

God and me

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Date: 11 October 2015

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[0:00] I'm not sure if you were listening when John opened the service, were you? Some of you were. Where did he quote from? Yes, that's correct. He quoted from the Psalms.

Psalms are a great place to go. The psalmist always paints for us a great picture of who God is and what God is like. The passage John quoted from fits in with the passage I want to quote, because I want to quote this morning from Psalm 125.

In Psalm 125 and verse 2, we read these words. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore.

The psalmist is clear. If God is sovereign over the world, and if we are God's people, then we have the hope that that sovereign God will love us and look after us.

He will love us and care for us. He will love us and do what's good for us. He will surround his people both now and forevermore. It's the promise that the scriptures hold out all over the place that God loves his people.

[1:11] And not only does he love them, he cares for them. 2 Kings chapter 6, I think, is a perfect illustration of the great truth that God cares for his people.

He cares for them at a personal level. We came into the chapter a little bit, but at the very start of the chapter, God raises an axe head that's fallen off in the water. It might seem a bit odd to you and me that he would do that.

But when you're the poor prophet who's lost the axe head that you borrowed, that's quite an important thing. You want to know that God cares for you at a personal level. Second part of the chapter is God showing his care at a political level, as things unfold at a national basis.

You see, God is concerned with you in your individual circumstances, and God is concerned with us at our national crisis level too. And in chapter 6, the passage John read for us from chapter 6, verse 8 through to 23, I think God demonstrates his care in three very important ways, and I think those are the three ways he continues to demonstrate his care today.

Let's have a look at the first one. God demonstrates his care for you and me through his words of truth. Through his words of truth. You see, God speaks his word, and in speaking his word, he protects his people.

[2:31] Did you pick that up? In the narrative, war has broken out between Aram and Israel. Aram is actually the country we would today call Syria. So it's a place that's still struggling with violence and heartache.

A war has broken out between Aram, between Israel, and the king of Aram, he's quite clever. So he says, I'm going to lay a trap. I'm going to go down to such and such a place.

I'm going to wait because when the king of Israel and his army come past, I will pounce on them and sort them out one time. It seems like a good plan, don't you think? It's the way that you would expect things to work.

Except God has other plans. See, God speaks his word through the prophet Elisha. And God sends word to the king of Israel to say, don't go there.

Stay off the grass. Don't go that path. You see, God has other plans. God protects his people because he speaks his word to his people.

[3:30] If you look down at verse 10, you'll see it's not a once-off. You'll see that it happens over and over again. Then Elisha speaks. The king of Israel goes and checks it out. And he finds it to be true.

Time and again, Elisha warns the king. The details are so accurate. So accurate that the king of Aram thinks his own people are betraying him.

He actually doesn't quite go that far. But he pretty much says, look, who's with the enemy here? Which one of you are the traitors? You see, how can the king of Israel be getting all this information?

He knows the most intimate details. In fact, one of his people says, he says, boss, boss, he even knows what you say in your bedroom. Is that a shock to us? Is that a surprise to us?

They shouldn't be because, remember, Elisha is simply speaking the words that God gives him. These are really God's words. These are words of truth.

[4 : 36] Because they come from the God of truth. These are the words of accuracy. Because this is the God who knows everything. You see, what can the king of Aram hide from the sovereign God of the world?

What details can the king of Aram keep secret from the God who knows all things? Now, it shouldn't surprise us that God's word is accurate. It shouldn't surprise us that God's word is true.

Because God's knowledge is complete. God's knowledge is exhaustive. God is all-knowing. And as he communicates that word to his people, God shows he cares for them.

See, his word brings deliverance. His word brings rescue. His word brings comfort. His word brings encouragement. And in fact, if you keep reading, you'll discover that God's word even brings hope. In very difficult circumstances. See, God speaks the truth to his people. That's how he shows them that he cares for them. Here's the million-dollar question, though.

[5 : 41] Will his people listen? I have an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old. Bless them. I ask that same question. Will they listen?

Will they listen? See, it's a question God has been asking since the beginning of time. Will his people listen to what he says?

Imagine for a moment God speaks. And he speaks the truth. And he speaks what is good for you. And he speaks what will bring about eternal salvation.

And he speaks about what will bring holiness. And he speaks all these things that will help you. But you will not listen. We have a doctor in our family.

My sister-in-law is a doctor. She's very clever. She doesn't give me much free treatment, I might add. But she's very clever nonetheless. She says one of the things she has discovered of late is that when people come to the doctor now, they've already diagnosed themselves.

[6 : 44] See, they go onto Google. Do you know what Google is? They go onto Google and they go onto the internet. And they come and tell the doctor what's wrong with them. See, I'm not like that. I walk into the doctor's room.

I'll tell you what I do firstly. The first thing I do is I check on the wall. I want to see their certificate. I want to know that they passed. And I'm of the opinion when they pass, they know more than I do. And so when I go to the doctor and I say, doctor, what's wrong? And the doctor says, Luke, you've got flu. You should take six weeks off. I listen. I do what the doctor tells me to do. See, now the question we've got to grapple with is when the sovereign God of the world who knows everything tells us the truth, will we listen?

Or will we go to Google? Will we think we know better? See, the challenge for you and me as we sit here even today is will we take God's word as truth?

Will we take it as the means that God has given to you and me to care for us? Will we see the Bible as this horrible rule book that we want to reject and ignore?

[7 : 55] Or will we see the Bible as God's demonstration of his love and care in a very practical, very helpful way? Will we come to the word of God and listen? In humble obedience, will we do what it calls us to do?

God demonstrates his care for us because he gives us the word of truth. I want you to notice the second thing from this passage. That God also demonstrates his care through the works of deliverance.

See, God doesn't just speak in this passage. God works in 2 Kings chapter 6. You can imagine the scene, can't you? The king of Aram is fed up.

Every time he tries to do something, God gives his secret away. He's laid plan after plan after plan after plan and everyone has failed.

He's not a happy camper. In fact, he's quite fed up. He calls his guards around and he says, look, we've got to deal with this. We've got to find Elisha. Do you see the irony there?

[8 : 58] Elisha knows exactly where he is and exactly what he's doing, but he doesn't have a clue where Elisha is. So he has to send off these soldiers, teams of them going all around.

It's like the amazing race 2 Kings 6 style. See if you can find Elisha. They go to all ends of the earth. They go looking for Elisha. Eventually, one group comes back and says, we found him. We know where he is. He's at Dotham. So the king says, let's send the SAS, the Green Berets, the South African Rikis.

Because it says they're the most powerful force. Let's send all the guys we can think of. Let's go and capture Elisha. They surround the city, horses and chariots. You've got to feel for the poor servant.

He wakes up the next morning. He's deep in his eyes. Imagine he goes to the curtains of the window, opens the windows. Can you imagine opening your curtains and there sit the FBI SWAT team looking in?

He actually says, my Lord, what are we going to do? You see, what he sees, he looks out there and he sees these horses and chariots. And he says, oy vey, 64-0.

[10 : 04] That's what he's staring at. He's looking at it. It's America trying to play South Africa in rugby. He says, we're finished. He looks at the situation.

And you don't feel it in English. But it is a sense of hopelessness. My Lord, what are we to do? The king of Aram has sent the most elite of the soldiers.

We are surrounded. If we go to our left, if we go to our right, if we go forwards, if we go back, we are captured. And this is the king who's not happy with you. What shall we do?

We are surrounded. I think that's his way of saying, we're going to die. We're going to die. It's a terrible predicament, isn't it?

But you see, here's why 2 Kings chapter 6 is a great chapter to remember. Because up until this point, we see only what normal people can see.

[11 : 05] Up until this point, we can only see what you would typically see with your eyes. But as the narrative goes on, we begin to see what you don't normally see.

We begin to see that God delivers his people because his hidden hand is always at work. Even when you and I can't see it.

See, the truth is, you and I do not always see the full picture. You and I tend to see only that which can be seen with the physical eye. But what if there is a reality that you and I can't see with the naked eye?

If there were scientists amongst us, they would tell you that if you got a fancy microscope and we came into your home, we could probably find dust that you can't see. You know what I'm saying? And if we looked at it under a microscope, we'd see all kinds of chochas and miggies. We'd see all kinds of those things. We can't see it with the naked eye. But with the right microscope, we'd be able to see it.

[12 : 14] 2 Kings chapter 6 is a microscope to show us what's there, but what you and I don't normally see. Elisha sees it. Elisha knows it. Do you see it, verse 16?

He might be able to see the SAS and the FBI SWAT team and all of them out there. But he turns around to this poor servant and he says, don't be afraid. It's at that moment, it's a great challenge for the servant, isn't it?

You see, at that moment, you might be tempted to think that your boss has lost the plot completely. We're not seeing the same thing, are we? Not if you can say, don't be afraid, the prophet answered, verse 16.

And then he says this. He says, those who are with us are more than those who are with them. It's at the point, it's like Heineken, you start counting up on your fingers.

Elisha, that's one. And the servant, that's two. And then you start counting the enemy. And you think, Elisha, have you lost the plot here, but those who are for us are more than those who are against us?

[13 : 12] Two to three thousand. That doesn't sound like good odds. And then Elisha says this. He says, Lord, open his eyes. Open his eyes. You see, what Elisha has had all along is confidence in the unseen God.

He has had confidence in the hidden hand of God. He has had confidence that despite what he can see, God is still very real.

God is still very present. And God still works for his people. So he prays, verse 17. He says, Lord, open his eyes. Let him see true reality.

See, verse 17. And then the servant's eyes were opened. And he looked. And he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

See, that's a very important point which you won't know because we skipped chapter 2. But in chapter 2 of 2 Kings, we meet the horses and the chariots of fire for the first time in 2 Kings.

[14:20] And it is put there to show us that when the horses and chariots of fire are present, this is God's presence at work. See, what the servant sees is that God is here too.

God has not abandoned his people. God is very real. God is very present. God is very present. And he was with them even though the servant couldn't see it.

See, friends, can I suggest to you today that there is a reality that you and I do not always see. The truth is you and I are quite short-sighted, even if you think you've got 20-20 vision.

We can't see all of reality. We are incapable of that. There is a reality which is hidden from us and it involves the hidden hand of God. It's what God does invisibly.

It's what God does in ways that you and I cannot normally see. It's the truth that God works for the good of his people despite what we think, despite what we feel, and despite what we see.

[15:25] And one of the questions that you will have to wrestle with if you are one of God's people is do you see that? Do you trust that? Is that your confidence in the world?

See, people like Dawkins want to say to you, God is not there. Tough luck. Hard breaks. Pays your money. He takes your chances. See, there will be some people in the world who want to say to you, suck it up and get on with it.

They offer you no hope and they offer you no encouragement, but the gospel is very different. See, the gospel says to us God is real and God is present and God is here for you and God works for you.

See, that is a completely different story, isn't it? See, I wonder as you sit here today, I wonder if you know that God is on your side. I wonder if you have that confidence.

I wonder if you have that encouragement. I wonder if you are confident that God is present even if you do not see him with your physical eyes.

[16:29] One author says this, he says, It's a great truth, isn't it? No one is safer than the people of God, even when they live in the most frightening of times.

It's a great truth, isn't it? One missionary is famous for saying, I am immortal until God is done with me.

Why did he say that? Because he was convinced that God would protect him until his purpose on earth was done. See, it's a great confidence, isn't it? You won't believe this at all.

But I was very little at school. Please laugh, get it out of your system. I was actually, I was the shortest boy in my grade, what's it now, grade, standard six.

What's that? Grade eight. I was the shortest boy in my standard six class. But I tell you, I would pick a fight with anybody. I wasn't always a minister, just so you know.

[17:28] I'll tell you why I would pick a fight with anybody. Because if I got into trouble, I ran to Andrew. Do you know who Andrew is? Andrew's my older brother. You see, I would pick a fight with anybody because I knew if I got into trouble, if I got out of my league, I just had to get to him.

He'd sort them out, it'd be fine. See, I had great confidence and great encouragement because I was convinced there was somebody bigger than me that could help me. Can I suggest to you that 2 Kings 6 asks you whether you've got that confidence.

Do you see that he who is for you is greater than those who are against you? Do you have the great confidence that God is on your side? Are you clear? Are you clear that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose?

Are you clear that God is for you? I know you won't always feel that. I know you won't always think that. I know you won't always see that, but are you convinced in your theology that God is working for you even when you can't see that?

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not promising you today. Therefore, things will go always the way you want them to go. That's not the promise being made in 2 Kings 6. It's not that you will get what you want necessarily.

[18:41] But it is the promise that God is always working for his people. It is Romans 8. In all things, God works for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.

It gives us great confidence and great encouragement. But I want you to notice he doesn't just deliver in giving sight to his people. Will you notice we see not just his hidden hand, but will you see also the restraint of evil?

See, God delivers his people because he restrains his people's enemies. He gives sight to his people so they can see clearly. But at the same time, did you see verse 18?

At the same time, he blinds the enemy. It's a wonderful play on sight here, isn't it? He gives sight so his people can see and he removes sight so the enemies can't see.

He strikes them with blindness. And I don't know about you, but I take it as a sniper is useless if he can't see. The SWAT are no good. An archer is useless if he can't see the target.

[19 : 40] Somebody who's going to throw a spear at you can't do it. Blindness defeats the enemy. And then you've got to love it. Elisha goes to him and says, you're at the wrong place. I've just spent all night surrounding the city and Elisha says, you probably shouldn't have asked that lady for directions.

You've got lost. Check your garment. Check your GPS. You're in the wrong town. I mean, essentially, Elisha lies to the bloke. He says, I'm not who you're looking for and this isn't the place. He says, but I can show you where you've got to go. And he literally, he leads them. We think it's about six miles, about ten kilometers. He leads them down the road and he leads them to the city of Samaria.

Now, again, what you probably haven't worked out yet is Samaria is the capital of the king of Israel. Israel. I'll give you three guesses where the king of Israel's army is based.

In the city of Samaria. So you can imagine the scene. Here comes Elisha with the elite special forces of the Aramean army. And he leads them straight into the fortress of the king of Israel.

[20 : 44] And then Elisha says, Lord, open their eyes. You've got to see the funny side to this. And here is our SWAT team, our elite military force. Their eyes are opened and we're in our guts.

See, it's reversed, isn't it? Five minutes ago, the servant was saying we're going to die. And now it's those who've been brought to do the killing who are probably feeling at this point, we're going to die. See, what has God done here? God has restrained the enemies of Israel from doing the harm they intended to do.

He did it quietly. He did it invisibly. He did it behind the scenes. There was no firecrackers. There was no explosions. There was no bells and no whistles.

See, God doesn't only work for his people. He works against your enemies. Again, it's an important thing to see that. I don't want to sound like I'm a complete cynic because I'm actually not.

[21 : 49] But I wonder if you've realized yet that if God was not restraining evil in our world, things would be significantly worse.

And as you sit here, you think, how it couldn't possibly be? Well, I hate to discourage you, but it could. It could. It could be much worse than it actually is.

And the only reason it's not is because God is safeguarding his people. Because God is working against our enemies. It is not as bad as it could be.

Because God cares. I wonder if you see that today. Can I suggest to you that don't be fooled. When the preacher stands up front here and he makes all these statements, don't be fooled.

I know just like you do that this is hard. You want to go home, don't you? And you want to rub your eyes a little bit because you don't always see this. You don't see this.

[22 : 54] The truth is we see the bad things in our world. The truth is we turn on our television just to find out about more bombs going off and more terrorist attacks and more ISIS and more corruption. That's what we see.

It might be even in your own home. It might be that things are going terribly at the moment. And you see that because you're experiencing that firsthand. It might be that as we sit here today, you are facing some tragedy or some crisis or some health scare.

And it might be as we sit here today, what you're actually wrestling with is where's God in all this? It might be that you're doubting God's presence. It might be that you're doubting God's power.

It might be that you are genuinely saying, God, don't you care? Because the truth is you feel like that servant. Oh, Lord, what are we going to do? It's hopeless.

And so today I want to say to you that it might just be a matter of perspective. It might be there's more than what meets the eye.

[23 : 57] It might be that there's a reality that you need to cling to today. You see, it might be that God is doing something. Which you don't yet see.

See, maybe there's a perspective that you don't see. Now, again, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that if you see that, your problems will go away.

What I'm wanting you to see today is don't think he's abandoned you. Don't think you're alone in this. Don't think that just because of what's happening that God is not for you.

See, God might have a different purpose. And God might have a different plan. That's the plan we want to see. Because that's the plan that will ultimately lead us to glory.

This is more than just wishful thinking. This is more than Luke just kind of being an optimistic kind of guy. Every cloud has a silver lining. No, this is confidence in the sovereign God of the world.

[25 : 05] This is confidence. Remember last week? He is real and he is present. And today it is that confidence in that real and present God.

That that God loves me if I am his child. In our prayer meeting earlier on, John shared with us from 1 John. The reminder that we've been adopted into his family. We are his children.

You know, despite the fact I would like to kill my boys occasionally. I love them deeply. And I would do almost anything for them. Don't tell them that.

But I would. See, I have to remind myself that I am God's child. And the truth is the sovereign God of the world would do almost anything for me.

He will work for my good always. He speaks his word of truth into my life. And he brings about deliverance. I know that sometimes it's hard to see verse 17.

[26 : 03] And I know sometimes it's hard to see verse 18. And the challenge then is will we listen to verse 16? Will we remember that he who is for us is greater than those who are against us?

And will we cling to that? One last thing that God shows his care. Words of truth. Works of deliverance. Will you notice thirdly and lastly, it's a short one.

The wonder of grace. See, God demonstrates his care by showing grace to us. In this, come back to two kings.

Down in verse 21, the Aramaeans have walked into the stronghold of the Israelite army. They find themselves in a very precarious position. And did you see that?

Twice the king of Israel says, let's kill them. He puts it more diplomatically. He says, my father, my father, should I kill them? But he's saying, go get the sword. Off with their heads. He wants to kill them.

[27 : 02] But Elisha, Elisha believes in the Geneva Convention. And he says, you can't do that. You actually have to treat these as you would treat any soldier.

You have to treat them with dignity. You have to treat them with respect. He says, you've got to show them honor. So he says, no, what you shouldn't do is you shouldn't kill them. What you should do is you should give them food.

Have a look at verse 23. So Elisha prepared a great feast for them. And after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them on their way.

See, they expected death. They thought they were going to lose their heads. Instead, they got a feast and they got freedom. They got two things they did not deserve.

Why? Because they were treated with grace. Grace is when you get what you don't deserve. And moved by grace, they were completely different.

[28 : 01] Did you see it? It's almost a throwaway line at the end of the section. Did you see it? And so the bands of Aram stopped raiding Israel. See, grace changes you, doesn't it?

When grace has come upon you, you are not the same person. When you experience grace, especially when you experience divine grace, you will never be the same again.

Over lunch today, if you're free, why don't you spend some time reading 2 Kings chapter 5? It's a great story of grace. Grace is a great story of grace. Grace is a great story of grace. Grace is a great story of grace. Of how a Gentile soldier, a general in the army, experienced God's saving grace that cleansed him.

And you will discover that this is a man who's never the same ever again. Grace changes you. You see, God's words of truth and God's works of deliverance are ultimately expressions of the wonder of his grace.

They show that he loves us. They show that he cares for us because he treats us time and time again in ways that they do not deserve. Dear friends, it's the same God who treats you and me with

grace, doesn't he?

[29 : 12] Doesn't he treat you and me with grace? Now just think on the play of words for a moment. Doesn't he in his grace send you not the words of truth, but doesn't he in his grace send you the word of truth?

Didn't Jesus himself say, I am the word, I am the way, I am the truth? See, God shows grace to us because he sends the word of truth into the world.

And why did God send the word of truth into the world? He sent him so that he could deliver us from our biggest problem. He could deliver us from sin. You see, God's hidden hand and his fight against the enemies finds its ultimate fulfillment at the foot of the cross.

Where God gives his own son to bring deliverance for you and me. See, God constantly demonstrates his love and care for us by giving us what we do not deserve.

Do you remember Romans chapter 5 verse 8? God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[30 : 18] You want to know that God cares for you? You want to know that God loves you? Where do you go? You don't go to your experiences. You don't go to what's happened this week. No, you go to the first Easter.

You go to the cross of Christ. It is there that we have the constant reminder that God acts in grace. He gives his people what they do not know. He sends his truth into the world to deliver the world from sin.

That's how we know God loves us. See, he gives you and me what we don't deserve. He gives us forgiveness. He gives us salvation. He gives us reconciliation.

He gives us eternal life. He gives us both a feast and freedom. It's very interesting. Those are the two images in Revelation. When you go to be with God in heaven, do you know what it will be? It will be a great banquet. It's a feast. And you will experience life as it's meant to be. Freedom. See, that's grace, isn't it? And that grace will call you and me to believe.

[31 : 17] See, will you see? Will you listen? Will you believe? Will you believe? Will you believe in this God? Will you believe in him despite the hardship you're facing today?

Will you believe in him despite the struggles you're going through? See, what will it look like to trust him? I think it will be to take God at his word. It will be to believe the word.

I think it will be to look at things from God's perspective. Not why is he doing this, but what is he teaching me? What does he want me to know? What does he want me to understand?

And how will he use this to mold me and shape me into his image of his son? You see, when you are at your weakest and most vulnerable, it's there you have to be clear.

And you have to hold with all your might that God cares. Because if you don't, you'll let go and you'll drift.

[32 : 19] And can I say to you, dear friend, you want to get this right when things are better, not when things are bad. You want to be convinced in your heart God loves you.

I hope that's true for you today. And I hope as we sit here you won't underestimate God's care for you. I don't know what you're going through. I don't know what burden you're carrying at the moment.

Maybe you've hidden it. And maybe nobody else here even knows. But God does. And so I want to speak to you today. And I want you to say, look at the words of truth.

Look at the works of deliverance. Look at the wonder of grace. Know today that God loves you.

Let's pray. Father, give us, we pray today, eyes to see, ears to listen, and hearts to believe.

Father, we pray that in the midst of life, Lord, even in the midst of struggle and hardship, may we look to the cross and be reminded daily that you love us and you care for us always.

[33 : 38] Father, help us to be sure today that because you are for us, we can overcome anything. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.