

BELPRES CHURCH

The Sixth Sense

2 Kings 6:8-23

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Thank you for being here. Those of you who are in this room right now and those of you who are joining us online, thank you for being here. Happy New Year to all of you. One of the main messages of basically almost every Disney movie ever made is "You can do it." It may be hard, but you can do it. If you are Moana, you can save your people. If you're a lion cub, you can defeat your uncle who killed your father and rip off the plot of Hamlet at the same time. You can do it. That's a basic Disney message. You can do it, because after all, everybody knows that when you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are, anything your heart desires will come to you. Really? Anything? Anything? Really? Because as much as my heart desires it, so far no NFL team has invited me to be their quarterback.

I'm beginning to think it's not going to happen. And now you have that song stuck in your head, don't you? Just think of the "It's a small world" song to counteract it. One of the messages our culture gives us over and over again, media, movies, music, "You are enough, you can do it." And some of that is good. Confidence is a good thing, but we take it too far. We can take it too far sometimes. And it's also true that culture tells us "You're not enough," or "You're too much this, you're not enough that." You've heard it said "You're not enough," You've heard it said "You are enough," but Jesus says He is enough, and nobody else. And there are a couple of problems with the "I'm enough" sort of messages or "I'm not enough" messages.

First, it is the idolatry of self, right? "Me, I am enough, I am enough. Me, me, me." The idolatry of self and self-sufficiency. "I don't need anybody. I don't need anything." But second, it says that this world is all that we see. There is no spiritual world, so I have to be enough, because I'm all there is and there's nothing spiritual world that's going to help me with anything. And we Christians even buy into this, and I'll get to that in a minute.

For a few more weeks, we are continuing a sermon series from the fall called You've Heard it Said, contrasting what our culture says to us with what the Bible says. And just to start the year, let me just do a brief digression to review where we are headed as a church. We are in the second year of a five-year plan, and one of the things in that plan is equipping our whole congregation to be fully engaged disciples.

And a disciple doesn't just go to church, though going to church is a good thing. It's a good thing. But a disciple is also someone who is becoming like Jesus, which is harder, but it also is better. It leads to a deeper life, and it leads to more courage, and it leads to more hope, and it leads to more joy, because of the power of Jesus in our lives. And we've talked about there are six marks of a disciple up there on that screen. And all last year, every sermon series we did was tied to one of those six marks. Most recently, because disciples obeyed Jesus as Lord through prayer and scripture, this summer we talked about prayer by looking at the Psalms, and this fall we talked about how scripture's worldview differs from our culture's worldview. And we're going to continue that series for just a few more weeks.

And then we're going to do a sermon series called Restored about how in the middle of the stresses of our lives, and in all that's going on in our country, and all that's going on in our world, how do we be restored mentally, emotionally, and especially spiritually? And part of that is becoming a disciple, because disciples experience the power of Jesus in their lives. Disciples see miracles. Disciples have better relationships. Through disciples, Jesus changes the world and heals the world, and we get to be part of it which makes our lives more meaningful and have more purpose. And we are not experiencing the power of Jesus the way we could because of our self-sufficiency. Because of our self-sufficiency, we're not seeing Jesus' power in our lives, in our problems, in our world. We aren't becoming like Jesus because we're not tapping into the spiritual power that is all around us. Disciples tap into the spiritual power of Jesus. That's what disciples do.

And the Bible repeatedly talks about what it calls powers and principalities and spiritual forces. When Jesus is arrested, He says, do you think I cannot call on my father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels? Spiritual power all around us. And part of the reason the American church is in free fall, utterly collapsing, is we've been relying on ourselves for what we can do, and not so much on God. We've been relying on our excellence in music and programs and preaching and all of that's good stuff. It's just not enough. And Bell Press, we fall into this temptation. We are a highly accomplished group of people. There's a lot of skills in this church. That's awesome, but if we only stick to what we can accomplish in our own strength, we will only get what we can accomplish in our own strength.

Every organization has a mission statement, and then every organization has shadow missions that you can tell that they have by how they behave and how they act. And as I've said before, by how we act, by how we behave, one of our shadow missions is "Bell

Press: we can do it, God can help." But some things, like becoming like Jesus, or a broken relationship, or a difficult school, career, health problems, some things are above our pay grade. We are not Moana, we are not the Lion King. We can't do it on our own. In fact, even things we think we can do without spiritual power, we mess those things up even. Some of you have heard me talk about how when my oldest daughter was five and my son was three, I took them to see the movie Polar Express, which was supposed to be this great kids' movie, so I was going to get all these dad points for taking them to this movie.

But the CGI wasn't well-developed yet, and so the characters ended up instead of looking charming, they just looked creepy, and there was a ghost in it. It terrified my kids. They sat there with their mouths open just like, and then finally my three-year-old son said, "Daddy, you should not have taken me here. This is not a good movie for me to see." Even things we think we can do, we can screw those things up. We need Jesus. We can't do it, but Jesus can. Jesus can. There's a story in the Bible in Second Kings chapter six, where a country called Aram and Israel are at war, which obviously has resonance right now because of Israel and Gaza, and that is a big topic that deserves more than just a few minutes. So we're working on having a forum in the next few weeks where we can talk about how do we think about this and respond to this biblically, for those of you who have questions and concerns about that in a few weeks. So stay tuned for that.

But in this story in the Bible, a prophet named Elisha and his servant are trapped in a city surrounded by the Aramean army. And the text says, "When the servant got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh no, my Lord, what shall we do?' The servant asked. 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered, 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' 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." Spiritual power everywhere. "Elisha prayed to the Lord, 'Strike this army with blindness.' So He struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked." And then Elisha takes the entire army captive.

What this story shows is that we are spiritually blind, and because of that, we lack the power to become like Jesus, the power to face our problems and our fears with courage and hope and joy, the supernatural kind. Because just like Elisha's servant, we can't see the spiritual world that is all around us everywhere. And often we don't even want to see the spiritual world around us. A friend of mine who's a pastor in a Presbyterian church did a sermon series on miracles, and they had an outbreak of miracles, like they started having all of these miracles. Like one woman who had been almost completely deaf for decades, in the middle of a sermon one Sunday as the pastor was preaching, suddenly she could hear perfectly again. A miracle, especially since it happened during the sermon. Who would've thought preaching can do anything at all?

One person got miraculously healed from terminal cancer. You would think that church would've been super excited, wouldn't you? You'd be wrong. My friend got all these angry emails. "Stop talking about this stuff." "You're scaring people." "People are going to think we're religious freaks." They didn't want anything to do with it. See, for a lot of us who are post-enlightenment Westerners, talking about spiritual stuff makes us uncomfortable. And while the Enlightenment's focus on reason and rationality was good for a lot of things, it doesn't explain everything. And one of the reasons people in my friend's church were mad is all these miracles were happening and their enlightenment paradigms couldn't handle it, and that made them uncomfortable and they didn't like it. The other reason we aren't comfortable about the spiritual world is we can't control it. So we want to shrink being a Christian down to just a little bit of self-improvement and some religious stuff that comforts us, because we can control that. That's safe. But we cannot control the Holy Spirit.

My predecessor once gave me some great advice. He said, "When it comes to the Holy Spirit, you never want to be in a posture of control." The problem is that we like control, especially Presbyterians. We like to be in control, and so we are missing the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Being a disciple is bigger than just some self-help and self-improvement and religion. Being a disciple of Jesus is being ushered into a whole realm of reality we didn't know existed because we are limited to our five senses. It would be impossible to describe to a person who had been blind their whole life, it would be impossible to describe to them what red and green look like, because they couldn't see it. But that doesn't mean red and green don't exist. It just means the person lacks the sense of sight to see it. Becoming a Christian and being a disciple is like getting an extra sense to perceive the spiritual world around us.

I am sure Elisha's servant had all the right theology about God. I'm sure he knew all the right things. I'm sure he could answer all the Bible questions just the way he should, but he lacked spiritual sight. It's not about knowing the right things, it's about seeing the things that are that we can't yet see. To quote Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." One of our elders just got back from India and he said when he was there, he talked to over a dozen people who in some way or another had been miraculously healed from something. And he said it really challenged him. He's a post-enlightenment Westerner. He's an engineer. He's a Presbyterian engineer, for heaven's sake. Talk about a double whammy. But he said, "If I don't believe that these things are happening now, do I really believe that they happened back then?"

Now, they don't always happen. Miracles don't always happen, but sometimes they do. We've had miraculous healings in this church, and I know that raises the question, "Well, what about when the miracle doesn't happen?" And I have preached on that 575.3 times, give or take, but sometimes we talk so much about what happens when the miracle doesn't happen, that we neglect to talk about what happens when it does. So often we

live as functional atheists. We live as though we are functional atheists saying we believe in Jesus, but acting like He's just a metaphor or a nice idea. There is a spiritual world, and unless we tap into that, we aren't going to be disciples who are becoming like Jesus, and we will not experience His power. But when we gain spiritual sight, when we gain spiritual sight, we can do things that are bigger than we are, like become a disciple of Jesus and triumph over the problems and the fears that we face.

And we can do that when we get spiritual sight for two reasons. First, to be spiritually sighted means that we see things from God's perspective. We evaluate our lives, politics, problems, circumstances, relationships through God's perspective, not our culture's, which means we are going to handle sex, money, power, relationships, all those things we're going to handle differently. And we see that in this text. After Elisha prays that the Aramean army would be blind, he takes them to the king of Israel and then asks God to restore their sight, which God does. And then the king says... And then it says, "The King of Israel asked Elisha, 'Shall I kill them, my Father? Shall I kill them?'" He says it twice because he's really excited to kill them. Like, oh goody, I get to kill them. Yay. "'Do not kill them,' Elisha answered. Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow?"

Yes. Yes, that's exactly what everyone did back then. Yes, that's exactly what you did with foreign army people. Instead, "Elisha said, 'Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink.' So he prepared a great feast for them. And after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's authority." He feeds them, he gives them a feast and they stop attacking them. The king of Israel saw things through his culture's perspective. You kill foreign soldiers. That's what you do. Elisha saw things from God's perspective, so he handled power differently. He used power to bless and not to kill. And in the process he turned enemies into friends. He handled power the way Jesus handles power. See, we were enemies of Jesus. We were sinful. We had rebelled. We were guilty. And yet Jesus dies on the cross to pay the price for our sins so that we can be welcomed to his feast.

A man I know had reached a complete impasse in his marriage. He and his wife had been hurting each other for years, and they were pretty much decided on divorce. Well, one day they were sitting in church, which was the only thing left that they still did together was go to church, and they were sitting there in church thinking how badly the other person needed to hear the sermon. And occasionally doing one of these, like the ministry of the elbow. Do you ever do that? Are you doing that right now? Well, the message that morning was on Jesus' command to love our enemies and to pray for them. And all of a sudden, this man got a thought. "I know who my enemy is. It's my wife. She's the one I can't love. She's the one I can't forgive. I can't make myself love her. I can't even make myself like her, but I can pray for her. And if I'm a disciple of Jesus, He commands me to do that, so I'm going to pray for her."

So he started to pray for her. For more years than he could imagine, he'd been looking at a mountain of hurt and anger and resentment. And if you had asked him, "What's the one thing you can't do? Where does your self-sufficiency fail? What's the one thing above your pay grade where you aren't enough?" He would've said in a heartbeat, "My marriage." But when he prayed and focused on God, he started to see that God was bigger than that mountain of pain and resentment. And over the course of about a year, something began to shift in him, and then something began to shift in her, and something started to melt in both of them. And over time that mountain was thrown into the sea and they now have a great marriage. Books on marriage, marriage counseling, super helpful stuff, but nothing compares to the unseen spiritual power of God that is all around us. He started to see spiritually, which means he saw his marriage through God's perspective, not the culture's, not his own perspective that said, get mad, get even, get divorced.

He saw his marriage through God's perspective, and he called on the unseen, but very real power of the Holy Spirit and his marriage was healed, because there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. See things from God's perspective. And then second, we see the power that is at work within us and around us. It's what Elisha saw that his servant couldn't see. Those who are with us are greater than those who are with them. If we only rely on ourselves being enough, we will be limited to what we can do, not what God can do. As Dr. Tony Evans says, "If all you wear is earth's glasses, you'll only see earth's results." We need spiritual eyes so that we are not limited to earth's conclusions. So how do we do that? How do we tap into this spiritual power? Well, a couple of things to start. You have to start by admitting that you're spiritually blind. You're not self-sufficient. We can't do it. We aren't Moana. We aren't the Lion King. We are spiritually blind. You got to admit that first.

Second, realize spiritual sight is a gift from God, so ask for it. Third, do what God says to do, like my friend did with his marriage. He had to take a leap of faith to obey Jesus, to pray for someone he didn't want to pray for, and then he saw God's power. See, so often the way I approach it, the way we approach it is, "Okay, God, show me your power and I'll do what you tell me to do." And God's like, "No, do what I tell you to do and you'll see my power." Obedience releases the power of God. Obedience releases the power of God. And then finally, keep our eyes open for how God is at work, and then when you see it, maybe don't try so hard to explain it away, but be open to the reality that there is a spiritual world all around us.

We got an email from some of our mission partners in Mongolia who were trying to get to Hong Kong, but one of them had an ear problem, so they couldn't fly there. So they prayed, and then God opened up another way for them. A coworker drove them nine hours from Mongolia to the border of China. Then another friend drove them to the city of Hohhot, and then a final person drove them from there to Beijing where they got on a train to Hong Kong. But in their email, this is what they said in their email, "Something wonderful happened that made us realize our driving detour may not have become a

detour at all. God used this journey for specific reasons, and He let us see one of the reasons." "See," keyword. "See," they had spiritual sight to see what was happening around them.

And they said in their email, "We first met our friend who drove us to Hohhot when we lived there five years ago. We shared about Jesus with her then and have prayed for her ever since. During the drive, she told us she's been diagnosed with cancer and had surgery, and she started asking us about our faith and about church and how she could attend church. But being a Christian there is really dangerous, and the government's been getting more strict, so we didn't want to risk the security of others by sending her to some church." So see, something they couldn't do, they couldn't do that. Above their pay grade. So they said, "That night we prayed that God would somehow lead our friend to a church, even though we couldn't connect her. At 2:00 AM the next morning, our friend met us to say goodbye, along with a driver she found to take us to Beijing, just some random driver. And we prayed with her and said goodbye and then set off with the driver.

But he happened to see us when we were praying for her. And he revealed on the drive that he was a Christian, too. And we told him about our friend, and he said that he would go back and he would find her and he would take her to his church. He is the only person we met in Hohhot on our trip. We saw that our trip probably wasn't really ours at all, and that perhaps God is willing to take His children across the world for the sake of one lost soul." Now, it could, of course, be a coincidence that this random driver just happened to be a Christian, except even though Christianity is growing very fast in China, there still aren't very many Christians. And in a country of a billion people, the chances would be low, and it could be a coincidence that he just happened to see them when they were praying, but they were not praying out in the open because it's dangerous to do that.

So how did he see that? I guess it could be a coincidence. It seems a more reasonable explanation is that, in spite of the obstacles the government had put in front of them, the spiritual power of Jesus guided them. The Bible says that Jesus, having disarmed the powers and authorities, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. In other words, there is spiritual power at work in our world, some of which is working against God's purposes. And we can see that everywhere. Just look at the news. But Jesus' power has triumphed over everything. Just like the power that was with those missionaries in Mongolia was greater than the government's power that was coming against them. Just like the power that was in my friend and his broken marriage was greater than the power that was coming against his marriage.

And just like the power that's in you and the power that is in with me, and the power that is in us as a church, is greater than all the health crises, greater than all our fears, greater than all the career problems we face, greater than anything else, because the power that

is with us is greater than the power that comes against us, because He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Amen? Amen. Jesus, as we turn into a new year, help us really hang onto that hope, and give us eyes to see what you are doing. Give us eyes to see the chariots of fire all around. And then, Lord, help us tap into that power, lean away from our self-sufficiency and into your all sufficiency, so that we can see not what we can do in our strength, but what you can do in yours. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

- What do you feel when you read this scripture (excited, angry, worried, etc....)? Why do you think that is? (Explain in your group and then take that response to Jesus in prayer this week.)
- As you read this scripture, where does it challenge your current cultural context?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are the characteristics of the physical/material approach of the two kings in this story (Aram/Israel) and how are they different than the spiritual approach of Elisha? What are the outcomes and actions of each approach?
- What do you think about how Elisha advises the king to treat their enemies (vs. 21-23)? Is this always the right approach?
- Where have you/do you see spiritual power at work in your life, church, world?

Further reading to enhance the discussion: Ephesians 1:18-22 and Ephesians 3:20-21.

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the

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conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.