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Chariots of Fire

Kings and Chronicles

Series: In the Days of Elijah

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The Village Church

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I. **Introduction**

- A. My favorite Elisha story – **2 Kings 6.8ff**
- B. Context
 - 1. Previously seen Elisha ministering to the faithful
 - a. Shunammite woman
 - (1) Giving her a son
 - (2) Raising her son from the dead
 - b. Sons of the prophets
 - (1) Feeding them – healing stew, multiplying food
 - (2) Recovering axe head
 - c. Widow of sons of the prophets
 - (1) Multiplication of oil
 - 2. Also seen him ministering evangelistically to an enemy of Israel
 - a. Healed Naaman the Aramean
 - 3. Now we see him in an unusual role – ministering to the king of Israel
 - a. That’s right – Israel, the wicked kingdom
 - (1) The one with practically no bright spot for a king
 - 4. He’s now a member of Israeli CIA (Mossad)
 - a. Prophets we’ve been studying (especially Elijah and Elisha) have almost never been friends of the government of Israel
 - (1) (Be careful when you are a friend of Israel – better make sure Israel is faithful to the covenant)
 - b. In this case, Elisha was helping the king of Israel
 - (1) Which king we’re not told
 - (2) Might have been Jehoash – 2 Kings 13 indicates they had a relationship
- C. Lessons
 - 1. Christians are to be the best possible citizens of any nation
 - a. Should not be trying to tear down the government
 - 2. **Romans 13:1–7** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.
 - b. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

- c. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,
 - d. 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.
 - e. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.
 - f. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.
 - g. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.
3. Governments are all about self-interest
 - a. Easy for Jehoash, or any king, to like Elisha when Elisha is helping him
 - b. But as soon as Elisha calls the king to account for his ungodly behavior, don't be surprised when the government becomes your enemy
 4. Ex: Christians ought to pay taxes
 - a. Nation voted; representative democracy
 - b. Representatives have determined which things ought to be taxed
 - (1) Some of those taxes we don't agree with
 - (2) We still ought to pay them
 - (3) Good citizens
 5. Ex: Gay marriage
 - a. Gay marriage is now legalized in the US
 - (1) As it is in some other countries – Netherlands and Canada
 - b. Let's say you have a family business – retreat and conference center in a beautiful part of WV
 - (1) One of the things you do is host weddings
 - c. Let's say, as a matter of conscience, that you will not host the wedding of a gay couple
 - d. You pay taxes, obey the laws, even drive the speed limit!
 - (1) But the first gay couple you refuse, see what side the government takes when that couple files an anti-discrimination law suit against you
 6. So we ought to be the best citizens
 - a. But don't be surprised when you end up on the other side of the government on moral issues
 - b. You may become their enemy
- D. Elisha is a prophet
1. Sometimes he calls the king of Israel to account
 - a. He's hated for it
 2. Sometimes he helps the king

- a. He's loved for it
- E. Such is the state of godly people in any nation

II. Hated Prophet

A. 2 Kings 6:8–10 (ESV) —

1. 8 Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, “At such and such a place shall be my camp.”
2. 9 But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, “Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there.”
3. 10 And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice.

B. Elisha, the man of God, warning the king of Israel

1. And the king heeding his advice
 - a. Not just once, but a number of times
 - b. Israel was better off for it
2. King of Israel at his best
 - a. Hearing the word of the prophet, responding to it
 - (1) When his enemy, the Armeans, were threatening
3. One would wish that the king of Israel would listen to the prophets when they warn of a greater enemy – sin!
 - a. Here the kings of Israel were at their worst
 - (1) Heard the prophets
 - (a) Didn't heed the warnings
 - (b) Even eliminated the prophets
 - b. One of the mistakes we all make is to see all kinds of disturbing circumstances as clear and present dangers
 - (1) But tend never to see sin as an even greater danger, not just to our physical well being, but to something even more precious – our souls
 - c. Particularly true to OT Israel
 - (1) Distressing circumstances were often a direct result of sin, covenant unfaithfulness
 - (2) God would give Israel over to their physical enemies as a result of disobedience to their covenant obligations
 - (3) One of their failures was to be more fearful of the effect (distressing circumstances) than of the cause (sin)
 - d. We ought to learn something from this
 - (1) Ought to be more fearful of sin (the ultimate cause of distress in the world) than of our distressing circumstances (the effects of sin – conflicts, violence, poverty, war, etc.)

C. 2 Kings 6:11–14 (ESV) —

1. 11 And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, “Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel?”

2. 12 And one of his servants said, “None, 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.”
 3. 13 And he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him.” It was told him, “Behold, he is in Dothan.”
 4. 14 So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city.
- D. Even though Elisha was loved by one king (Israel), he’s hated by another (Aramean)
1. Picture of what happens when a Christian functions as a Christian in the world
 - a. The world hates the Christian
 - b. The Christian doesn’t even have to be antagonistic toward the world; the world still hates the Christian
 2. In this case, Elisha isn’t attacking the Arameans; merely warning Israel about the danger they pose
 3. Unfortunately, Christians are often surprised at that hatred
 - a. We haven’t really done anything to the world
 - (1) But the world still hates us
 4. **John 15:18–19** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
 - b. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
 5. King of Aram realizes his plan is not working; wonders if there’s been a leak
 - a. Goes looking for a spy!
 6. Servants know what is actually happening on the ground
 - a. As servants often do!
 - b. They tell the king that Israel doesn’t need a spy
 - (1) They have Elisha – Israel’s secret weapon
 - (2) And he can tell the king of Israel what he says in his own bedroom!
 - c. And no electronic sweep will reveal the bug
 7. Elisha, after all, is a prophet
 - a. He speaks what God tells him
 - b. Since God knows everything, Elisha has access to intelligence that no mere mortal can imagine
 8. All of which, of course, makes the king of Aram very angry
 - a. King determines to get him – sends a great army
 9. Enemies of God are often really foolish (even stupid)
 - a. Reminds me of my father, the policeman
 - (1) Crooks are stupid
 - (2) Usually they get caught

- b. Here's what Aram knows (or should have known)
 - (1) Heard about Elijah
 - (a) Killed 400 prophets of Baal with fire
 - (b) Killed two battalions of soldiers with fire
 - (2) Naaman – knows of the extraordinary power of Elisha
 - (a) Elisha having received double portion of spirit of Elijah
- c. And they still want to tangle with that guy?
- 10. They discover that Elisha is in Dothan
 - a. They don't send a mere battalion, but an entire army to deal with one guy who happens to be a man of God

III. Spiritual Prophet

A. **2 Kings 6:15** (ESV) —

- 1. 15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"
- 2. Another servant, not Gehazi
 - a. Gehazi had been dispatched with his leprosy
 - b. Gehazi, of course, had seen Elisha operate and might have had a different response (or not!)
- 3. This servant goes out for his morning walk
 - a. Whoa! We're in trouble!
- 4. Typical of our response in the face of dire circumstances
 - a. Overwhelming!
 - b. Provokes great fear

B. **2 Kings 6:16** (ESV) —

- 1. 16 He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."
- 2. Servant – "Are you kidding? There are hundreds out there, all out to get us, and I'm doing the best I can to count, and I'm up to two!"
- 3. Elisha – "Fear not"
 - a. Reminds us of Jesus
 - b. "Fear not" is Jesus' most frequent command in the NT
 - c. If God is on our side, it doesn't matter what our circumstances are, we don't need to fear!
- 4. **Romans 8:31–39** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - b. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - c. 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

- d. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
 - e. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
 - f. 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”
 - g. 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
 - h. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
 - i. 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
5. Elisha – we have more than they do
- a. Quite perplexing to the servant, whose relying on his own human faculties and his ability to do arithmetic
 - b. Elisha has a different set of eyes for such things
 - (1) Spiritual eyes; eyes of faith
 - c. Recognizes that the battle is actually engaged in a wholly different level than a merely earthly plane
 - d. **Ephesians 6:12** (ESV) —
 - (1) 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- C. **2 Kings 6:17** (ESV) —
- 1. 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
 - 2. Now the servant saw the reality of the spiritual realm
 - a. Glimpse that we probably never see
 - b. But we can see with the eye of faith
 - (1) With the knowledge that our tests, conflicts, adverse circumstances are not about the stuff we can see, but about the stuff we can’t see – the spiritual realm
 - 3. **2 Corinthians 5:7** (ESV) — 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.
 - 4. Even though you may never see the chariots of fire
 - a. You must know that they’re there!
 - b. And that nothing can happen to you outside of the care of a loving a sovereign God
 - 5. Context for Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5 – doesn’t know whether he’ll live or die
 - a. Reasons – to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord

- b. It will be all right either way
- 6. Because the chariots are there

IV. Praying Prophet

- A. **2 Kings 6:18** (ESV) —
 - 1. 18 And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, “Please strike this people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.
 - 2. Elisha prays blindness for the people
 - a. God hears his prayer
 - (1) Just as He heard the prayers of Elijah
 - 3. We would do well to have prayer as our first response to adverse circumstances
 - a. Instead we often wring our hands, wallow in self-pity and fear
 - (1) Worse – complain to others about our circumstances
 - 4. But Elisha prays for deliverance
 - a. His prayer is answered

V. Merciful Prophet

- A. Here the prophet does something really unexpected
 - 1. Shows mercy to those who are his enemies
- B. **2 Kings 6:19–20** (ESV) —
 - 1. 19 And Elisha said to them, “This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.” And he led them to Samaria.
 - 2. 20 As soon as they entered 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.
- C. I envision that when they were struck with blindness, they probably left all their weapons at Dothan
 - 1. Became like docile pets, willing to be led anywhere by someone who claimed to know the way
 - 2. When their eyes were opened, they found themselves in Samaria
 - a. Enemy territory
 - b. Where are their weapons?
 - (1) “Oh no, we left them back (let’s see, where were we?) at Dothan”
 - (2) “We’re doomed!”
- D. **2 Kings 6:21** (ESV) —
 - 1. 21 As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down?”
 - 2. King wants to kill them
 - a. As kings were apt to do in those days
 - b. But recognizes that they have been delivered there by Elisha
 - (1) Asks Elisha what he should do with them

- E. **2 Kings 6:22–23** (ESV) —
1. 22 He answered, “You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom 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.”
 2. 23 So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.
- F. Here we see the extraordinary mercy of Elisha
1. These were people who were out to get him – even kill him
 - a. Yet he doesn’t return evil for evil
 2. Does what Jesus teaches us to do
 3. **Matthew 5:43–48** (ESV) —
 - a. 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’
 - b. 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
 - c. 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
 - d. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
 - e. 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
 - f. 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
 4. Inclined to think that he had other concerns
 - a. These are just soldiers carrying out orders
 - (1) They’re not the real bad guys
 - b. He wants them to know there is a prophet in Israel and a God in heaven who takes care of His people
 5. So he feeds them
 - a. A great feast as it turns out!
 - b. And sends them away
 6. Never to return again
 - a. At least not to mess with Elisha
 - (1) (There would be another siege of Samaria some time after this – but Elisha would not be the object of this military operation)

VI. **Lessons**

- A. For all of Elisha’s uniqueness, differences from us
1. We can still learn
 - a. **We’ll be hated**
 - b. **Always view our circumstances with spiritual eyes**

- c. Make prayer our first response
- d. Have mercy on those who oppose us