

Lessons From Elisha 04 God's Provision

by Joseph Balsan

God provides for us in all things, including material and spiritual needs, and we must appropriate and accept Christ for ourselves to experience spiritual uplift.

Duration: 47:30

Scripture: 2 Kings 6:6, Psalm 23:3, Psalm 37:4, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "God's Provision", "Spiritual Restoration"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of restoration in relation to a man who lost his borrowed axe in the water. The man cried out for help but received no response, and in his despair, he came to the end of himself. However, as he focused his eyes on a star in the heavens, he felt himself begin to rise. This story teaches that the same one who saves us from our sins is also the secret to our spiritual sanctification and uplift. The preacher also shares a story about a man who experienced spiritual depression and found encouragement in the idea that life is a series of ups and downs, but ultimately, we can rise again with the help of God.

Transcript

So he went with them, and when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water. And he cried and said, Alas, master, for it was borrowed.

And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed unto him the place. And he cut down a stick, and casted him thither, and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee, and he put out his hand, and took it.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of his word. Now I realize that we have a most unusual incident here. You know, we might wonder how a little incident like this might be recorded for us in such a tremendous book like the Bible, which brings before us such tremendous things like the creation of heavens and earth, and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and some of the great events and great teachings that we have brought before us in the word of God.

But I believe that this illustrates for us very aptly how that God is interested in the minute and small details of our lives. You know, we are sometimes prone to think that perhaps God is not interested in the material things that pertain to our lives. But I think that in this portion that we have read here, we have brought before us that God is interested in all that pertains to your life and to mine.

Now I realize that in this materialistic day, when so many are prone to believe that there are no such things as miracles because they don't see very many so-called physical miracles today, why, they look at a story like this and they say, well, how is it possible that iron could swim? And yet we know that every day man is causing iron to swim, isn't he? Man takes his big ocean liners and he sends them from one continent to the other and he makes them to swim. He makes them to go through the waters without sinking. And then we also know, for instance, that man has made his submarines and these submarines are propelled through water.

They contain perhaps a hundred men. They can stay underwater for a long period of time and yet men ridicule the idea that God can do physical miracles such as this and also such as perhaps the story of the fish swallowing Jonah. You've heard the story of the woman who said, well, I believe that the fish swallowed Jonah, but if God said that Jonah had swallowed the fish, I would have believed that too.

Well, it's good to believe the Bible, but you know, to believe anything unreasonable. And so we find that all the things that God brings before us are reasonable, although we cannot always reason and explain them. And so here in this portion that we have read, in this sixth chapter of 2 Kings, we have this beautiful incident of the iron that did swim.

And you know, as we look at this incident, why there were four things that were suggested to me as I was reading and studying about this portion as illustrating to you and me God's provision for you and me in all things. Now, it's wonderful to know that God does provide for us in all things. Remember the circumstances here? It says, The sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too straight for us.

Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there where we may dwell, and he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.

Now, of course, this young man who was one of the sons of the prophets, and you know, I think the tone, you know the sons of the prophets are usually set in a, not in such a bright light in the scripture. It seems that they make various mistakes and so on. They seem to very seldom understand.

But we find here that this was a good desire on the part of this man. He says, The place where we dwell is too straight for us. In other words, expansion.

Expansion and enlargement. In the work, a good desire. You know, that was the desire.

Now, you know, separation. I'm going to speak about it a little while later. And so we have brought before us that there was a good desire.

And you know, every one of us are. They wanted the prophet Elisha to be with them. Now, the prophet Elisha with them.

And as they came to Jordan, they began to cut down wood. And as they were cutting down wood, as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water, and he cried and said, Alas, man! And he showed him the place, and he cut down a stick, and therefore said, He take it up to thee. And he put out his hand and took it.

Now, as we think of this, I want to look at this first as a wonderful illustration of salvation. You know, when God made man, God put man in the garden of Eden, to be the master. But you know, man fell.

Just like this axe head fell, man fell as a result of his carelessness. And all men today are fallen creatures. All men today, just like that axe head, they are in sin.

Now, I know that this is contrary to much of the teaching that we receive in so-called schools, and much of the teaching that is abroad today. You know, if you look at many of the philosophers' writings, and you listen to much of the teaching that goes on in our schools, the idea is not that man has been separated from God as a fallen creature, man that he is. It's very different.

That teaching is, where man ever lost the ability to make and develop these things. H.G. Wells' History of the World, began to develop through a fish. It was swept in an ambivalent tree.

And it began to develop wings to man. But you know, the thing that amazes me is that what they needed, knew just exactly what they did become. And the thing that puzzles me is, where has man, who is the most intelligent of all these creatures, where has he lost that power? Where has he lost that ability? And man has gotten out into space.

But you know, in order to get into space, he doesn't develop organs within himself that is able to enable him to live in space. He's got to carry all his paraphernalia and all his material with him. And so the thing that puzzles me in the theory of evolution is, where did man lose that power to develop within himself the organs that would enable him to launch out into space as the primitive forms of protoplasm and the primitive creatures were able to develop and become something that they weren't before.

Well, of course, that theory falls down when we come to the Word of God, doesn't it? The Word of God tells us not that man is evolving, but the Word of God tells us that man, separated from God, has fallen into the pit of sin. And there in that pit of sin, he is lost, that he is in darkness, that he is just like that piece of iron. He is unable to raise himself.

He is unable to lift himself up. He needs something more, something outside of himself altogether. And of course, the wonderful thing about it is that this young man, this son of the prophet, he realized and was conscious of what had happened.

He says, Alas, Master, for it was borrowed. This thing that was given to me, it was not my own. It was borrowed, and it's lost.

And so the prophet says, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And we know the simple procedure that Elisha took. Elisha cut down a stick, and he cast it in thither, and the iron did swim.

My, what a beautiful picture we have here of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the living stick, wasn't he? He was the living branch. But before man could be redeemed, before man could be lifted up, our Lord Jesus had to be cut down.

Yes, that's why he had to die. You know, all the other religions of the world, they emphasize the life and the teachings of their founders. They make very little of their death.

But Christianity emphasizes the death and the burial and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Because everything centers around that, doesn't it? If he had not died, there would never have been a means of

lifting up the lost sons of men. But the Lord Jesus had to die.

The Lord Jesus had to be cut down on the cross. We remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.

If there had been another way whereby man could have been saved, the Lord Jesus would never have had to go to the cross. But there was no other way. There was no other way whereby man could be lifted.

The Lord Jesus had to die. He had to go to that cross. And you know, when that cross and the truth of that cross is brought to the sinner.

And I want to say this this morning. You know, we're having some preaching about the Lord Jesus as the answer to the sinner's problems, the solutions to his difficulties, and the cross is not mentioned. A number of years ago in *The Witness*, I read a series of articles which is now in book form, written by Mr. George Goodman, a book that I have.

And it is entitled *The Gospel We Preach*. And in that series of articles, he emphasizes that many today are not preaching the gospel. They are preaching nice messages, and they are in a certain measure preaching Christ, but they are not preaching the cross.

The gospel of Christ centers around the cross. The death of the Lord Jesus as the means to put away sin. God's provision for sin.

Christ had to die. Christ had to lay down His life. He had to bear our sins on Calvary's cross.

He had to rise from the dead. And the hymn writer has beautifully put it when he says, I must needs go home by the way of the cross. There's no other way but this.

I shall ne'er get sight of the gates of light if the way of the cross I miss. Elisha took the branch, and he cut it down, and he cast that branch into the water, and the iron did swim. And he says, He said to the young man, Take it up to thee.

And he put out his hand and took it. He had to appropriate it for himself. And it's the very same with the sinner.

The sinner has to appropriate and accept Christ for himself. You remember in the Old Testament the beautiful incidents that we have of the sacrifices? You remember that when they brought the burnt offering? When the man brought the burnt offering? Or when the man brought the sin offering? You remember that when he brought the burnt offering, he laid his hands upon the head of that burnt offering, and that burnt offering was slain. And that burnt offering was cut up in its pieces.

It was flayed. That means its skin was taken from it. And then it was cut up into pieces, and it was placed upon the altar, and it was all consumed upon that abrasion altar.

And it says the man was accepted. It was accepted for him. And in the sin offering, the man also laid his hand upon the offering, and he confessed his sins, and then he slew that offering.

And part of that offering was taken, and it was offered upon the altar. The blood was sprinkled before the altar, and the man knew that his sin was forgiven. In both of these instances, he had to lay his hand upon the head of the offering.

And both of these offerings speak of different aspects of the sacrifice of Christ. When the man laid his hand upon the head of the sin offering, he was, as it were, transferring his guilt to that offering which was going to die for him. Just as you and I, when by faith we accept Christ as our Savior, when we accept Him for ourselves, our sins are forgiven.

But you know, when he put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, all the acceptability of the burnt offering was appropriated or applied to him. He was accepted in all that the burnt offering stood for. And what a wonderful thing to know that when you and I, by faith, accept Christ, not only are our sins forgiven, but you and I are accepted in virtue of what He is and what He has done.

The other night when I was speaking about being accepted in the Beloved, a brother after the meeting asked me, do I believe that there are degrees of acceptance before God? Are there degrees of acceptance before God? You and I are accepted before God in virtue of what Christ is and of what Christ has done. We are accepted in the Beloved. And that is our state, our standing of acceptance before God.

But, of course, there are degrees and the simplest believer is just as acceptable to God as the most mature or the greatest exponent of Christianity, the Apostle Paul himself, because we're accepted before God in virtue of what Christ is and what Christ has done. But, the measure of there are degrees of well-pleasing to God, perhaps it's merely a matter of semantics, that is, words. Acceptance is the same to every believer in Christ.

But the degree of our well-pleasing God, that is something else. That is determined by our state, by our progress, by our growth, by our development in Christ, by the way that you and I live for Him and please Him and devote ourselves to Him. This was what the Apostle desired.

He sought in all things to be well-pleasing unto Him. And that should be the desire of every believer. So, every believer, in virtue of what Christ has done, has the same degree of acceptance.

But every believer is not as well-pleasing as he might be because of his life. And we should aim to be well-pleasing. And so, Elisha told the young man, take it up unto thee.

He had to appropriate for himself, and so we need to appropriate for ourselves the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who gives life. But then, you know, we think of this as a beautiful picture or illustration of sanctification. My, that's quite a word, isn't it? Sanctification.

Separation. Separation. Separation from what? Separation from all that is not of God.

Separation from that which is contrary to God. But you know, separation is only half of it. That's the negative side of it.

Separation. How many have separated and they've become religious Pharisees? Separation in its entirety is expressed separation or sanctification unto the Lord. That's the positive.

Sanctification unto the Lord. My, you know, here we find it. We find this man as he is busy at his work, so occupied with his work, and as he is cutting down wood, the axe had fell from the water and he cried and said, O last man, you know, we don't go along very long in our Christian life, when like this axe head which was separated from the handle and which was being taken down into the depths, you and I feel within ourselves a downward pull.

How often we feel that, don't we? Every one of us, we have spiritual desires, but, you know, we find within ourselves a downward pull. I was speaking about that the other day. That thing called sin that dwells within you and me.

Paul speaks of it in the 8th chapter of Romans. The law of sin and death. He speaks about it in the 7th chapter of Romans.

He says, I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. He desired, as it were, to rise and aspire and attain to the highest that the Lord had for him, but he found within himself a law, a gravitational pull that was always pulling him down. That's what we find in our experience, don't we? We find that which is pulling us down.

I visited a young man in Des Moines not so long ago. His life was sort of erratic. He'd go on for a while, then he'd drop out.

Then he'd go on for a while, then he'd drop out. And so when we visited him, he said to him, he says, How is it? Do you find it that way in your life? Do you find in your life you go on for a while? Yes, he is. We find within ourselves a pull that's taking us down, down, down.

Here this young man realizes that the axe head is going down, that the axe head is down. I think of that word that we have in the Gospel of Mark. It says that Peter was beneath.

Peter was beneath. Remember in the place of the fire, it says Peter was beneath. I thought to myself, well, that's the way it sometimes is.

The new man is down. The new man is down below. Well, here we find that the axe head was down.

It speaks of the spiritual life as being down instead of being up. Well, the thing about it is it can't lift itself up. And so the prophet is asked to come and help.

The last master who was borrowed, and the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither and the iron did swim. What is the lesson that is taught us here? The lesson that is taught us here is that the same One who saved us from our sins is the same One who is the secret for spiritual sanctification and spiritual uplift.

He is the secret for our spiritual life. I remember reading a story one time in one of Mr. Goodman's books about a man who was very depressed about his spiritual life. He didn't seem to make any progress.

And one time he fell into a sleep. He was sleeping and he had a dream. He dreamt that he was walking along in the dark, stumbling in the dark, and suddenly he fell into a deep pit.

And as he fell into that deep pit and jostled from side to side, he broke numerous bones in his body, including his legs. And there he was at the bottom of the pit. And he cried aloud for help.

And he yelled for help, but nobody came. Then he tried to lift himself up. And he might lift himself up a foot or two feet or three feet, and then in his weakness he would fall back again.

And finally in despair, he came to the place where he came to the end of himself. And when he came to the end of himself, all he could do is just lie at the bottom of that pit and just think of his hopeless condition. And the more he thought of it, the more despairing he became.

And then he began to, as it were, focus his eyes on the star that was in the heavens. And you know, as he focused his eyes on that star, he became fascinated with that star. And as he looked at that star, suddenly he felt something happen.

He felt himself begin to rise. And as he felt himself begin to rise, it startled him. And startled him so much that he took his eye off the star and down he went.

And he thought, that's strange. How did that happen? Why did I begin to rise? He says, what was I doing that I was beginning to rise? And then he began thinking, yes, I was looking at that star. And as I was looking at that star, I felt myself rise.

And so he fastened his eyes upon that star. And he looked at that star. And as he looked at that star, sure enough, he began to rise.

And as he began to rise, why, he says, that's it. That's it. And then he took his eyes off the star again, just to see if it was so.

And sure enough, it came. And so he got his eyes on that star. And he kept his eyes on that star.

And as he kept his eyes on that star, he began to rise. And he rose and rose. And he learned, he awakened when the tremendous secret revealed to him.

He says, that's it. He says, I've got to get my eyes upon Christ. I've got to be occupied with Him.

I've got to know Him. I've got to learn of Him. I've got to have Him set before me.

And if I have Him set before me, He is the secret of power to the sanctified life, to the spiritual life, to the life of victory. You know, I read a story one time about a man who was a trainer of dogs, as well as a boxer. He was a very rough character.

And the Lord came in and saved him. And when the Lord saved him, why, he made marvelous progress in his spiritual life. And everybody wondered, well, how did he make such marvelous progress in his spiritual life? Because he was going far beyond even some believers who had been on their way for years.

And they asked him one day, how is it that you're making such wonderful progress? He says, well, he says, you know, I find that the Christian life is just like training dogs. Huh? He says, yes, he says, I find that the Christian life is like training dogs. He says, one thing, one thing you have to teach the dog is absolute obedience.

And he says, the way that I teach a dog obedience is, a dog is very easily distracted by other things. He says, when I'm walking along with a dog, he says, that dog might see a bone. Or that dog might see something else and make for it.

He says, when that dog sees the bone, he says, immediately, he says, I've got to get the attention of that dog. And so I call him. And I get his eye on me.

And he says, when I've got that dog's eye on me, the power of that bone on that dog is broken. As long as I can keep that dog's eye on me, that dog has no desire for the bone, because he sees his master. He sees the one who loves him.

He sees the one who wants his good. And he says, it's the very same, when the bone of this or the bone of that wants to lead me away from the Lord, all I do is get my eye on him. And he says, when I get my eye on him and keep my eye on him, oh Lord, help me.

Lord, in this moment of impurity, Lord, thy purity. Thy purity. Lord, in this circumstance of tension, Lord, thy patience.

In this circumstance of trial, Lord, thy love, thy gentleness, thy grace. He gets his eye on the Lord. Here we find that he says, he took the branch, cut it down, cast it in, and the power of that branch drew that iron up.

And the man was to take it. He was to take it. He says, take it up to thee.

Do you and I take to ourselves the power that the Lord Jesus offers us to live in victory over sin? To live the sanctified life unto Him that is pleasing to Him? What a beautiful illustration we have here of the secret of spiritual sanctification unto the Lord. And we find here also the secret of His care in the stresses of life. I want you to notice, they were going to the place that was in accordance with the will of God.

They were going there with a good desire, a desire for enlargement. They were going there with the presence of the Prophet Himself with them. You would think to yourself, well, with such wonderful things, why, there could be no difficulties.

You know, people seem to have an idea that if I have the Lord with me, and if I'm in the will of the Lord, there's not going to be any problems. There's not going to be any difficulties. There's not going to be any stresses.

Oh yes, there will be. There will be, because His desire is our enlargement. And His enlargement comes to us through the various circumstances and trials and tensions of life.

Because we're believers doesn't mean that we're not going to have the stresses and the strains and the difficulties of life. You know, it's nice to live in a greenhouse where, like as the flowers, I might say, the temperature is always right. But the Lord doesn't keep us in spiritual greenhouses.

The Lord allows us as His people to experience the tensions, the stresses, the problems, the difficulties of life. Now here was a very small thing. A man was busy about his work.

And suddenly as he was busy about his work, the ant's head flew off and fell into the water. Now perhaps if it had been his, he might not have thought so much about it. But you know, it didn't belong to him.

It belonged to somebody else. So naturally, here was a man who had something to worry about. Do you and I have things to worry about? You know, the wonderful thing about the Bible is that it takes thought for the little things.

The Lord tells us, the Lord thinks so much of us that He's numbered the very hairs of our head. That He puts our tears in His bottle. Watch this thing.

He thought of Paul. And he thought of Paul being there. And as Paul writes, he writes to Timothy and says, when you come, bring my cloak with me because it's going to be cold here.

And he says, bring my books too. And Paul in turn writes to Timothy. He says to Timothy, Timothy, you're having some stomach trouble.

He says, take a little wine for thy stomach and thine offering. What? The Bible occupied or trouble? Mentioning a man's stomach trouble? Or the Bible mentioning a man's need of a cloak? Or the Bible mentioning a person's tears? Why do you know that in the Old Testament, for instance, where we have the Lord laying down the law for Israel in regard to the tabernacle and giving the most precise instructions in the very same course of those instructions, He takes so much thought for them. He says, now when you build a house, He says, you put a battlement around the top of that house, the roof of that house.

I don't want any of your children falling off the roof and being hurt. So you build a battlement above the roof of that house so that there won't be anyone be hurt falling from it. Why, sure the Lord is interested in the material problems and cares and stresses and circumstances of His children.

Why the prophet didn't say, oh that's too small a matter for me, the ax head. It was something that was worrying this man. It was something that didn't belong to him and he had lost it.

How was he going to explain it to his friend? Perhaps his friend thought very much of it. It might have been something that was in the family for some time with which there were associated memories. So he says, where fell it? Where fell it? And he took him to the place and he cast in.

And when he cast in, why the thing came up. You know I've found many times that when I forget little things and I look around for them and I can't find them. You know what I do? I find it works.

I get down on my knees and I ask the Lord, Lord what happened to it? Where is it? Lord where is this thing? Lord where is it? And you know it's amazing, I can spend hours looking for a thing and not finding it. And a short time after I've prayed about it, why it rises. It comes right where I want it.

Just what I need. Do you think that God cares for you so much that He's interested in the little things that worry you? In the little things that perplex you? In the little things that disturb you? He knows what you have need of. And He's interested.

And He's able to do those things. You know it's nice to just be able to recount and think of the things that the Lord does. I remember an incident in my life when I was up in northern Michigan pioneering up there for 13 years.

In my different times we had need and the Lord answered in a remarkable way. One day I was so depressed and discouraged not knowing how I was going to meet that rent. I was a bachelor at the time yet.

It wasn't very much. But you know I went out with gospel tracts and as I went out with gospel tracts as I was walking along down the street suddenly I saw something green. I picked it up.

It was more than enough to meet my needs. God's provision. He has the most unusual ways to meet your needs.

He's interested in all that pertains to you. The little things. Sometimes we think, well I won't bother the Lord with this little thing.

Well, He's very interested in the little things as well as the great. But you know there's a fourth way in which we can look at this incident. This is the last and that is in regard to restoration.

Here was a man who was so busy working that the axe had flew off and fell into the water. And he was incapable of getting it back of himself. The axe had fell into the water and he cried and said, Alas, Master, for it was borrowed.

I wonder this morning have you and I in the midst of our activities lost our joy? Have you in the midst of our activities lost our peace? Have you in the midst of our activities lost our spiritual power? You and I can think of days and times past when our lives were a power for God. When we were doing things for God. When we did have a joy that carried us.

And we say, it's gone. It didn't last. It was borrowed.

It was borrowed. He came to the prophet about it. He came to Elisha about it.

And Elisha said, Where fell it? Where did we lose it? Where did we lose that joy? Where did we lose that power? Where did we lose that peace? Is it perhaps when we cease to read this word daily? Is it perhaps when we cease to pray daily? Is it perhaps when we cease to confess him daily? Or is it perhaps at that time when we gave somebody a piece of our mind? You know, one brother says, Well, I gave him a piece of my mind and I lost peace. I gave him a piece P-I-E-C-E of my mind and I lost P-E-A-C-E of mind. Oh, how easy that is.

Did I lose it when I had that fight, that argument with my husband, with my wife, with my brother, my sister, my neighbor? When that difficulty arose, Oh, he was wrong, she was wrong, definitely wrong. Yes, but we lost something there. We lost something there that has had its effect.

Where fell it? Where fell it? That's the question. Where did I lose it? Where did that rupture come in? Where did that difficulty come in? Where did I lose it? He showed him the place. Oh, I like those words.

He showed him the place. There's someplace where it took place. Someplace where the severance took place.

Someplace where the difficulty took place. And what did he do? He cut down the stick and cast it in thither. The cross.

The cross. Oh yes, the cross. You know, the cross answers our problems.

Mistreated? Misrepresented? He shouldn't have done it? Wasn't the Lord Jesus mistreated? Wasn't the Lord Jesus misrepresented? You and I can think of the cross and its varying aspects and we could never exhaust the various aspects of the cross and how it meets our needs. But you know, when you and I are brought in the light of that cross, in whatever aspect it may be that we have need of it, you and I can have no response but to have our heart melted in the presence of that cross as we think of what our Lord did for us. And the iron began to swim and he said, take it up to thee.

Lay hold. You know, the Lord has made wonderful provision for us in salvation. The Lord has made wonderful provision for us in sanctification.

The Lord has made wonderful provision for us in the stresses and the strains of life. And the Lord has made wonderful provision for your restoration and mine no matter what you and I may have fall. I remember reading a story one time about Mr. Frederick Stanley Arnott who was one of the pioneers in the work in Angola and he was at a conference and he had many remarkable experiences there in Africa with

natives and with animals and narrow escapes and all of that.

All that you know which we love to hear and that thrills us as we hear about it. And somebody said to him, Brother Arnott, would you tell us what is your most favorite verse in the Bible? What do you think is the most wonderful verse in the Bible in order to illustrate all of your experience? And you know what he said? Of course they thought he was going to speak like Paul did in one place. The Lord delivered me from the jaw of the lion or things like that.

They were looking for some unusual expression like that. He said to me the most wonderful verse is that verse in the 23rd Psalm where it says, He restoreth, He restoreth my soul. Ah, how wonderful.

He restoreth not me, it doesn't say He restoreth me, it says He restoreth my soul. You know, that's something inward. That's something profound.

That's something only He can do. But He doesn't when you and I are brought into proximity and into sight of the cross and into the understanding of what He did. And we appropriate to ourselves the spiritual benefits that issued to us from the cross and the result is that you and I are fitted to represent and serve Him.

Brother Pontius, will you close in prayer please?

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