

CareySunday 2026: What do you see?**Dr Paul Jones – Message Transcript**

G'day. Paul Jones is my name. I'm the principal at Carey Baptist College.

I wanted to talk to you today about 2 Kings 6. It's an interesting story that revolves around one thing really. Not prophecy, not battles, not even Elisha. This is a story that's primarily about seeing. And often when we talk about seeing, we're asking whether or not someone can see what's there, what's right in front of them. See that cloud shaped like a Bible? Did you see how fast that girl was running? Have you seen our pastor's new trainers? Those questions are about whether you see what's out there or not. But sometimes when we ask someone what they see, we're not asking what's there, we're asking about that person's unique perspective. So there are personality tests that present you with images and ask, "What do you see?" And your answers to those questions are not about identifying what's there on the page. Your answers reveal something about who you are and how you view the world. Have a look at this image, for example.



The Rorschach test is a well-known test where you're presented with a series of symmetrical ink blots like this and asked, "What do you see?" Now, of course, the psychiatrist isn't testing your eyesight. She's working out who you are. The basic idea is that when you are shown a meaningless ink blot, your brain tries to ascribe meaning to it, and what you see says more about you than it says about the ink blot. What do you see here? A butterfly chicken, perhaps? A wolf is a common response. A couple of pigs on a pogo stick is something I saw after looking at it for a while. What do you see?

It's a really important question, because what you see, and sometimes what you don't see, says a lot about you. As we grow up and mature as adults and as Christians, we learn to see things differently, don't we? In one sense, the world out there might not change a lot. The Bible itself hasn't changed. The words are the same. But as we mature, we learn to read the world differently, to read people differently, and to read scripture differently. Not because those things change necessarily, but because you're changing. So let's take a look together at an Old

Testament narrative about seeing. I'm going to read this to you from The Message simply because it's a paraphrase that has been written for easy listening. This is 2 Kings 6:8-23.

⁸ One time when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, after consulting with his officers, he said, "At such and such a place I want an ambush set." ⁹ The Holy Man sent a message to the king of Israel: "Watch out when you're passing this place, because Aram has set an ambush there." ¹⁰ So the king of Israel sent word concerning the place of which the Holy Man had warned him. This kind of thing happened all the time.

¹¹ The king of Aram was furious over all this. He called his officers together and said, "Tell me, who is leaking information to the king of Israel? Who is the spy in our ranks?" ¹² But one of his men said, "No, my master, dear king. It's not any of us. It's Elisha the prophet in Israel. He tells the king of Israel everything you say, even what you whisper in your bedroom." ¹³ The king said, "Go and find out where he is. I'll send someone and capture him." The report came back, "He's in Dothan." ¹⁴ Then he dispatched horses and chariots, an impressive fighting force. They came by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ Early in the morning a servant of the Holy Man got up and went out. Surprise! Horses and chariots surrounding the city! The young man exclaimed, "Oh, master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶ He said, "Don't worry about it—there are more on our side than on their side." ¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed, "O God, open his eyes and let him see." The eyes of the young man were opened and he saw. A wonder! The whole mountainside full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha!

¹⁸ When the Arameans attacked, Elisha prayed to God, "Strike these people blind!" And God struck them blind, just as Elisha said. ¹⁹ Then Elisha called out to them, "Not that way! Not this city! Follow me and I'll lead you to the man you're looking for." And he led them into Samaria.

²⁰ As they entered the city, Elisha prayed, "O God, open their eyes so they can see where they are." God opened their eyes. They looked around—they were trapped in Samaria! ²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I massacre the lot?" ²² "Not on your life!" said Elisha. "You didn't lift a hand to capture them, and now you're going to kill them? No sir, make a feast for them and send them back to their master."

²³ So he prepared a huge feast for them. After they ate and drank their fill he dismissed them. Then they returned home to their master. The raiding bands of Aram didn't bother Israel anymore.

What a great story, hey? I love the book of Kings. And there are three Israelites in this story, and each of them sees differently, and their ability to see or not see tells us a lot about them. Because of that, each of them has something to teach us about ourselves, too, about our own capacity to see or not see. So the story begins, like every good story, with a problem.

And the problem is the prophet Elisha. More specifically, the problem is Elisha's ability to see. Elisha is not a problem within Israel. He's a problem for the king of Aram. Every time the Arameans plan an attack on Israel, Elisha knows. He sees, and he reports back to his own king,

the king of Israel. So what does his seeing tell us about who Elisha is? Well, first and foremost, it confirms that he is Yahweh's prophet. Another word that's sometimes used for a prophet in the Old Testament is a seer. Not a hearer or a thinker or a runner, but literally a seer. Someone who sees beyond what's in front of their face. Someone who can see or perceive what God is doing in a complex situation. And as the story goes on, as we'll see, again and again, Elisha sees what others do not see.

My mum passed away about 17 years ago, and one of the qualities that I remember most vividly about her was her ability to see. Boy, was she perceptive. I would tell her things about my life, and we would chat back and forth, and then she would get straight to asking the question. Not a question clarifying some detail in what I'd shared, but the question. The question that defined the entire conversation from there forward. She'd see through the fluff, see through the games we play when we talk, and she would get straight to the heart of it all. I wonder if that's you. Are you a seer? Someone who can discern what's really going on? And if you are, I hope you're using that gift to bless others.

Now, because of Elisha's ability to see, the Aramean king wants to deal with him, get rid of him, so he gathers all of his forces and targets this one man. Because if he can get to Elisha, he can get back to raiding Israel successfully with the element of surprise, which I'm told comes handy in warfare. But as we suspected, Elisha sees this attack coming as well. And at this point, we're introduced to our second character, Elisha's attendant, or servant, or sidekick. And Elisha's sidekick clearly doesn't see in the way that Elisha does. So let's ask our question again. What does the servant's lack of sight say about him?

Well, when he's introduced, he's described as an attendant, but in the next verse, a different Hebrew word is used, a word that means boy or lad, and he's quite likely a teenager. Perhaps the reason the author uses that word is simply that Elisha's sidekick lacks the maturity to see past the end of his own nose. Actually, that reminds me, when my daughters were younger, like four or seven years old, I remember that they would give 100% of attention to whatever was right in front of their faces. So if they were blowing up for whatever reason, throwing a tantrum, all we had to do was put an object right in front of them, and they'd suddenly forget everything else. "Ah! Oh." So we're not surprised when this young boy, he gets up in the morning, and he freaks out because all he can see is that the city is surrounded by horses, chariots, warriors. So he says what any trusty sidekick says to the superhero in a moment of crisis, "Holy Toledo, we're surrounded." Well, not quite, but he says the 1000 BC equivalent, "Alas, master, what shall we do?"

And of course, that is a very good question. What shall we do? And before we look at how Elisha responds, let me ask you, if you were in this situation, what would you pray for? Deliverance? Power? Strength? Courage? Any of those sounds good to me. But Elisha asks for none of those things. Elisha prays instead for sight, for insight. He prays for the ability to see better, to see what's really going on. And not for himself, but for the boy alongside him. Now, if this isn't a lesson in pastoral care, I don't know what is. When times are tough, when the odds are overwhelming, when you're stuck and can't see an escape hatch, don't pray for a way out until you have asked to see what is really going on. And if you can see what's going on, as Elisha can, then pray for those around you. Pray that they too might have their eyes opened to things as they truly are. Pray for your church leadership team. Pray for your family. Pray for your work colleagues, your children. Whoever you're with, pray that their eyes will be opened.

That's what Elisha does. He prays that this boy's eyes will be opened so that he can see. And see what? Elisha's point of view? No. Elisha prays that he will see reality.

17b And the Lord opened the eyes of the boy, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

That's verse 17. I said a moment ago that when we talk about seeing beyond what's obvious, beyond what's right in front of our faces, we're talking about maturity, aren't we? Someone who can hear offensive words, but not take them too personally because they can see that they were spoken by someone who's hurting. That takes maturity. Someone who already knows the best course of action, this is definitely what we should do, but sees an opportunity for others to discover it for themselves and to grow. And without saying, "I knew it. I told you so." Or someone who knows your problems, your struggles, your failures, but doesn't treat you any different because of those things, because they see you and love you. Those qualities come with maturity. So may I ask, how's your spiritual maturity? Is your ability to see beyond improving with age, as it surely ought to? I hope so.

Now, the next thing that Elisha does is that he traps the Arameans. And again, the story sticks to its theme of sight. Only this time, Elisha prays that the Aramean army will lose their sight and be blinded. And when they are, they're struck with blindness, Elisha leads them into the enemy city. Of course, the irony is really thick at this point. They've come for him, for Elisha, but they've never seen him or heard him, so they don't recognize the voice that says to them, "Follow me. I'll take you to the man you seek. Come on." And sure enough, they follow, and when their sight is restored, who should be standing right in front of them, but Elisha. They've been led into a trap.

The armies of Aram are within the walls of Samaria in the north of Israel. And here we meet our third and final character. Like the boy, Israel's king can't see very well either. Verse 21 says,

21 When the king of Israel SAW them, he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"

What the Israelite king sees is an opportunity. An opportunity for victory, an opportunity for vengeance, an opportunity to crush this army that has been hounding him for so long. And finally, he has them trapped, surrounded. They're sitting ducks. That's what the king sees. And what does this tell us about the kind of person that he is? Well, he's evidently someone who grasps at what's in front of him. Perhaps he's impulsive. Repetition is rare in Hebrew, but here we have him repeating himself because he's so eager to get the job done. "Can I kill them? Can I kill them?"

And now Elisha becomes a problem for the king of Israel, because Elisha doesn't see what the king of Israel sees. He doesn't see an opportunity for vengeance. He doesn't see even judgment. Elisha sees a very different kind of opportunity, an opportunity to show mercy and grace. And he's not just thinking about letting them live. No, Elisha sees well beyond that. He says, "No. Did you capture with your sword and your bow those that you now want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink, and let them go back to their master." Paul talks in the New Testament about blessing your enemies. I'd say this is a pretty good example of that.

Have you ever been in one of those situations where you have every right to get even, to hold a grudge, to cease contact, to turn away? What do you see when you're in that situation? Because what Elisha sees is a rare opportunity to help others see the character of God, a chance to make God known, and he takes it. Verse 23,

23 So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master.

The last line of the story comes as no surprise. The raiding bands of Aram didn't bother Israel anymore. We're not surprised at that because Elisha's actions have enabled Israel's neighbours to see who God is. A God of mercy, a God of grace. Whatever you face this week, I hope you'll reflect on this question: What do you see? In each situation that arises for you, be it wonderful or tragic, fair or unfair, pleasant or painful, I encourage you to look for insight, look for maturity, look for mercy. Amen.