

**2 Kings 6:8-17—“Don’t Be Afraid!”**

It was the middle of the afternoon when Phyllis heard a knock at her door. An elderly widow, Phyllis opened the door to find an unknown man standing on her front porch. When he saw her, he quickly reached into the large coat he was wearing and moved towards her as if to attack. But suddenly, the man stopped. His eyes grew wide, the color drained from his face, and he turned and sprinted away. Later, the police caught and questioned the man, and he confessed that he planned to kill Phyllis and then rob her. When the police asked why he ran away, he told them, **“When the door opened, I saw two large, strong men standing behind her.”** Phyllis lived alone. There was no one else at her house that day. She believes those two large, strong men were angels God sent to protect her.

There are literally thousands of similar “angel encounter” stories on the internet. Mysterious strangers who appeared out of nowhere to help fix a broken-down car, only to disappear once the car started running. Unexplainable forces, or voices that prevented people from crossing the street...just before a truck runs a red light. Many people claim to have had run-ins with angels. Maybe even some of you!

But are these really the works of God’s powerful angels? Or tales from powerful imaginations? Angel, or hallucination? Angel, or a humble Good Samaritan who didn’t want recognition? Angel, or lucky intuition? Angel, or mere coincidence?

While some angel stories are more believable and compelling than others, the fact is—we can believe that angels exist, and view them as examples of God’s protecting grace, because the internet isn’t the only place full angel encounter stories. The Bible is saturated with accounts of God sending angels to guard and protect his people!

Today, as we join with 1,500 years of fellow Christians to celebrate September 29<sup>th</sup> as ***The Festival of St. Michael and All Angels***, we’ll see why angels are one more reason God can tell us, ***Don’t Be Afraid!*** and we can confidently believe him.

Our sermon text for today is one of those accounts. God’s prophet Elisha, whose name fittingly means, “My God saves” served as one of God’s mouthpieces in the northern kingdom of Israel. And although Israel’s kings had forsaken God, and most people had followed their lead, God lovingly still protected them. During this stretch of the mid 800s B.C., Israel’s enemy, the king of the Arameans, repeatedly tried attacking and ambushing the Israelites. But despite his intel and planning, the Israelites were always a step ahead of him. Outraged at the repeated failures, the king finally concluded that there must be an inside man; a traitor who was feeding his plans to Israel.

Finally, one of the king’s advisors revealed that the problem wasn’t an inside man, but a man of God. ***“Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”*** God had been revealing the king’s plans to Elisha! And once the king discovered that Elisha was in the city of Dothan, he sent a strong military force with horses and chariots to surround the city and end this prophet problem.

In the morning, Elisha’s servant wakes up, grabs a cup of coffee, glances out the window and BAM! The Aramean army has them surrounded! Imagine waking up to heavily-armed North Korean troops ready to kick your door down! Understandably, he panics, crying out to Elisha, ***“Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?”***

Have those words ever sprung from your mouth or run through your head? “What are we gonna do?” Probably not from a besieging army, but maybe you’ve felt surrounded with worry about your wealth or your

health; attacked by fears over your family or your future; in peril of being captured by addiction or anxiety. And in those moments of fear, it's easy to wonder, "What are we going to do?" "What can I do?" The problem is that we look to ourselves for protection and rescue. Obviously, Elisha and his servant couldn't fight off this powerful Aramean army.

And yet, Elisha calmly tells his servant, **"Don't be afraid."** Although there were thousands of reasons to be afraid, armed with swords and chariots, Elisha wasn't afraid because he trusted that they weren't alone, and that this wasn't their battle to fight! ***"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."***

Counting two of them, Elisha's servant was probably confused. Until Elisha prayed, ***"Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he...saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.***

Here's how Christian artist Chris Powers depicts the scene (***image can be found at the bottom of the sermon document***). Here's Elisha and his servant, surrounded by Arameans. But surrounding the Arameans is a far greater, far mightier angel army! Elisha and his servant didn't need to be afraid, because they could see that God had sent his angels to protect them from harm! And God did just that, making the whole Aramean army blind. Elisha then led them all into Samaria, the capital city of Israel, to be captured.

We can replace our panicked, "What shall we do?!" fears, with "Do not be afraid" confidence when we trust that whatever danger, fear, difficulty, or disaster surrounds you, God has also sent his angels to guard and protect you from harm and danger! As we hear in the Psalms, ***"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."***

But what exactly are angels? Where did they come from? What do they do? Many people envision angels like cute, chubby babies with wings who strum harps and play in the clouds. As much as I like cute babies, I don't feel confident that they will protect me from harm and danger, even if they can fly!

But the Bible says angels are ***"ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation."*** Angels are powerful spirits, created by God sometime during the six days of creation, in order to serve him and carry out his will by guarding and protecting his people! Those protector angels aren't described as chubby babies, but as powerful warriors, superior to mankind in wisdom and power. The Bible depicts the angels protecting God's people from physical and spiritual harm—like the leader of the angels, the Archangel Michael, who fought against Satan and his demons and hurled them out of heaven. The Bible depicts the angels proclaiming warnings or good news to protect God's people, like the great messenger angel, Gabriel. The Greek word for "angel" literally means "messenger." In word and action, angels are powerful beings God sends to give us extra reasons to not be afraid! Because the angels are wiser and more powerful than anything that makes us afraid here on earth!

But as I scoured the internet for angel encounter stories, I found one that made me think. A man told a story about his mom when she was young. She and a friend were about to cross a normally deserted road, when suddenly a feeling of dread came over her, and she couldn't move. Her friend still crossed the road alone, when a speeding truck hit and killed her. He closed out his story with this: ***"That makes me wonder about the other little girl. Was her angel taking a smoke break or something?"***

It's easy to trust that angels will protect you when you can see them in action—like Elisha's servant eventually did. But what about when you can't? What about when angels don't put out the housefire, or stop the shooter, or prevent the cancer? When we still deal with painful or harmful things, can we still take to heart that God tells us "Don't be afraid"?

A pastor I formerly served with pointed out something in this text I'd never connected. God sends his angels to protect Elisha in the city of Dothan. The only other place where Dothan is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 37. Near Dothan, where God sent angels to rescue Elisha, ten of Jacob's sons grabbed their brother Joseph, and sold him to slave traders bound for Egypt. Where were the angels on the hills then? Why didn't the angels strike Joseph's brothers with blindness? Why didn't they kill the slave traders so Joseph could escape?

After many trials and troubles in Egypt, God eventually brought Joseph to the second highest position of power in all of Egypt. And there, Joseph tells his brothers, ***"It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."*** God didn't send the angels to stop this from happening, because God had a plan to bless Joseph, and many others, through this painful, seemingly harmful event of being sold into slavery. In both events that took place in Dothan, we see God bless and protect his people—whether angels took action or not.

Whether we can see the results of God sending his angels to intervene and protect us, or whether we ultimately face the difficult or painful struggle, we can still trust God when he tells you, "Don't be afraid," because God is still working for your good. As he promises, ***"In all things, God works for the good of those who love him."***

Maybe there are specific times in your own life when you think God sent angels to protect you from harm. But even if you can't, consider this. How many times have you been oblivious to the fact that God sent angels to guard and protect you? How often have God's angels protected you from the attacks of Satan or demons as you went about life ignorant of the spiritual battle going on around you? Whether we realize it or not, like Elisha tells his servant, "Don't be afraid!" Because God has sent his powerful angels to guard and protect you!

We can rightly thank God for the gift of his angels! But I think the caution is not to get so caught up in angels, that we lose sight of the one who created and sends them; the real reason God can tell us "Don't be afraid." Interestingly, a recent poll shows that 80% of Americans believe in angels, but only 70% of Americans believe in Jesus as their Savior. More people trust in angels to protect them, than Jesus to save them! And that's a problem.

I want to show you Chris Powers' picture again, but I want to highlight something that you maybe didn't notice before. Yes, we see the angel army of God protecting them. But here, in white, do you see what's really holding them safe? Two, nail-pierced hands. I love that imagery.

Yes, in love God sends his powerful angels to protect us from physical and spiritual dangers. But Jesus is the reason we don't have to be afraid of anything in this life. Whether an angel stops you from crossing the road, or whether you get run over by the truck—don't be afraid. Whether your cancer miraculously disappears, or whether it ends your life—don't be afraid. Because Jesus has already overcome the world. Because Jesus has already saved you for eternity!

It's Jesus that has defeated sin and Satan. The archangel Michael and the other good angels defeated Satan and the evil angels, but Revelation says, ***"They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb."*** Don't be afraid, because the nail-pierced hands of your Savior are holding you safely!

Maybe you can tell an amazing story about how God sent an angel to rescue you. Maybe not. But all of us can tell the story about how God sent his Son, to save you for eternity! That means, no matter what, "Don't be afraid!"

2 KINGS 6:15-17



