

October 18, 2009

I Look in the Mirror and See Gehazi

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? ²⁷ 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.*

In Jesus' name, dear people of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus,

I know people named Elijah. I know people named Elisha. But I don't know a single child or adult named Gehazi.

That's really sad. Just as the prophet Elijah had a protégé named Elisha, so Elisha had a protégé. His name was Gehazi. Elisha is nearly as well known as Elijah. The Lord used them both powerfully in his kingdom. But Elisha's protégé is unknown.

What bothers me most about this sad event, is that when you know the story of Gehazi, you may have to admit as I do that

When I look in the Mirror, I see Gehazi.

Let's spend a few minutes getting to know Gehazi. He was *a man who experienced God's power and grace.*

Gehazi is first introduced to us in 2 Kings 4:8-17. It is about 800 years before the birth of Christ. Elisha is already known as a powerful prophet. The previous chapters tell us of five miracles that Lord performed through Elisha. In 2 Kings 4 we hear about a woman from Shunem who provided Elisha a place to stay. Elisha wanted to know how he could return her kindness to him. So sent his servant Gehazi to get her. (This reference in 4:12 is the first mention of Gehazi.) She said she didn't need anything, but Gehazi mentioned that she had no son and her husband was old. The Lord through Elisha promised her a son. And that promise was fulfilled. **Gehazi saw God's power in this gift of a child.**

But the account continues. The boy grows up – perhaps he is about preschool age. He goes out to be with his dad during the harvest. He gets a headache, so dad has a servant carry him back to his mom. Can't you see mom stroking the little boy's head as he moans in pain from the headache. The pain gets worse and worse. About noon the child died.

The Shunammite woman had a donkey saddled and she hurried to Elisha. Elisha then gives his staff to Gehazi who is to lay it on the boy. But nothing happens. Then Elisha came and stretched himself out on the boy twice, and his life returned. Gehazi was an eyewitness of this. **Gehazi saw God's power when a boy was made alive again!**

Shortly after that we come to this more familiar Bible account of Naaman. What you may not know is that Naaman was the Osama bin Laden of 800 BC. He was the commander in chief of the Aramean army. (Aram is in the area of modern Syria, just northeast of Israel, with Damascus as its capital.) Aram was the greatest threat to the existence of Israel at this time. And Naaman personified that threat.

Naaman was not a nice man. He kept a little Israelite slave girl in his house. She had been kidnapped during a raid on Israel. I wonder what happened to her mom and dad. Perhaps she saw them slaughtered before her very eyes. The ruthlessness of the suicide bombers of today had its match in the ruthlessness of Israel's enemies who would cut open pregnant women.

Naaman was "Enemy Number One" of God's people. Yet here is evidence of God's grace, his love that is absolutely undeserved. The Lord leads this little slave girl to testify to her faith. So Naaman goes to Israel to be cleansed of his leprousy.

Here again we see something of what Naaman was like. He brings 150 pounds of gold and 750 pounds of silver and ten sets of royal clothes to buy his healing. He isn't coming as a beggar. Whatever the cost, Naaman can pay it. Can't you just see his pride oozing out of him as he comes into Elisha's village?

Of course, Elisha sends out his a servant to tell Naaman to wash. Naaman blows up in anger. "I'm not going to go wash in that filthy Jordan River!" A butcher, a proud boastful man, a hot-tempered man. Hardly someone that deserves God's notice.

But Gehazi saw God's grace when Israel's enemy was healed of leprosy. What you and I would not have done, God did. Naaman was cleansed. And he was converted. He was changed from God's enemy into God's friend. He confessed, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

When you consider Gehazi's experiences, don't you see that you have had similar experiences?

Granted, you and I haven't had the opportunity to hear a prophet announce to a barren couple that they would have a child. But each of us is a miracle of God's power. Psalm 139 sums it up so well, "You created my inmost being...I am fearfully and wonderfully made." **We see God's power in the life he gives us.**

We haven't seen a little boy raised from the dead, but the Holy Spirit has given us ample evidence in the Gospels that Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus proved by his own resurrection that what he said is true: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25,26). **We see God's power when Jesus was risen.** That is God's promise that we too shall rise.

And we have seen God's grace in action. In Romans 5:6-8 we read that "when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Just as we can see the sins of Naaman, so the Lord can see ours. He too knows that by virtue of our birth we are his enemies. Yet, **we see God's grace when Jesus died for us, his enemies.**

All of this sets the stage for the next tragic events. It is likely that just as Elijah groomed Elisha to take his place, so Elisha was grooming Gehazi. Gehazi could have been the next Elisha, but...

Gehazi was a man who lost his focus on God's power and grace.

Look at how he despised that grace of God! Naaman came thinking he could buy healing. Elisha gave it to him free of charge. But Gehazi was not thinking in the terms of "grace." He felt that Naaman got off too easy. So he ran after Naaman with a story. "Two sons of the prophets have come from Ephraim. Give them a talent of gold and a couple changes of clothes."

Naaman was a changed man. He urged Gehazi to take more. Naaman wasn't at fault for his generous gift. But Gehazi was. **Gehazi chose wealth over grace.**

What troubles me about this is that I see myself in Gehazi's actions. Don't you see your lack of grace too? When you feel that someone else is being treated better than you, don't you get angry? Philip Yancy in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace* called it "ungrace." My life is filled with "ungrace"! I take for granted that I should be forgiven – after all I'm not really that bad. (Let's be honest, the rich young man in the gospel lesson – Mark 10:17-27 – isn't the only one who thinks, "God, I've been a pretty good soul.") I make grace cheap for me, but unavailable to others.

Think of the person right now that you just can't stand – someone at work, someone in your class, a family member who has done you wrong – giving blood on Friday I heard a man continue to hold a grudge against his brother and sister that he hasn't seen at least since 2002! So grace is good for you and me, but not them? Don't you choke sometimes when you pray,

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”? Man, if that’s the way God forgives me, I’m lost!

Gehazi chose wealth over grace. What wealth does Satan use to tempt you to choose wealth over grace? Perhaps it is money. Third quarter stock reports came in the mail this past week. Do you find yourself focused more on those reports than on God’s Word? Is it the wealth of fame or glory that attracts you? How many young athletes spend hours in a gym but don’t give a thought about whether their play gives God the glory or not? How many students strive for good grades with the goal of finally being able to look down on those “low-lives” in the class with them?

I hate reading this account about Gehazi, because I see so much of myself in Gehazi. And it is frightening for **Gehazi also despised God’s power.**

Gehazi thought that he could hide his sin. He hid the silver and the clothes in his tent. What was he going to do? Wear them after Elisha died? Only wear them when Elisha was out of town? You know, the idea is ludicrous to anyone – anyone except Gehazi. He thought he could get away with it.

But **Gehazi experienced God’s power when he got leprosy.** “God will not be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:7,8).

I’ve had a new appreciation of God’s power over the last several weeks. We may think that our lives are under our control. We store up money so that we can buy lots of shoes and clothes and stuff. But God can so quickly take it all away. I know a man who was accused of a crime and his whole family left him. He can’t eat. He can’t sleep. He reminds me of Job. Everything changed in minutes.

I think of others of you who have suddenly lost your jobs – and all your plans for the future seem to just go “poof.” Others of you have lost your health.

We have all experienced God’s power, his awesome ability to change our lives very quickly for the good or the bad.

And of course, the ultimate change is that he can simply take our life from us. A healthy man my age dies suddenly of a heart attack. A teen is killed in a car accident. And suddenly we are standing before God’s throne. He has awesome power – to save or to destroy! No wonder the author of Hebrews warns, **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31).

This is a frightening way to end a sermon. But this is the tragic way that Gehazi’s ministry ended. He left under a curse. A man who had experienced the power and grace of God exchanged it for something that could give him pleasure in this life. And he lost that too.

What a powerful warning this is to us! Consider what it is that Satan is using to take your eyes off of Christ and his Word. What are our priorities? If like Gehazi and the rich young man in the gospel, wealth has become your priority, put it to death! Remember that the number of shoes or cars or houses isn’t going to save you from God’s wrath. If the kids activities are keeping you so busy that you don’t have time to think about your relationship with God, then remember that your children, as precious as they are, can’t save you from death. More than anything, they need

to see that you place your relationship with Christ as more important than their sports or their comfort or their pleasure – and more important than your own.

Yes, I see Gehazi in the mirror of God's law. It is frightening. I deserve God's power coming down on me in judgment. So let's together cling to God's grace. God in his grace saved a sinner like Naaman. God in his grace came into this world to die for a sinner like Gehazi. He came to die for a sinner like you and me. Keep your focus on his grace and his power to help you now and forever. Amen.

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