

Lessons from the Life of Elisha, Part 6: Naaman (Pt. 2), Gehazi, and the Floating Ax Head (2 Kings 5:17-6:7)

I. Miraculous Provision Recap (2 Kings 4:38-44)

- a. Elisha heals the poisonous stew.
- b. Elisha multiplies the bread to feed 100 sons of the prophets.
- c. Foreshadowing of Jesus feeding the crowds.
- d. See God's compassion for his people and how easy it is for God to provide, even if miraculous to us!
- e. Ultimately, God's plan was to provide us Jesus, the bread of life, so we might have eternal life. (**John 6**)
- f. Related, we see God's power over death in the story of the poisonous stew and the Shunammite woman.

II. The Story of Naaman, Part 1 Recap: Naaman Healed of Leprosy

- a. Recap 2 Kings 1-8
 - i. Naaman, a great commander of Syrian army, has leprosy.
 - ii. God uses a young Israelite servant girl (captured in a raid) in Naaman's home to tell Naaman that the prophet Elisha can heal him.
 - iii. After a bit of confusion, Naaman winds up before the prophet Elisha with his treasure to be healed. (ten talents of silver, six thousand gold shekels, and ten changes of clothing).
- b. Read **2 Kings 5:9-19**
 - i. Naaman comes to Elisha with treasure for his healing.
 - ii. Naaman has some wrong expectations, walks away from his healing!
 - iii. But Naaman humbles himself as others reason with him. He obeys.
 - 1. Imagine, "dipping" (*baptizo* = to baptize) 7 times
 - 2. Doubt, embarrassment, fear, hope, awe
 - 3. God loves the Gentile Naaman, who was conducting raiding parties against God's people! Willing to heal his enemy if he humbles himself in obedience.
 - iv. Elisha rejects Naaman's wealth twice.
 - v. Naaman is determined to worship God alone.

1. Asks for red earth to offer sacrifice “to the Lord alone”
2. Asks for mercy when he has to go in to help his master worship his master’s god Rimmon.

c. Lessons from the early Christians

i. Many of the early fathers saw the story of Naaman as a foreshadowing of Christian baptism.

1. As Naaman was baptized and healed of his leprosy, we are baptized and forgiven of our sins.
2. Naaman the Syrian, a Gentile, represents the purification available to all the nations through baptism.
 - a. Jesus had at first sent the apostles only to the lost sheep of Israel. (**Matthew 10**), but...
 - b. “Go therefore and disciple the nations, baptizing [the nations] into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching [the nations] to observe all things I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even t the end of the age.” (**Matthew 28:18-20**)
3. Jesus baptism, like Naaman’s, took place in the Jordan River. (**Matthew 3:13.**)
4. “It is not surprising that [Naaman] had such thoughts and rebelled.... A man who had made his career in the army could not have access to the mystery hidden in that unusual healing.

“Therefore Naaman was sent to the Jordan as to the remedy capable to heal a human being. Indeed, sin is the leprosy of the soul, which is not perceived by the senses, but intelligence has the proof of it, and human nature must be delivered from this disease by Christ’s power which is hidden in baptism.

“It was necessary that Naaman, in order to be purified from two diseases, that of the soul and that of the body, might represent in his own person the purification of all the nations through the bath of regeneration, whose beginning was the river Jordan, the mother and originator of baptism.” (Ephrem the Syrian, *On the Second Book of Kings* 5.10-11, 306-373 A.D.)
5. “Yes, and yet again, his disciple Elisha, when Naaman the Syrian, who was diseased with leprosy, had come to him as a suppliant, cleanses the sick man by washing him in the Jordan, clearly indicating what should come, both by the use of water

generally, and by the dipping in the river in particular. For Jordan alone of rivers, receiving in itself the first-fruits of sanctification and benediction, conveyed in its channel to the whole world, as it were from some fount in the type afforded by itself, the grace of Baptism. These then are indications in deed and act of regeneration by Baptism.” (Gregory of Nyssa, bishop of Nyssa (modern day south-central Turkey), c.a. 372 A.D.)

d. What happens at baptism?

i. **Acts 2:38**

1. Sins forgiven
2. Receive gift of the holy spirit

ii. Read **Romans 6:1-7, 20-23**

3. Baptized into Jesus’ death
4. Raised to a new life, set free from sin
5. Yet something even greater: “... and the end, everlasting life... the gift of God is eternal life...” (v. 23)
 - a. Victory over death, a theme in these stories of Elisha: raising the Shunammite’s son, healing the death in the pot, and more stories to come.

e. Chuck’s mother passed away a few weeks ago. Chuck, Alison, and Will were there the moment it happened. Very powerful to see. Here is a quote from a book that Chuck’s mother liked very much. Hard hitting about the reality of death and the hope of eternal life:

"Consider fifthly the state and condition of this corruptible body of ours as soon as we are dead. Alas, it immediately becomes pale, stiff, loathsome and hideous, insomuch that our dearest friends can scarcely endure to watch one night in the same room with it, much less bear to lie in the same bed! And so fast does it tend to stench and corruption that its nearest relations are the first to desire to get it out of the house and to lay it deep underground, that it may not infect the air. But what companions, what attendants must it meet with there? Worms and maggots. For these, O Man, thou art pampering thy body! These are to be thine inheritance – or rather, they are to inherit thee.

“Whatever thou art today, tomorrow thou art to be the food for worms. Worldlings, who are enamored with your own and others' beauty, and thereby too often drawn from your allegiance to God,

vouchsafe for once to reflect upon the condition to which both you and they must soon be reduced, and you will see what little reason you have to set your affections upon these painted dunghills, which will so quickly betray what they are and end in stench and corruption.

“We read that St. Francis Borgia was so touched with the bare sight of the ghastly countenance of the Empress Isabella after death, whom he had seen a little before and all her majesty and all her charms, as to conceive an eternal disgust of this world and a happy resolution of consecrating himself wholly to the service of that King who never dies. Let similar considerations move us to a similar resolution.”

- Bishop Richard Challoner (1691-1781); chap. 7 of *Think Well On It*

1. As we get a bit older, our skin gets a little rougher, bodies a bit more worn, function less well, a bit less beautiful. A taste of decay.
 2. Ultimately, death comes. Finality. Will happen to all of us.
- f. **Where Naaman received healing of his leprosy, we receive forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life at baptism, if we remain faithful to God and obey Jesus’ commandments until the end of our lives. This is the gift of God, our salvation.**
- i. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’” (1 Cor. 15:54-55)
 - ii. We have been shown the answer to this problem that faces every man and woman. We are sitting on the greatest treasure and secret of all.

III. Story of Naaman, Part 2: Gahazi’s Greed, Deceit, and Curse

- a. **Read 2 Kings 5:19-27**
- b. Can’t we cut Gehazi a break?
 - i. Elisha and Gehazi were so poor!
 1. Not enough food and some was poisonous. Had to rely on miracles to get a decent meal.
 2. Had to rely on hospitality of others.
 - ii. Gehazi may have wanted to feed others, do good. Money from Naaman could have been used for that.

- iii. What about the future? Unknown. Perhaps this is the time to cash in and store up for the future, just like those extra loaves Elisha provided!
 - iv. We can learn much from both the good and the bad examples provided us in Scripture.
- c. Elisha's example
 - i. Strong trust in God's providence (at peace, not anxious).
 - ii. Providing for other's needs from God's provision (the healing of the stew, the bread).
 - iii. Rejects Naaman's wealth. "As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.' Again he urged him to take it, but he refused." (**2 Kings 5:16**)
- d. Compare to Gehazi
 - i. "Behold, my master spared this Syrian Naaman, yet from his hand he received nothing of what he brought; but as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something of his." (**2 Kings 5:20**)

We see several fatal flaws / sin in Gehazi's heart and life:

 - ii. Greed
 - 1. Looking for comfort, more than what God is providing him. Not content. Wants more.
 - 2. And he wants someone else's stuff (Naaman's) for himself.
 - 3. He wants silver and clothes (and gardens, olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and men-servants and handmaidens, which all sounds very nice!). (**2 Kings 5:26**)
 - 4. Parable of the rich fool (**Luke 12:13-21**)
 - a. "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."
 - b. Jesus: beware of covetousness (goes to the heart of the real issue!)
 - c. Tells a parable: rich man stores up money for his own ease, comfort and excess. God calls him a fool because his life is taken suddenly and he wasted his wealth storing up for himself. Could have been used for others.
 - d. Punch line: "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is

not rich toward God.” **(Luke 12:21)**

- i. Covetousness: wanting other people’s stuff, not being content, wanting more for self, not being rich toward God.

5. Elisha is poor, but he is rich toward God

- a. what he has he shares and God works through him to provide for others.
- b. God’s Spirit and power is strong in him (like Jesus).

6. Gehazi, is poor, tagging along and participating with Elisha, but...

- a. Gehazi wants to take something from Naaman for himself, covets Naaman’s wealth.
- b. Even though he is poor, he is greedy, not rich toward God.
- c. God’s Spirit is not strong in him. (Can’t heal the Shunammite woman’s son.)
- d. In the end, he gets what he wants, and leprosy, which will cling to him and his seed forever.

7. Jesus calls this person a fool. Gives us a much better way with a warning:

- a. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- b. “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
- c. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
(Matthew 7:19-24)

8. Early Christians had a very different perspective on wealth than the world in their day:

- a. “That many of us our poor, this is not our disgrace, but our

glory. For, as our mind is relaxed by luxury, so is it strengthened by frugality. Yet, who can be poor if he does not want – if he does not crave for – the possessions of others? Who can be poor if he is rich towards God? He, rather, is poor, who, although he has much, desires more.” (Mark Felix, c. 200, 4.195)

- i. Mark Felix was a lawyer, probably saw the lives of the wealthy and the poor.
 - ii. Can’t be poor if you don’t want anything!
 - iii. Can’t be rich if you desire more!
 - iv. Gehazi is poor (in possessions) and greedy (poor in spirit)! Whereas Elisha was poor (in possessions) and rich in Spirit, rich toward God.
- b. “‘Sell your possessions.’ And what is this? Jesus does not ask him to throw away the substance he possessed and to abandon property (as some carelessly think). Rather, He asks him to banish from his soul his notions about wealth, his excitement and morbid feeling about it, and his anxieties.” (Clement of Alexandria, c. 195, 2.594)
- i. I can imagine Gehazi’s excitement when Naaman comes with wealth to give. I can imagine Gehazi’s anxiety and worry by challenging life reliant only on God.
 - ii. Elisha: not excited about wealth, not worried about poverty. (like Jesus and how he calls us to be)
- c. “It becomes us not to lay down our souls for money, but money for our souls – whether spontaneously giving, or patiently losing.” (Tertullian, c. 200, 3.712)
- i. We can give our souls (time, energy, best efforts) to our jobs/earning money. No!
 - ii. We give money for our souls (giving to others), or patiently losing (not chasing wealth)
9. May we beware of greed in our own hearts. Seek God’s healthy and righteous perspective on wealth and possessions!

iii. Deceit

1. “Peace. My master sent me saying, ‘Indeed, just now two young men

of the sons of the prophets came to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.”
(**2 Kings 5:22**)

- a. Gehazi tells a bold-face lie to Naaman.
 - b. (What a transaction: Naaman, so grateful for his healing, gives greedy Gehazi 2 talents of silver. Two very different hearts coming together!)
2. A second lie: “Now [Gehazi] went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, ‘From where have you come, Gehazi?’ And he said, ‘Your servant did not go anywhere.” (**2 Kings 5:25**)
- a. What a moment – a fork in the road! Gehazi given an opportunity to come clean:
 - i. Option 1: be honest, tell the truth, ask for forgiveness. Result: forgiveness, no leprosy.
 - ii. Option 2: lie and try to cover up. Result: cursed with leprosy.
3. By God’s power, Elisha knew what was done in secret. We cannot hide anything from God.
4. Gehazi: “secret sin” becomes known to all, with outward sign of leprosy.
- iv. Lack of Compassion for the Syrian
1. Gehazi: “my master spared this Syrian Naaman”
 2. Naaman, an enemy of God’s people, repented of his pride and obeyed. God then worked his healing, free of charge, a gift to Naaman.
 3. But, Gehazi wants Naaman to pay something (so Gehazi can benefit!)
 4. Gehazi misunderstands the free gift of God: Naaman’s baptism and healing.

e. Lesson for Us

- i. Covetousness is a serious sin.
 1. “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.” (**1 Corinthians 5:11**)

2. Many of these are obvious to us. But how about covetousness? (desiring the wealth, abilities and talents, the house, the life situation, the husband or wife, the things of another)
 3. If this becomes a pattern in a brother or sister, we are not even to eat with them!
 4. Sins of the heart have severe consequences like “outward sins”.
 5. Let’s be diligent, guard our hearts, and take this sin seriously. Like any sin or temptation, fight with Scripture, prayer, confession.
 - a. (pray for the woman I am tempted to lust over, pray for the brother I am angry with, pray for the person who has something I am tempted to covet)
 6. To the self-accused, there is line between a) admiring the gifts of others, to be inspired and called higher by their example, by how God has blessed them, and the fruit of their lives, and b) crossing over to coveting, bitterness, discontent, competitiveness, etc. which is sin. Don’t let Satan beat you up!
- ii. Let’s not even try to hide our sin from God and each other.
1. Gehazi (and others: Cain, Saul, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira) were all unable to do it. Eventually sin is revealed.
 2. Satan tempts us with deceit. Stay in the darkness. Keep us isolated, feeling alone, until we give up. Wants us to believe that our sin could never be forgiven.
 3. This is a lie! Let’s turn ourselves. Confess, repent, be forgiven.
- iii. Let’s not be like Gehazi, whose heart (filled with covetousness) misunderstands the heart of God.
1. God offers the gift of forgiveness too all nations/peoples through Christ through baptism when we enter into the Kingdom.
 2. He continues to offer us the free gift of forgiveness through the blood of Jesus as we walk in the light and remain faithful to Him. (**1 John 1:7**)

IV. The Floating Ax Head

- a. Read **2 Kings 6:1-7**
- b. Three levels/floors (of a house):
 - i. First floor/level: What happened?
 1. Not enough room to support these men.
 2. Go to the Jordan River to build a home.
 3. Very poor, do not own an axe, so they borrow one, then proceed to lose it, falls into the water, probably buried in the mud at the bottom of the river somewhere.
 4. Cry out to the prophet, realizing this is a serious problem (have no money to replace this valuable tool).
 5. Elisha breaks off a stick of wood, throws it into the water where the axe head had sunk, and the ax head raises to the surface of the water.
 6. The young man grabs it so he can continue to build the home for the prophets.
 - ii. 2nd level: lessons from the story (moral, good/bad examples, etc.):
 1. The young prophet is a great example of concern for other's property! (He lost something of great value that was not his.)
 2. Turns to the prophet for help! (takes humility to ask for help when we are in trouble; need to go to those with Godly wisdom)
 3. God (through Elisha) provides for their basic needs (raises the lost axe head) so they can build their home.
 - iii. Is there anything here that points to Jesus? (the third level) Early Christians thought so!
 1. "And accordingly Elisha, having taken "wood" and cast it into that place where the iron had been submerged, forthwith it rose and swam on the surface, and the "wood" sank, which the sons of the prophets recovered.... What is more manifest than the mystery of this wood: that the obduracy of this world had been sunk in the profundity of error and is freed in baptism by the wood of Christ, that is, of his passion, in order that what had formerly perished through the tree of Adam should be restored through the tree of Christ?" (Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 13, ANF 3:170)
 2. "Elisha, by throwing a piece of wood into the Jordan, brought

up to the surface the iron head of the ax with which the sons of the prophets had begun to cut wood for the construction of a building in which they proposed to read and study the precepts of God; just as our Christ, by being crucified on the wood of the cross and by sanctifying us by water raised up us who had been immersed in the mire of our mortal sins and made us a house of prayer and worship.” (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, FC 6:286)

3. “Moreover, in the boy who was from the sons of the prophets and from whose hand the ax slipped, we not unfittingly understand Christ our Lord. That ax that fells seems to signify Adam or the whole human race. Therefore, the son of the prophets held the ax in his hand, because the Lord and Savior had in the hand of his power the human race, which he had created. Just as the ax fell out of the prophet’s hand into the water, so the human race through pride shook off itself free from the hand of almighty God, fell and plunged itself into the river of dissipation and the waters of every sin....

“At his coming Elisha threw in a piece of wood, and the iron swam. What does it mean to cast the piece of wood and bring the iron to light, except to ascend the gibbet of the cross, to lift up the human race from the depth of hell and to free it from the mud of all sins by the mystery of the cross? After the iron floated, the prophet put in his hand to recover it, and it returned to the useful service of its master. Thus it also happened to us, dearly beloved brothers....

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you.” Does it not seem to you as though he is shouting to the ax, which is lying in the mud? Awake, he says, you who sleep in the deep waters, and Christ will enlighten you through the mystery of the cross. All these truths have already been fulfilled in us, beloved brothers, through the sacrament of baptism...” (Caesarius of Arles, ca. 500 AD, ministered in Gaul (France), Sermon 130.1-3, FC 47:233-34)

V. Conclusion

- a. O.T. has characters and stories to teach and instruct us, inspire and encourage us, warn and protect us, and help us see Jesus!
- b. Let us rejoice in God’s power to rescue us from sin, to raise us to a new life, to be made into useful tools in His hand, and to be able to overcome death itself!