

Question: We live in a dangerous world with the constant threats of terrorism, war, crime and bullies. What advice would Jesus offer to keep us from being overwhelmed by fear of these dangers?

Since the Son of God came into our world and lived as one of us, we can be assured that he knows our fears and understands the reasons for them. However, he never promised to remove all threats from our lives. Instead, he has assured those of us who trust him that he will always be with us and help us in whatever we face. I believe Jesus might use the Old Testament story of Elisha, the king of Israel and the king of Aram to illustrate how God helps us deal with these kinds of fearful situations (2 Kings 6).

When the prophet Elisha sent word to the king of Israel warning him of an ambush set up by the king of Aram, the Israelites were able to avoid being entrapped. In a similar way, we can avoid some fearful situations by taking preventive measures whenever possible. For example, it is foolish to walk down a dark alley at night unprotected, to leave doors unlocked in a high-crime area or to eat food at a restaurant known for contamination. We should view any advance knowledge or warnings of danger as blessings from God.

But what are we to do about unexpected threats about which we know nothing or are unable to deal with by our own power? We can be encouraged by what Elisha said to his servant when the army of the king of Aram had secretly surrounded them: “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16). The servant soon saw that the greater army of the angels of the Lord surrounded the Aramean army. As we learn to trust in the presence and power of God to protect us, we do not have to be overcome by fear. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. . . Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:28-31). Romans 8:31 adds, “If God is for us, who can be against us.”

In addition to taking preventative measures and trusting in God's presence, Christians should strive to live in peace even with their enemies. While surrounded by the enemy army of the Arameans, Elisha prayed for deliverance. God answered that prayer, and the Arameans were soon under the power of Elisha's command.

But Elisha did not seek their death after he had captured them. Instead, he commanded that food and water be set before them. The story ends by telling us that the armies of Aram returned home and stopped raiding Israel's territory (2 Kings 6:23). The lesson for us is that instead of being overcome with a spirit of fear or of revenge, we should promote peace, eliminate hatred and break the endless cycle of bitterness and anger. This can be done through understanding, forgiveness, love and compassion even toward those who would harm us.

We can take comfort in the words Jesus said to his disciples in the evening before he was crucified: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

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