

June 10

2 Kings 5-8

Hey, I'm Dave Irwin. Thanks for joining me for the Project 4:4 Daily Accelerator for June 10. Today we're mainly covering 2 Kings 5-8.

Do you have one of *those* neighbors? The kind that always seems hostile towards you. The kind that yells at your kids for walking on their grass, but never picks up their dog's "presents" from your yard. The kind that steals your newspaper if you're not out there to catch it from the paperboy. The Aramean nation was *that* neighbor to the nation of Israel and they play a central role as antagonist in today's reading.

I like the way one scholar frames the struggles we read about today. He says they are not primarily about military or political developments or even great human suffering. These struggles are about the difference between sight and vision. Sight shows us what is here, what is temporal. Vision shows us the spiritual realities that transcend the temporal. Let me show you what this means.

The first sight vs. vision encounter is seen when Elisha and his servant are trapped in a city when the Aramean army surrounds it. They are after Elisha because he has been helping Israel's king with supernatural insight into the Aramean's plans. Elisha's servant is understandably shaken and afraid. His sight shows him a large military force with the sole purpose of taking out Elisha. As Elisha's servant, he will almost certainly be collateral damage. But Elisha's vision shows him so much more and he prays that God will allow his servant to see what he already sees. God answers Elisha's request and his servant suddenly has the vision to see an even larger, overwhelming military force with chariots of fire there to fight for Elisha. Sight vs. vision

The second sight vs. vision encounter comes when Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army, seeks healing from his leprosy. He had been told by one of his Israelite slave girls that the prophet in Samaria (Elisha) can cure him of his leprosy. When Naaman goes to meet with Elisha, he is instead met by Elisha's messenger and he is given a very simple but very odd cure: wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and the leprosy will be healed. Naaman left that meeting angry because Elisha did not come to meet him in person and his prescription for healing seemed ridiculous. Naaman's sight focused on his pride as an important person in Aram and the humiliation of doing something so odd. But Elisha's vision leads him to confront Naaman on several levels. He confronts his pride by not meeting him in person and in requiring him to humble himself by washing in the Jordan, which he clearly felt was beneath him. He also confronts Naaman's desire to work for and earn his healing. Elisha left him no way to accomplish the healing on his own. He could not purchase it with money. He could not earn it by accomplishing some great feat. He was asked to do something very simple that seemed foolish in faith that it would bring healing. Naaman is persuaded to comply by his servants and he experiences God's healing power as his leprosy is completely healed. Given his new found vision, Naaman returns to Elisha and pledges faith in the LORD alone. Sight vs. vision.

The third sight vs. vision encounter comes when Elisha's servant Gehazi looks to cash in on Naaman's experience. Naaman had offered to give gifts to Elisha in gratitude but Elisha refused. Gehazi's sight told him that he deserved to benefit if Naaman was feeling generous. He chases after Naaman and collects a reward for himself. Elisha confronts Gehazi when he returns and demonstrates that his vision was literally there at the moment that Gehazi collected the reward. Elisha rebukes Gehazi for his lack of vision to see what God was doing and proclaims that Gehazi will now suffer with Naaman's leprosy. Gehazi's sight of the here and now produced greed in his heart and clouded his vision of God's plan. Sight vs. vision.

The final sight vs. vision encounter in today's reading has some rather disturbing elements. The Arameans have laid siege to Samaria. Interestingly, the text doesn't tell us who was king of Israel at this time. Our chronological Bible puts it during the reign of Joram, the son of Ahab and the brother of Ahaziah. The text says that the Arameans were led by king Ben-Hadad. Scholars do not think this is the same king that Ahab fought. Rather the name Ben-Hadad has become a title of sorts for this particular dynasty in Aram (similar to Caesar in the Roman Empire). The siege has lasted long enough that famine-like conditions have set in for the people in the city. Starving the people inside a city was a key tactic of a successful siege. The writer uses a bit of commonly used slang to describe really bad famine conditions. He gives us the market price for a donkey's head and dove's dung (slang for edible seed pods). In other words, things had gotten bad enough that people were paying exorbitant amounts for what they would normally throw away. These conditions set the stage for a lack of vision resulting in a terrible act. Two mothers make a deal to do the unthinkable – they eat their own children. This only comes to light because one woman complains to the king that the other woman wouldn't cook her child when it was her turn. Their sight could only show them the reality of their suffering. Because of their idolatry and evil ways, they didn't have the vision to see God at work and trust in Him.

The king also chooses sight over vision when he blames the suffering on Elisha and sends someone to kill him. On the one hand, the king's reaction is quite understandable. After all, Elisha had been proclaiming God's judgment against the kings for some time. It makes sense that the king would vent his frustration on Elisha. However, the king betrays his lack of vision when he confronts Elisha. The king acknowledges that the suffering is from God but questions why he should continue to submit and wait on God. He knew the siege was sent from God but he didn't have the vision to respond to it in humility and repentance. Responding to his sight of the here and now, he just wanted the pain to stop. He did not possess the vision that his predecessor, King David, had. When confronted with a punishment from God, King David's vision resulted in humble repentance and the LORD was merciful to Israel. Sight vs. vision.

2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that we live by faith, not sight. Allow me to tweak that slightly for today's reading and say that we should live by vision, not sight. Living by sight only shows us the here and now and we can only react to what we see happening around us. Living by vision enables us to also see past lessons, future possibilities, and the invisible spiritual realities at work in our lives. May you live today with vision, not sight. Thanks for joining me today.