

I got to see what very few have. So, I guess it's fitting I speak to you on this Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. My name is, well...debatable. In the section of Scripture you heard from 2 Kings chapter 6, I'm simply called "**the servant of the man of God**" – in other words, Elisha's servant. Some conclude I must have been Gehazi, since he is identified in the previous chapter as Elisha's servant. However, Elisha sent him away and he contracted leprosy, after sinfully profiting from one of Elisha's many miracles. But while biblical scholars will debate whether I was Gehazi or someone else, there is no debate that I saw amazing things – things that defy the laws of nature. For instance, just before the words your pastor read earlier, Scripture records the time Elisha and his prophets-in-training were building a meeting place along the Jordan River, when an "**iron axhead fell into the water**" (2 Kings 6:5). It was a simple accident. But the ax was borrowed. The man using it would owe a great debt – tools like this were not cheap. So Elisha cut a stick, threw it in the water, and the iron axhead floated to the surface, easy to retrieve. Assuming God's laws of nature haven't changed these past 2800 years, an axhead doesn't float without divine intervention. Miracles like this made it clear Elisha was a "**man of God**" – a prophet who could be trusted to speak God's true Word.

As I said a moment ago, I was what very few have – an army of mighty angels. And believe me, they were nothing like the cute, cuddly, marshmallowy creatures you see in greeting cards or cartoons. They are very real, and the ones I saw looked like "**horses and chariots of fire.**" Allow me to set the scene a bit. Things at this time were difficult in Israel. The "**king of Aram was at war with Israel,**" it says. Aram's king isn't mentioned here by name, but from other parts of Scripture¹, it's clear this was Ben-Hadad II. Essentially, he was leading raiding parties into Israel – mainly boarder skirmishes. All-out war would come later. But already it was clear the Arameans could penetrate our borders with ease. The King of Aram, however, became frustrated that wherever he set up camp, Israel seemed to be one step ahead. It's like his phone was tapped. The King of Aram thought there might be a double agent among his officials. "**Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?**" he demanded. But this wasn't the work of traitor or spy. As one of his officials told him, "**Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.**" Now, my master didn't actually have transcripts from the king of Aram's bedroom. The Aramean official was using hyperbole to make a point. The fact is, God was revealing to Elisha the intentions of Aram's king – a reminder that nothing escapes the all-seeing God. There is nothing you can keep secret from God – including the sins you keep secret from everyone else. God sees everything. But as unsettling as this may be, take comfort knowing that nothing in your life slips God's attention. He sees your every need – including the need for forgiveness – and has the power to help and rescue as he knows best. He certainly did for Elisha and me.

When the king of Aram realized Elisha had foreknowledge of his plans, he sent a search party to find the pesky prophet. They learned that Elisha and I were staying in Dothan – a small town roughly 20 miles west of the Jordan River. If you know the story of Joseph, Dothan is where his jealous brothers threw him into a cistern, and eventually sold him into slavery. Well, when I woke up one morning and looked outside, I thought something similar was about to happen to my master and me. Aramean forces had slipped in under the cover of darkness and surrounded us. And not just a few. It was "**an army with horses and chariots.**" When I saw this vast army surrounding the city, I panicked. "**Oh no, my lord!**" I cried out to Elisha. "**What shall we do?**" I saw only an enemy force I could never withstand...until...God opened my eyes to see another, far more powerful army.

"**Don't be afraid,**" Elisha said to me. "**Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**" Then he prayed to the Lord, saying, "**Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.**" Suddenly, I saw an army of God's protecting angels – "**Horses and chariots of fire,**" more than could be counted. It was nothing like I had ever seen or imagined. It was now clear who was in charge – not the Aramean army. God's angels were there at his command, to protect and serve us in our need. Now I knew I had nothing to fear, just as Elisha said. And if you read the rest of the biblical record, you discover how God not only brought about victory for Israel. He did so in a manner that led to respite in this war between Israel and Aram.

When the perils of life confront you, **what army do you see?** In those moments before surgery, as you drift off in an anesthetically induced dreamland, your mind swimming in all the risks and what-ifs, **what army do you see?** When your child is wheeled away on that padded metal cart with a look of both resignation and fear, and you are helpless to help, **what army do you see?** In that cold and sterile room where an army of medical staff bustles about, there is another army present. You don't see them. But I did. And God promises that these powerful angel allies will make sure his will is done. Even more, they will see to it that the devil and his legions cannot have their way with you or your loved one.

Yes, **what army do you see,** when your pet phobia takes hold of your heart? From tree-flattening storms to cliffside trails to unseen viruses. When your daring child leaves the railed lookout and climbs to the rocky edge, **what army do you see?** When your immunodeficient parent or spouse is in a public place with legions of infection-carrying germs swirling about, **what army do you see?** When your child or grandchild head off to college, and you know the kinds of shenanigans, temptations, and sin you got into at their age, **what army do you see?** The same army of angelic allies God used to protect you in those moments of bad judgment are still around for today and tomorrow's generations. God's promise you sang earlier from Psalms 91 still stands: "**He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone**" (Psalm 91:11,12).

¹ 2 Kings 6:24; 2 Kings 8:7-15; 1 Kings 20:1-12

You know, as I awoke that morning surrounded by an enemy army with their horses and chariots, you awake each day similarly surrounded by a very real demonic army. With wave after wave of lies and temptations, they not only seek to drive you into sin, but also off the cliff into the despair of being separated from your Savior. Remember what Paul the prophet wrote thousands of years later. Your “struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). For this reason, God equips you with the armor you’ll need in this fight for your everlasting soul – “the belt of truth...the breastplate of righteousness...the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit,” God’s Word. And along with personal armor, know also that powerful allies are with you in the fight. When Satan takes you to the dark places of your sin and guilt; when the accuser sinks his claws of shame into your conscience; when the “powers of this dark world” surround you with moral decay, *what army do you see?* While the influences of Satan’s army are certainly evident, don’t forget who is also there – the army of allies God opened my eyes to see – “horses and chariots of fire.” God’s angels don’t just run alongside your car or ambulance. They surround your soul. They protect you in ways that allow God’s forgiveness and grace to envelop the battlefield. They sustain you in times of temptation, just as they did Jesus in the wilderness, and in Gethsemane when his soul was in anguish. When death draws near your loved one, *what army do you see?* In the closing breaths of your own earthly life, *what army will you see?* The demons of a flawed life will seek to fill the room. But God’s “horses and chariots of fire” will outnumber them, allowing the cross of your Savior to shine through the darkness, and beckon you home.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about something you might not often think about. Like I said, very few people in history have seen angels with their own eyes. But when you read the Bible, God will open your eyes as he did mine, so that with faith-filled sight, you can know what I saw is true for you, as well. God’s angel army surrounds you with his own protection and care, today and always.

Amen.