

# GEHAZI'S GREED

*SERIES: FIRE FROM HEAVEN*



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2 Kings 5:15-27  
10th Message  
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Leprosy has long been both a disease and a symbol. In the ancient world it symbolized death. A dead body is characterized by decomposing flesh, and a person who has a skin disease with the appearance of decay seems to have been claimed by death. Ancient societies feared and banished lepers.

The section of Scripture we're going to look at in this message, 2 Kings 5, begins and ends with leprosy. In the last message (Catalog No. 5208) we began the story of Naaman. Verse 1 says, "The man [Naaman] was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper." In this message we will consider a man named Gehazi, a servant of Elisha. The final verse of the chapter reads, "So he [Gehazi] went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." We can learn a good deal by comparing Naaman and Gehazi.

Naaman's experience of leprosy led to salvation, to cleansing. He was told to dip in the Jordan River seven times and finally when he came up he was cured of the disease. His story calls to mind resurrection, life replacing death.

Gehazi's experience was the opposite of Naaman's. He was a hypocrite whose hypocrisy was hidden for a long time and finally became displayed outwardly, as he was covered in leprosy. Naaman's story offers encouragement, while Gehazi's sounds a warning.

Let's consider the text. In the last message we met Naaman as the commander of the army of Aram. He had earned a place of great honor—a proud and gifted man. Yet, facing a crisis he could not overcome, he was led to faith in God. We saw that Naaman's leprosy was cured. What we're going to see now is the change that took place inside Naaman. What were the marks of new life, not just outwardly on his skin, but inwardly in his heart?

I hope what we read will encourage and challenge us to ask questions: Are we, who know the love of God and have been given life in Christ, marked in the same way? Do we show evidence in our lives as Naaman did?

## The marks of new life

2 Kings 5:15-16:

**<sup>15</sup>When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now." <sup>16</sup>But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.**

The first evidence of Naaman's new life was the striking proclamation he made about God in the presence of his Aramean entourage. "There is no other god besides the Lord, the God of Israel. My allegiance now is to this One alone. I have crossed a line I will never cross back over again."

Leslie and I were at a wedding recently. In the course of the wedding this familiar statement was made by the bride and groom: "I will forsake all others and cling to you alone, for the rest of my life." Naaman's vow was similar. "I will have no other God."

We should note that a public statement, speaking aloud our allegiance to Christ (most solemnly at the time of our baptism), is an important part of our walk with the Lord. We call on all who hear to take our faith commitment seriously. Testimony was spontaneous for Naaman. His heart changed and it seemed to him that the only reasonable thing he could do was to declare his allegiance to the One who had saved him.

The second thing we see in these verses is the generosity of this new man. Naaman came from Aram with large supplies of gold and silver and expensive clothing to purchase his health. He intended to pay the God of Israel for assistance. Of course he was not allowed to buy the gift that he wanted. God would give it to him for nothing.

The resulting generosity is different. The offer of money proceeds from a grateful heart. The Scriptures teach that giving has two proper motivations: One is to declare that God owns everything, by giving the first of what comes to us (in the Old Testament it was to be a tenth, as part of the temple worship [Leviticus 27; Deuteronomy 14]).

The other basis for giving is gratitude. We've received so much from God! His grace is so bountiful that we must pass it on to others. That's clearly the case with Naaman. His life had changed and it was demonstrated in his spontaneous generosity.

Elisha refuses to take the money, probably to reinforce for every observer that Naaman's healing was a free gift.

2 Kings 5:17-19:

**<sup>17</sup>Naaman said, "If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. <sup>18</sup>In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." <sup>19</sup>He said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him some distance.**

In this paragraph there are two more observations we can make about Naaman's changed heart. The first is that he expected to worship. He arranged to take dirt from Israel, pack it on mules back to Aram, and then erect an altar on these particles of Israel's land where he could worship Yahweh. The only way he knew to worship, given his background, was to offer sacrifices on a physical altar. Much of his thinking in this was immature. By the time of the New Testament Jesus will say to the woman at the well that it doesn't matter where you worship God. "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:23). But Naaman's motives were right, and that's the point. "My life from now on will be characterized by worship of the God who saved me. I am arranging a time and place for that."

Again, this can challenge and encourage us. Have we made worship a priority? Do we delight in meeting with God? Have we set aside regular time to join with others in his presence? Naaman lacks depth of understanding, but his passion to be in God's presence is beautiful.

The last thing we can observe about Naaman concerns the problem that he anticipated on returning to Aram. He was the king's senior servant. We're probably supposed to understand from this story that the king was an elderly man (although the language is a little difficult, and there are other ways to interpret it). This old king would go

into the house of his idol and would want to bow, and he would need someone to help him, so his servant next to him would have to bow, too. Naaman said, "I don't want it to look like I am bowing when in fact I am helping the elderly king to lower himself. I don't want to even give the impression that I am obedient to another god whom I no longer regard." He was serious from the start about integrity of faith, even in appearances.

A woman in the church emailed me, anticipating this passage. She wrote:

*"Chinese folks worship and/or give acknowledgment to our dead ancestors, especially around Chinese New Year's. It involves lighting incense, burning fake money so that the dead ancestors have money to spend in their afterlife, and a food offering for the deceased to enjoy. Every family member is expected to bow three times, as if the dead were watching, or something. This is something I struggled with, growing up as a Christian, because in my heart I found it to be wrong, as I am literally bowing to other idols. When I do submit to the bowing, I usually give a prayer to God to apologize. I know that God knows where my heart is."*

She is talking about a point of stress that's very similar to the one that Naaman is describing. How can we be who we're called to be when there are cultural complexities and difficulties and misunderstandings? It's not just trying to avoid the appearance that we're not who we claim to be. What about all the compromising circumstances we find ourselves in? Perhaps our boss will require us to be in situations in which bribes are offered to customers, or partaking in sleazy entertainment is part of making a deal, or we're expected to kick the weak, or ridicule the hurting? We're put in situations where our superiors expect us to act in ways that our conscience won't let us act. How do we steer our way through that? Naaman realized from the beginning that he would need help with this.

Elisha's answer to him is very important for us. He didn't say what Naaman should or should not do. He didn't tell Naaman to make some loud proclamation in the middle of the temple that he wasn't really worshiping Rimmon. What he said was, "Go in peace." The Lord knows that you will face complex and difficult moral choices in the world, where your allegiance to God is not going to be appreciated. But go in peace. Be confident. The Spirit of God is capable of steering you through it. He'll give you the words to say when you need them. He'll open doors you haven't anticipated. He'll find a way to allow you to honor him.

Now the tone of the story changes to one of warning. Gehazi was someone we had seen before. He was Elisha's senior servant, his right-hand man. That was the role that Elisha had with Elijah once—an important position.

## A disease of the heart

Gehazi was like Judas in that at some point in his life he had given way to greed, resenting the poverty and deprivation that have befallen the righteous. Similar to Judas (John 12:4-6), he had become a thief. He did not realize what he had become. I think we'll see in Gehazi someone who not only lies to others, but who lied so well that he even deceived himself.

2 Kings 5:20-21:

**<sup>20</sup>But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, "Behold, my master has spared this Naaman the Aramean, by not receiving from his hands what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." <sup>21</sup>So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw one running after him, he came down from the chariot to meet him and said, "Is all well?"**

Notice Gehazi's use of spiritual language: "As the LORD lives" is exactly the same phrase that Elisha used in verse 16.

Naaman and his entourage started back to Aram. As soon as they're out of sight and Elisha was off somewhere else, Gehazi was determined to pursue Naaman and get something out of him. He thought dismissively of "this Naaman the Aramean." He was proud of his spiritual heritage; proud of the place he had among the people of God; proud of the things he knew. He was as proud toward Naaman as Naaman was toward the Jews. Remember Naaman's remark when he first came: "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" Aram was richer and more important, and he approached Israel with pride in his heart. In the same way Gehazi was spiritually proud and contemptuous of Naaman. He even thought Elisha was a fool. Nobody was as smart as him. Nobody was as alert or as aware of the real world and how things ought to go. He assumed he could do whatever he wanted.

2 Kings 5:22:

**<sup>22</sup>He said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Behold, just now two young men of**

**the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothes.'"**

This is a complete lie. He made up a story about people who didn't exist, and asked for gifts for them. He presented himself as having no needs of his own, of course—like Elisha, poor but pure of heart.

2 Kings 5:23-25:

**<sup>23</sup>Naaman said, "Be pleased to take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of clothes and gave them to two of his servants; and they carried them before him. <sup>24</sup>When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and deposited them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed. <sup>25</sup>But he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere."**

This is a very important question that Elisha asked him. "Where have you been, not just in the last hour or two, Gehazi, but in the course of your life? What road are you on? What choices are you making?" His question was eventually going to bring the man out into the open, but first Gehazi added to his false testimony. "I haven't gone anywhere."

2 Kings 5:26-27:

**<sup>26</sup>Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money and to receive clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and male and female servants? <sup>27</sup>Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.**

This is the last event recorded for us concerning Gehazi. (There is a paragraph in chapter 8 that mentions Gehazi, but it is out of order chronologically.) We are not told the final outcome. We are supposed to wonder, "What will Gehazi do with his leprosy?" For Naaman, leprosy was the crisis that eventually led him to trust God. Now Gehazi has leprosy. Will he cry out for help? If so, God will cleanse him, too. The unanswered question invites readers of the text to examine themselves. Are we foolishly self-reliant, or wearing false smiles over resentment toward God?

I want to conclude by recalling two statements Elisha makes. He said, "Be at peace," to Naaman. The Aramean commander faced a great many difficult circumstances as he returned to his home, but he had answered the question of allegiance to God once and for all. God's presence ministers peace to us in the most challenging settings.

Remember also the question put to Gehazi. "Where have you been?" Accomplished deceivers often fool themselves most of all. We benefit from hearing God's servant call us to examine the course of our lives.

We've heard a blessing and a question. One or both of those might be a word from the Lord that we can apply to ourselves.