The Lost Axehead
2 Kings 6:1–7

Robert D.Pace

Whatever else can be said about this narrative, we should understand that it focuses on, revolves around, and wouldn't be a story without a lost axehead. Had the axehead remained attached to the handle, there would have been no emergency, no need to consult Elisha for a miracle, and no need to exercise faith.

(**Synopsis of Story**) **In summary, here's what happened**. The great Prophet Elijah had started a School of Prophets that expanded under his successor, Elisha, whom we are studying today. There were now three cities where the School of Prophets existed—Jericho, Gilgal, and Bethel. The prophets had grown here in Gilgal to the point that the facilities were cramped quarters. Thus, they undertook an expansion project. With Elisha's approval to enlarge their facility, the prophets went to the river and cut timber. Each man took turns striking blows against those thick lumbering trees until, finally, the axehead flew off the handle and sank into the Jordan River.

At first glance, this mishap seems trivial and unnecessary for recording within the pages of Holy Writ. But a careful investigation of this lost axehead discloses a series of serious problems. That's why I first want to investigate this mishap and apply it to our lives.

(Transition) Let's start by looking at the Problem of the Lost Axe Head.

The Problem of the Lost Axe Head

Problem #1: Misfortune happens when believers do God's will. (Reread)

Have you noticed how quickly things can go awry when you're doing God's will? You can't identify a sin or anything that got you off-track, but a roadblock arose! There are times when things seem to turn against us when we are right in the middle of God's will. That's what this story of the lost axe head shows.

(Illustration) Some years ago, a friend and I went to the streets to witness. We were outside a Bar sharing Christ when a huge man walked up and held a knife inches from my face. (That's some reward for preaching the Gospel!) How would you like to witness in the face of a switchblade? Fortunately, everything went fine.

While the Bible doesn't say why this ax head broke free from the handle, there are two explanations:

> **First, this prophet-lumberjack was careless**. Not being a professional axeman, this prophet didn't know how to monitor his equipment. It was likely an axe handle that always needed to be bumped down into place. People who frequently use axes can relate to this.
>
> **But another explanation for this accident is that this prophet may not have been careless at all; he simply had an unavoidable mishap**.

It's important not to jump to conclusions when we see problems or unusual occurrences in the Kingdom of God, because such situations—whether problems, misfortune, or difficulties—don't indicate a project is out of God's will. In fact, Jesus told us that Satan comes to "kill, steal, and destroy." He's always on the prowl and trying to disrupt God's work.

Satan hates God's work. Humans miscalculate. Mistakes happen. Christians can get weary and quit. But remember, God, with His providential mastery, is always in control. And there are times when the Lord is supremely responsible for letting Biblical episodes like this occur. I think it was God himself who twitched loose that handle and flung it directly into the water. This will become evident later in this message, but for now, let's move to the next issue.

(**Transition**) So, Problem One shows how misfortune can happen when Believers do God's will. But now let's consider . . .

Problem # 2: This axehead was borrowed.

Because this device was "on loan," it required someone from the Company of Prophets to make restitution for its replacement. This is what the Law of Moses required from indebted people. the owner's servants until repayment was worked off.

Back in the 8th Century BC, iron was a valuable commodity. That meant someone was doomed to a lengthy period of servitude to repay the debt. That's quite a price to pay!

Problem # 3: Without a cutting device, this prophetic housing project could not continue. It was doomed to fail!

I want to apply this point to everyone here. There are times when our human skill, our intellectual prowess, and our physical power cannot complete an assignment without "outside instrumentation." For this group of prophets, they needed an axe with a sharp edge to accomplish this mission.

If you noticed, I just pointed out two things these prophets needed: both an axe and a sharp axe. That's what would make their project effective.

Do you realize this is what Christians need to accomplish many of God's assignments? I'm not talking about a physical chunk of metal with a wooden handle. I am talking about an "axe" mentioned in the "Book of Acts." God has given everyone here a special instrument —yea, special instruments, plural—designed just for you. I'm talking about spiritual gifts. Gifts from the Holy Spirit. It's this "outside instrumentation" from the Holy Spirit that makes you supernaturally effective for kingdom assignments. Like the axe was to the company of prophets, the Holy Spirit's gifts and talents to you are the instruments that accomplish God's purposes.

It could be an axe of prayer, or giving, or teaching, or mercy, or serving, or encouraging. Whatever your assignment may be, always remember to exercise your spiritual gifts. This is the "outside" assistance that makes you supernaturally effective.

(**Transition**) This leads us to Problem #4.

Problem #4: It would take a miracle to retrieve this axe head from the bottom of this rushing river. And that's what happened!

A few moments ago, I mentioned how things can go amiss even when we obey God. That's why the Lord placed this story in the Bible. He wanted to illustrate His providential mastery over life and to show how He can turn defeat into victory. Here's something that's imperative to remember: while we can make terrible choices and create awful problems, God can always work things to the praise of his glory. Always.

Is there a Scripture that testifies to this? Yes, and most Believers are well acquainted with it. Paul said this in Romans 8:28, "**And we know** that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Here's what I like about this verse. It's stated in the first three words: "**And we know; and we know; we know this**! Regardless of how bad we mess up, "**We know** that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

(**Transition**) With that in mind, let's re-examine how the problem of this lost axe head was resolved.

The Recovery of the Lost Axe Head

A. First, the young man rushed to Elisha and, with a flurry of words, explained his dilemma: "Oh, Man of God, we have borrowed an axe from a townsman and now it's lying in the Jordan River." You can hear the desperation in his voice. And that's okay. There is nothing inappropriate or even overreactionary with this young man's actions. He admitted his dilemma.

But there is something more that this young man recognizes. Listen to his exact words in verse 5. He cried out, "**Oh, Man of God, we have borrowed an axe from a townsman and now it's lying in the Jordan River**." Elisha was recognized as having the "hand of the Lord" upon him. And that is often the key to securing miracles.

> Ezra 7:6 notes that God granted Ezra unusual favor with the king of Persia. Notice verse 6: "The king had granted him ***everything*** **he asked,** ***for the hand of the Lord his God was on him."*** (The Lord's "hand" made the difference!)
>
> Ezra 7:9 says that Ezra's journey from Babylon to Jerusalem was successful because **"the gracious hand of his God was on him."**
>
> In Ezra 7:27—28, he summarizes why his efforts were successful when he said, **"the hand of the Lord my God was on me."**
>
> And then three more times, Ezra mentions either the **"hand of God"** being with God's people.

You see, this is what makes us successful with God. It's his hand resting upon us!

B. Once this young man admitted his problem, it became Elisha's moment. He listened carefully to each word of the story. It's wonderful that Elisha responded without accusation. Why blame anybody who is serious about God's work? Elisha understands the drama without emotion. There is something about people of faith who know how to stare down problems. People of faith don't let problems overwhelm them because they know their God towers above them. Elisha, with calm repose, asks, "Where did you lose the ax"?

(Insight) That's a perfectly normal question for Elisha to ask. We ask the same question when we lose something of value. We ask, "Where did I last possess the object?" "When did I last see it?" Some people might disagree and say, "If God could give buoyancy to that chunk of lead, He could also tell Elisha where it fell in the water." But remember, the Holy Spirit has purposely placed every word of Scripture into its place. And in this passage, he is disclosing a secret. Elisha's simple question, "Where did you lose the axe?**" demonstrates our need to identify where we may have lost our effectiveness in life**.

Have you lost your kingdom's sharpness because you stopped praying? Is the blade of your life missing because you stepped out of God's will? If you lost your cutting edge, go back and consider where you lost it. Why did you lose it? Where did you lose it? Recall these things now because it's important.

2 Chronicles 26:3—5

2Chonicles 27:6

2 Chronicles 15:1—7

(Transition) Now let's return to Elisha and the axehead, because this story doesn't terminate with a whimsical memory of where you lost anything. **The story of the far-flung axe head is about reclaiming our losses**. So let's continue.

C. When this young man identified the place of his loss, Elisha moved into action. **The Bible says Elisha took a piece of wood and threw it into the river**. Within moments, the axe head swam to the surface of the Jordan and bobbed like a cork! The Company of Prophets looked on in stunned amazement.

The imagery of this stick is obvious. That piece of wood represented how the Cross of Christ rescues us. It shows that there is no salvation, no miracle, without Christ! Jesus, upon that wooden Cross, raises us from the depths of sin and restores us to our rightful place.

(**Transition**) The Jews had been released from 70 years of Babylonian Captivity. They returned to their homeland to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall. But because their work was ordained of God, they had enemies that sought to foil them. That meant they needed supernatural help. And here is how the Bible says it happened:

D. But the story is not quite over. Listen to Elisha's words once the axehead arose on the water. He said to those nearby: "Now take it up for yourself." In essence, Elisha said, "Reclaim your usefulness and get busy again. Everything is alright." And that's what I hear the Lord saying to you: Reclaim what you lost and get back to Kingdom work because "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to rehearse how you can reclaim your cutting edge with God:

1. Admit that you need God. Verse 5 says when the young man lost the axe head, "he cried out and said, "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed."" Don't be ashamed to confess your mistake and ask God for help.

2. Identify where you lost your usefulness. You recall that the young prophet stepped forward and told Elisha where the axe head had flown into the river. And we too should confess to God where we lost our blessing.

3. Work with God's plan to restore your loss. Elisha said to the young man in verse 7, "Take it up for yourself." So he put out his hand and took it."

An axe handle without the axe head is but a memory of what "once was." Let God restore what is lost, because it's time to re*claim your cutting edge*.