

2 Kings 5

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2001

Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Our reading today is from 2nd Kings 5, beginning in verse 15, and the reading will actually pick up the narrative kind of midstream.

The verses that we'll be jumping into come on the heels of Elisha's healing of Naaman of leprosy. Please stand in honor for God's word. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him.

And he said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel, so accept now a present from your servant. But he said, As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, If not, please let there be given to your servant two mules load of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord.

In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant. When my master goes into the house of Ramon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Ramon.

[1:07] When I bow myself in the house of Ramon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter. He said to him, Go in peace. But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought.

As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him. So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, Is all well?

And he said, All is well. My master has sent me to say, There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talon of silver and two festal garments.

And Naaman said, Be pleased to accept two talons. And he urged him and tied up two talons of silver and two bags with two festal garments and laid them on two of his servants.

And they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house. And he sent the men away and they departed. He went in and stood before his master.

[2:20] And Elisha said to him, Where have you been, Gehazi? And he said, Your servant went nowhere. But he said to him, Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?

Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants? Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.

So he went from his presence like a leper, like snow. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, today we close out what was a four-week beginning of the year series entitled Generous Joy.

Four straight talks on giving. A topical series. And if you've been around Holy Trinity very long, it is an aberration.

In fact, I think it's probably the first topical series I've ever been a part of at Holy Trinity in 12 years. Very few at any rate. Our normal practice is to work sequentially through a book.

[3:41] And so we will, even next week, take up where we left off in the book of Joshua. But we wanted to start the year on this subject of Christian stewardship, of generous joy.

And because of that, in the text I have chosen, I need to say a few words by way of introduction. I have a great aversion to turning to the Bible in order to pull from a text in the Bible something that might fit the needs of a series such as we are in.

So how to do this text? Expositionally, not merely topically. A few words then by way of introduction. Second Kings is part of a larger literary unit.

For centuries, it ran through time together with 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. Those four books were like children, arm in arm, crossing the playground together.

In fact, if you pick up the Septuagint today, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, this isn't 2 Kings, it's 4 Kings.

[5:08] So, all through time, we should be looking at this text as if it is part of that larger unit. It's important for us to remember that.

Therefore, we need to remind ourselves that it wasn't until the Vomberg Rabbinic Bible, which was published in 1517, that 2 Kings was really, for the first time, separated out even from 1 Kings.

I want you to know that at the outset, you shouldn't read this on its own. You should read it, and it should be understood in the context of the preaching as seamlessly connected to 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings.

In other words, this is part four of a work given to the history of the kings of Israel and the kingdom. Knowing that our text is connected in this way enriches our understanding.

[6:19] The original readers would have read this text at the earliest in the time of the exile, a time where people were wondering, how did it all go wrong?

Where did we come off the rails? In other words, it was read by a people longing for God's true king to arrive, and knowing that it was the history of the kings that moved this exalted promise given to David to this long, slow descent into the exile of a people.

I want you to know that because, in a sense, it situates my mind for how we approach this text today. We live after the promised king has come.

We need to remind ourselves that our passage sits within the overall message of the Bible and should be read through the lens of God's great promise to David when he said in 2 Samuel, When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And God's forever king, fulfilling the promise to David, is Jesus the Christ.

[8:04] And so while the first readers were longing for the arrival of the true king, today's readers long for the return of the same.

How are we to live while waiting for the arrival of the king? Our text shows us both how to and how not to live as they waited for the coming of the king.

I want you to see the text today then through those lens. Three portraits. Three people who inform us about how life should and should not be lived while we wait for Christ's return.

Let me tell you the portraits. You're going to see Elisha and his godliness. Naaman and his generosity. Gehazi and his greed.

Portraits on living life while waiting for the king. Let's take a look then at Gehazi's greed.

[9:26] Who is Gehazi? And what do we know of the time in which he lived? He first appears in the text, if you'll take a look, and it'll be helpful for you to have it out. Verse 20.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God. That's who he is. He's the servant of Elisha. He first appeared in the narrative back in chapter 4, verse 12, under the same name, the servant of Elisha. And it's repeated again in verse 25 of the same chapter 4. And so, who was he? He was a servant to the man of God. Now, if we had time to look at the kings in this particular prophetic narrative, we would have known that he was also a member of something called the sons of the prophets.

You'll see that phrase back in chapter 2, verse 15. The sons of the prophets. Chapter 4, verse 38. The sons of the prophets.

Chapter 6, verse 1. In chapter 4, verse 43, we learn that there were a hundred such sons of the prophets. So, who was Gehazi?

[10:38] He was a servant to the man of God. He was a son of the prophets. In other words, he was an apprentice training for full-time ministry.

He was a young man in training. He was in church and attended intern meetings and wanted to make use of his life for the glory of God.

What about the time in which he lived? Well, the times were tough. He was living under a king that had no regard for the word.

He was living in a time when God had withdrawn resources from his people on account of their sin. Chapter 4, verse 38 tells us we were in the midst of a great time of famine that was pervasive throughout the land.

So we have a young man training for ministry, living in difficult times in the midst of famine.

[11:47] Who was he at its core? Well, he was opportunistic in all the ways he should not have been. He had just seen Elisha turn down a present.

Chapter 5, verse 15, He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, that is Naaman. And he came and stood before him. And he said, Behold, I know now that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.

So accept now a present from your servant. But he said, that is Elisha, as the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive none.

And he urged him to take it. But he refused. Gehazi has seen Elisha turn down a present from Naaman who has just been miraculously healed of leprosy.

And there's some sense that the gift that Elisha turned down would have been substantial. Take a look back. We didn't read it, of course, the opening part of chapter 5 where you have the great narrative of his healing.

[13:03] But take a look and see the kind of gift Naaman brought with him when he sought healing. The middle of verse 5, So he went that is Naaman taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

And Elisha said, I will receive none. Gehazi, this young man in training thought this was indeed ridiculous.

Particularly in such a great time of need. If you want to see his heart, Gehazi's heart, as he waits for the ruling king, it's right there in that ugly phrase in verse 20.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian in not accepting from his hand what he brought.

As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him. That's the heart of Gehazi.

[14:24] I will run and I will get. His gate was for opportunistic gain.

He asks, he posits this story. Oh, Naaman, a couple of other pastors just rolled into town. They don't have much, you know, times are tough.

Elisha sent me. Wonders if perhaps you could give them a little money to send them on their way. Maybe a talent of silver. Two changes of clothing.

I mean, these guys, their preaching outfits are rather run down. Naaman says, a talent of silver.

Let me give you two. And he urged him. Look at the word there in verse 23. Interesting, isn't it?

[15:26] When he came to Elisha, verse 16, 16, and he urged him and he refused. When he came to Gehazi and he urged him, what does Gehazi let him do?

I guess it'll be difficult, but we will take both. And then he had to send people with him. Why?

Because a talent of silver is about 75 pounds.

So Gehazi wasn't putting these on his shoulders heading back to his own tent. Two people go, each carrying a 75 pound sack of silver and a new Brooks Brothers suit hung over their back.

And they put it in the tent of Gehazi. I calculated just on the back of a napkin, since I don't do math very well, what 75 pounds of silver must be like.

Well, each bag had to be a little over 20 grand anyway, so this was a substantial gift. Gehazi was now set. He just had a \$40,000 windfall.

[16:35] Talk about winning the lotto. He could not believe it. Now, it'd be easy for me to talk about Joel Osteen.

to bring up TV preachers, to talk about people whose gate is for gain, but all the targets are too easy. Did you know that we have between six and ten people in our midst sitting here even today who are presently training for ministry?

What is the great danger of one who trains for ministry? It is this. The great takeaway of Gehazi is this.

Gehazi had nothing to offer the world precisely because his heart wanted everything the world had to offer.

That's it. That's it. You will have nothing to offer the world if your heart is held by all that the world has to offer.

[17:51] I use the word heart intentionally. Take a look at Elisha's words to Gehazi, chapter 5, verse 26. But he said to him, did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?

Elisha's heart went out because Gehazi's heart had gone after.

This is a great thing for anyone in our midst who wants to give their life to vocational ministry until Christ returns.

The lesson of Gehazi should forever stand before us. I want to turn from Gehazi's greed to Elisha's godliness.

In one sense, I just want to let you know that here you have a portrait of how pastors ought to conduct themselves until the Lord returns. The takeaway will be just the opposite as what we saw in Gehazi.

[19:05] Elisha has much to offer the world precisely because his heart was dead to what the world had to offer. That's it. It's that simple. He had something to give the world because his heart was not held by the world.

And in that sense, he is a great contrast to Gehazi. Who was Elisha? Well, he's spoken of throughout the text as the man of God, the holy man, the faithful one in an era when God's people at large had left and abandoned fidelity to God and his ways.

He is a great example of what anyone heading into ministry ought to strive to be. his heart was dead to the world.

As a consequence, he had great things to offer. Look at his response. I want to say a couple things here before I get on to Naaman.

Look at Naaman. Naaman is really called a great man. Chapter 5, verse 1. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria. He was a great man.

[20:35] The word there, of course, is gadol. A great man. And look at his response to the great man, this one who was really the secretary of defense for Syria.

His response is commendable. Verses 15 and 16. I will receive none as the Lord lives. But it's an intriguing response because stewardship cannot be reduced to this minimalistic picture of all pastors forever never receiving a thing in ministry.

Especially in light of what he did when he was in the presence of a great woman. In my translation, the ESV, it doesn't use the word great, but back in 4.8 in the Hebrew, of course, it is great.

One day, Elisha went on to Shunem, where a great woman lived. Godala. Yeah, she was a great woman.

And look at the instance there, the event in chapter 4, beginning at verse 8. As he went, there was a great woman, and she urged him to eat some food.

[21:52] So, whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, Behold, now I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way.

Let us make a small room on the roof with walls, and put there for him a bed, and a table, and a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there. Verse 11, One day Elisha came, and he turned into the chamber, and rested there.

So, Gehazi treats the great woman in her desire to give something to him differently than he responded to the great man, Naaman.

Indeed, there is another instance in chapter 4, verses 38 and following, where another person will bring food from afar, not only for Elisha, but for his hundred interns in training.

And Elisha gladly receives the gift, and feeds those in his presence.

[23:03] So, what is going on? At one point, Elisha is accepting food, clothing, a place to stay, he's got lodging.

At another time, he says, no, I shall have none. What is the difference? Between the two? I'm not precisely sure.

But I think you have to read somehow between the lines of chapter 5, verse 26. This indeed is what he said to Gehazi.

did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants?

Was it a time? Now, it's interesting, he says all these things about orchards and vineyards and animals and servants, which of course were not included in the gift.

[24:11] It's almost as if Elisha has already fast forwarded what Gehazi would do with the talents of silver. He'd set himself up really well, you know. He'd buy some land so that he'd be okay, food so that he'd have enough, servants so that he would be waited upon.

But was it a time? Let me put it as simply as I can. It is one thing for people in ministry to receive the necessities which are needed for life's sustenance, lodging.

It's another thing to receive gifts, in a sense, self- gratifying excess for himself. Gehazi would take it for himself.

Elisha knew the wisdom of what it was to be able to receive the gifts of God's people in ways to support the work and to support themselves without ever taking things for themselves as if they were going to situate their own life well in this world.

Let me put it as simply as I can. Now is not a time for personal gain. The words that Paul writes to the wealthy in 1 Timothy 6 I think apply to both people and pastor alike.

[25:50] If I could find it. verse 16. What the man of God is to be pursuing.

Chapter 6 verse 6. Now there's a great gain in godliness with contentment. For we brought nothing into the world and we could not take anything out of the world.

But if we have food and clothing with these we will be content. people and those who desire to be rich fall into temptation into a snare into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.

Gehazi was given over to the love of money and Elisha was not. Gehazi had nothing to offer the world because his heart was taken by everything the world had to offer.

[27:01] And Elisha had great things to offer the world precisely because his heart was dead to what the world had. This should be a mark then for those of us in pastoral ministry to have a heart like Elisha's.

There's nothing wrong in the midst of a four week series on stewardship to the pastor to talk to the pastor, is there? Is that okay? Not just the pastor talking to the people, time for you to give all year long.

No, the word of God addresses the pastor. Not a time for personal gain. Look at the pastor's heart. Look at Elisha's heart. I love this. His heart was a giving heart.

His heart spent itself on behalf of his people. He poured himself out. Look at the kinds of questions Pastor Jay and myself should be asking.

Look at the kinds of questions Elisha asks. Take a look at 2 Kings 4 verse 2. The heart of a good pastor. And Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you?

[28:09] Tell me. What have you in the house? What shall I do for you? Look at chapter 4 and verse 13.

And he said to him, Say now to her, see you have taken all this trouble for us. What is to be done for you? Take a look.

It's there as well in verse 14 but also in verse 26. The heart of Elisha, is it well with you?

It's a wonderful reminder in regard to how pastors are to be stewarding resources, never for personal gain and with a heart given over to the people.

Gehazi's greed, Elisha's godliness, Naaman's generosity, Naaman's journey to being one who was known as a man of generosity and joy is a fascinating journey and it's in the opening part of chapter

5.

[29:29] Naaman's great because in Naaman you don't have a young man training for ministry. In Naaman you don't have a preacher who's already in ministry.

who's Naaman? Well his name is just pleasant. He's just a pleasant pagan. He's just a nice guy. He's a professional businessman. He's actually more than business isn't he? He's the secretary of defense. He's important. He's got work to do. How does a regular pleasant person come to be known for generous joy?

Well he had to come over many hurdles. Four big ones. He wasn't out there looking for God. He had to have a crisis in his life before he thought about God. It wasn't until he had leprosy that he thought my goodness is there a man of God anywhere who can help me?

But until then he's just cruising along doing his thing working hard. I love Naaman. But he had some hurdles to overcome.

[30:37] First he was preoccupied with position. It's really fascinating. You'll have to go back home tonight and read it. A little girl says to him, well you know there is a prophet in Israel you could go talk to.

I bet he is a man of God. So where does Naaman go when he's looking for help? Well he takes all this big gift and he runs to the king of Israel who freaks out of course because the king has already abandoned any belief in God.

He has nothing to do. Can't heal him. But Naaman you see was preoccupied with position. I'm an important man. I have a great need. I'll go to my counterpart.

Not the pastor but to the king. But he overcame that hurdle. He was also preoccupied in a sense with a reliance upon power.

I mean look at all the money he brought. He thought you could buy help. The gospel is always just opposed to that.

[31:39] Bring your ten bags of silver home and all your gold and bring your closet of changed clothes back with you. You can't you don't relate to God that way.

You have a need? Well you won't find it met by walking through the political hallways of our city. You have a need?

Well you won't find it by being able to bankroll yourself to an answer. The third hurdle he overcame was pride. I mean when you read the text he's called to go down finally to where Elisha's office is. And Elisha doesn't even come out to see him. I mean that's fascinating. How many businessmen do you know that ever pick up the phone to call a pastor to say I've got a problem in my life?

I mean that is so rare. Incredibly rare. You've got all kinds of pastors picking up the phone to want an audience with important business people.

[32:46] But rare is the man on the street who picks up the phone and says okay I'll come and see you. I got some things I need to talk about.

And then when he gets there Elisha didn't even come out. He sent a servant out to him. He said tell him to go wash in the river. He'll be fine.

Like take two aspirin in the morning you'll be all better. I don't think Elisha was being pompous. I think he was trying to let Naaman know it's not about me.

It's not about you. It's about following the word of the living Lord. And I'm so glad Naaman that you are no longer preoccupied with position and thinking you'll get this met somewhere else.

I understand that you don't think you'll get it through your own power and your resources. I'm glad you finally made an appointment with the pastor but the real deal is not the pastor himself but God's word. Are you willing to submit yourself to God's word?

[33:49] And he was. He didn't like it at first because the particularity of the message was to go wash in this dirty Israelite river. I got better water at home he said.

Just as many today don't like the particularity of the cross. But he went through them all and the result his skin was like the skin of a baby.

He was healed. And what did he do? He was told to return to work. Go back to work. And he exemplified his generosity with a readiness to support the work.

He thought nothing of giving Gehazi those two bags. His question is a great one to Gehazi. It's the same question the man of God asks.

Is all well? That's what the person in the pew ought to be asking when they come in to the work of the living God. Is all well?

[35:04] Can I do anything? What's needed? How can I forward the work? Well we need a talent of silver.

I got two! That's generous joy. What a great thing.

It reminds me of Zacchaeus you know. Zacchaeus when the gospel came into him you're like oh man this is great. God has changed my life.

All the people I ripped off out there okay I'm giving it back I'm going to give it back four times as much. Not just going to pay it. Not just going to pay it with interest.

I'm going to lavish the world in generosity. That's what the gospel does. I remember leading a young man to Christ in a restaurant.

[36:09] It was a breakfast restaurant. restaurant. And when it actually happened where you could just see it wasn't you could just see he understood the gospel and embraced it and his eyes turned and he looked at me and he said this is so great.

Can I can I buy you some ice cream? You know nine in the morning he wanted to walk down to the cock robin and get me a sundae. Why?

Because when God was at work in the giving of the gospel it releases in the heart of the person generous joy.

It's the first mark of a changed life. Thanksgiving and giving. Thanks giving.

show me a man who won't relinquish a dollar and I'll show you a man who doesn't know the strength of the gospel.

[37:19] Show me a preacher who isn't out for personal gain and we'll show you a work that could make progress for Christ.

show me young men and women training for the work who aren't enamored with all that the world has to offer.

Our heavenly father we thank you for these moments together in this text and we pray that we would be like Naaman and Elisha for the glory of your gospel and your son in whose name we pray amen.