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Skeleton and Source of Life

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Here is a bizarre but true story told to Joseph Bates, the early Adventist pioneer, while he was traveling on a ship. Bates introduces the story:

"Among our passengers to New York was a Mr. Loyd, chief mate of a Philadelphia ship that was detained in London. He, in a very serious manner, related a very singular incident that occurred some few years previous, while he was a sailor from Philadelphia. He said that he never had dared to tell his mother or sisters of it. I will try to relate it in his own words.

"Said he, 'I was lodging away from my home one night in another part of the city, when the house was beset by the police. For fear of being identified with those that were disturbing the peace, I fled from my bed into the street with nothing but my night-dress on, and finally secreted myself in the market place, while a friend that was with me went back to obtain my clothes.

"About midnight a gang of men,

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passing through the market place, discovered me, and after a few inquiries of who I was, etc., they said, 'Drive this fellow on before us.' My pleading was in vain; they

continued to keep me before them until we entered the Cemetery, about two miles out of the city. We here came to a large flat stone with an iron hook in it. They placed a stout rope in the hook, which they brought with them, with which they swayed the stone up.

"This was opening a family vault, where a Jewish lady of distinction had been deposited that day. The jewelry upon her person was what they were after. The exciting question now was, who among them would go down into the vault and get the jewels? Said one, 'Here is the fellow.' I begged and entreated them, for the Lord's sake, not to require me to commit such a dreadful deed. My entreaties were disregarded; they crowded me down into the vault, ordering me to go and strip off her jewels..., they bid me hand them up. As soon as they got hold of them,

they dashed down the slab and ran away.

"I felt overwhelmed at my hopeless condition, doomed to die a most horrible death, and fearing every moment that the mangled corpse would lay hold of me. I listened to the rumbling sound of these robbers, until all was silent as death. The stone over me I could not move.

"After a little I heard a distant rumbling of the ground, which continued to increase until I heard strange voices over the vault. I soon learned that this was another gang, most likely unbeknown to the first, and they were placing their rope to swing up the same stone slab. I at once decided what to do to save myself. As the slab came up, I leaped out of the vault in my white night-dress, or shirt.

"Horror-stricken, they all fled back toward the city, running with such speed that it was difficult for me to keep up behind them, and yet

I feared if they should stop, I should be discovered and taken. Before reaching the city, I had drawn up some nearer the two hinder ones,

when one of them cried out to his companion, 'Patrick! Patrick! the old woman is close to our heels!' Onward they raced through the market and fled away from me, for I stopped here to hide myself. After a while my friend, having obtained my clothes, found me, and I returned home."*

You think that's exciting? The Bible tops that story in 2 Kings 13: "Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the

man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet" (vss. 20, 21; NRSV).

This was no sailor in his night-



shirt; it was the corpse himself. The dead man who touched Elisha's skeleton *actually* came to life! The funeral party must have been stupefied with amazement!

Dead bodies and bones were ritually impure to an extreme degree, even if you washed them. Because bones were so impure, they could be used to desecrate holy places, which is what King Josiah did to illicit places of worship (2 Kings 23:13, 14). But Elisha's bones were special. Not only did they make a dead body pure; they raised it to life.

Resurrection made possible by the death of another. Sounds like a foreshadowing of resurrection because of the death of Christ! This makes sense because there is a powerful connection between Elisha, whose name means, "My God is salvation," and Jesus, whose name means, "The Lord is salvation." Like Jesus, Elisha was used by God's power to bring a dead person to life (2 Kings 4:32-35), heal a leper (5:9-14), and multiply food (4:42-44).

Elisha's ministry pointed forward to that of Jesus, just as the ministry of Elijah, his predecessor, pointed forward to that of John the Baptist. Like Jesus, Elisha was a teacher of truth and righteousness to restore his people spiritually, and he healed people physically as well.

The story of Elisha demonstrates three important principles:

1. *Purity and life go together.*

Elisha's skeleton made a man pure and alive at the same time, just as Naaman was given new life when he was made pure and healed from leprosy (2 Kings 5). Jesus also gave new life to people He purified, including those whom He raised from the dead (Luke 7; John 11).

Moral purity also goes with life, as God said to the Israelites: "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:5; NRSV). By pouring love into our hearts through His Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), thereby enabling us to live in harmony with His law of morally pure love, the God of love makes it possible for us to continue to live in His universe, where love must rule, or we will ultimately destroy each other.

2. *Life and holiness go together.* Life from Elisha's bones was due to his holy connection with God, who is holy and the Source of all life, as graphically illustrated in Ezekiel 47, where a river of life flows out from His temple. Verse 12 says: "On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (NRSV).

This sounds like the tree of life by the river of life in the book of Reve-

lation (22:1, 2)!

Jesus makes the water of life available to each of us individually. He said to the woman at the well: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14, NKJV).

3. *God can use human beings as sources of purity, holiness, and life.* Elisha had no power in himself. He derived it from God. Similarly, apostles such as Peter could perform miracles like those of Christ, including raising the dead, by the power that God gave to them (Acts 3-5, 9, 19).

Not only does Christ make us wells of water springing up to eternal life; in John 7:38, He goes a step further: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living

water" (NKJV). Although God is the ultimate Source, Christ makes His followers into secondary sources of life so that they can emulate Him and carry on His earthly ministry while He is ministering for them in heaven. This promise is for whoever believes in Him, which includes us today.

We will not necessarily perform the kinds of miracles wrought by Elisha and Jesus' disciples. Yet by God's grace, we too can be channels of blessing and healing to the world. If the Lord could use Elisha when he was dead, surely He can use us while we are alive!

* Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), pp. 21-23 (in Advent Pioneer Library CD, *Words of the Pioneers*).

