

<Read text: 2 Kings 5:14-27>.

For those of you who don't remember the story of Elisha and Naaman, a little bit of context before we go on. You see, Naaman was the chief military leader from a pagan country that had caused trouble for Israel before, the land of Aram. He had some kind of skin condition, not necessarily what we call "leprosy", but definitely unpleasant and incurable by normal means. However, Naaman's wife had a servant girl who had been essentially plundered from Israel. Despite the overall spiritual condition of Israel (which was pretty poor), the servant girl had faith in the true God and the current prophet of God, Elisha, so she recommended her master go find this prophet to be helped.

Long story short, this man from an enemy land came to Elisha to be cured. Elisha did not even come out to see him. He simply sent Naaman a message to go wash in the river Jordan seven times. Naaman at first went off in a huff. He was an important man! This prophet wouldn't even see him. And go wash in Israel's filthy little river? What was wrong with the rivers in Aram? But with some advice from his servants, Naaman calmed down and saw that it was at least worth trying. And what do you know, it worked.

So as we see here Naaman returns to Elisha and wants to give him some of the treasures of his homeland that his king had sent with him. He certainly seems to have converted, though his understanding of the real God is minimal at best, his enthusiasm certainly seems genuine with the requests he makes of the prophet before he leaves. So why did Elisha refuse the gift? Here and at the end of the reading Elisha makes it clear they shouldn't take anything but he doesn't elaborate why. Well, we'll get to that in a bit.

What we want to focus on today is what Gehazi did next. His speech to himself is a minefield of selfish and sinful thoughts. It likely began when he either heard Naaman describe or saw him show what gifts he wanted to give. He wanted what Naaman wanted to give. And so he comes up with a way to get it.

Now, before we rail on Gehazi too hard here, let's take a second to put ourselves in Gehazi's shoes. Let's imagine that you and one other guy own and run a little hamburger stand. The other guy is your boss, but it's just the two of you struggling to make ends meet, and whatever you have is shared between you two. Now, let's say the senior executive of McDonald's marketing is passing your little stand out in the middle of nowhere one day and blows a tire. He's basically stranded, but your boss happens to have a spare nearby and helps the guy out. The guy is so profoundly grateful that he offers you both a check written out to more than twice what the two of you make in a year.

And your boss turns it down.

Now, what's going through your head? The hundreds of reasons he *should* have accepted the money? Some way to follow this guy and collect this reward anyway? Justifications for doing it behind your boss's back? After all, you guys really do need that money. And look at who you'd be taking it from. It's not like he or their company doesn't have money to spare and on top of that they're the *bad guys*. Shouldn't have even done the favor for him in the first place and it's practically criminal to do it for *free*. It would actually be a huge injustice to not get that money from the guy. Hey, the boss doesn't need to know where it came from when you have the savings to bail you both out later in a rough time. It's for his own good, he's just too soft.

You know, none of that is probably too far off from what was going through Gehazi's mind that day. It's almost uncomfortably easy to understand what was going through his head. It seemed perfectly proper and justifiable on the surface. All those thoughts. About how to get what they deserved from this Aramean. What was owed them for how they had helped. And much more than just changing a flat tire; he had been cured of an incurable disease! But they all started when he saw the money. The wealth that he wanted for himself. And it should be his. It was so close. Naaman was just giving it to them. There had to be a way to get it.

And so he reasoned it out. Naaman was a bad guy. He shouldn't get this service for free. It's great that he believes in the Lord now, but after everything he did against their nation as the general of Aram's army, there ought to be a little reparation made too. He can't just waltz off saying everything's okay now. There needs to be some cost for him involved. Gehazi even went so far as to drag the Lord's name into his bundle of nasty. "As surely as the Lord lives..." which was an oath form at the time. He was swearing on the Lord's name that this was something that needed to be done!

Of course he's not going to wreck his master's good name either, isn't going to say that Elisha changed his mind after Naaman left. He concocts this story about needing some supplies for visiting prophets, all very religious sounding and proper. Naaman is happy to be able to give his gift, and Gehazi returns with his spoils. Well we saw how that turned out. By the Lord's insight, Elisha knew what had happened and by God's decree, Gehazi was punished with Naaman's leprosy for the rest of his days.

All this came about because of Gehazi's struggle with what was fair. What was owed to him and his master. Or what Naaman owed the Lord. However you look at it, it all stems from this concept of what is owed. And that's where we're going to look now. We saw how easy it would be to fall into the same trap that Gehazi did, to give in to that temptation to chase wealth sinfully even when it seemed like the right thing to do. In fact, his sin was even greater than we've made clear so far, but again, we'll deal with that in time. For now, for our own sake, let's look at this question of what is owed you so that we can steer clear of the same trouble if it should come our way.

Well, what *is* owed you? I'm pretty sure that if you don't give it much thought, you'd definitely come up with some things. After all, we all do our work, we put in our time and we deserve compensation for that. And when we've worked enough, we ought to get time to rest and relax afterward as well. We deserve a quiet, peaceful life with just enough to be content without worries. Advertising makes this even worse on us with how much it has started to lean on this idea that you "owe" yourself this or that luxury. These aren't treats or extras anymore, they are things you *deserve* because of how great a person you are.

You may already be able to sense how wrong this attitude can be. But even when it comes to our Christian lives, to our relationship with our Lord, we can slip into this mentality. After all, I'm good about my faithlife. I come to church pretty regularly. I don't break any of the big commandments in public. I give a tenth of all I get and I... fast twice a week? Oh, we wandered into some dangerous territory there, didn't we? Sounded pretty much exactly like the Pharisee that Jesus condemned for thinking he was so great.

After all, what does God owe you for all of your hard work for him? You probably know the answer already. Nothing. Sounds harsh, almost unfair. But issue here is not God being unfair, it's you thinking you've done hard work for him. You haven't. What you have done is ignored him when it's convenient. You've set him aside when something "more fun" came along. You've forgotten his commands and you've set up idols of dollar signs in your heart. You trust him when it's easy but when you don't know what he's doing or how he'll do it, you panic and doubt that he's capable of helping or even watching what's going on. What do you suppose God owes you for all that?

Very clearly, nothing good. Now, despite all of that, what *has* God given you? He has fed and clothed you from birth. He has put people in your life to help and protect you, he has seen to your every earthly need. And of course, above and beyond that, he took his sinless Son, his own child, and he sacrificed that Son so you could walk free for your crimes. He put Jesus to death in your place so that he would not have to punish you for all your neglect of him. You are free from all fear because of this. You will not die, you will live. You will not be punished, you will be rewarded. You gave God nothing in exchange for this great gift and nothing you do now will ever repay that debt. You did not buy it, you did not earn it. It was given by grace alone. We want to talk about what we deserve, what is owed us, but the best that we have was given to us completely *undeserved*.

So...what is owed you? Still nothing. There is nothing more you need beyond everything God has already freely given you. It has to be that way, it has to be all God; and it is great that it *is* that way. Not only is it simply fantastic that we can rest on God's work with complete confidence, knowing it does not depend on us in any way, but we've seen that as soon as you start walking down that road of thinking you're owed anything for your work you end up in some very dark places.

This was the reason Elisha refused the gift from Naaman. This was the reason Gehazi's sin was so dire. Naaman's salvation depended on him depending completely on the Lord. In recognizing that what the Lord gives, he gives by grace, he gives without deserving as a free gift. Naaman may have wanted only to give a gift out of thanks, but the danger to his new faith was too great for Elisha to accept. There was every chance that Naaman would go away thinking that he had then compensated God for the healing miracle, or even worse returning home with stories of how he had bought the Lord's favor with this wealth and received healing in return. Gehazi, by his selfishness, had not only hurt himself with his sin, he had also endangered Naaman's new faith in the Lord.

This is why it is so essential that we understand what is owed us. The answer is nothing. No one in this world, no matter how hard you work, no matter how many sacrifices you make, no matter how much someone else may have hurt or offended you, you are owed nothing. God, in his grace, will see to it that you have everything you need regardless. He has seen to your eternal needs, he will continue to provide your daily needs. Whatever then that you *don't* have that you think you ought, whether you think it's from him or others, isn't for you to complain about. Start each day fresh with this attitude and understanding. God owes you nothing today. In his grace, God has and will give you everything you need. The natural result of this understanding and trust will be a contentment and peace that lets you meet the challenges of the day and of eternity confident in the undeserved love of your Lord.

Amen.