

鐫 ESSONS FOR CHRIST 担 HARVEST HANDS”

(II Kings 6:1-7)

典 *he sons of the prophets said to Elisha, Look now, the place where we live before you is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, and each man get there a beam, and let us make us a place there where we may dwell. And he answered, Go. One said, Be pleased to go with your servants. He answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was felling his beam, the axe head fell into the water; and he cried, Alas, my master, for it was borrowed! The man of God said, Where did it fall? When shown the place, Elisha cut off a stick and threw it in there, and the iron floated. He said, Pick it up. And he put out his hand, and took it.”*

What is the greatest loss a Christian can suffer? Is it not the loss of the near presence of the Holy Spirit? Is it not the loss of spiritual power which comes from an up-to-date relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? The story in Second Kings six concerns that loss.

Let me turn the miracle into a parable. In this story, we will let Elisha the leader represent Jesus the Lord. The "sons of the prophets" suggest all vocational Christian workers (*all Christians*, according to Ephesians 4:11-12). The axe handle stands for your life. The axe head represents the Holy Spirit, the "cutting edge" of the Christian life. You see, dear Christian, you exist to be *controlled by* and to *carry and convey* the power of the Holy Spirit! The trees represent lost, Godless men, (all men in their natural condition), who must be "felled" by the Holy Spirit and fashioned together to build "a house for God to dwell in, a habitation of God through the Spirit" (see Ephesians 2:19-22). Keep these identifications carefully fixed in your mind, and let's explore the story.

I. A PATTERN FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE THAT WE SHOULD APPROVE

First, this story suggests *a pattern for Christian service which we should approve*. Elisha, the miracle prophet, was the president of a seminary which existed to teach and train God-called preachers, "the sons of the prophets." The seminary had grown so rapidly that it had exceeded its dormitory space. The students suggested that the seminary be moved to the Jordan River valley, and that larger dormitory and classroom space should be provided for it. Note the pattern suggested for us by these servants and their service.

They *worked in a close relationship with the master*. Verse one says, "The sons of the prophets said unto Elisha." They did nothing in their service without consulting him. Did not our master say, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you expect you abide in Me." (John 15:4)

They *worked under a deep burden over their need*. They said to Elisha in verse one, "Behold now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us." If a Christian walks in close relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will usually give him a deep burden for expanded

vision and larger ministry. Job 36:16 says, "God would remove you out of the narrow place into the broad place, where there is no narrowness."

They *received a specific commission from their Master* to go ahead with the project. They said to Elisha, "Let us go unto Jordan, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell." And Elisha answered, "Go ye." A Christian cannot read Elisha's command without hearing Jesus' Great Commission, "Go ye and disciple all nations." "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

They *worked with a recognition of full dependence upon the Master*. When Elisha said, "Go ye," one of the preachers then said to him, "I pray thee, go with thy servants." And he answered, "I will go." The Christian worker must have the Presence of Jesus, his "Heavenly President," all the time and all the way!

They *worked in a unified effort*, yet each had a sense of individual responsibility. In verse two, they said, "Let us go, and take every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell." One of America's greatest early statesmen said, "The greatest thought that has ever passed through my mind is the thought of my individual responsibility to God." And this consciousness of individual responsibility must be balanced by a wonderful sense of teamwork, of family fellowship, and of unified effort with all other Christians in fulfilling our Master's Great Commission.

They *engaged in diligent service*. Verse four says, "When they came to Jordan, they cut down wood." Every Christian should take seriously the old adage, "We are here, not to loaf, but to labor." Paul said, "I labor more abundantly than they all," and so should we.

So here is a beautiful, practical pattern for all Christian servants, a pattern we should approve.

II. A PERIL IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE WHICH WE SHOULD AVOID

Midway in the story, there is a sad interruption, and the interlude points to *a peril every Christian worker should avoid*. Verse five says, "As one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water." Let me remind you that, in our analogy, the axe head represents the Holy Spirit, the "cutting edge" of power in the service of a Christian. And the axe head was lost. What a peril for a servant of Christ, and the deadly danger is always present!

Note that this servant did not lose the axe handle! Though this is foolish and inconceivable to us, it is exactly what many Christians do when they experience the loss of the Holy Spirit's power in their service. However, to hew with a handle alone only bludgeons and bruises the trees, and seldom hews one down! How many lost people in our communities have been left bludgeoned and bruised, but "uncut" by the sharp, skin-killing, sinner-felling conviction of the Holy Spirit because our service is in the flesh, a mere axe handle, without the axe head of the Spirit's mighty hewing power.

Psalm 74:5 says, "A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees." How strong, thick, and deep rooted in sin the "trees" are today! Each Christian servant is to lift up the axe upon these thick trees. But what if we lose the axe head? Look at the peril.

He lost it *while he was working*. "As one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water." It surely did not fly off the axe head without becoming loose first. How careful we must be about looseness in the Christian life, even while working for Christ. The axe head probably gradually loosened on the handle, and because the worker did not exercise great caution, it was soon gone. It is perilously possible to lose the power of the Holy Spirit while engaged in Christian service!

What he lost was *borrowed*. He said to Elisha, "It was borrowed" (verse 5). You see, dear Christians, the power by which we serve Christ is never really ours (anymore than the axe head and axe handle are ours). Psalm 62:11 says, "Power belongeth unto the Lord." Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost has come upon you." The power is never inherently ours; it is borrowed. How dependant we should be upon the true Owner!

He was *conscious of his loss and deeply distressed about it*. Verse 5 says, "And he cried, and said, 'Alas, master!' for it was borrowed." Many of us today are like Samson, who suffered the loss of the Spirit's power, but "knew not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him." The church at Laodicea thought it was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing," but it didn't know that it actually was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). This tree-cutting servant was in an emergency and he knew it.

Dear friends, the loss of the Holy Spirit's power should never be treated as a casual matter. It is an absolute crisis! Any sense of loss of this power on our part should prepare us for the third part of the story.

III. A PROCEDURE IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE WHICH WE SHOULD ADOPT

The concluding verses of the account outline for us *a procedure we should adopt in order to have the lost power restored*. If you have lost the "cutting edge," if your spiritual life has been sinking below the surface of the waters of sin, selfishness, idleness, indifference, worldliness, bad disposition, etc., take heart. You may be restored, renewed, reinstated, and re-equipped in service. How? The prescription is vividly spelled out. Let me put it in Christian terms.

Abandon all labor. This man stopped working instantly when he realized the destitution of his loss. How foolish for him to go on working, and yet, Christians are not always as wise as he. Thousands of pastors, evangelists, Sunday School teachers, witnesses, keep on "flailing away," even when the axe head has been lost. For our Master's sake, we must stop all work until the loss is corrected.

Approach the Lord. "Alas, master!" the servant cried. And so must we. Each of us must get alone, make a full confession of our loss and the possible reasons for it, and put our case absolutely into the Master's hands. Don't try to recover the axe head yourself! Don't try to

borrow a substitute! Don't give up and leave the forest! Jesus is more interested in this than you are. He wants you to have a sharp axe head to be employed in the most effective work of "cutting down" the trees and "building up" the House. Cry out to Him about the lack of power.

Admit the loss. This young preacher must have felt awfully foolish as he confessed the problem. After all, he should have felt the loosening of the axe head. He should have known that a serious problem was developing. But he did not let his embarrassment prevent him from a frank and full confession of loss. And we, too, must shamefully confess our loss to Jesus.

Acknowledge the location. When the servant told Elisha, "The man of God said, Where fell it?" (verse 6). "And he showed him the place." How simple! The best place to find something that is misplaced is where you lost it. Many of us need to retrace our steps spiritually today to some "river bank" where we watched our spiritual life sink out of sight and lost the power of the Holy Spirit. If you don't know the exact place, retrace your steps like Mary and Joseph did after they had "lost" Jesus without knowing where they had lost Him. You'll find the axe head back where you left it.

Appropriate the lifted power. "Appropriate" what an important word! How did Elisha restore the axe head to the servant? Strangely, "he cut down a stick, and cast it in" the water where the axe head had fallen. A branch of a tree! How peculiar! Will any Spirit-taught Christian question the interpretation? Before the power can be restored, the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus must be applied anew to the believer's life. The Christian must "re-enter," in effect, the Death and Resurrection of the Lord. The cut down stick represents the Death(the Cross) of Jesus. He Himself was "cut down" in death, and cast into the river of death. And when even a splinter of Calvary's Dying is inserted into our lives at the point of our loss, a miracle occurs! Then "the iron did swim." God raised the iron against all natural laws. God raised Jesus against all natural laws. And God will restore the power of the Holy Spirit in spite of all the down-dragging gravity of that which caused the loss. God's grace can raise your sunken spiritual life, dear Christian, though it has descended into the mud of this world, if you will follow His prescription and apply anew the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

This young man was never told to analyze the miracle, but to appropriate it. The miracle did not call for the explanation of reason, but for the exercise of faith. "Elisha said, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand and took it." (verse 7). There's a work to be done! There is a great House building! Others are wielding axes, felling trees, and trimming branches. Remember, God's purpose is, "Every man a beam." Is the sharp, keen axe head in its proper place on the axe handle of your life? Are you working on some "thick trees" on your part of the forest?

IV. SOME PRINCIPLES TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED

We dare not leave the story without searching out some of its larger principles.

1. The responsibility of a lent life.

How careful we ought to be with borrowed property! When something is loaned to you

by someone else, you have a special responsibility to the real owner, and you must not be careless about this responsibility. Christian, do you recognize that your life is a "loan" from God? "You are not your own. You are the *product* of God, the *purchase* of God, and the *project* of God. You are His by *production*, by *purchase*, by *providence* and by *purpose*. Your life is on loan to you by God 葉o serve God's purpose *on His terms*. May God illumine us!

2. *The tragedy of a lost life.*

The axe used to be so keen, so sharp, so bright, so useful, but now it is sadly reduced to uselessness. The axe is damaged, the work is hindered, the workman is frustrated, and the owner is grieved. This speaks, not of a lost soul, but of a lost life (a Christian, but now "good for nothing Matthew 5:13). When we are in this condition, we need His special lifting power. We need a visitation upon our lives that produces the equivalent of the formula, 殿nd the iron did swim. May God grant this miracle to us!

3. *The glory of a lifted life.*

The sunken iron was rescued by means of a tree (think *Cross*), raised by means of a miracle (think *power*), and restored to its former use (think *grace*). Both the regeneration of a new believer, and the restoration of a backslider, are absolute miracles. May this "glory of the Lord our God" be upon us!

A last word to the reader who may not even have the axe head. Friend, if you have never trusted and received Jesus Christ as your own Lord and Savior, your heart may be as heavy as iron at the bottom of the fast-running river of sin, but Jesus loves you and He died and rose again for you. When you fully trust him to save you, he will raise you from the dead and raise up your natural earthly affections to things in Heaven above (Colossians 3:1-3). Trust Him, receive Him into your heart today, and then you can tell your own personal version of this story: "And the iron did swim."

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