

**2nd Kings 6: 1-7; “Making Iron Float”, Message # 10 in the series –
“Elisha and the Prophets”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall
on September 19th, for those gathered at his home.**

Tonight we want to look at another of Elisha’s amazing miracles which the Lord gave him to perform to the great encouragement of this individual man, one of the sons of the prophets, who had borrowed a tool to help in the work of building a new Seminary building to the glory of God. While he was working, swinging the ax, the iron ax head, which must have been loosened over time, came off and flew into the river, and the prophet who had borrowed it, could not find it. So he came and told Elisha about this sad thing, and Elisha was determined to help him. We want to look 1st, at the setting of the miracle, then 2nd – Elisha’s consent to be a helper in this good work, and then 3rd – What this miracle means to us today; that he was able to make the iron float. I pray that we would together see that God is very interested in all of the particular concerns that each of us has in our particular labors in promoting the advance of Christ’s kingdom, and He will help us through His servants.

1st of all – The Setting of the Miracle; the School of the Prophets.

It seems as though the setting must have been either Jericho or Gilgal, for those were places which were mentioned before, as places where the sons of the prophets had schools. In 2nd Kings 4: 38, it says – “And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land.” “Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.’” It was in that context that Elisha performed the miracle of the healing of the stew so that it was not poisonous for them to eat. In 2nd Kings 2: 5 we read – “And the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?’” “So answered, ‘Yes, I know; keep silent.” Joseph Robinson one of the writers of the Cambridge Bible Commentary says – “There is nothing to indicate which, out of the various prophetic communities is here spoken of. But by the proposal which follows, that they should go to the Jordan, and bring from thence each man his own beam, we may conclude that the place was not far from the river.” “The station nearest to the Jordan of which we are told is Jericho, and it may be that there, the company had grown beyond their buildings.”

The context of this story that follows is that the “place where these prophets dwelt with Elisha was too small”. Although this was true, that they needed a bigger place to dwell in, and to meet together in, it meant that the word of God was precious to them, and that they were experiencing a revival of sorts in relation to Elisha’s being able to teach these men, the good doctrinal and practical truths of the word of God so that they could teach others also. They wanted this good work to continue, and so they consulted with Elisha over what they should do. This was a very good and strong working of God’s Spirit in these men to want to build something lasting; a place where men could be trained for the ministry, and strengthen one another’s hands in the work of God.

Turn with me over to 2nd Timothy chapter 1, verses 12 to chapter 2, verse 2. “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day.” “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” “That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.” “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me.” “The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day – and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.” “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

It ought to be the desire of every Christian pastor and every Christian, especially those who desire to become a pastor, to hold fast the pattern of sound words which are found in the Bible. Elisha, we

have seen in past studies, was a representative of Christ to the Old Testament people of God in his day. In the case that we are looking at here, he was acting very much like our Lord would have, in such circumstances. He, being only a man of like nature as we are, can also be seen in this passage as a man who was acting like a New Testament apostle in Old Testament times. He was such a prophetic representative of God and such a servant of the truth of the word of God, that these sons of the prophets, realizing this, they wanted to be strong in that truth, even as he was. They saw in Elisha, not only a prophet, but a strong believer as well. They saw him as a pattern for their own ministries in that day. They were holding fast the pattern of sound words which they had heard from him, in faith and love. Elisha was keeping that good thing which had been entrusted to him; that is, the ministry which he had been given, and the gift of God by the Holy Spirit which enabled him to minister to many others. They desired to become like him in the ways that they believed by faith they could.

And so, Elisha being strong in the grace of God, the things which he had received from God in truth, he by the gifts and graces given to him, desired to commit these to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Therefore we have seminaries in our day; therefore there was a log college before there was ever a greater institution built at Princeton. Godly teachers and preachers of the word have always rightly desired to see the form of sound words conveyed to the next generation, and have taken steps to do it. The pattern of sound words is the truth of the word of God which all faithful servants of the Lord must preach and live by themselves, if they would see the Lord's kingdom advanced. These men very diligently sought Elisha out, and they said, "See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us," "Please let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell." "So Elisha answered, 'Go.'"

2nd - Elisha's consent to be a helper in this good work.

Verse 3 says – "Then one said, 'Please consent to go with your servants.'" "And he answered, 'I will go.'" "So he went with them." Now, here I believe that it is legitimate and necessary that we must once again see Elisha as the one who was representing Christ and all duly ordained prophetic authority to these men. They were men who wanted to do this good work for God, and for themselves. And yet it is very important before beginning any great work for God in relation to helping to labor in His kingdom, that we beg permission from Christ Himself, and that we will also ask for the proper spiritual authority that we should be under, (a pastor or leader in our church) to help us as well. These men wanted Elisha to consent to go with them. They wanted his help and advice at every stage of the work, right from the beginning. Similarly, whenever we are to undertake any big building project or anything that will help in the building of Christ's Church, we should beg Christ to come with us into it. It is surely true in one sense that He is with us always, even until the end of the age. But it is just as surely true that we need to see of what great importance it is that His approval of all that we are doing is obtained.

Lord, will you not go with us, and help us by giving us grace and wisdom and your blessing upon our endeavors? That ought to be our prayer. Will you not supervise our work? Will you not help us in the work? Will you not establish the work of our hands? Turn with me over to Psalm 90, verses 13-17. "Return, O Lord!" "How long?" "And have compassion on Your servants." "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!" "Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil." "Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children." "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands." Ah, this was not only a good prayer for Moses and the children of Israel to pray and ask for. It is a good prayer for a pastor and the people of that congregation to pray for, as well. If the Lord's presence and the evident blessing of the Lord upon the work of the ministry is not being seen, it is most appropriate to pray – "Return, O Lord!" How long will it be until we know the reality of Your presence and blessing with us? How long will it be until we can have that ultimate sense of satisfaction that you are showing us this mercy of Your known and felt blessing among us? It is right to pray that God would make us glad according to the days in which He has afflicted us, and the years that we have seen evil.

It is also right to pray and ask that God's work would appear to us, His servants, and that He would come with and be with us in the midst of that work; that He would reveal His glory to us and to our children. When you pray this way you are asking that the beauty of God's grace and favor and glory would be upon the church, and His good Spirit would be working in each member, and that God Himself through Christ, would establish the work of our hands. This is the picture of what these prophets were asking Elisha to do; as God's representative to them, that he would go with God's servants. It is right to pray this, many times; that God's good work would be established in our midst, and that we would know the reality of it, and be able to rejoice in His help to us, in all of our labors for Him. We should often pray that Christ would go with us in our work and our labors for His kingdom. We should pray that the Lord as our God would establish Himself in our midst as our Counsellor and Helper. We should pray – Lord, make this church a place where we might dwell together in faithful love for your word, and faithful love for your people.

We should also try to understand that we can bring all of the most practical aspects of our work, both physical and spiritual, to our Lord, and also to our pastor, or the one who has spiritual authority over us in the church. Verses 4 and 5 – “So he went with them” “And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees.” “But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, ‘Alas, master!’” “For it was borrowed.” I want you to notice that this poor man who was a prophet was very concerned that he had lost this axe-head because it was borrowed. And since it was borrowed, he wouldn't be able to restore it to the one that he borrowed it from. Turn with me over to Psalm 37, verse 21. “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous show mercy and gives.” Now, it was probably true that whoever had loaned this axe to this man, had shown him a great mercy in letting him use it for a time. Whether it was a wicked man or a righteous man, we are not told. But it was probably something that the owner used often and needed back again.

So, the prophet who was working with it, when the head loosened and finally was thrown off the handle into the water and lost, being a poor man, he thought that he wouldn't be able to pay the owner back, and thus his reputation for being a righteous man would be sullied. Look at Proverbs 21, verse 1 – “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.” This poor prophet had probably deliberately chosen to have the good name of a righteous man rather than going into debt over buying expensive tools, but in relation to the work of the Lord, he had borrowed this axe. Therefore he sought counsel from his pastor/friend Elisha what he should do about this awkward situation; this accident. Let us understand that there is no such thing as an accident in God's reckoning of things. All things which men consider as accidents, to Him are all fully known, and planned for, and ordained. But to us, who are mere men, there are such things as accidents.

A.W. Pink says this: “In one sense it is perfectly true that there are no accidents in a world that is presided over by the living God; but in another sense it is equally true that accidents do occur in the human realm.” “This calls for a defining of our term.” “What is an accident?” “It is when some effect is produced or some consequence issues from an action which is undesignated by its performer.” “From the divine side of things, nothing occurs in this world but what God has ordained; but from the human side, many things result from our actions which were not intended by us.” “It was no design of this man that he should lose the head of his ax; that he did so was accidental on his part.” Very true! And Elisha knew this. And so, he asked a good question of the younger prophet; a question which we should ask ourselves whenever we lose something of value. Verse 6 – “Where did it fall?” Where did you see it last, in other words? Sometimes this may greatly help in terms of our finding what was lost. In this case it did, as we shall see in a moment. But what I want you to remember now is that when you have lost something of value, especially when you are doing the work of the Lord, it will be good to take counsel with someone who understands the spiritual principles of truth and righteousness, as you go about to find it, or recover it. For they will no doubt be able to help direct you in relation to what you should do, God helping them.

And then 3rd – We need to understand what this miracle means to us today; that Elisha was able to make the iron float.

Verse 6 says – “So the man of God said, ‘Where did it fall?’ “And he showed him the place.” “So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float.” “Therefore he said, ‘Pick it up for yourself.’ “So he reached out his hand and took it.” Once again, recall that Elisha’s actions are meant to represent God’s sympathy as personified in our Lord Jesus Christ, and are meant to point us to Him and to His help to us, as believers, who are engaged in the work of His kingdom. The work that this prophet was engaged in, was helping to fell the trees which would make up the building in which they all would dwell in, and be instructed in. His labors now were brought to a standstill. The axe that he was using, lost its head. So, it is often true that when we are trying our hardest to help in the building of the kingdom of God, that our labor is brought to a standstill by some providential circumstance which is beyond our control. It may seem that we may never be able to complete the task that we have started or reach the goal that we have, of glorifying God in our work of helping to build the church. What should we do? We should do what this man did. We should go to the prophet – In our case – Christ. And we should lay before him exactly what has happened, and how we have used borrowed resources which we cannot now replace. We should note the place where we have made our mistake, and then trust that Christ will make the iron to float; that is, that He will take the thing that has been lost, and is impossible for us to recover, and he will bring that instrument back to us; He will raise iron ax-head contrary to its nature, to the surface of the water, and cause it to float.

Perhaps a good example of this would be John Bunyan. Bunyan was doing the Lord’s work of preaching the gospel and the word of God to many people, back in 1661. But he was arrested because he was a Baptist preacher and refused to give up preaching when he was told that he could not continue to do it because of the Conventicles Act of 1593 which stated that it was civil offence to attend a religious gathering other than at the parish church with more five people outside your own family. Bunyan was preaching to far more people than that; sometimes to thousands secretly in the woods. He was arrested and put in Bedford Prison, and he was held there for 12 years. His ax-head of preaching the word was under the water, and he did not know if he could get it back again. But He prayed to Christ, and the Lord was able to make the iron float. He wrote Pilgrim’s Progress there in prison; a book which besides the Bible, has sold more copies almost, than any other book, teaching us much about living the Christian life. And after his imprisonment, he still went on to preach and to write many books and do great good in the building of the Church of Christ; the effects of which are still with us to this day. So, do not grow discouraged when the instrumental means of preaching and sharing the gospel which have been afforded you, are lost to your sight. The Lord sympathizes with you, and He will help you according to His sovereign will and power.

It says in our text, in verse 7, that Elisha told the prophet who had lost the ax-head to “pick it up for yourself”. Each of us has to prove for ourselves that our Lord is well able to work contrary to our expectations, and contrary to the nature of what usually we would expect to happen, to bring about the good things necessary to fulfill the Great Commission, and help in the building and advance of Christ’s Church. But it shall be done. And it shall be done, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God. The stick that Elisha threw in the water was not the handle of the axe, but a small tree, it appears by the word in the original. If we think about the tree representing the tree upon which Christ died, we can say that when we will think about all of what God accomplishes through the death of Christ, and His resurrection from the dead, we can see that He will be able to make the iron float and rise up in the waters of our difficulties. He will help us to go forward, according to His will, to accomplish those things which seem to be too difficult, and even impossible to us, if we will apply to Him for help. This is the lesson of our study tonight.