

Kings and Prophets 14-04-04b

We resume our study now in 2 Kings, we're in chapter 6. And although it seems like kind of a brief episode, I think you would agree that you can find quite a bit to think about in this floating axe head. And in particular, looking at the preceding two episodes, thinking about the elements involved in the larger picture. It is water that is healed in Jericho in the first case through the addition of the salt.

It is a watery stew that is healed in the second case with the addition of the flour. And of course, it is water involved in not only for a while obscuring this axe, but eventually being the means of its retrieval because he makes the iron float. And the water is changed from being a problem to an asset.

I was encouraged to change my license plate front and back on the VW van this morning in the dark, sort of by necessity at the request of our friends in the law enforcement community. And so I was out there with a flat blade screwdriver and as you probably don't know what this is like, but I dropped one of the screws and couldn't find it. And this is on a flat concrete street.

And I thought, even with a flashlight, how hard can this be? I'm in a limited space. There's a curb on one side. It's a reasonably sized screw.

Where could it have gone? But when you lose track of a thing, if it flies into an unexpected location without observation, then it can be hard to find. And this axe head could have been difficult to find even if it had flown on the ground. You're in the woods.

If you ever dropped anything in the woods, I've still got a pair of earmuffs up there somewhere in Rogers County that I lost on a walk and I went back and retraced my steps, couldn't find them. They hit the ground. It's not that overgrown, but I'd never found them again.

Some woodland animal may be benefiting from them now. But you can lose track of things. But here, it goes into the water.

It's a valuable thing, but the very water that is so useful for other things winds up being an impediment in this case until something happens with the application of this stick. Elisha cuts a tree, cuts a stick, casts it into the water, and the water that was the source of the problem now becomes the means of the solution. It might be hard to find the axe head if it's out in the detritus surrounding the riverbank.

It's not hard to find when it is floating on top of the water where axe heads don't... It's not like, well, which one of these axe heads is mine? I mean, there's only going to be one. And so the application of this particular thing... Does God need props to do miracles? Yes or no? So if He uses a prop, it has significance. This is my thought.

This is my suggestion to you. When Jesus heals, sometimes He heals at a distance. Go home,

your son is well.

Don't trouble the master any further. Your daughter died. Don't doubt, only believe.

He goes home, his daughter is made well at that very hour. Jesus sometimes will touch someone. Reached out His hand, took the little girl, Talitha, Kumi.

She comes back to life. Other times, He manifestly involves something. Remember when He spit on the ground and made a paste and applied it to the guy's eyes.

Did Jesus need this or the cure wouldn't work? No. He does it for a reason. When we studied that miracle, we went into that.

But keep in mind, this is a little bit of moisture and a product from the ground, commonly available materials that speak of greater things. And when you think about the days of the law, the days of Elijah, and the days of the... Isn't it interesting that so much is made of Elijah's mantle and how important it is for Elisha to get it? Then you never see the thing again. There is a time when in the days of the law, you have a certain paradigm, and it is to go to Israel, it is to go to Jerusalem, it is to go to the tabernacle or the temple, it is to go to the place of offering and sacrifice, it is the place of Levitical, covenant, ritual relationship with God.

And we've seen many times now that Elijah sort of sums that up. John the Baptist is the latter day Elijah and puts a punctuation mark at the end of the age of the law. Man born of woman, none greater than John.

Why? He's the summation of all the law and the prophets. And Jesus says as much. All the law and the prophets were until John.

Right? He's closely associated with them. Well, John is Elijah if you will accept it. Why isn't he Elisha? Elisha must come before the great... No, Elijah must come before the day.

Now we're in the time of Elisha. And in the time of Elisha, you don't have to go back to these centralized and idealized and supernaturally provided things. In the age of grace, we have access to them as common.

It's as common as salt. It's as common as flour. It's as common as sticks.

You do not have to go up to heaven. You do not have to go down to the depths of Sheol. It is near you.

It is in your hearts. It is on your lips. And this is a very excellent reminder for us of how close the power and provision of God is for us.

We don't have to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. We don't have to go and see the priest. We don't have to go light a candle down at the chapel.

We don't have to get into the confessional to be absolved. It is near. It is immediate.

And as was pointed out on the break, you remember what the salt was to be brought in for that Jericho healing of the waters? How did he get the salt? What did he require for the salt? What kind of bowl? A new bowl, because this is the New Testament, the New Covenant, Jesus says, in My blood. This opens the way. We have a new and living way through the veil, which is His flesh.

This is My body, which is broken for you, unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood. Remember that whole thing? Many turned back from following Him because they couldn't grasp. Same thing in the first generation of the church that was almost entirely Jewish, and they couldn't get past the requirements of the law.

By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, not anymore, not now. This is the age of grace. But you have this great preview in the ministry of Elisha of what the age of grace is going to be like.

You don't need Moses' tablets? Get some salt. You don't need manna falling from heaven? Grab some flour. You don't need Aaron's rod that budded? Or Moses and the Egyptians and the rods miraculously turning from one thing to another? And by the way, what is the very first sign miracle in Egypt? What turns to blood? The water turns to blood.

What is the sign that Israel marches out from under that hardship and slavery? It is the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorpost that frees them. Out of the Lord's side comes forth blood and water. I would submit to you that in the New Testament when it says, by the washing of water and renewing of the Holy Spirit, you can understand that grammatical construction in a number of different ways, but a legitimate way to understand it is by the washing of water and renewal, both of them, of the Holy Spirit.

By the washing of water of the Holy Spirit, by the renewal. The washing of water and renewal of the Holy Spirit. What is the living water that flows out of the inside of the one who comes to the Lord Jesus? What is His gift? I go away, but I will give you another comforter.

The water and the blood. We are saved and cleansed and redeemed. We have atonement.

We have reconciliation. We have all of these things through the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin. And then we are sustained by the living water, the water of the Word, which is inextricably linked to the ministry of the Holy Spirit because without Him, the Word makes no sense to us.

The Word is useless to us. But the washing of water and renewal of the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit applying the truth of God, making it understandable to us. So this presence of water is no accident.

The association in each of these cases of water in the wells and streams of Jericho, water in the stew, and water here in the Jordan itself, the Jordan that used to be a barrier, that used to be an

impediment, that had to be stopped up for Israel to cross, now isn't stopped up at all. Remember what happened when they batted it with the mantle and went across one way, and Elisha bats it with the mantle and comes across the other way, just like Israel does? So all of these things conspire to suggest, I think, that application is our responsibility at the mundane, earthly, human, daily things level. It is a matter of washing and watering and caring for livestock and doing the normal things that water enables us to do.

Elisha makes that possible when he heals the waters of Jericho. It is the normal sustenance and eating and providing hospitality for others. And if that gets spoiled, it is mended, it is fixed with something near at hand, with something available, but yet still symbolizing and reminding us of the provision and the power of God, and the same thing in this third case.

So in each case, as was very astutely observed by a number of us during the break, notice that there is a good portion of these episodes where the rest is up to you. When the water of Jericho is healed, it's not an artesian well. They've still got to get the water.

They still have to take it home. They still have to apply it. They're going to have to irrigate or carry it to their animals or do whatever they do.

The water itself is healed. Now you can obtain and use the water for yourself. It isn't a jar in everybody's house in Jericho that's always full of fresh, clear water, supernaturally provided.

It is cleansed, clear water that is available if you will go get it. In the case of the stew, what does it say after he heals it? Give it to them so that they can, it says, serve it to the people that they may eat. By the way, what is the fourth miracle in this context that we haven't said too much about in this last week or two? What's the one right after cleansing the stew in the pot? Remember the barley loaves? Feeding over a hundred men with just a few, which is what the Lord Jesus did.

Shall I set these few loaves before so many? He said, give it to the people that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, they shall eat and have some left over. But it's barley bread. This is not a luxurious repast.

It's not quail flowing in from the sea and being knocked down because they're so plentiful. It is sufficient and it is one meal. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

God provides, give us this day our daily bread. This wasn't a perpetual meal. This is a single meal.

The stew is a single meal. There is the idea that this is something that is new and fresh and a challenge for us on a daily basis, on the occasion when the need arises. It isn't endless.

It isn't something that you can take for granted. When the occasion arises, we have to think. We have to stop and analyze.

Is there something at hand that is sufficient to meet this need? And nothing is added to this bread. He doesn't say, sprinkle it with olive oil and then hand it out. He could have, right? Could he not have said, bring me some olive oil? He sprinkled the barley bread and said, now give it to them to eat.

But he doesn't do it. And I ask myself, why? He had to have flour for the poisoned stew, had to have salt to cleanse the water of Jericho, had to throw this stick in. Why didn't he just say, go look again? And behold, the axe head was floating on the water.

Easily, trivial for God to do any one of those things. But there is a mechanism involved and in every case, including the barley bread, there is something at hand. There is something available.

So many times, I think, we face a problem and we say, well, God's just got to intervene. God's got to parachute in something that isn't already here. We don't look at what is available.

I was tempted, I'm not going to do this, so don't hold me to it. And I apologize in advance for saying it. But I think there is a legitimate reference you could make here to calling this MacGyver spirituality.

You remember MacGyver? He was the guy that could take a Bic pen and a Q-tip and create a gun that could shoot the guy. He could take a bobby pin and a wad of gum and get himself out of locked jail cells. He took what was at hand.

But MacGyver never just supernaturally blew open doors or supernaturally did these things. He was famous, he's iconic for taking common ordinary materials that you wouldn't think could solve a problem and combining them in creative ways and in knowledgeable ways to solve problems. And I think that element is here.

I think we are being encouraged when we face a crisis, of course, we look to God. This is the man of God acting with the power of God and that element is present in every single one of these. You can't just throw salt in water and it always gets pure.

You can't add flour to poison food and make it well. If it was, we'd have a whole lot more leftovers that didn't get thrown out. Oh, what is this green stuff in the jar at the back of the fridge? I don't know, but pour some flour on it.

We'll eat it tonight. Right? What does this suggest to us? When we do apply and use the things that are available to us, God in His power and in His grace will do what we cannot do. But we do what we can.

We contribute. Work out your own deliverance with fear and trembling. Work out your own... Why doesn't He say sit still and wait for your deliverance? It's not what it says.

It says work out. We talk about this when there's a problem. Well, I've got to work out the

solution.

I've got to work out the answer. Right? Well, we've got to work out the answer. How much is what we do? How much is what God does? We've seen this before in studying the Sabbath.

Right? There's actually, in my view, at least 11 commandments. Not 10. Why? Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy is the archetypal command.

But what's underneath that? There's an imperative. Six days thou shalt labor. Why didn't that one get listed? Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work.

That's a command in the 10 commandments but it's not numbered and it gets left out. Well, remember the Sabbath day. Don't forget the rest.

What about the command to work? Six days labor and do your work. Rest on the seventh. Well, we're out from under the law.

We celebrate every day alike. Every day is a holiday. Every meal is a feast.

Every day is a Sabbath and every day is a work day. All in one. We figure out what our six days of labor and work are.

And we figure out when we have done that work and completed everything that we should do. We have ground our flour. We have cut our sticks.

We have mined our salt and brought it to the problem. And now it is time to rest. And this is back to the working out idea.

It's not lazy Christianity. It's not laissez faire. I'll lay back and let the stretcher carry me to salvation.

I've got to think. I've got to apply. I've got to cycle what I know of God's truth and say, have I done my part? Have I done my six days of labor? Is it now the Sabbath? Is it now the year of Jubilee? Not only have I done my six and rested every seventh, but this is a Jubilee year.

And I'm going to really rest and celebrate. I'm going to let my land lay fallow. I'm going to resolve all debts and cancel all outstanding obligations.

Ownership is going to revert back to the clans and families, to whom they belong. It is a year of Jubilee. It is a year of release.

Got to know when that is. Got to be watching the calendar, right? Same thing here. I really believe that this little set of Elisha miracles is emphasizing for us the importance of looking around and making sure we know what is at hand that can be applied to the problem in the expectation that God is going to do the hard part.

God's going to supply that which our measures can never fulfill. But you notice Elisha always

does something and others help him. Bring me a new bowl.

Bring me some salt. Bring some flour. Elisha does the work of casting it in.

Elisha cuts his own tree and throws it. And then what does he say in verse 7? Pick up for yourself. Circle for yourself.

There is a point beforehand where activity and thought is required. There is a point where God acts. And then there is a point in each one of these miracles where now you take it from here.

In this life, it isn't finished and complete and all done and we just sit back and have the obligatory applause scene afterward. You've heard my rant about the obligatory applause scene before. They still do this.

Just incredible. A recent example I won't even mention. But you pick up for yourself and He, HaEchad, the One, the guy who asked Elisha to come along, the guy who cried out, He reaches out.

How much better to reach out and pick up the provision of God than to reach out and take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and go in the completely opposite direction. He reached out His hand and took it. It would be interesting to just overlay this with Eve reaching out her hand and taking.

Which kind of reaching out and taking do we want to do? Well, this brings us now to the liar, liar, pants on fire, shame on you, Elisha, pericope. And as I have often gone over time in the past, I'm going to go under time tonight. Shock of all shocks.

You'll have to put a red circle around this one. But we've completed our study for this evening and I want to begin fresh next time in verse 8 of 2 Kings 6, talking about the Syrians. By the way, where's Naaman the leper, the great army general? Where is he from? And what army is this that is about to be involved in this Syria? Yes.

So, it's fraught with possibilities. And we'll read it over, be thinking about it, and we'll tackle this next section of 2 Kings 6 next time. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the love that You expressed toward us, the compassion and the grace in revealing to us Your truth and securing it for us with the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit, granting all of these things to us because of the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. And in Him we are so privileged, we are so blessed, and we have such great opportunities. We pray that as we consider these things that we've seen tonight in the hours and days ahead, that Your Holy Spirit will impress them on us, give us understanding not only objectively but also in the context of our own walk before You, the particular assignments and responsibilities that You have given to us, so that we may grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in His name. Amen.