

RESTORING OUR EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING GOD

2 Kings 6:1-7

INTRODUCTION

This event took place in the 8th century BC, during time of the kings, when Israel was split into 2 kingdoms - Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

The two central characters in this text are an unnamed prophetic student and the prophet Elisha.

The text begins by telling us of a problem that the School of Prophets had.

Apparently they had grown so much that their current building would no longer meet their needs.

So they asked permission of their teacher (Elisha) to go down to the Jordan River where trees were readily available in order to build a new facility for their school.

Elisha said, "Sounds like a good idea -- you can go."

But not wanting to be without their teacher one of the students asked Elisha, "Won't you please come with your servants..."

And so Elisha and his students headed down to the Jordan River to build a facility for the school of the prophets. And when they arrived they immediately began to work on cutting down trees, each student doing his part.

A building project to train young men for God - a noble cause, don't you think?

One man, while chopping at a tree, developed a problem. The iron axe head came flying off his axe handle, and fell into the Jordan river sinking down to the bottom.

This man lost his axe head, he lost his cutting edge - he lost his effectiveness in doing the work he had set out to do.

Were you at one time swinging your axe of service for God with great vigor - chopping away with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength - building up the Kingdom of God?

But somehow, somewhere along the way, you lost your cutting edge; you lost your effectiveness in serving the Lord.

There is no greater work in the world than building up the Kingdom of God.

And therefore we need to be as effective at this as we possibly can.

If we have lost our cutting edge, we need to get it back.

DEEPER STUDY

We can learn 3 important principles by observing what this unnamed prophet in II Kings did to regain his cutting edge which will help us also to regain our effectiveness in serving the Lord.

Firstly, like the young prophet, we must admit that we have lost our cutting edge.

That was the first step the prophet had to take - admit that he no longer had his cutting edge ...that he had lost his effectiveness.

He was assisting in the building of school to train and teach young men about God and about service to God.

It was an important work - and he was no longer effective at it.

To admit that we have a problem is the first step and many times, it is the hardest step.

We can see numerous examples around us; where admitting that one has a problem is the first step in healing - drug addiction, alcoholism, a broken marriage,

workaholism and many other similar problems.

Now you may be thinking that to admit we have a problem in one of those areas is more serious and is different from the situation in our text. Besides how else could this young man have reacted? He had no other option.

Let's look at some other possible reactions he could have had.

a) He could have been glad that he lost his cutting edge.

He could have used this as an excuse to quit working. After all he had been working hard for a long time and he had done his share of the work. Now it was time for others to do theirs. Yes, he could of thought that he deserved a break today.

b) He could have refused to admit that he had even lost his axe head at all because of pride.

He could have said, "What do you mean? I don't have a problem." and just kept right on chopping, or rather banging away with just an axe handle -just going through the motions, making a lot of noise and maybe, even breaking out in a sweat, but accomplishing absolutely nothing.

The text says the man had borrowed the axe. At that time, iron axes were very rare and expensive. Being a student and

young prophet, he wouldn't have had the money to buy it. If someone had not loaned him an axe, he would not have been able to do the work.

Our talents and our abilities are not ours either -they too are borrowed - they are on loan to us from God.

And just like the young man in our text, we have an obligation to the real owner of the talents -to God!

Jesus talked about this in the parable of the talents which we read in Matthew 25:14-30.

We are responsible to do our share of the kingdom work - whether that means cutting 1, 2 or 5 trees.

You see, God has given each of us talents and abilities so that we can assist in the building up of His Kingdom.

And, if we find out somewhere along the way that we have lost our cutting edge - our effectiveness - then, we are not really doing much for the Lord.

If this is our situation or even if we have never really ever served the Lord, the first thing we have do is admit that we are not serving the lord as we should.

Secondly, like the young prophet, we need to determine where we lost our

cutting edge.

Whenever you want to find something you lost or misplaced, you think, "Where did I have it last?"

And you usually find it hard to recall the answer.

When the young prophet realized he lost his axe head, he went to his teacher and told him about what had happened.

And in verse 6, Elisha responds, "Where did it fall?" In other words, where did you have it last?

Now this man did not plan to lose his cutting edge - it just happened.

And isn't that the way it is with God's servants sometimes?

They have been working real hard, for a long time, chopping down tree after tree - contributing significantly to building God's Kingdom, but somewhere along the road they lost their effectiveness. And like that young prophet, they didn't plan for this to happen.

As a matter of fact, when they were younger and fresher, they said something similar to what Peter told Jesus, "Though everyone else at times stops serving you

Lord - stops doing your work - not me. I will never stop."

But one day when they finally take the time to look into their hands, they see that they are only holding an axe handle.

They discover that they have been just going through the motions, convincing themselves they were still serving the Lord.

And who knows for how long they've been just banging away with an axe handle and accomplishing very little for the Kingdom?

If we ever get to that point, if we want to get our cutting edge in God's service back, we need to remember where we left it - where we last had it.

And once we determine this, we need to ask ourselves one more question - Why did we lose it?

Did it happen when you:

- Stopped attending church regularly?
- Became jealous of someone?
- Got angry because things weren't going your way?
- Stopped praying and reading God's word on a regularly?
- Stopped tithing?

- Rationalized the importance of money, career, things, family and pleasure above God's work?

If you really have the courage to take a deep and serious look at your spiritual life, you can discover where and why you lost your cutting edge of service to the Lord.

When the young prophet lost his cutting edge, he first admitted his loss and next, determined the place where he lost it.

Thirdly, like the young prophet, we must act out our part in recovering our cutting edge.

But before we discuss what the man did to get back his axe head, it is important for us to study the role Elisha played in its recovery.

Let's keep in mind that Elisha was not a magician. Rather, he was a prophet of the God Almighty and the power he had to perform miracles was not his own, but from God. He was a man through whom God spoke His Words and performed mighty acts.

Therefore, this miracle on the part of Elisha not only shows us that Elisha was concerned about this man's problem, but more importantly, that God was concerned and that God cared.

We often lose sight of the person. This is very apparent in our society where people are rarely viewed as "people," real people, with real needs and problems. But are rather they are viewed as just a statistic or a number in a computer file - not so with God!

This miracle clearly illustrates 3 truths about God:

a) God is concerned with the individual.

Though there were many men cutting down trees that day, still the Almighty God took the time to help the one who had a problem.

Jesus made God's concern for the individual crystal clear when he taught on the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son - teaching us that each of us matter to God and are valuable to Him.

b) With God, there are no problems too small to bring to His attention.

I Peter 5:7 reads "Cast all your cares upon him because he cares for you..." Our Father wants us to cast all of our cares upon Him. Do you have any problems or concerns today - have you cast them upon God? Why don't you?

Yes, a man losing an axe head may not seem like that big of a deal - but God cared.

c) God will help us solve our problems.

If you have lost your cutting edge in serving Him, know that God cares and if we ask Him, He will help us regain it.

Did you notice that the young man's work in regaining his axe head did not end when he admitted he had a problem or even when he sought help from the prophet of God nor even when he determined the place where he lost it. There was yet another thing he had to do.

Elijah did not retrieve the axe head for the man even though he had the power to.

Why?

God wanted the young prophet to be involved in the recovery himself.

There is something special - something great about the power of God and the effort of man working together.

Why would we want our effectiveness back?

Maybe we are comfortable with the way things are and don't really miss our cutting edge.

Maybe serving God is just one among the several important things in our life.

Let's recall the time when Jesus went to visit Martha and Mary - these sisters may

have had the same blood but they had different spirits.

Even though Martha thought Jesus was important, she also thought other things were just as, or even more important. But Mary considered Jesus as most important above all. So while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to His Words, Martha was in the kitchen preparing the meal for Jesus and the guests, frustrated that Mary was not helping.

The Bible says that Martha was distracted from Jesus by other things and Jesus said to Martha, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one is needed. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken away from her..." (Luke 10:41)

Jesus and His Kingdom are the priority - do you believe that? If so, do you live it?

If not, that's why we should want to get our cutting edge back!

What are you doing right now on earth for heaven's sake?

Are you like Martha, distracted by other things - your career, family, recreation, pleasure or the pursuit of material things - such that you are no longer an effective kingdom worker?

Have you adopted the world's motto when it comes to the church asking "What can the church do for me?"

30 years ago, John F Kennedy won the election to the White House by saying, "Ask not what your country can for you but what you can do for your country..."

In 1992, Bill Clinton became this country's president by making promises of what the government will do for people.

Our culture has undergone a change for the worse...and now, far too many look at the church as a place to be served rather than serve.

If you think the work of God's kingdom is the most important - and you want to swing your axe of service effectively once again, you need to:

a) Go to God in prayer.

He will reveal to us what has happened in our life -why we have ended up where we are - and he will place our cutting edge within our reach.

Then it is up to us.

What will we do with what God is telling us?

Ignore it?

Rationalize it?

Or Act on it?

b) Pick up our cross daily and follow Christ, just as He commanded us.

We can make our lives a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God if serving Him is our #1 goal.

To begin with, you will repent of the sin or sins that caused you to lose your cutting edge - your laziness, your jealousy, your selfishness, your lustful desires, your pride, your miserly spirit...

iii) Repent and change.

We should stop doing what we shouldn't be doing and start doing what we should.

Maybe we may need to go and seek a brother's forgiveness. Repentance and restitution can be painful, but they are necessary.

d) Remember that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

If this young prophet would have checked his axe head occasionally, he would have

noticed that was loose and he could have done a quick and rather painless repair.

When was the last time you did an inventory of your spiritual life?

We're not talking about what others think of you as a spiritual person, but who you know yourself to be deep down inside.

- Do you spend time with God regularly, praying and meditating on His Word?
- Do you attend church and bible study regularly?
- Do you serve the Lord in this church?
- Do you give God the very best of your material goods?
- Is there a sinful behavior or attitude that is rotting the wood around your axe head making it very loose?
- Do you look for opportunities to share Jesus?
- Is Jesus really at the center of your life?

If you answered any those questions in the wrong way, chances are you are not chopping down many trees for the kingdom - that you are probably not a very effective kingdom worker.

Regular spiritual inventory and reflection of our tools will help us make small occasional adjustments and keep on going.

But the devil would prefer that we never do this until much damage has been done and the repair is big and costly.

CONCLUSION

As long as there is breath in our bodies, we can get our cutting edge back.

Let's wrap up by taking a look at Samson's life. He lost his cutting edge and did not even know it.

After Delilah cut his hair, even when the philistines came to arrest him, Samson still thought he could shake himself free. The Bible says, "but he did not know that the Lord had left him..."

This once mighty warrior of God was imprisoned, blinded, forced to grind wheat like an animal - he was mocked and abused. He was hardly an effective servant of God at this time.

In prison, he had time to think - to determine what happened in his life that brought him to such a low point and to find where he left his cutting edge.

Then, he reached out to God, repented of his great wickedness and returned to God!

He prayed to God to restore his strength - and God did!

That blind, beaten man placed his hands on the giants pillars of the pagan temple and brought it down, destroying more of God's enemies when He returned to God than in all his years before. It was his greatest victory!

Where are you in your spiritual life and service to God today?

Have you lost your effectiveness as God's servant?

Are you just meaninglessly going through the motions of serving Him?

If so, do you want to serve God once again with the passion and fruitfulness you did before?

If you return to God, your greatest victories may still be ahead.

Maybe you have no idea what it means to serve God with purpose and power.

If so, God is waiting to help you become all He intended for you to be.

This week, let us check our axe of spiritual service and ensure it is in prime condition. If not, let us go to God

and seek His help to make the needed repairs.

God wants all of you and me - He wants us to serve Him with our heart, mind and strength - so He can accomplish great and mighty things in His Kingdom through us.

Let us commit to becoming effective partners with God in His Kingdom work of reaching lost souls and getting the Church ready for Christ's coming.