

GOD HAS AN ANSWER FOR YOU

II Kings 6: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Are you worried about a special need in your life, your spouse's life, your family's life, or your church's life right now? I call you as we face special needs--remember how often God promises to meet all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Have you forgotten His promises? Matthew 6: 32 is powerful. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." My all-time favorite is Psalm 37: 25, and I can speak with David. "I have been young, and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread." Beloved, when you think your dreams have sunk, remember God's power defies the law of gravity. I ask you again, "Have you forgotten the promises of God?" Philippians 4: 19 is still in the Book of Books, the Bible. "But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Have you forgotten David's Psalm 34: 9, 10, and 19? "Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing...Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." Don't ever forget Matthew 6: 33. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." Beloved, our Father is the great Provider. In our relationship as born again children of God, we have all His promises and all our provision in Him. Jesus wants us not to worry, but to only trust Him. We need to remember, as H. Edwin Young once said, "Our extremity is always the Lord's opportunity." Like David did in I Samuel 30: 6, we read, "But David strengthened himself in the Lord, his God." Our greatest strength is often shown in our ability to stand still and trust the Lord in our storms.

Our text today seems to be one of the most-simple little stories in the Bible. I was told this week the three points of the message. (It sinks, it floats, It's God!) I won't use that outline but it's true. This little story doesn't seem to pack a punch unless you dwell on it, and then, meditate a while. In 2006, I began thinking more about axes and axe heads, after I stumbled upon an old axe head while I was out hunting during elk season. I was at the edge of the wilderness somewhere between the Sweetwater River and Lander. No elk were around, but as I walked, I almost stepped on an axe head. I cleaned off the axe head and noticed vague words imprinted on the left-hand side of the blade. At home, under a magnifying glass, I made out the words, Cohoes, New York, Cast Steel, D. Simmons Shop. This axe head is an antique, not as old as the axe head in our Elisha story, but I researched about Cohoes, New York. Virginia B. Bowers, the historian in the City of Albany, New York wrote to me on November 8, 2006. She wrote, "Dear Pastor Carlson, I was so delighted to receive your inquiry regarding the axe head you discovered which was made in Cohoes, New York." She sent me a map marking the spot, on Simmons Island, where the cast steel factory was, on Ontario Street now, just east

of Koschisko Avenue, where the axe head was made between 1825 and 1834. She sent me a picture of a New York State Historical Marker that reads, “AX FACTORY ESTABLISHED BY DANIEL SIMMONS IN 1825. SAID TO BE THE FIRST FACTORY IN THE UNITED STATES TO MAKE AXES FROM CAST STEEL.

Daniel Simmons made the cutting edge of this axes by welding a piece of steel into a groove designed into the bit, on the working edge of the axe. Joining the wedge of steel into the groove of the bit was a critical step and required flux (borax with sal ammonia). The iron body of the axe head was brought to a white heat, the steel insert to a cherry red, the flux sprinkled on the interfaces, the pieces quickly assembled, brought to a welding heat are forged together. The final steps were to complete the shaping of the working steel edge by hammering, grinding, heat treatment to develop optimum hardness in the cutting edge, and finally grinding and polishing. This lost axe head in the Wind Rivers was made about 200 yrs. ago. How was the axe head made back in Elisha’s time about 2912 years ago? Jews used axe heads back in the days of Moses. Deuteronomy 19: 5 was written around 1451 BC, 558 years before the prophet Jeremiah wrote II Kings about this lost axe head. Moses wrote, “If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past, as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor, so that he dies, he may flee to one of these cities of refuge.” Axe heads have been flying off their handles thousands of times for millennia. These Israelites smelted way back before Moses. Forging iron axe heads goes back to Genesis 4: 22—dating back to 3875 BC, where we read, “Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was a forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.”

What does God want to teach us in this simple story of a lost axe head and a found floating axe head? We all know axe heads don’t normally float in water. Try it if you don’t believe me. The axe head I found weighs 3 and a half pounds. It doesn’t float well. What is God’s message for us today? I see four simple lessons that could change your life. What are they?

GOD’S CALL TO HOPE AND HIS MIRACLES HAPPEN OVER AND OVER IN THE MIDST OF OUR NORMAL EVERYDAY LIVES. (I.) Notice in vs. 1-2 the normal circumstances showing us how God works with us. They are: (1) **God’s call to hope and miracles happens in the midst, of faithfulness and unfaithfulness.** (See II Kings 5: 15-27) We just finished learning about one of the sons of the prophets, Gehazi, who became overcome by a lying spirit like Ananias and Sapphira, a materialism that invades many of our hearts, and a coveting spirit for what was not his own. Yet this story is couched in the midst, of a growing school of the prophets, under Elisha’s charge, probably in Gilgal, next to the Jordan River, or nearby in Jericho. There are Gehazi-like people, and we can be

tempted and succumb to being like Gehazi, with lying lips, with a filthy love for the world, and with a covetous spirit for what we don't have. Yet, lest any of us grow cynical, if we are honest, God's people often are faithful men and women who love Jesus. And I warn each of us, don't judge the Gehazi people around you, for the Word of God warns us in I Cor. 10: 12, "Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (2) **God's call to hope and miracles happen where His people are hungry to know the Lord and to be used by Him.** These sons of the prophets, v. 1 were effective heralds of God's Word. God had touched their hearts. They had an understanding, of how much they needed to learn from their seminary professor, Elisha. (3) **God's call to hope and miracles happen where God's message is proclaimed, and lives are being changed.**

People who love Jesus would flock to hear Elisha today; they would long to be near him, and they would eagerly seek to learn from him. (4) **God's call to hope and miracles happen where growth is stretching His disciples and where there is a need for a building program with limited space.** With growth comes growing pains--not having enough teachers, too many children in Sunday School for one teacher to teach effectively, or there is learning going on in a place that is becoming too small for the disciples. Notice verses 1-2. The prophet's disciples said, "See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan River and each of us get there a log, and let us, make a place for us to dwell there. (5) **God's call to hope and miracles comes when those who serve Him are industrious, hard-working, and sacrificial, but who often have little resources, and who are often poor.** Seminary students almost always have been poor, and this son of the prophets was so poor he had to borrow an axe to help with the seminary building program. (6) **God's call to hope and miracles often come while a man/woman of God is energetically doing the work of the Lord.** Now he couldn't help in the project. He was troubled. The axe was borrowed. The student would have to reimburse the lender for the lost axe head. This loss was no small loss, as it might cause the young seminary student to drop out of school. 2nd,

GOD'S CHOSEN VESSELS TO TEACH US TO TRUST HIM FOR ANSWERED PRAYER, ARE JUST FAITHFUL PEOPLE LIKE ELISHA.

(II.) Notice that servants of the Lord, pastors as well as prophets aren't above working and doing their share in a building project, or cleaning up a mess in the bathroom, or cutting the grass, painting a classroom, or taking trash to the dump. Notice II Kings 6: 3-4. We read, "Then one of the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Be pleased to go with your servants. And he answered, "I will go." So, he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan River, they cut down trees." Notice how this prophet of God, once the top student of the prophets, the protégé of Elijah signed on to the idea of a building program without it being his idea. It's always best when a building program comes from the congregation, and not from one of the pastors. But pastors and people should all sign on. And when asked,

Elisha accompanied the sons of the prophets to begin the building program for a new seminary campus near the Jordan River. He would put his shoulder to the work. He would lend his support and his encouragement. Elisha knew that the best lessons are often taught where there is on the job training. Elisha didn't shrink away from being sweaty with his students and getting to know them where accidents happen, where tempers can flare, and where even borrowed axe heads can fly off the handle into the Jordan. (Somebody, anybody, nobody, everybody.)

Here is a lesson for leadership that few leaders learn. The lesson is in being willing to teach as a humble servant. None of us know everything. Working side by side with men or women far more skilled in a building trade than you are is good medicine for any leader who doesn't mind sweeping or mopping a floor, who doesn't mind holding a ladder for an electrician who is fixing a light, or who doesn't mind getting down in a septic tank and cleaning out a clogged line with a plumbing snake. While I was in college in the early 60's, I worked for the maintenance crew under the leadership of a big man named Jon Von Busch. Our college had many houses that were part of the college campus, and he had no one else who would clean out a clogged-up line to the septic tank. I have no idea how many times I would see students on campus walk past me, with a ladder put down in the septic tank and I with a manual snake, was getting that dorm house back in working order with the plumbing. Lessons like this are great for us as leaders. On Friday, when I arrived at church in the morning, I found an E and L Logistics semi driver sitting beside Bloedorn Lumber trying to reload his truck, as his load of onions was all shifted to the right. I jumped up in the semi-trailer and started carrying 50-pound bags of onions to Jose, a thirty-year old born-again believer, in his first year of driving and his first load of onions going from Oregon to Chicago. As I worked, Jose insisted I find a younger man. He said, "I am 30 and this job is killing me. How old are you?" I said 74. He said, "Isn't there someone else you can get me?" I said, "Tell me what you will pay." He said "I'll pay \$400.00 to help me get the onions off the truck and packaged straight. There were only 16 pallets with 40 50-pound sacks of onions to a pallet. I called one of the strongest men I know—Jeremy Lui, who works for Union Pacific, and we went to Wells Fargo to get the \$400.00. Four and a half hours later, the job was finished. Jeremy Lui, that was difficult work. The onions were packaged and had to ripped open and the onion juice burns the hands. That was excellent leadership training.

One last note on faithful leadership is found in the New Testament in a verse that is often misunderstood. James 4: 10 states, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you." The most accurate translation of this verse must note that the Greek text is in the passive voice. It would better be understood as "be humbled," "allow yourselves to be humbled," or it means the equivalent of "submit yourself to the humbling process of God." What exactly does that mean? It means that every one of us is proud. Leaders most often can be proud. God wants to bring us

to a place of humility, a place of dependence, and to quit having to be in charge, running our own lives. Dependence on the Lord, as Elisha had, is probably why God did so many miracles through him. Dependence on the Lord humbly recognizes our need for God, for His authority in our lives, for His sovereignty to rule us, and for His right to direct our lives His way. Elisha was a perfect example of what the New Testament means of the branch depending on the Vine. Thirdly,

GOD’S CARE FOR US AND HIS CHOICE TO HELP US IN OUR CRISES, NEVER VARIES FROM AGE TO AGE. (III.)

Notice in II Kings 6: 5-6, that this is the story about a crisis. “But as one of the sons of the prophets was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water, and he cried out, “Alas, my master! It was borrowed. Then the man of God said, “Where did it fall? When he showed him the place, Elisha cut off a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float/swim.” What does this crisis teach us about facing our crises? Does God care for us and does He choose to help us even today as he helped this young seminary student close to 3,000 years ago? While I was preparing this message, I got a call from a man I helped with Traveler’s Assistance. We help hundreds of people. This man came to town from Ft. Smith, Arkansas to play in a band. He had tattoos all over his body, but I knew he needed Jesus. We had the joy of leading him to Jesus, talking to his wife and two daughters and seeing if we could get them back together. His hair hung below his waist. He said to me, “What do I need to do to grow in Jesus?” I gave him a lot of follow-up material, a Bible, some books, and he said, “I am serious about Jesus.” Then I said, “Let me talk to you like a son.” God’s Word says in I Corinthians 11: 14, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is a disgrace for him.” He looked at me as if I shot him. I never apologized, but I prayed over him on August 25th, 2018. Russ Pfeiffer called me Friday. He sent me a picture and said, “My hair is shorter than yours.” We laughed. He is working at New Vision Center in Van Buren, Arkansas. He has gained custody of one of his two daughters, and he is leading others to Jesus. He is on the worship band in his church. He begged me to ask all of you to pray that his wife, Erin, will take him back, and drop the divorce proceedings. I prayed. Will you? She says it is too little too late, but I believe God is able. If He cared for an unnamed seminary student in Gilgal, he cares for Russ Pfeiffer in Ft. Smith, Ark.

How do we learn to trust God and His care and His choice to come help us in our trials when we’ve lost our borrowed axe heads? (1) Invite God’s presence in every moment of your life daily—now, just as the seminary students invited Elisha to go with them. (2) Like this student, cry out to God as he cried out to Elisha, “Alas, O no! The axe was borrowed.” Turn to God immediately in your crisis. Run to Him in your desperation. Call on His precious Name. (3) Know God will use your circum-stances to bring about a solution. Logs were felled all over the place, so Elisha just cut off a stick from a fallen tree and threw it in the water. Fourthly,

GOD’S COUNSEL FROM THE PAST REMINDS US THAT GOD STILL RESTORES BORROWED TOOLS WE MUST HAVE TO BE EFFECTIVE.

(IV.) There are lessons here in closing. Elisha seems like a type of Christ, just as the sons of the prophets typify us as Christ’s disciples. The axe head reminds me of the power of the Person of the Holy Spirit—His enabling, His anointing, without which, like the axe head, we are powerless. Warren Wiersbe says in his excellent commentary, “Whatever we have has been borrowed.” He’s right. Paul asked the question in I Corinthians 4: 7, “What do you have that you did not receive?” John the Baptist said, in John 3: 27, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.” Beloved, whatever gifts, abilities, possessions, or opportunities we have are all from God—gifts, borrowed treasures. Just like the prophet who lost the axe head, judgment day was around the corner when he would have to tell the axe head owner. I lost your axe head, and he must reimburse the cost or replace the axe head. Each of us must give an account for who and what we have been given. I was given a Christian family for 22 years before I was married. I must pray for them, as I heard a second brother of mine, Tim, now with Bruce, has type 2 Diabetes. I was given a wonderful wife, Jinny over 52 years ago. I must answer for how I have loved her and lived with her with understanding. Maybe you haven’t lost your axe head, but you need the counsel of Eccl. 10: 1, “If the axe is dull, and he does not sharpen it, then he must exert more strength.” God wants us not to work harder, but smarter, by God’s grace. Let’s use His gifts for His glory.

Did you know that this young prophet lost his valuable borrowed tool while he was serving the Lord? It can happen to you too? I cannot tell you how many people I know and love, who have lost their effectiveness for God on the job, as a pastor, as a church member. The good news is God is able, to make iron float. He is able to recover for us what appears to be lost for good. God can put us back to work. Do what this young seminary student did when he lost his axe head. He immediately stopped working. It’s foolish to swing an axe handle without an axe head. Make a full and frank confession to the Master. Show the Master where you lost your effectiveness in service. Then stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. He loves you as much as He loved that seminary student. Tell the Lord where you lost your cutting edge. Now look at II Kings 6: 7. “And Elisha said, “Take the axe head up.” So, he reached out his hand and took it. God’s gifts and callings are irrevocable. Reclaim them in His time, employ them wisely again. Your story isn’t over. Pastor Brian—NE. MN. Cook—He had an affair. I have cried with him for hours. He’s back-God can make iron swim. It is awful when we lose our gifts and callings on the job, but we serve a God of all grace who can restore, bless His heart. The stick Elisha threw in the Jordan, reminds me of the cross of Christ. Bring your lost axe head story to Him, bring your loss to the cross. God can still make axe heads float for His glory. I said at first, the outline was “It sinks, it floats; It’s God! It was lost, it was located, it was lifted from the depths; it was lifted again to serve the Lord. I pray, May God by His healing grace, make our lost axe heads float. Amen, amen!