

When coalition forces started Operation Desert Storm in 1991 they were anything but an invisible force. 750,000 troops facing off against approximately 300,000 Iraqi soldiers is not invisible. Those superior numbers combined with superior air power and weapons to help minimize the ground campaign. They did sometimes use invisible technologies though. Stealth bombers, smart bombs with laser guidance systems, and infrared night bombing technology all were essentially invisible to the enemy.

Big forces with plenty of numbers and weapons can't be missed. Many times the protections and forces in place to serve the larger community are much more hidden and invisible. Plain clothes officers mix into a crowd, unmarked cars patrol, video cameras, sensors, and any other number of technologies are employed. These invisible forces keep society safe and make any response quicker should the need arise.

The two individuals in the first lesson are in a tough spot. What got them there and what would get them out is for our consideration. Examining this account will give us a confidence and assurance of why we don't need to be afraid. It will also remind us of the Lord's promises.

In any conflict it's important to understand what brought the two forces against each other. Elisha and his servant were surrounded by the enemy. But why? Elisha was a prophet in Israel and for Israel. Israel as a nation was surrounded by nations completely opposed to their way of life and their religion. Since Israel wasn't a strong nation they were frequently invaded, occupied, and sometimes conquered.

One such nation was Aram, immediately north of Israel. The king of Aram started making plans for war with Israel. Imagine the commanders of our military forces setting up strategy, troop movements, and supply lines and the enemy sitting right over their shoulder in the planning room. That would be a failing campaign. That's exactly what happened with the king of Aram. He planned his troop movements and where he thought Israel was weak. And everything he said the king of Israel heard, not because he was in the planning room with the king, but because Elisha was prophet. God communicated directly with his people through Elisha. So every time the king of Aram made a move, Elisha told the king of Israel exactly what was coming. But Elisha wasn't in the strategy sessions of the king of Aram. God was. God knew what was happening, told Elisha who told the king of Israel, and the king of Israel used the information to avoid military defeat and capture.

Once the king of Aram realized his plans were being foiled by Elisha he wanted him captured. He marched his huge military force toward the small city Elisha lived in. All of Aram's horses and chariots came riding out in a very visible show of force. The city where Elisha lived was surrounded and it looked very bad for God's prophet.

If you woke up, walked to your front room and opened the blinds, only to see the entire police force on your lawn with lights on and guns out you would be shocked. That kind of visible show of force would definitely get you out. Elisha's servant felt similar. The very unfriendly Aramean army was waiting to capture his master. **"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?"** Things didn't look good and the servant was afraid. Even though he was with the prophet of the Lord he still panicked and didn't know where to turn for relief or comfort or peace.

This world throws up a visible show of force against us from all angles. Cancer comes storming into our lives. Without warning it can take everything from us in short periods of time. It can change everything. We say, what shall we do? Things might not look good at work. People pressure us, sometimes purposefully, to do things we know we shouldn't. We face the attack of others to do business a certain way that may not be proper. We unintentionally get involved in relationships that put the squeeze on us from all sides. We cave to pressure. It's like we're outnumbered and on the edge of failure. And we have failed. We trust what we see and what we see is politically, economically, and spiritually the world with overwhelming numbers against us. Immense pressure from very visible forces against us. Relief, comfort, peace, these are far off for us.

The servant for Elisha may have forgotten, but Elisha didn't. Didn't forget where to go when everything seemed against them. **"Don't be afraid, the prophet answered."** No reason to fear. Worry was unnecessary. It was the confident words of someone who knew already where the reason for no fear was coming from. **"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** Elisha and his servant weren't just two standing alone against hundreds or thousands of chariots and horses. They weren't outnumbered. God was on their side. God was with them. God had been with them the entire time. He brought his invisible forces. That's all Elisha needed to know. He didn't have anything to fear, nothing to worry about. Nothing could stand against him.

See what Elisha saw. I mean this huge army with horses and chariots ready to take him prisoner, capture him, and probably kill him. Yet surrounded by this army was no reason to worry. Not if he saw the larger army standing around them. Chariots, horses, not of earthly kind, but heavenly. Chariots and horses of fire, the army of God, on the mountain surrounding the enemy surrounding him. It was a sight so beautiful Elisha wanted the same comfort for his servant. Just a glimpse of the invisible forces sent by God ready to protect him. **"Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."** In an instant the servant was aware of the invisible protection that made Elisha so confident and calm.

Think how the servant's perspective changed. Before God had only operated under promises. He had no idea, no concept, of the great battle happening just behind the real life scenes of this world. Once his eyes were opened by God, he knew God's strength first hand. It was overwhelming. Powerful, complete. God's invisible forces were a strength no earthly army could stand up against. Not with horses, or chariots, not with all the soldiers in the world. The invisible forces of God were more, stronger, better. Yet what's curious, God didn't give that great and vast army of horses and chariots of fire the order to charge. He didn't use them at all. The Lord allowed the servant to see and he caused the Aramean army to not see. The Lord blinded them and saved his people.

Are you in need of a perspective change? Are the attacks, pressure, and opposition from the world too daunting. Do you give in to fear? Worry? I do at times. Elisha reminds you to not forget. The numbers, strength, and momentum might be against us, but **"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** Those with you may not be visible, fighting a fight you can see. But that doesn't mean they're not there. God is with you. God is on your side. That's his promise to you like it was to Elisha and the servant. God with his invisible forces and his unseen shows of force and power have been with you your entire life. Remembering the God who is on your side means nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. Nothing can stand against you.

Instead of thinking about what you aren't seeing, what God keeps invisible, think about what you have seen. God's power is invisible but that doesn't mean he hasn't acted or isn't still acting for you. His invisible strength is made visible in other ways. Not one enemy of God can stand up against the waters of baptism. Every fear or worry of yours is washed away in that powerful water linked with God's own son. Jesus is the power of God and in a personal way, by faith, you're rescued through visible water connected to him. Rescued to know and feel peace even in a world of overwhelming attacks and trouble. Everything invisible of Jesus is yours. His glory, his power, his life through resurrection are all yours through baptism. No earthly army can achieve that peace, give that kind of calm and comfort. When temptations attack and seem to win, the invisible power of the sacrament we partake in today rescues. God feeds you in a miraculous way with his unseen but very real forgiveness. Forgiveness earned by Christ. Invisible power in bread and wine to take your sins away. Basic elements assuring you of eternal life. Power motivating you to new life, calming fears, and overcoming worries. Power not from swords, bombs, or soldiers, but from the precious blood of Christ Jesus.

We'll likely never see the invisible forces of God on this side of heaven. We won't see what the servant of Elisha saw surrounding them. Horses and chariots of fire, a symbol of God's own power. What we will see, what we have seen, what God's Word makes clear, is the love, caring, and compassion of God. That he doesn't want you to miss. Open your eyes to the Lord's invisible forces seen in the love and forgiveness of Christ, God's power at work today in you being made visible.