

Sermon 44, When God Gave a Prophet the Axe, 2 Kings 6:1-7

Proposition: God is at work to take care of His people — so trust Him.

- I. God's Providential Provision, vv. 1-4
 - A. Building Materials, vv. 1-2, 4
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Introduction

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, you may feel that I'm starting to get rather repetitive in these evening sermons. Every week it's the same old message: God cares for you! God provides for you! Trust Him and see whether He doesn't come through to help you with your neediness!

Maybe you've all gotten it. Maybe you trust God at the level you should trust Him, all the time. But the text keeps driving this message home to us and it is only right for us to pay attention. God clearly wants us to know what He did for His people in the days of Elisha, and so we should listen as the text shows us, time after time and story after story how our God went out of His way to care for the nameless, the helpless, and the at-risk. Once again, we see that at the heart of the universe is not callous indifference but rather love, care, and generosity. Our God is at work to take care of His people — so trust Him.

I. God's Providential Provision, vv. 1-4

We see a number of features in our story that get mentioned and then dropped again. Why was the prophet's place too small? Was it simply a meeting place or a dorm-type facility? Why did they want to go to the Jordan for wood, especially since the banks of the Jordan today are not particularly wooded? Why did they decide to relocate? The narrative doesn't follow up on any of these questions. It's not interested in giving us a window into the daily lives of the sons of the prophets. It is interested in telling us a little vignette, a little anecdote that reveals what our Jesus is like. Indeed, if you want to drag the story in a particular direction that the author wasn't thinking of, perhaps the most fruitful place to go is to compare the ease of moving and building in Ancient Israel to the difficulty we experience today. These prophets didn't have to do an environmental impact study. They didn't have to pull permits. They didn't have to be inspected. They didn't need to pay fees and property taxes. They just up and moved when the fancy took them. That sounds like freedom to me!

A. Building Materials, vv. 1-2, 4

Well, we see that God provided building materials and place for these prophets to establish their new meeting place/dwelling. Surely this shows us something about the generosity of our Father. He provided through ordinary providential means for these people to have a place to pursue their calling. And He still provides today through ordinary means. If you have a job, a place to live, a place to meet with your fellow believers, thank God. Literally thank Him! These are mundane, but they are things for which God cares. Otherwise, why would he take the time to mention them in a book as concise as this Bible?

B. A Prophet, v. 3

Specifically, though, God provided a prophet for these sons of the prophets. Did they know that a miracle would be needed before the day was out? Probably not. Yet in asking Elisha to go along, they inadvertently were preparing for the need that would arise later. God was at work, giving them what they were going to need before they ever knew they would need it.

Brothers and sisters, have you ever realized this about your own life? Can you look back and say, “God took me here, gave me this, prepared me with such-and-such experience, long before I ever knew I’d need it?” I know I can. The fact is that our God provides, both when we know we have needs and long before we realize how needy we are.

II. God’s Concern for His People’s Need, vv. 5-7

God not only provided, but He showed that He is concerned about His people’s need. To us, this seems like a little need. You lost the axe-head? Go buy another one for \$25. Except that in this era, the Iron Age, iron was really expensive. Losing a borrowed axe-head then was probably more like wrecking a borrowed car today. It involved some serious financial difficulties. No wonder the son of the prophets who lost it was upset!

Yet, as we saw with the widow’s oil, God cares. God is willing to hear and take care of you when you call on Him. Now, this was a real need — not a greed but a potentially financially crippling incident. When you need financial help, do you go to God (and His divinely appointed agents, the deacons) first? Do you cry to Him and look for help from Him? Or do you assume that He cares for big things but neglects small things? This text shows us that God cares about small things that seem like big things to us.

III. God’s Power for His People’s Need, vv. 5-7

But another thing I want to point out, a factor that was present in the story of the widow’s oil but one which I didn’t emphasize when we looked at that story, is that God has the power to intervene. He made the iron float! Now, compared to raising the dead that’s nothing. But I guarantee that no one here has ever seen iron float. Iron is denser and heavier than water. It sinks, rapidly. But this iron floated when Elisha threw the stick in after it. Why? Because of the power of God.

God is powerful. For God to roll back the laws of nature and make things do what they naturally wouldn’t is what we call a “miracle” — and it is something God specializes in. He doesn’t always do miracles, of course. But when He does, they are for the benefit of His people.

As we saw at the chapter's beginning, God's ordinary way of showing His care for His people is through His providential workings on our behalf, workings in which we participate. But God's power extends not only to providential ordering, but even to doing things that sound unbelievable.

Do you actually believe that God can heal cancer? That He can cleanse you from sin? That He can make you stop sinning your favorite sin? That He will make you like Christ? That He can bring reformation and revival to a whole nation and to the whole world? That He is in charge of political leaders and political processes? You see, God's power is for you. It's for your needs — not in a 'name it and claim it' sense, but in the sense that He cares and wants us to come to Him in prayer for everything, big and small, from missing car keys to flooded homes, from lost children to lost pennies. You see, when you recognize and trust in God's power, then you will instinctively and automatically cry out to Him when you're in distress. You won't seek coffee, drugs, cigarettes, porn, or other coping mechanisms. You will seek the power of the living God.

IV. God's Trustworthiness for His People's Future, vv. 1-7

Dale Ralph Davis asks us to consider how this incident must have sounded to the original audience of Kings, when the book was completed some 300 years after Elisha's time, during the devastation of the exile. To those seated by the rivers of Babylon, weeping over the destruction of their land, their people, their church, and their future, what message would this account convey? That God can restore. The same God who made the axe head float can take care of you today if you only trust Him. The stories appeal to Israel to seek the God who showed His power not just on behalf on the high and mighty (like Naaman), not just in the events of geopolitics (as we'll see in the rest of this chapter) but even in the mundane affairs of life, like losing a borrowed piece of iron.

If you're depressed over the state of the American church; if you have financial difficulties, health difficulties, or other needs — then remember what kind of God you serve. Cry out to Him. You don't have to accept the allegorical interpretation that sees this axe head as the human soul, sunk beneath the waters of judgment until the wood of the cross intervened and gave you new life so that you could rise to the top. But you should see nonetheless that the same care and power that God showed in surfacing this axe head He showed preeminently in the work of His Son. Jesus did indeed get thrown into the waters of judgment for you so that you could live. Do you see that foreshadowed in this incident? Do you see the power and the care of Almighty God for you, His humble servant? It's there. Trust this God, not only with your current needs, but with your future. Amen.