. He looks out in the morning, and he is terrified, ***"Oh no, my lord, what shall we do?"*** By all outward appearances, he and Elisha are completely outnumbered. And this leads us to what happens next...

## II. ...because in verses 16-17, we learn that THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM.

The servant is terrified, and we pick up with Elisha's reply (in verse 16),

***<sup>16</sup> So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." <sup>17</sup> Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.***

And so, we find that the servant's eyes are opened as he is allowed to see what cannot be seen. Elisha assures him that ***"those who are with us are more than those who are with them,"*** but the servant doesn't see this until his eyes are opened. He looks again, and he sees that the soldiers surrounding them are surrounded themselves by an unseen army – horses and chariots of fire. What a relief that must have been!

And what I find interesting here is that this unseen army really isn't what leads to the victory later on, but it does bring comfort to this young servant. And hopefully it brings comfort to us as well. There are times when we feel surrounded and overwhelmed, but we need to know that we are also surrounded by unseen armies. There is another world out there, a spiritual realm, that we cannot see. I think of working on a document in Microsoft Word. Looking at a page, we might see words on a white background, but isn't there a lot more to it than that? The font has a name and a size, there are differences in spacing and paragraphs and styles. All of that is defined behind the scenes, until we hit that little button that says "show/hide." And suddenly, the unseen formatting becomes visible. In a sense, this is what Elisha prays for. He wants his servant to see what cannot be seen.

In a way, this is what Joshua and Caleb were able to see when they spied out the Promised Land. By faith, they could see what the others could not. This is what David could see when he first saw Goliath. He could look beyond the giant, to God. And in the same way, whenever we are overwhelmed, our prayer is to see things from God's point of view. We're looking for God's promises, for God's solutions, for God's perspective. And we do this because of what King David wrote when he had to pretend to be insane to escape from Abimelek. As he was surrounded in a dangerous situation, David remembered (in Psalm 34:7), that, **"...the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."** By faith, David could see the unseen.

And when the unseen starts getting blurry, when the unseen is unclear, worship and study and prayer and fellowship help bring the unseen realm back into focus. That's why we really need to come together on the first day of every week. We remind each other that the things around us are not always as they seem. So, we have the reminder here in verses 16-17 that when life caves in on us, when we feel surrounded, there is a value in seeing the unseen, remembering that God is bigger and has better solutions than we could ever imagine.

### III. **And this leads us to the last paragraph, where we learn that SEEING THINGS FROM GOD'S POINT OF VIEW HAS A WAY OF CHANGING WHO WE ARE, AND OFTEN LEADS TO UNEXPECTED AND SURPRISING SOLUTIONS.**

Let's notice what happens next, in verses 18-23 – 2 Kings 6:18-23,

***<sup>18</sup> When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. <sup>19</sup> Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria. <sup>20</sup> When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. <sup>21</sup> Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" <sup>22</sup> He answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." <sup>23</sup> So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.***

We might have gone into this paragraph expecting a huge battle, but that is not exactly what happens! Instead, Elisha asks that these men be struck with **"blindness,"** and from what I understand, this is not the usual word for being blind, but it's a word referring to their vision being altered in some way. They were dazzled and

disoriented, like deer caught in the headlights. Elisha then offers to take them to the man they are looking for, and he takes them directly to the king of Israel. Their eyes are opened, and the king of Israel is pretty much begging for permission to kill these men. Elisha, though, has other plans. He seems to suggest that it is immoral to kill somebody in custody, so instead, Elisha suggests treating them well. They had come down to Israel to wreak havoc, to kill Elisha, but his response is to give them bread and water, to serve them a **“great feast.”** He then sends these men home, and we find at the end that they stop making those raids into Israel.

What do we learn from this? We learn here that love wins! Yes, there were times when God called for war in Old Testament times, but this is not one of those times. And as a result of this act of mercy, because of this act of grace, some meaningful change takes place. Eyes are opened on both sides, and love wins. As I think about what happens here, I’m wondering if we can’t learn from this that our conflict isn’t necessarily with other human beings all the time. Yes, it does look like it. But that’s looking at what is seen. The unseen realm reminds us that **“...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 6:12). But in this struggle, it’s so easy to either panic like Elisha’s servant or to immediately jump to revenge like King Jehoram. But there is another way – either be the ones who serve a great feast to those who’ve done us wrong, or be the ones who have a change of heart concerning immoral and abusive behavior. Either way, spiritual insight has a way of changing who we are. **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Luke 23:34). I’m thinking of what Paul would go on to write in Romans 12,

***<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ... <sup>17</sup> Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. <sup>19</sup> Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

### Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this passage, and as we think about everything we’re facing right now, let’s realize we can go in one of two directions. On one hand, we can be absolutely terrified like Elisha’s servant, as he wakes up and sees this huge enemy army. Or on the other hand, we can ask God to open our eyes so that we would see things from his point of view, ultimately allowing us to face this week with calm and with love.

As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning for being the almighty God who is always with us, even when we cannot see you. We pray that we might open our eyes and see what is happening around us through eyes of faith. We ask forgiveness for those times in the past when we have treated others with anything less than love. Going forward, we ask that we might look at every person we meet just as you see them. Help us to see souls. Help us to see each other as being made in your image. Open our eyes. Forgive those who sin against us.

We look around us and see a world in chaos. We see suffering, and evil, and sickness, and death. But we also see you. We see you in those who help others. We see you in our daily bread. We see you in our Christian family. Open our eyes to our role in this world. We pray for wisdom to be able to treat others just as we ourselves would like to be treated. We pray for opportunities to love our neighbors.

Thank you, Father, for allowing the situation to improve to the point that it has, allowing us to hopefully come back together one week from today.

We praise you and we thank you for all that you continue to do. We come to you in the name of your Son Jesus. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)