

**2 Kings 5:14-27.**

***14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. 15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant." 16 The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. 17 "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. 18 But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this." 19 "Go in peace," Elisha said. After Naaman had traveled some distance, 20 Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him." 21 So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked. 22 "Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, "Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'" 23 "By all means, take two talents," said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. 24 When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left. 25 Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha. "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered. 26 But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.***

**Go in Peace and Give with Joy**

- ***We are not to think we can pay for our healing and salvation***
- ***We are not to chase after the wealth of this world***
- ***We are to give generously from a heart cleansed by God***

God loves a cheerful giver. From little on we are taught this biblical truth. It is God-pleasing to be generous - to not be greedy and selfish, but to share. As Christians we have had this message repeated to us over and over again, perhaps because this is something that from little on we have struggled with. From little on a part of us has always liked to receive and to have much better than we like to give and share; and so we have been reminded many times and in many different ways, "God loves a cheerful giver". Perhaps it is precisely because have heard that refrain time and time again that it seems so curious

that Elisha would not take Naaman's offering in our lesson for today. Naaman offered to give Elisha a tremendous amount of wealth after he had been cleansed of leprosy. Naaman was certainly a cheerful giver. If God loves a cheerful giver why didn't Elisha take Naaman's offering?

The Lord had in mind to teach us several important lessons from this single portion of Scripture. Through Elisha God teaches us that we are not to think that we can pay for our spiritual healing and salvation, but rather we are saved freely by the grace of God. Through Gehazi, Elisha's greedy servant, the Lord reminds us that we are not to chase after the wealth of this world. And through Naaman the Lord shows us that we are to give generously from a heart cleansed by God. Above all the Lord sends us on our way today telling us to - **go in peace and give with joy.**

Naaman had been cleansed of a horrible disease. The prophet Elisha had told him to dip into the lowly Jordan River seven times and he would be cleansed. Naaman at first refused to believe this order, seeing it as somewhat hokey and foolish. This was a serious disease. He had leprosy. His life and his well being were at stake and the best the prophet could tell him to do was dip into the Jordan River. The Jordan wasn't even a particularly impressive river. Naaman had washed his body before in cleaner rivers and was still infected. It seemed pointless to follow the prophet's order, however, he had heard of some of the amazing things this prophet was capable of; he had heard about the remarkable acts of Elisha's God. And so eventually he obeyed. He gave it a shot. He dipped into the Jordan River seven times and he was cleansed. It was a miracle, a complete and immediate healing. His skin was fresh and clear like that of a young boy. Immediately his body was cleansed and even more importantly his doubting heart believed.

Elisha's God, the God of Israel, was the only true God and now Naaman knew it and wanted to praise the name of the LORD. And so he returned to the prophet and he brought his entire entourage with him. He came and stood face to face with God's prophet and expressed his thanks with praise and now wanted to give a gift to express his thanks. However, the prophet Elisha responded in an unexpected manner, ***"As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing."*** Naaman insisted and continued to confess his devotion to the true God. He promised never to make a single sacrifice to another god or to bow down to another god on purpose. In fact, right then and there, he asked for forgiveness if he would ever in the future inadvertently bow down to the false gods of his fellow countrymen.

Naaman was fully devoted, fully committed to the true God of Israel. And so of course the poor miserly prophet Elisha would now accept this generous gift from the wealthy Naaman. But he didn't. Elisha simply sent Naaman on his way. His body was healed, his life changed, and his heart belonged to the LORD. "Go in peace", Elisha said to Naaman. "Go in peace".

You can imagine the unexpected and awkward silence that followed. Naaman had brought his entire encampment to find the man of God and here there all stood. Naaman was so willing to give, Naaman's servants were prepared to retrieve whatever treasure their master told them to get, and Elisha's servant was so ready and willing to receive. But yet Elisha refused any gift and told Naaman to simply go in peace. Perhaps a few jaws were

left agape when Elisha refused the gift. I wonder what Gehazi's face looked like when Elisha refused. But why? Why do you think Elisha was so unwilling to receive anything from Naaman? Why wouldn't he accept such a generous offering?

Elisha wanted to make it clear that a person cannot buy salvation. Naaman's heart was in the right place, but as Naaman's attendants were gathered around, the prophet wanted make sure not to give the impression that anyone could just pay for forgiveness, purchase a miracle, or buy peace with God. The salvation that comes through faith in the true God was a gift freely given. As much as Naaman's generous gift would have proven beneficial to Elisha and his ministry, to refuse the gift served Elisha's ministry and message even more. All those who were gathered there that day witnessed how the true God does not need money or offerings, but gives healing and peace freely in his grace.

As a congregation we regularly gather for worship and we come into God's presence so that we can praise his name as we recall his great and mighty works, as we sing our hymns of praise, as we come to him with our prayers, and as we give our offerings. Our offerings are part of our worship. They are given so that the name of the LORD may continue to be proclaimed. Our offerings are not the price of admission, or payment for services rendered. Our offerings are not the things that qualify us for membership in God's family, or gain us access to his healing and love - for who could ever pay enough for such rich mercy or such wondrous love. Elisha went out of his way not to give that impression to strangers but I wonder if this is not the impression that at least some of our own members may have.

Let us make this absolutely clear, our offerings are in no way payments taken, but they are gifts generously given to support the work of the church. They are to be gifts generously given from thankful hearts who want to make sure the healing and saving word of Jesus is proclaimed in this place and everywhere. And that's why we don't demand or even expect visitors to give an offering. That's why when members forget their offering on a particular Sunday the ushers don't just stand in the aisle with the collection plate until they fork something over. That's we don't drop people from membership merely because they have not given their share to support the church. This is not a club with club dues, but as members of this congregation we join together to support the work of the gospel in this community. As members of a synod we support mission work worldwide.

We gladly join together to bring the healing of Jesus to others. We are here to share the gospel with a sick and dying world. We are here to distribute the peace of Jesus to our members and to the members of our community whether there are rich or poor or somewhere in between. And so our offerings should not simply be about our own stability, but it about doing the work of the gospel. It is about giving from a thankful heart and then putting our blessings to work so that many more might receive the gifts of forgiveness, peace, and heaven, which all come freely through faith in Christ Jesus. All the money in the world could not buy us peace with God, but in his grace Jesus shed his holy precious blood to give us peace. We give in order that we might share the peace of Jesus that we have been freely given.

As we learn from this portion of scripture that salvation and peace cannot be bought we also recognize how easily we *as individuals* can fall into the same kind of money chasing endeavors of which Gehazi shamelessly participated. When the wealth and the possessions

of this world are waved in front of us, how easily you and I can be enticed to run after such things with reckless abandon. While Elisha was content with the little that God had given him, his servant had a lust for more. He could not stand the fact that Elisha had passed on such a windfall and so he ran after the man with great wealth, fabricated a story to help his cause, brought home twice what he asked for and then tucked it all away for himself. And when confronted about what he had done, he lied about it.

Friends, there is greedy Gehazi in all of us that is uncomfortable with the concept of contentment. There is a part of all of us that looks with yearning eyes at the things of this world. At times we all bow down to the gods of this age – money and materialism. We may not bow down in temples and shrines, but we bow down to these modern day gods when we go out of our way chasing after the wealth of this world. We do this in different ways and with varying speeds. We overspend and needlessly overextend our budgets. We overwork ourselves just to have a few more things. We are dishonest in our dealings so that we can hang on to or grab a little more wealth. We might even lie to ourselves and make excuses about our excesses and try to cover up our greed. We may be able to fool ourselves and maybe even those around us, but we cannot fool God. He sees and knows all. He sees our greedy hearts hard at work.

And so we need to stop and take an honest inventory of our lives and our motives. We need to ask ourselves some serious questions. Are my possessions and my money becoming the most important things to me? Do I really need this much? Why I am going so far out of my way to get more? Am I selfishly holding on to too much? Can I afford to be more generous?

And as we examine our methods and our motives we also need to remember what is truly important. Our God is the one who has given us all things. He takes care of us, and in his mercy he has cleansed us and saved us. We are his dear children and the riches of heaven are our eternal inheritance. The price paid for all of this was not a treasure chest of gold or silver, but it was the holy precious blood of Christ willingly shed for us. It was the body of Christ hung on a tree and laid in a tomb for you and for me. He died in our place and now he has washed us clean in his blood.

Every sin has been paid for. Every sin has been buried with Christ including the daily sins of materialism and greed, and now the risen Lord lives in our hearts and enables us to be content with what we have. His love fills us and moves us to generous and helpful with others because he has given us the priceless gifts of forgiveness and peace and the free gift of heaven. And so like Naaman we go in peace and we give with joy. We take the gifts that God has given us, whether there are many or there are not so many and we use them to praise the name of our only true God. We will be careful to manage what the good Lord has given us, and we gladly give a portion of our wealth to support the work of the gospel. As we do so we are certainly not trying to buy our way into heaven, our paying our dues to a congregation, but we will use the money that God has given to cheerfully proclaim the name of the true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God is the only true God. He is the only one who can save. He is the only one who cleanses us from the horrible disease of sin and gives us what money can't buy. He gives us heaven. He gives us forgiveness. He gives us peace. May we respond with hearts and hands that praise him. Dear friends in Christ go in peace and give with joy. Amen.