

Welcome to our morning service on the 31st of May 2020. I trust that God will be with us and we will know a blessed day. We're coming to the end of our series, "Behind closed doors" and this morning we're going to look at the subject, "From fear to faith." In one sense I'm a bit sad that we're coming to the end of this series. I have really enjoyed looking at different passages from the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. This morning we're back in the Old Testament, so please open your Bible with me to the second Book of Kings, chapter six reading from verse eight. We're going to consider Elijah and his servant Gehazi behind closed doors in the city of Dothan. And there we will witness great fear, but the situation goes from fear o faith. So please turn with me to the second Book of Kings, chapter six, and verse eight Shall we hear the Word of God.

⁸ Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." ⁹ And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." ¹⁰ Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice.

¹¹ Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"

¹² And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

¹³ So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him."

And it was told him, saying, "Surely he is in Dothan."

¹⁴ Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

¹⁶ So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸ So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

¹⁹ Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

²⁰ So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!

²¹ Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"

²² But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." ²³ Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.

We thank God for this wonderful passage from his word. Shall we bow in prayer:

"Loving and eternal God in heaven we thank you for the Holy Word of God. And Lord we pray that this morning, your Word would truly be food for our souls. Whatever state we find ourselves in: whether we are fearful, or whether we have peace reigning in our hearts... Lord whatever is going on with our emotions and whatever thoughts we have, we pray oh God that our minds would be centred upon you and your word. For You have said that that if our minds are stayed upon You then we will be kept in perfect peace. So bless your word to our hearts and for any who do not know the saviour, Lord we pray that you would open their eyes that

they would see the Lord Jesus, and come to him, and believe in him. So we trust you this morning, and we look to you by faith, and pray that you will be with us now. In Jesus' Name."

To begin with I want to bring a few thoughts about COVID-19. Perhaps you're very fed up of thinking of this subject but I just wanted to mention it for a reason. It's a potential killer. You know that. But I want to say that fear is a natural part of our makeup. Fear is given to us by God. Think of this: If there's a fire God has given us this mechanism of fear within to help us to flee from fire. We have fear of being hurt and so we go from it. So fear is a good thing. But fear, you know what I'm going to say...fear can also cripple you. Fear can also sometimes be so overwhelming that you just can't function normally in life. So often in the Bible we find individuals and peoples who are fearful and overwhelmed by that fear. And so often we hear God's word coming to such people saying: "Do not be afraid" for you are God's children. His servants have been redeemed and as children God comes to them and says, "Do not fear" Yes "banish that fear." Trust me and cast your cares upon me.

Well naturally we fear COVID. Yes, but we all know too that the thought of contracting COVID-19 can cripple some and leave them in emotional turmoil. What do we do at such a time? We use reason, and we use faith. Reason tells us this. There could be 40,000 deaths soon. That's an awful lot of people. But 40,000 out of a population of over 66 million is a percentage of 0.0006 %. It's not just less than 1%. It is far less than 1%. But you might be saying well that's fine if you're a young person. We know that it's hit mainly the elderly. And yes, it's true. 90% of those who've died are over 65. These are the figures from the Office of National Statistics given on the 15th of May 2020. Now out of that age bracket of 65 or over nearly 50% of all deaths are at the age of 85 or over. And so the average age of death from COVID is the age of 80. I think that puts things in perspective, but I want to show you something else. Yes, use your mind and use reason in order to have perspective. But what do you think about God? I want to bring you into the realm of faith. If you're a Christian if you're a child of God you know you have a Sovereign. You know that if you contract this disease, it will be by his permissive will. And even if you die of this disease it is because he numbered your days. He is permitted that it should be so. Why? That he would bring you to glory. Yes you have wonderful hope... you'll be with Christ in heaven. Last week we saw that wonderful vision of our Saviour in glory and majesty... and that's your destiny to be with him !! So how are we to face COVID-19? Yes, there is a right natural fear. But we certainly will not be crippled, or overwhelmed. By God's grace COVID certainly will not bring our lives to a total stand still so that everything is just put on hold. We'll be wise in the way that we live but we will also trust in the living God.

Now consider Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He had every reason to fear. Why? Because a vast army was encircling the city of Dothan, and they were there to take his master Elisha... And that meant him also. They had come to take them all the way to Syria, where they were to face the king, and it probably meant death for them both. He had every reason to fear. And we see him in a panic don't we? See the end of verse 15, he says, "Alas my master - what shall we do? He wakes up in the morning for these people have come at night. He sees the scene. "What shall we do?" is his response. And Elisha comes in and he says, "Do not fear. Those who are with us are more than those who with them." Elisha is thinking in the spiritual realm, in the supernatural realm. He understands that God has an army of angels protecting. He knows that God is for them. And then he prays for his servant. He prays that God will open his eyes. Isn't it wonderful when you have people who pray for you when you're fearful? And what is his prayer? He prays that God opens the eyes of his servant, and suddenly the servant sees a heavenly hosts and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha and protecting them.

So this morning, we're looking at this lovely subject of "From fear to faith." Maybe you have many fears at the moment and perhaps it's not to do with COVID. Maybe your fears have to do with your own personal health. Or what you face is it to do with loved ones. Or perhaps it's fears to do with your job. Or fears about the future? If you're a Christian, God doesn't want you to live with crippling fear. He wants you to cast your cares upon Him and not to be

anxious for anything. He wants you to trust in His Son Jesus Christ. He wants you to know that he is a sovereign Lord who cares for you as his child.

1) When it hit's home

Now the first thing I want us to look at this morning as we consider this subject "from fear to faith" is this: It's one thing to know these things in our mind, theoretically, but it's another thing to experience them and know them in reality. When you in the middle of a test and things begin to hit home it's then you need to know the power of your God. You see, up until this point Gehazi has been an observer of God's power. He's understood what God can do, but only as a spectator. Just earlier in this chapter there's been a miracle. A borrowed axe head has plunged into the depths of a river, and it's a bad situation for the prophets to be in... all sorts of accusations could come against these men of God. But Gehazi witnessed the power of God as Elisha makes the axe head float. And in the previous chapter Gehazi has also appreciated the wonder working power of God. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army is cured of his leprosy! And surely Gehazi has heard about, or maybe even witnessed other wonderful events in the life of Elisha as Elisha is used by God to raise someone from the dead. The Shunamite's woman's son! Elisha is also used by God to purify a pot of poisoned stew; and is used by God to purify the source of a city's water, simply by adding salt to the source. There are so many miracles in the life of Elisha... here's one more: the provision of bread for 100 prophets by multiplying just a few loaves to provide for 100 men.

Gehazi had appreciated all that he had seen and heard. He'd been an observer. He's been a spectator. He's seen what God can do and what God does do. But now he's in trouble personally. Now things begin to hit home for him. And so he must ask "Do I believe in this God? Can I trust him myself? You see he wakes up in the morning and the question is.. is his mind on the Majesty the power of God? Or are his thoughts only taken up with the enemy that he can see? The answer is that any thoughts of God's power and his benevolence towards his people quickly disappear. He's overwhelmed with fear.

But Elisha, the man of God, has certainty and peace. He is trusting God. He's already seen, Elijah his master going to heaven in a charity fire... he's already seen some of the supernatural realm of God, and he's convinced that the heavenly hosts are around them, and so he says "Those who are with us are more than those with them." And he prays that God would show this to his fearful servant.

How about you? You understand the doctrine of God's sovereignty. You understand that God cares for you and every single detail of your life. You understand something of His mighty power. You believe that God spoke and this world came into existence: you're convinced of it. You believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You believe in all of his miracles, you're certain of these things. But when it hits home and when you're in the trial do you then trust God? We have to admit that so often we are like Gehazi and like the disciples of Jesus. Gehazi just looked at the problem and he didn't look at his God. Likewise the disciples when they're on the lake of Galilee and they have Jesus with them fail to trust God. Jesus is asleep in the boat, but he's with them. But the disciples don't believe that Jesus is in control. They wake him up in that great storm on the lake of Galilee, with water crashing into the boat. They wake Jesus up and they say "Don't you care Master... we're going to perish!" So often we're like that. We panic. We cannot see that there's an end to our situation and we can't cope. And the Lord has to rebuke us as he did his disciples: "Oh you of little faith." Then on another occasion we see the Lord again rebuking his disciples for hardness of heart. You see, they're bothered that they've only got one loaf of bread left. Jesus said, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees"... but the disciples do not understand and are just concerned about the fact they've only got one loaf of bread. Jesus said, don't you know, don't you understand. See what I did for the 5000 people: 12 baskets of bread leftover when I fed the 5000. See what I did for the 4000. There were seven baskets of bread leftover ! How slow we are to believe in God's provisions. How slow we are to remember all His power.

2) The Kindness of God

Gehazi should have remembered what God had already been doing for Israel. Think of the passage we read just a little earlier... of how God wonderfully protected the king of Israel and the people of Israel from calamity through His servant Elisha. How? Well God revealed to Elisha the very strategies and plans of the king of Syria. The king of Syria had a plan to capture the king of Israel in a certain place, and Elisha could see those plans being made in the very king of Syria's bedroom! So he said to the king of Israel. "Don't go to that place. If you go there, you'll be captured." And that didn't just happen once or twice but on several occasions. And so Gehazi knew that God was an all seeing God, who was working on behalf of his people Israel even though, the king of Israel was a wicked man, though he was an apostate. Yes God was watching even over him... and would not God watch over them? ...over Gehazi and Elisha, the man of God? Brothers and sisters, when it hits home: When you're in the midst of fire and when you're in the floods; when you're in the trial and when you're the difficulty. Stop. Pray. Look up. Trust. And isn't God kind? See how he calms Gehazi's fears. Elisha says "Do not fear." That's the first words he says... he doesn't reprimand him or scold; he doesn't tell him off and doesn't say where is your trust? He just calms his fears and then he gives him a reason for him not to be fearful: "Because those who are with us are more than those are with them." Brothers and sisters, we have every reason to trust in our God. During this coronavirus crisis, and during all the trials and all the difficulties of life, we have every reason to trust Him. We not only have the angels around us and that's true of us as much as Gehazi... Yes we have angels that surround and camp around the saints of God. But we also have our Lord Jesus Christ our elder brother, at the Father's right hand. We have the Spirit of Christ within us. We have the presence of God and... "If God is for us, who can be against us?" We have every reason to trust. We have a Saviour, who has bled and died for our sins and has risen from the dead. Now if he's done that to save us from damnation will he not be with us now in the trials and the difficulties that we go through? Oh how wonderful to know that he says to us. Do not fear. He's a kind God. Do not fear, because I am with you. And not only that, we are reminded that God not only shows kindness to us but he has tremendous power to help us.

3) The power of God

Just think of this verse 17. Elisha prays that Gehazi's eyes will be opened. And as he prays so his eyes are opened. And what does he see? He sees this vast array of angels. It's a vast company, and they're more than the big vast army, the huge infantry of soldiers that surround them. He sees the heavenly host and chariots of fire. Now we don't look to the angels, though they're there for God's people. We look to Christ. And we look to him in the Word of God. We are reminded who he is in the Word of God. You see you may be in a very fearful situation and you may feel oppression in your heart... maybe you even feel darkness in your heart. You may be going through a very tough time and evil time when the darts of the enemy are arrayed against you. Then you remind yourself of your Lord Jesus. Remember when he crossed over the lake of Galilee and he came to Genneseret and there was a demon possessed man with a legion of demons. What happened? He fell at the feet of Jesus, and the demons were fearful in the presence of Christ. Jesus then cast out those demons into what we read in the Bible, were 2000 swine, yes 2000 pigs. This means there was one demon for one pig. So that man was really demon possessed. But in the presence of Christ the devil and the demons fled. So my friend if you have Christ in you, and if Christ is with you and he is your Lord, no matter how dark your situation you can be sure He will protect you. Sometimes the worst situation to face is death isn't it? When Jairus' his daughter died it was desperate. But Jesus said to him, "Only believe. All things are possible for those who believe." So the man cried before Jesus with tears, and said, "I do believe, help my unbelief." And Jesus heard his prayer and his daughter was restored to life. When Mary and Martha came to Jesus, and they held on to him in despair as their brother Lazarus had died, they just couldn't understand why Jesus hadn't come sooner. But Jesus knew this was for the glory of God and that he would remedy the situation. He said "I am the resurrection and the life" and he raised Lazarus. No matter how difficult your situation is, remember your Saviour, remember his power, and remember his love.

4) Prayer

As Elisha prayed so God answered his prayer. He prayed that God would strike the enemy with blindness and as he prayed so his prayer was answered. We must pray in our trials, and know that God answers according to His purpose and his will, in a wonderful way. In 1940 on the 26th of May, that's 80 years ago this week, King George VI called the nation to pray. Many people responded to the call went to churches and chapels all over the UK. It is said that outside Westminster Abbey there was a queue a quarter mile long! The King called them not only to pray, but he said, "Pray with a spirit of repentance." Why? Britain was in a very dangerous position. The British army of over 300,000 were trapped in Dunkirk. The enemy was encroaching. And it looked hopeless. They believed that only 10% of the soldiers could possibly be saved but that would mean virtually the whole of the British Army would be wiped out. It would be the end of the war for us. The Allies were not there for us, and so the nation prayed. How did God respond? He sent storm clouds and so there was cloud cover from the German bombers. He also gave a tremendous calm on the British channel – such a calm that had not been seen for many years. The calm lasted for several days. And then hundreds of little boats went across the channel, and brought back 335,000 soldiers, and they called it the miracle of Dunkirk in answer to prayer! Brother or sister, when you're in the midst of the trial get down on your knees. Call upon God and ask him for mercy, and look to the God who has all power. After the Dunkirk miracle Winston Churchill said "I sometimes have a feeling of interference. I want to stress that I have a feeling that some guiding hand interfered." He wasn't a Christian but he recognised that it was the hand of God that rescued Britain.

5) Trusting the God of grace

We are children of God and we know God. We can then say with David, "*LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. ² Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.'*" ³ *But You, O LORD, are a shield for me My glory and the One who lifts up my head.*" (Psalm 3:1-3). We have many enemies that surround the church today. We have the Richard Dawkins of this world. We have the new atheists like Sam Harris, and like Christopher Hitchens. They seek to control the minds of our young people and brainwash them. Many surrounded us! Oh that we would lift up our heads and that we would look to our God. But at the same time oh that we would learn to respond to our enemies graciously. You see, as we conclude this morning I want us to consider how Elisha and his servants were delivered by showing grace to their enemies.

First Elisha prayed that the Syrian army might be blinded and they were! And then we read in verse 19 this statement. And Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me. I will bring you to the man who you seek. But he led them to Samaria!" You see he knew that they really wanted to take out the king of Israel for that's what they had been trying to do over the years. So he brings them to Samaria to the King of Israel. And then he prays that their eyes might be opened and their eyes are. And as they are opened that see they are in Samaria, and they're frightened. And the king of Israel says to Elisha, "My master shall I kill them? Shall I kill them? And notice the way in which Elisha responds: "In war, would you kill your captives? Of course not. You need to give them bread and water"... that's what the Bible says in Exodus. That's how you are commanded to treat your enemies. And so what does the King of Israel do? He sets before them a great feast! (verse 23) And then they're sent back to Syria to their master. And then we read "The bands of Syrian Raiders came no more into the land of Israel." What a deliverance! What a glorious deliverance! The deliverance didn't come only through judgement, (for it was a form of judgement when they were blinded, and were humiliated in Samaria) but the deliverance came through kindness, through grace. And surely that's how we ought to face our enemies, the enemies of the church and those new atheists.

We look at what's happened in society,,,, We've seen the dismantling of our moral values and the slide into moral chaos. And the danger for the church today is this: Yes we are to stand on truth but the danger is to stand on the truth by simply attacking those who oppose us. But this doesn't actually benefit anybody. We need to show love, speak the truth but also be gracious and kind. We do not pay evil for evil. We read in Romans 12. "*Repay no one evil for*

evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

You see Elisha, the servant of God overcame the enemy by doing good. And God acted in a marvellous way. He restrained the Syrians from coming in to raid their land again. Now perhaps you're going through a hard time... you can have enemies at work. Sometimes in the church you may have people who trouble you... and even in your family, that sometimes happens. And there are many, many enemies that surround the church and that hate the word of God. Oh that we would look to Christ and His power to deliver us. But the way to go is to show love to those who persecute us. Oh that we would be kind and gracious and merciful like our Saviour Jesus Christ. He faced his enemies there in the garden of Gethsemane with love. When Judas came and kissed him falsely Jesus called him a friend and a comrade. And when they came to take him with spears, swords and club He was gracious. You see Simon Peter chopped off the ear of the servant of the high priests, but Jesus healed him. Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and upon the cross he loved his enemies. "Father, forgive them for they know what they do" he prayed. And Jesus upon the cross demonstrated the greatest triumph of all. For it was the most glorious deliverance of all when he conquered Satan, and paid for our sins. And having done that He rose from the dead. And if we trust in him we are free from the condemnation of sin, we are taken out of the grip of the devil. And we become the very children of God. Now if God loved us so much and did not spare his only Son but graciously delivered him up for us all how shall he not with him freely give us all things? So in this world when trials hit home and when you're surrounded with darkness and when you begin to fear, look up to the Saviour. He died for you. Look up to him, for He's preparing you a home in glory... so trust in Him. Perhaps there's somebody listening who doesn't yet know the Lord Jesus. I would ask you: Are for him, or you against him? Now the king of Syria was only for himself. He'd seen the commander of his army healed from leprosy. He'd seen the kindness of God's people through Elisha. But he was a wicked man. He made unprovoked attacks upon Israel. He was against God's people and against God. What about you? Are you for God? Are you for his people? Do you have a love for the people of God and above all a love for Jesus Christ? There's no better place to be, than to be part of the people of God. Oh, you may be in a minority but "If God is for us who can be against us?" MAY YOU TRUST IN HIM.

David could say this in Psalm 27: "*Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident. ⁴ One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. ⁵ For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.*" (v.3-6)

Oh may this be your experience! AMEN