

“The Floating Axe head”  
2 Kings 6:1-7  
(Preached at Trinity, February 27, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As **Chapter 6** opens the scene has entirely changed. Naaman has returned to Syria, healed of his leprosy and thankful for his new life in service to the God of Israel. Gehazi has begun his new life as a leper. He would have departed to live among other lepers. If he was married, his wife and children were also soon infected. If he was unmarried, he would have taken a wife from among those with leprosy and his offspring would have also been infected according to the Word of God.  
**2 Kings 5:27 NAU** - "the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper as *white* as snow."
2. Now we find Elisha being approached by the sons of the prophets with a request for a larger dwelling place.
  - A. This in itself was a source of encouragement. Elijah believed the fires of devotion towards God in Israel had died. He believed he was the last of God's servants.  
**1 Kings 19:14 NAU** - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
  - B. God assured Elijah that he was not alone. God was maintaining a remnant of faithful servants.  
**1 Kings 19:18 NAU** - "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."
  - C. Now it would seem that the numbers of God's faithful were continuing to increase even in the midst of Israel's spiritual decay and apostasy. The school of the prophets was growing. Since the number of prophets was increasing they were in need of more space.
  - D. The phrase, "the place before you where we are living" suggests some type of meeting hall where they were gathering to hear Elisha teach.  
**Verse 2** however seems to have an eye upon the living quarters of the prophets—the place where they live.  
"let us make a place there for ourselves where we may live."  
Either way, they had outgrown their space and needed to start a building program.
3. Elisha grants their request and he and the prophets journey to the Jordan River to begin cutting timber to build the larger space.  
This provides the setting for the next miracle from the hand of Elisha.

4. Like with the other miracles, some have difficulty accepting this at face value. Are we to believe that iron can be made to float?
  - Refusing to accept the miracle of a floating axe head they say what really happened was Elisha poked around with the stick until it struck the axe head and he lifted it into the hand of the anxious young prophet. Or perhaps, when the location of the axe head was pointed out to Elisha, he took a stick and pushed it into the shallow waters where the prophet could reach in and grab it.
  - Others just put it into the realm of legend – a story that was greatly embellished as it was repeated over the years.
  - Still others try to moralize the passage or turn it into an allegory. God lifts up those sinking in sin. Or they point to the symbol of the submersion and rising of the resurrection.
5. Of course, if we follow their interpretations, we deny the clarity and infallibility of Scripture. We fail to appreciate what is called the *sensus literalis* – the plain literal meaning of the text.
 

The text tells us something extraordinary took place. The iron axe head was made to float. God most often works through the use of natural means. But at times God works above and beyond nature. The definition of a miracle is God working outside natural law or suspending the ordinary processes of nature. The natural realm tells us that since iron is heavier than water it will sink. God miraculously made this heavier than water object float.
6. We always need to ask ourselves, what is the intent of the author? Why is this passage here? If we take it at face value, we can appreciate how the author is putting God on display – the perfections of His divine nature as well as His grace, power, and presence in the affairs of men.
7. We've seen God's gracious hand in the lives of ordinary people as we've walked with Elisha. We've seen ordinary people like a widow and her two children that God delivered from the hand of her creditor. Or God intervening in the life of Shunamite woman whose child had died. Or God's presence in the fellowship meal of the prophets purifying the pot of poison stew. Or God healing the military leader suffering from leprosy. All were demonstrations of God's activity in everyday situations that occur in the lives of everyday people.
  - A. Now we come upon this scene at the opening of **Chapter 6**. It also screams of normalcy. A group of young men are energetically cutting wood to build an addition onto their living quarters. They are not wealthy or influential men. They were humble men in the service of God. They were not builders. They were prophets. They didn't even own the tools of carpenters. And the tools available were the simple tools of antiquity.
  - B. As one particular prophet was swinging an axe the head came off. It flew into the muddy water and sank. If that was not bad enough, the axe did not belong to him. We are told that it was borrowed. There are moral and legal responsibilities that accompany borrowing from our neighbor.

**Exodus 22:14-15 NAU** - "If a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution. <sup>15</sup> "If its owner is with it, he shall not make restitution; if it is hired, it came for its hire."

1. It you borrow something from someone, and it is lost or damaged, you have the responsibility of replacing or repairing the item. If you borrow something you have a duty to return it in as good or better condition than when you received it.
  2. This young man was in a bad situation. Iron tools were all hand-made and expensive to replace. You couldn't just go to the local hardware store and buy another mass-produced tool. He was not acting carelessly or irresponsibly. It was an accident, but he was still responsible for the care of his neighbor's axe.  
He lost the axe-head and was responsible for its replacement.
  3. If one was not able to afford their financial responsibility they could be sold into slavery.
8. We can see several things about the nature and character of God.
- I. We can see God's grace in the lives of men
- A. He cares about the mundane
    1. There are huge issues in this world. Issues of life and death. Nations have nuclear weapons directed at one another. Terrorists maim and destroy, sometimes killing multitudes.  
Billionaires scheme and politicians vie for power.
    2. In the midst of earth-shaking events God oversees the mundane, the ordinary events of life.
      - a. Does He involve Himself as we try to find a parking space?  
Does He care about scraped knees and nose bleeds?  
Flat tires, lost wallets, and on and on?
      - b. Does He hear the prayers of a single saint in a world of unimaginable need?
  - B. One of God's attributes is His kindness. He is gracious, compassionate
    1. He is gracious to intervene in times of need. He came to this prophet in the loss of the axe head. It wasn't a matter of huge significance, but it was important to this prophet.
    2. Jesus cared about the wine running out at the wedding feast at Cana. It might seem like a small thing, but it wasn't small to this young couple.
    3. 2 Kings wasn't completed until after Judah was taken captive by Babylon. How would they read this? Would they read it as a message of hope and encouragement? That God cares about the needs of His people, even in the midst of affliction, even in the daily affairs of life.  
They would have read it the same way we should read it. That God is gracious and kind towards His people.

II. We can see God's power to do His holy will

A. God is able to do things great and small

1. God is able to sustain the universe but is mindful of a sparrow on earth  
**Matthew 10:29-30 NAU** - "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.<sup>30</sup> "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."
  2. Can the God who knows the atomic structure of a star at the far reaches of our galaxy bother with the hairs on your head?
  3. Can He maintain your heartbeat?
- B. It is really a small thing for God to work with or without the use of means.
1. God could have decreed that all of the prophets begin swimming in the Jordan, probing the bottom hoping to locate the axe head.
  2. God could have had an unknown benefactor supply a replacement axe.
  3. This was the time for a miracle. Iron has greater density than water and so it sinks. Wood has less density and so it floats. Iron doesn't float, unless God orders it.
  4. God commanded and the axe head floated. But He used Elisha to accomplish His will.

III. We can see God's presence and oversight over all things. God is here.

A. God is both transcendent as well as imminent

1. As a transcendent God He is infinitely other than His creation. He is holy, holy, holy.
  - a. God dwells in light inaccessible. He is can only be known through self-disclosure.  
 Martin Luther: God is Deus absconditus – “the hidden God”  
 Had God not revealed Himself man could have no knowledge of Him.
  - b. God dwells in light unapproachable – He is totally beyond us
  - c. God told Moses  
**Exodus 33:20 NAU** - "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"
2. As an imminent God He is near and intimate. Here is the wonder of wonders. God created us in His image, in His likeness.  
 He enters into relationship with His people.
  - a. Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Christ 700 year before His birth.  
**Isaiah 7:14 NAU** - "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."
  - b. Isaiah doesn't give us any information regarding this Immanuel, but the Hebrew was clear and 700 years later Matthew gave us the meaning.  
**Matthew 1:23 NAU** - "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

- B. The great Emmanuel is with us, among us
  - 1. His presence with us is intimate. It is constant and compassionate  
**Matthew 28:20 NAU** - "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
  - 2. His presence is with us now. He will be with us for all of eternity  
**John 14:2-3 NAU** - "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also."
  - 2 Corinthians 5:8 NAU** - "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."
- C. The presence of Christ is a loving, caring presence. He is our Shepherd
  - 1. The Psalmist wrote  
**Psalm 23:1-4 KJV** - "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."
  - 2. In our worst trial our Savior is with us  
**Psalm 23:4 KJV** - "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me"
  - 3. When Paul was in prison he felt all alone, deserted by all the brethren – but Paul knew that he was not alone.  
**2 Timothy 4:16-17 NAU** - "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me"

#### Conclusion:

- 1. This is our God. No need is too great, nor too small. We can cry out to Him at all times.
- 2. This should encourage us as we live before God. We need to trust him always.