

Copyright August 8, 2021. Geist Christian Church. All Rights Reserved.

Title: Beach Reads: Construction Miracle

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

Text: [2 Kings 6:1-7](#)

E-Mail: [Ryan Hazen](#)

[Watch the service.](#)



Welcome to installment number two in our annual Beach Reads sermon series. Beach Reads is an end-of-summer series that started many years ago when summer reading lists became popular. This year, there are four stand-alone stories that are pretty obscure and rather unbelievable. Last week, we explored a long sermon by

Paul that caused a young listener to fall asleep in a third-story window and fall to his death. Coming up next week – talking donkeys and the week following a bad hair day. None of the four show up in the assigned scripture cycle so they may be new to you. But, here they are – in the Bible nonetheless.

Today, a construction miracle. Before we get far, I have to tell you about my experience on Monday when I started doing some research and study in earnest for this sermon. I went to my go-to commentary for some ideas and background on the passage. There was a commentary on the story BEFORE this one and the story AFTER this one. Commentary on THIS story was MISSING. I'm unclear whether that was a printer's error or if the commentator just thought this story so odd that there was nothing to say about it. For a moment I thought about changing directions but decided to press on.

It's an odd story indeed but before we jump in we need to reacquaint ourselves with Elisha for he is the only name mentioned and the main character in our story. Sometimes Elisha gets confused with Elijah because their names sound a lot alike. Both Elijah and Elisha were Old Testament prophets although neither has their own book in the Hebrew scriptures. Elisha was a student of Elijah. Together, they helped restore Israel in a time of wicked rulers. In 2 Kings 2, Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan River on dry land much like Moses parting the Red Sea except Cecil B. DeMille didn't make a movie about Elijah and Elisha.

Understanding that Elijah would soon pass away, Elisha asked to be blessed with a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah was then carried straight into heaven by a chariot of fire. Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle and used it to cross the Jordan again on dry land. He received the double portion he had asked for and performed many miracles in Israel. The story of Elijah and Elisha is a beach read for another summer.

Elisha was somewhat unique among the Old Testament prophets in that he was also a teacher of many other prophets. He was similar to what we might think of today as a seminary professor. There was a group of men – and they were all men at that time - who desired to learn about the word of God. Elisha taught them in what was known as the company of prophets. It was, in many ways, the Old Testament equivalent of a seminary but they would have also lived together – a bit like a monastery. ¹

Our story begins with the information that this company of prophets, or seminary, had been blessed with numerical growth. But with growth comes the challenge. The challenge for them is that they needed a larger residence hall – more dorm rooms. They said to Elisha, "Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live." (2 Kings 6:2).

So, they all, including Elisha, go to the river bank where the woods would have been plentiful and begin cutting down trees. All building projects have change orders and things that happen that were not anticipated in the original design. It happened when building one of the additions on this building. Next time you walk down the corridor by the main restrooms and the library, you'll notice that the hallway turns. The original design was for a straight hallway but there was a house on this property that was not acquired as quickly as originally thought. A straight hallway would have put the new addition on top of the house. The owner would have frowned on that, so the hallway was redesigned with a jog in it to avoid the house.

Things happen with building projects. For Elisha, it happened as he was watching the trees being cut down for the new dormitory. As they were felling the trees, somehow the ax head gets loose and sails into the water and sinks to the bottom of the river. "But as one was felling a log, his ax head fell into the water; he cried out, 'Alas, master! It was borrowed.'" (2 Kings 6:5).

Elisha was the leader of the group – they cry out to him and call him "master." It was a good thing that he decided to come along because this is more of a crisis than we might think. A lost ax might not seem like a big deal to us but in a time without Ace Hardware stores or Menard's, it would have

been a big deal to lose any such tool. Add to that the fact that the user had not only lost it, but it wasn't even his to start with – it was borrowed.

In those days, Israel was technologically inferior to the surrounding nations, and an iron implement such as an ax head was a valuable commodity. In Elisha's day, it was less like losing a replaceable tool, and more like totaling a friend's borrowed Lamborghini. The cost of replacing it was prohibitive, and in Elisha's day, it might have even involved the borrower selling himself into slavery to pay for the loss. Not to mention, there would have been an immediate work stoppage. The borrower of the ax would have watched his future sink to the bottom of the river right along with the ax head. For all intents and purposes, his life was now over. The seriousness of this rather odd event cannot be overstated.

Elisha remained calm, trusting in God. "Then the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. He said, 'Pick it up.' So he reached out his hand and took it." (2 Kings 6:6-7). The man's life was saved, and the building process could continue. But...but...iron doesn't float. Whatever Elisha did, a miracle occurred that reversed a course of events that was spiraling in an unfortunate direction. Like last week when Paul picks up the dead Eutychus and brings him to life, this week Elisha returns life to the man who had lost the ax head and gives him a new lease on life.

As with any story, those who hear or read this story bring their own baggage when they seek to interpret what this floating ax might mean. In its original context, 850 years before the birth of Jesus, this miracle would have revealed that if Israel would only listen and respond to the word of Elisha and the prophets, Israel could remain at peace. If they would only heed Elisha's words they would be safe from the threat of invasion, disaster, and captivity. Elisha and the prophets proclaimed that Israel must reject the worship of false gods, and cling to God alone. If Israel would listen to Elisha when he told them to shun idolatry as the man listened to Elisha when he told them to cast a stick of wood into the Jordan River, all would be well. The story was not simply about what it took for Elisha to build a place for his community, but what it would take for Israel to build a place for their future. We certainly chase false gods today lest we think this interpretation might not apply to us.

Another interpretation of this story starts to emerge after the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Christians began to read this passage in the light of their experience of Christ. In particular, a Christian might ask the question, "Why did Elisha throw a stick of wood into the Jordan? Why not just throw a rock into it? Or why did he not just say, 'Let the iron ax head

float? Why did he throw anything into the river?" To the Christian, this story began to take on Christian qualities. The wood that he threw in came to represent the wood of the cross and later, that very ax head became a symbol of hope for new life.

Christians would see Jesus and, ultimately, themselves as that ax head. Just as the iron ax head floated in defiance of the laws of nature and rose from the depths of the Jordan River, so Jesus also rose from the depths of the grave. Christians are promised eternal life and resurrection. If it were just up to the laws of nature, that ax head, remember it's representing us, should have remained in those watery depths forever. But since the wood of the cross has been thrown into that water, we can rise anew. The wood of the cross makes all the difference: it makes unfloatable iron float, and it makes mortal bodies rise immortal.

For us Christians, that iron ax head is a symbol of hope. Because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. HOPE FLOATS. I didn't know until this week that HOPE FLOATS was the name of a 1998 movie starring Sandra Bullock and Harry Connick, Jr. While I still haven't watched it, I did read a fair amount about it this week.

"Hope Floats" begins with a talk show where Birdee Pruitt, the Sandra Bullock character, learns that her husband was cheating on her. Devastated, she flees from Chicago with her young daughter and moves back in with her mother in Smithville, Texas where she was the three-time Queen of Corn in high school. She works to put her life back together, to raise her daughter, and to find a new life. One of the best Birdie lines in the movie could be instructional to every one of us - "Beginnings are scary, endings are usually sad, but it is the middle that counts the most. You need to remember that when you find yourself at the beginning. Just give hope a chance to float up." -Birdee Pruitt

Our beach reads story today is seven brief verses, buried in the long narrative of 2 Kings. It's no wonder my go-to commentary missed it. But it has immense significance for all of us who face what we believe to be the end of something. It might be the end of a relationship, the end of a job, or the end of a life, someone we love, or even our mortality. Our trust in God to walk with us as our life unfolds is key to our contentment in life.

A new minister was walking with an older, more seasoned minister in the garden one day. Feeling a bit insecure about what God had for him to do, he was asking the older preacher for some advice. The older preacher walked up to a rosebush and handed the young preacher a rosebud and told him to open it without tearing off any petals.

The young preacher looked in disbelief at the older preacher and was trying to figure out what a rosebud could have to do with his wanting to know the will of God for his life and ministry. But because he respected the older preacher, he proceeded to try to unfold the rose, while keeping every petal intact. It wasn't long before he realized how impossible this was to do. Noticing the younger preacher's inability to unfold the rosebud without tearing it, the older preacher began to recite a poem...

It is only a tiny rosebud, A flower of God's design; but I cannot unfold the petals with these clumsy hands of mine. The secret of unfolding flowers is not known to such as I. GOD opens this flower so easily, but in my hands, they die. If I cannot unfold a rosebud, this flower of God's design, then how can I have the wisdom to unfold this life of mine? So I'll trust in God for leading Each moment of my day. I will look to God for guidance In each step along the way. The path that lies before me, Only my Lord and Savior knows. I'll trust God to unfold the moments, just as He unfolds the rose. ²

Whether you take the Old Testament interpretation of our ax head story to stay close to the one true God who has the power to make iron float or the New Testament interpretation that the cross of Christ promises resurrection to new life, either way, you'll understand that your hope rests with God to unfold the moments of your life and bring hope to the surface, even against impossible odds.

¹ Commentary basis for this sermon found in article titled "A Floating Axe-Head" by Fr. Lawrence Farley found at Orthodoxy Christian website April 26, 2019. www.orthochristian.com.

² Poem titled "The Rosebud" by Pastor Darryl L. Brown found at https://www.ellenbailey.com/poems/ellen_145.htm.