

II Kings 6: 15-23; Genesis 19:1-11; Lord, Open their Eyes! I. The Blind are Directed II. The Proposed Destruction III. The Surprising Offer

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who are your enemies and what do you desire for them? Who has not secretly delighted to see their enemies fall? For example, do we delight to read stories that highlight our president's foibles- or in stories that claim our vice president is the worst vice president ever? What about closer to home- do we enjoy it when those who were mean to us get what is coming to them? Well, today we are going to be surprised by the gracious nature of our God and the offer of peace to Israel's enemies. In reading about the continued conflict between Syria and Israel in our text, it would be like the conflict between the US and the USSR during the cold war. Or the hostility between England and Germany in the WWII. That is the kind of long, slow burning hostility that would be seen between Syria and Israel in our text. Years of oppression. But as we have often found in our study of Elijah and Elisha, we find the opposite of what we expect! The unexpected happens- there is a contrast and reversal that reveals the loving kindness of our God to those who could be labeled as undeserving! So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the mercy of God to Israel's enemy- the army of Syria. At issue is this; who really is our enemy and how are we to respond to their presence today?

### **I. The Blind are Directed**

In our first point we find those who see are made blind- and in their blindness they are led like sheep to the slaughter. To briefly review, last week we found Elisha and his servant in Dothan surrounded by a Syrian army. Elisha's servant cries out in fear because they are surrounded- there is no way to escape, but the LORD reveals the presence of His angelic host for the comfort of His servant. This army tried to catch Elisha by surprise with the hope of silencing this prophet, but there will be no surprise here! The LORD and His prophet are fully expecting this visit. Notice the contrast here- the various ways in which sight can be given and taken away. Elisha's servant is blind to the truth- so Elisha prays for him to be able to see in v. 17- open his eyes Elisha says, and the LORD reveals the presence of the angelic host. So

upon seeing, this servant of the LORD has his fears relived and he receives great comfort in this knowledge of the truth. The truth casts out fear! However, there is also this army that has surrounded the city of Dothan. And with this army, they will be struck with blindness in v. 18. Elisha prays again, please strike this army with blindness, and they become blind. And when they can finally see again, they will be terrified by what they see! The LORD has the power to give sight to the blind- but also take away sight from those who see! So this Syrian army is struck with blindness. Now this word for blindness is used only here in our passage and in Genesis 18. As we read, there was an angry mob at Lot's door and the angel of the LORD struck them all with blindness so that they groped around and could not find the door. The blindness of these men served to secure deliverance for righteous Lot. So like the Sodomites, this Syrian army is struck with blindness so that they cannot find their way into the city to capture Elisha. But remember this- the residents of Sodom were struck with blindness and they remained in Sodom- even after Lot and his family was led out by the angels. Why is this important? Well, these blind men remained in the city- remained in their blindness if you will- until the city itself was destroyed. Their blindness sealed their destruction as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire from above. So thus far, we have an expectation of the same thing! This group of soldiers in our passage are being led like sheep to the slaughter! Since they cannot find their way into the city, Elisha goes out and takes them by the hand. This is not where you are to go- come over here- follow me. So Elisha leads this whole army 10 miles to the South. In v. 19 we find that he leads them into the very heart of Israel- into the capital city of Samaria. Right into the middle of the city- past the city gates- right into the hands of King Jehoram. Israel's enemy is handed to them! So those who are blind to the truth can see the truth- by faith perceiving what cannot be observed. But it is also truth that those who claim to see can also be struck with blindness. Seeing they do not see. So upon being brought into the city of Samaria, Elisha prays again. Lord, Open their eyes. Now these men see the truth- they are finally struck by the reality and seriousness of this situation.

## II. The Proposed Destruction

Open the eyes of these men- and the now see! What did they see? Well, they saw their own impending death! They were locked in their enemy's city- surrounded by an Israelite army- with no hope escape! The tables have been turned- hoping to capture Elisha they are not captured! They have seen their own foolishness- how unwise they had been! To think that they could capture Elisha the prophet of the LORD- when the LORD knew and revealed their every steps. So as fear and dread filled their hearts- with the expectation of death- finally the King of Israel speaks! Shall I strike them down? Shall I kill them all- he says in v. 21. Shall I be like the fire of God- the sword of God's justice- as was seen in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah? Shall I consume this wicked army as the army of darkness was consumed by the fire of God in Rev. 20 which we read last week! I mean, that is a reasonable request, right? That is what we expect- the enemies of God will be destroyed and a complete victory handed to the Israelites! We can now take revenge upon our enemies- give them a taste of their own medicine! Strike them down! The fact is, this is often our own desire isn't it! When we see our enemies, we often say in our hearts, I hope someone does to them what they have done to me! In reading this proposed destruction we might be thinking- Yes! Finally, the enemies of Israel are going to get what they deserve! The enemies of the church are going to be consumed because of their rebellion! But that is not what we find, is it! We need to be careful and not rush to judgement- particularly in our view and treatment of fellow man. Take, for example, what Prov. 24: 17 says. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls. Let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and be displeased and He will turn away from His anger. Did you catch that, if you boast and gloat when your enemies fall, the LORD will become displeased with you! We need to be very careful that we are not secretly taking pleasure in the misery that other men suffer. Or that we find delight when fellow man is humiliated. Yes, the wicked will receive their just reward, but God's people do not take delight in their fall! As we found in our introduction, we need to be clear on who, exactly, is our enemy? Our sworn enemies are the devil, the

world and our own sinful flesh. These enemies are not the enemies we find in our text today. Rather, the enemy in our reading is not a spiritual force but a human force! Remember from last week, that there are two battles or two armies present. One spiritual and one physical. What then of this physical army- will they be destroyed because they represent the army of darkness? Are they only pawns in the Devil's scheme to wipe out Israel and thus destroy the seed of the woman? We remember this parallel truth- The wicked men of this world will be dealt with! Either by their destruction or by their conversion! Either they will be broken and shattered by the spear of the Son's justice, or they will be broken and humbled by the Sword of the Spirit. But it is not from our hand that this justice will be delivered! We need to leave room for the wrath or justice of God as Rom. 12 says. It is in this way that we can both pray for the destruction and removal of the wicked and pray for the conversion of the nations. But as we have seen, we are warned from delighting in their fall, but rather we are called to rejoice when the sinner repents! We must never be angry or sullen when a sinner repents and finds life as Luke 15 puts it. So we pray for the LORD to work out His will- either way. By humbling their hearts or by consuming them in His wrath. We leave room for the justice and the mercy of our God. So what then do we find in our passage? Justice or mercy?

### **III. The Surprising Offer**

Well, what we find is a surprising offer of grace! A marvelous manifestation of the mercy of our God is seen. Instead of death, we find life! Instead of the grave, a feast in v. 23. Although offering the sword, Elisha instructs Jehoram to offer them a meal. This Syrian army is not treated like an enemy but as a guest! Just as Jesus taught us to do in Mat. 5- love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Offer your enemy a cup of cold water and in this way fulfill both Prov. 25 and Rom. 12! You see, knowing God's presence and power frees us to be gracious and kind. Elisha could see that there were more with him than against him- this army posed no threat. The church is repeatedly called to overcome evil with good- to do good to all- as much as depends on you live at peace with all men- and

to love your neighbor and even your enemies. This applies to all areas of life as well. School, work and even the church- showing kindness to all and even enemies. We can do this because we know who has the power- and whose Kingdom really is coming. We can learn to be like our gracious King- who instead of death gives a banquet! And isn't that why Jesus came, after all? He did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world as John 3 says. He came so that we might have life through His blood and in His name! This life- these blessings are given to us- while we were yet enemies, He saved us and laid down His life for us! So you see, we have a wonderful privilege to follow after Jesus in serving others- in showing love to our enemies- because that is what Jesus did for us! And you know what- those who receive this kindness are often changed by this kindness. Those who receive love may come as enemies, but they leave as friends. As Jesus wins over His enemies by showing and giving His love to them, we find that in our passage, the army of Syria is treated like a guest and they leave at peace. As v. 23 ends, and the Syrians did not come into the land to raid anymore. These men had seen the truth- that they deserved death but had been given life and blessing. Having been spared for the sword, their lives are changed and they no longer live as they once did. It's as if Jesus blinded them so that He could open their eyes to the truth- to see their pressing need- to be humbled and treated as guests by their arch rival. Now changed, and sent home. This is all part of the great reversal that takes place- where enemies are made friends, deserved death is replaced with a banquet and blessings, and wars cease as peace arrives. And even the recipients of this feast is instructive. These are Gentile sinners being saved from the sword! These are Syrians who are led like sheep- not led to the slaughter- but led beside still waters and to green pastures. Elisha prepares a table before them, even in the presence of their enemies! As Naaman and now this Syrian army experienced, the God of Israel holds blessings for the nations as well! All nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham!

To conclude, once again our passage reminds us that we must know who our enemy is. As Eph. 6 says, our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our fellow man is a fellow sinner in need of the grace and

mercy found in Jesus Christ! Ez. 33 says that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they would repent and live. Or as II Peter 3 puts it, in God's patience he is willing that all should repent. We need to be clear in our mind- as Elisha's servant was taught. There are 2 kinds of armies present in this passage. One spiritual and one physical. The spiritual enemies are our sworn enemies whom we resist, hate and seek to put to death. But these physical armies are not the ones we hate- nor do we fear those who can only attack the body. Rather we seek to show kindness to our fellow man as we seek to reflect the kindness and love God has show us! We are those enemies- those hostile ones that Jesus died for and made into His friends. We were once spiritually blind, but now we see! Instead of the sword, He prepares a banquet before us! Jesus Christ reveals the mercy of God to the enemy army of Syria- He has revealed that mercy to us as well! So may we rejoice in the kindness we have received, and be generous and kind to those enemies that God has placed on our path!