

Sun., May 9 - (Mother's Day) Strange Fire #4: Fire of Protection

Series: "Strange Fire: Spring Message Series"

Memory Verse: Zechariah 2:5 "I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it."

Message: Strange Fire #4: Fire of Protection -Pastor David

Sermon Scriptures: 2 Kings 6:15-18, Exodus 14:19-20

Reading of Scripture: 2 Kings 6:8-14

Blurb: Our God is an all-consuming fire of protection. Just as good mothers protect their children, so God protects and fights for us. When we put our trust in God, we will be carried through all the attacks of our enemies, even if that means being carried safely into eternal life.

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew
Mother's Day!

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor Andrew
"I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it." -Zechariah 2:5

ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY: Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -Pastor Andrew

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify
Hymn to the Holy Spirit
Your Love Defends Me
Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Hymn to the Holy Spirit* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor David

“I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it.” -Zechariah 2:5

ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY: Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Your Love Defends Me

How Like a Gentle Spirit

Surrounded (Fight My Battles)

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Kings 6:8-14 -Reader:

In 2 Kings is the story of the King of Aram wanting to capture the meddling prophet Elisha. So, the king sends an army to find him. 2 Kings 6:8-14,

“8 Aram’s king was fighting against Israel. He took counsel with his officers, saying, ‘I’ll camp at such-and-such a place.’

“9 The man of God sent word to Israel’s king: ‘Beware of passing by this place because the Arameans are going down there.’ 10 Then Israel’s king sent word to the place the man of God had mentioned to him. Time after time, Elisha warned the king, and the king stayed on the alert.

“11 Aram’s king was extremely upset about this. He called his officers and said to them, ‘Tell me! Who among us is siding with Israel’s king?’

“12 One of his officers said, ‘No one, Your Majesty! It’s Elisha the Israelite prophet who tells Israel’s king the words that you speak in the privacy of your bedroom.’

“13 He said, ‘Go and find out where he is. Then I will send men to capture him.’

“They told him, ‘He is in Dothan.’ 14 So the king sent horses and chariots there with a strong army. They came at night and surrounded the city.”

PRAYERS & GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: Mother’s Day -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: Strange Fire #4: Fire of Protection

Fire of Protection. Zechariah 2:5 “I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it.”

You’ve watched all the movies. You’ve heard the stories. People traveling in the wilderness...it’s dark and cold...perhaps they’re lost...or they’re in the woods...they hear the wolves howl...the leaves rustle with dangerous critters. How can you stay safe? What must you do for protection? You circle the wagons, you huddle up in a group, and you *build a fire*! Yes! Fires provide light. They provide heat. They help you cook your food. But very importantly, they keep you safe. They keep “the scaries” away! To them, fire is dangerous. It burns. Stay back! But to us, the fire provides a ring of protection.

Our God is an All-Consuming Fire, who consumes what threatens us. He is our ring of protection. He is our refuge and safety.

Just a bit ago you heard the story from 2 Kings 6 of how the King of Aram sent a division of his army to capture the meddling prophet Elisha. They found him at Dothan, and so during the night they surrounded the city with lots of soldiers, horses and chariots. He didn’t mess around with a small strike team. The whole city is completely surrounded. It doesn’t look good for Elijah!

You know how the scene plays out. The surrounding army sends word into the city: “We are only after the one guy. Send him out, and we’ll spare the rest of you. If you don’t, we’ll burn the whole city down, and you will all die with him!” And in the movies, they find a way to escape or the city stands strong. But in the real world, the front gates open and the individual is pushed out!

Verse 15, “Elisha’s servant got up early and went out. He saw an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. His servant said to Elisha, ‘Oh, no! Master, what will we do?’”

You’ve said this. You’ve gotten up early, looked things over in your life and seen an impossible enemy. Perhaps it wasn’t physical soldiers with swords, but something equally strong and lethal. Perhaps it was a terminal diagnosis. Perhaps it was the death of a relationship. Perhaps it was the doors crashing closed on your hopes and possibilities. You faced something you could not win. It was too strong, too powerful, too overwhelming. Your shoulders fall, your breath catches in your throat, and desperation floods your mind. All you can say is, “Oh, no! What will we do?” You scramble for options, but none of them are good. You are surrounded. You hear the hungry wolves howl.

The wide-eyed, stammering servant blinks at Elisha. He has seen the surrounding army. And he is wondering, “Do we go out there and die, or do we stay in here and die?”

But Elisha seems strangely relaxed and composed. His steady eyes meet the frantic gaze of his servant, and he says calmly, verse 16, “‘Don’t be afraid,’ Elisha said, ‘because there are more of us than there are of them.’”

Now, his servant’s eyes start darting around. He quickly scans the city counting in his head, “A hundred over here, another hundred over there, another hundred in that section, perhaps another hundred past there....hmmm less than five hundred, and many of them women and children. But the army out there has got to be ten times that, all well armed soldiers. Poor Elisha, he’s lost it. The crisis has made him snap. It’s just too much for him.”

Verse 17, “Then Elisha prayed, ‘Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.’ [The problem, you see, was not the enemy soldiers he can see. The problem was the man’s blindness! He’s not seeing something that Elisha can see.] Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and fiery chariots surrounding Elisha.”

The Arameans had a scary number of soldiers, horses and chariots, yes, but what the servant was finally able to see was God’s heavenly army surrounding them. And did you catch the *kind* of chariots? God’s army was full of horses and *fiery* chariots! This is God’s army, with chariots of fire,

God's all-consuming fire! Elisha was not worried, even when facing such an enemy, because He trusted not in human horses and chariots, but in God's divine army with chariots of fire! Around them is a vast enemy army. But surrounding the vast enemy army is an even more vast army with chariots of fire!

The king of Aram saw just a prophet. The Aramean army saw a small city surrounded and outnumbered. Elisha's servant saw the enemy army. But all of them are blind! They cannot see what is actually there. They do not see what is really real.

And so, when the Arameans attack, that is exactly how they are defeated. Verse 18, "The Arameans came toward him, so Elisha prayed to the Lord, 'Strike this nation with blindness.' And the Lord struck them blind, just as Elisha asked."

If you want to know how it turns out, read the rest of 2 Kings 6. It's not exactly how you think, but the Arameans stop raiding the Israelites.

Strange Fire: God's Fire of Protection. First key point: When you put your trust in God, there is more than what you can see. You are not alone. The enemy you face may be real, and it may be far bigger than what you can handle, but you are not alone! When you look with the eyes of faith, you can calmly say, "There is more of us than there are of them!"

Let's practice that. As disciples, we need to be saying that over and over again. "There is more of us than there are of them." Say that with me, "There are more of us than there are of them."

God is an all-consuming fire, and that is a fire of protection.

Remember when God showed up to Moses in the burning bush? That was also fire of protection. Exodus 3:7-8, "Then the Lord said [from the burning bush], 'I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians'" God is their protection, and so He has come to rescue them from their slavery.

As God leads them out into the desert, He goes before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar *of fire* by night. Check out Exodus 13:21. God is a fire leading the way. But when the Egyptians mount their chariots and ride after them to take them back, we see God's fire of protection. Exodus 14:19-20, "God's messenger, who had been in front of Israel's camp, moved and went behind them. The column of cloud moved from the front and took its place behind them. It stood between Egypt's camp and Israel's camp. The cloud remained there, and it brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side, so they didn't come near each other all night." When Egypt's army came close, God's fire of protection moved in between them. It kept them separated: the Egyptians in darkness, but the Israelites in light so they could cross over the riverbed. And from then on, it says in Exodus 40:38, the pillar of fire hung over the tabernacle as their fire of protection.

Psalms 34:7 proclaims, "On every side, the Lord's messenger protects those who honor God; and He delivers them." Psalm 125:2 says, "Mountains surround Jerusalem. This is like how the Lord surrounds His people, from now until forever from now!" God is a circle of protection, a ring of fire that protects His people. Turn to Zechariah 2:4. The prophet Zechariah is seeing God's messengers who tell him to proclaim to the Israelites, that soon Jerusalem will be like an open field, with throngs of people and livestock. It will not need walls of protection. Why? Verse 5, "I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it."

Our God is a wall of fire all around. He is a hedge of protection. Just as a campfire creates a ring of safety when we stay close to it, so our God is a ring of protection, inside of whom we can rest.

First key point: When you put your trust in God, there is more than what you can see. You are not alone. 2 Kings 6:16, "'Don't be afraid,' Elisha said, 'because there are more of us than there

are of them.”” Second key point: our God is a fire of protection for us. Zechariah 2:5 “I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it.”

Today is Mother’s Day. And one thing mothers do best is protect their kids. You can wound a mother, and she most likely will turn the other cheek. But if you wound a mother’s kid, look out. There is a momma bear that comes out, and that protecting instinct will not be diverted. Our God is our divine mother. He is that kind of protection. You can be like Elisha when facing all kinds of trouble. You can be calm and at peace. When things come at you from all sides, you can be steady. You rest safe in the circle of God’s protection.

Christians face things differently. We have a calm that comes from within. Our fears are not wild and abandoned. They do not take over. They don’t rage uncontrollably. When we face disasters beyond our comprehension, we turn to God and our hope is rekindled. This is true when it comes to the vast enemies of our world, like hunger, poverty, injustice, racism, earth destruction, violence, hatred. We do not despair. We take them to our God and cry for help. And our God steadies us, reminds us that there is more than what we can see, and in that calming trust, we are able to go back and tackle the vast problems, empowered to do our part. We cannot save the world, but we claim a God who can. The enemies we face do not immobilize us. *They* are limited by our trust in Jesus.

One more key point: God always protects us eternally. God does not promise to protect us from every trouble or pain. God protected Elisha, and his servant, and the city. God came to the rescue of the Israelites when enslaved in Egypt. God promises to be a hedge of protection around His people. But that doesn’t mean that God will always protect His people from all earthly harm. Often God lets His people suffer pain and difficulty in this life. If He didn’t, our relationship with God would shrivel to making God our bodyguard. It is through the difficulties that God allows that our faith is exercised and made stronger. God uses them to bring good. And God uses them to bring about other victories we cannot see. So, we continue to trust, even when God doesn’t heal like we want. It is okay to ask, and we should. But all of our prayers for healing and deliverance are tempered with still letting God be God and being okay even if it doesn’t go our way.

And the reason we can be at peace with that is because again in God there is more than what we can see. Our lives are not just what we live in this life. This life is short, passing, temporary. We are created for glory, for eternity. So we can suffer trials of many kinds in this life, knowing that we will certainly win the final victory. This life, with all it’s trials and problems, will pass away. We have a life of eternity that will never end, where there is no more pain, no more sorrows, no more powerful enemies. God has already defeated the greatest enemies: defeated sin and death and hell. The worst that the enemies of this world can do is take away our earthly life. But that is not who we are. We are made for eternity, and in Jesus that is rock-solidly certain.

So, that is our hedge of protection, our wall of fire surrounding us. Nothing can touch us that will take away our future. While in this life we face enemies. But we have God as a fire of protection. There is more than what we can see. God fights for us, here and now. And when we suffer pain and loss, we go to Jesus, who we know will carry us victoriously into eternal glory.

Yesterday we had the funeral for Judy Dittberner, who unfairly passed away way too soon from a web of physical maladies. As she took her last breaths, those of us around her bedside felt a deep pain we could not describe. But even then, that pain did not destroy Judy’s loved ones. Duane simply said to me, “She is in God’s hands.” With tears in our eyes, we proclaimed, “Judy is not dead but alive. Because of Jesus, she has begun her new life!”

Our God is a fire of protection, pushing back the enemies even of death itself. And when death crept in close, God took Judy into His hands and delivered her to her new, glorious life for evermore.

This, too, is your God, your fire, your protection.
Amen.

[IN-PERSON WORSHIP ONLY] CLOSING SONG: *My Lighthouse* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Next Sunday's message: Strange Fire: Burnt Offerings

Outdoor worship! Bring a chair!

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"I will be to her a wall of fire all around, says the Lord, and I will be its glory shining within it." -Zechariah 2:5

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

ACOLYTE: God's light leads us out into the world.