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IS YOUR MINISTRY A CALLING OR A BUSINESS?

Today's Text: 2 Kings 5: 1-27; Acts 6: 1-8

Extracts:

1. **“And he (Naaman) returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and stood before him and said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing (gift) of thy servant. But he (Elisha) said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he (Naaman) urged him to take it; but he refused... But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him” [2 Kgs 5: 15-16, 20]**
2. **“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” [Acts 6: 1-4]**

Joseph (real name disguised) was a valuable member of the choir in the church where my family worships in Los Angeles. He is a talented musician. Before he gave his life to Christ, he used to lead a band to Europe every summer. His joining the church and choir made a significant difference. In furtherance of his calling, he bought sophisticated musical equipment for the Parish. Then, one day, he had a disagreement with the Shepherd (the spiritual leader of a Parish) over his ambition to have more say in the running of the church as “a major contributor.” The Shepherd’s position was that he himself was subject to the authority of the Parochial Committee, which is elected by the members every two years. Joseph was not prepared to wait. He left the church and packed away the musical equipment!

In almost every congregation today, there is a battle for the soul of the Ministry of Christ between those who want to pursue their calling in the fear of the Lord and those who see the church as a business enterprise. Undue emphasis is placed on money as if healing and miracles can be bought and sold. The family (husband, wife and children) holds tightly to the finances of the church and succession is from parents to children. Yet, Jesus did not appoint any of His brothers among the twelve Apostles. To whom did Paul hand over his ministry? What should be the proper place for money and its pursuit in propagating the word of God? These are some of the issues that we shall examine today, using the story of Elisha and Gehazi as the case study.

1. Every believer has a ministry!

To minister means to serve. A minister of God is a person who serves God. Since the whole duty of man is to “fear God and keep His commandments” [Ecc. 12: 13], then, every true believer is a minister of God. However, since God is not a God of confusion, He has spelt out several ways by which we are to serve Him and endowed us with Spiritual gifts to succeed. We are all familiar with the 5-fold ministry: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” [Eph. 4: 11-12]. Even in rendering service or administering your ministry, you have to rely on God who assigns “to every man severally as He will” [1 Cor. 12: 11, 28]. It is immaterial what social status your ministry enjoys. If you are good at dusting the pews of your church, you will receive as much reward from God as would the owner of a worldwide television ministry.

For your ministry to be successful, these are the minimum standards that must be met:

a) *You must be called by God*

In the words of Jesus, “The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few; *pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest*” [Matt. 9: 37-38]. On another occasion, He told His disciples, “*Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you*, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you” [Jn 15:16]. Clearly, unless and until God calls us, our ministry has not begun.

When Jeremiah was called, God told him, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” [Jer. 1: 5]. Peter was running a small fishing business with his brother, Andrew, when Jesus called him out to become a “fisher of men” [Mk 1: 16-17]. Paul was on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians when Jesus called him to become “a chosen vessel unto Me and to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” [Acts 9: 15].

How many people running their ministries today were called so clearly? What I hear quite frequently is something like, “the Lord ministered to my heart that...” or “I just knew it that...” Well, it is true that God can speak to us in different ways but in every circumstance that He has called people in the bible, it was not a hidden matter!

b) *God will specifically prepare you for the ministry*

No army recruit will be sent into battle without any adequate training. In like manner, we cannot overnight jump into our ministry until God has trained us to do well there. Jesus prepared His disciples over a period of three years. In spite of that, He told them on His ascension into Heaven to remain in Jerusalem until they would have received the Holy Spirit [**Acts 1: 3-8**]. After Paul's conversion, he spent three years in the Arabian Desert where God prepared him for his ministry [**Gal. 1: 11-18**].

What do we have today? A toddler with a running nose in spiritual matters wants to pastor a church! S(he) has no wilderness experience, no testimony, nothing to report. They have not even had enough time under a spiritual mentor. Why all the impatience to break out on your own? Who sent you?

c) *God feeds His ministers*

God has ordained, "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" [**1 Cor. 9: 14**]. Under the Law of Moses, specific instructions were given to the people for taking care of the priests and Levites because they did not receive any inheritance as was given to the other eleven tribes [**Num. 18: 20-28**]. Therefore, ministers are entitled to earthly rewards. The danger, however, is that "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" [**1 Tim. 6: 10**]. Paul kept his trade as a tentmaker so that "when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ *without charge*, that I abuse not my power in the gospel" [**1 Cor. 9: 18**]. The Apostles appointed seven deacons to administer to the material needs of the believers so that they could concentrate on their calling [**Acts 6: 5-6**].

What we are saying here is that if, in deed, God has called and ordained us, and prepared us for our ministries, He will also take care of our needs. He sent ravens and later a widow to feed Elijah for three-and-a-half years during the great drought [**1 Kgs 17: 1-16**]. It is when we go on our own that we struggle to survive and hence be tempted to pursue money as in a business enterprise. Let us study the story of Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, so as to get more insight into the subject.

2. **Elisha was called!**

You will recall that when God was ready to take Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind, He commanded him, among other things, "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy place" [**1 Kgs 19: 16**]. At the time, Elisha was a farmer. Elijah went to Shaphat and cast his mantle on Elisha. After bidding his parents goodbye, he "arose and went after Elijah and *ministered* unto him" [**vv.19-21**]. Here, we see that Elisha started as a servant to Elijah. As a

servant, he did his master's bidding: cooking, running errands, etc. He left the comfort of his parents' home and the freedom of tilling the ground with oxen. God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. Right now, he was a servant! He had to be prepared for his prophetic ministry.

For many years, he served his master, learning how to fear and obey God, learning what it took to be Spirit-led. On the day that Elijah was taken away to heaven in a chariot of fire, Elisha was not discouraged by the circuitous journey from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho and across the Jordan. In recognition of his tenacity, Elijah asked him what he wanted done for him "before I be taken away from thee," and Elisha replied, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" [2 Kgs 2: 1-9]. Elijah assured him that he would receive it provided he saw the chariot that would take him away. In other words, he had to be born again because, in the words of Jesus, "except a man be born again, he *cannot see the kingdom of God*" [Jn 3: 3]. The chariot came from the kingdom of God and only those in Spirit could see it! Elisha had been adequately prepared for his ministry. He received the double portion of his master's power [2 Kgs 2: 12-13]. That was when his ministry began.

Powerful miracles followed. He hit the Jordan with Elijah's mantle that he had now inherited and the waters parted for him to cross on dry ground! In Jericho, he healed the waters that the sons of the prophets could not drink before [vv. 14-22]. In last week's lesson, we saw the miracles in the home of the Shunammite woman. She miraculously had a son and when he died, God raised him to life through Elisha [2 Kgs 4: 8-37]. When a man from Balshalisha brought him the first fruits of his farm, 20 loaves of barley and full ears of corn, Elisha did not corner them for himself. Rather, he instructed that they be given to the people. When his servant told him that that would not be enough for the one hundred people there, he prayed and the food was multiplied to go round [vv. 42-44]!

In today's story, the king of Syria sent the captain of his host, Naaman, to the king of Israel to be healed of his leprosy. When word came to Elisha, he asked the army general to go and dip himself in the Jordan seven times [2 Kgs 5: 1-11]. How did Naaman know that there was a prophet in Israel? It was the Jewish girl that had been taken as war captive by the Syrians and who was now the little maid to Naaman's wife that had told her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" [vv. 2-3]. Even in captivity, this young girl had her own ministry to speak of the true God to unbelievers!

After some hesitation, and following prompting from his servants, Naaman obeyed and lo, he came out completely healed of leprosy [vv. 12-14]! He returned to Elisha and offered him gifts. When the general left his country, he might have thought that he was coming to a specialist hospital! He carried ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold and ten sets of clothes [v. 5]. In today's terms, we are looking at several millions of dollars! Some modern day ministers would

call that the answer to their prayers. They would grab the gifts and give testimony on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN)! But not Elisha. He told the general, “*As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.*” Naaman urged him and he still refused [vv. 15-16]. Today, at the second prompting, we would grab the gifts by saying, “If you insist!”

Here is the best part of the story. Naaman now realized that he was not healed by a man but by God Himself. He decided to begin to worship this living God! He requested for “two mules’ burden of earth” for “thy servant will *henceforth* offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord” [v. 17]. Naaman had been healed physically *and* spiritually. That is what a true ministry is all about. It happened because Elisha’s ministry was a calling, not a business. Can we say that about his servant, Gehazi?

3. But Gehazi was a businessman!

We are not told much about how Gehazi became Elisha’s servant. However, we could see much earlier that he was not as dutiful to Elisha as Elisha had been to Elijah.

We first encountered Gehazi in the home of the Shunammite woman [2 Kgs 4: 12]. He it was who knew the kind of reward to give to the woman for her service. She did not have a child. Gehazi was Elisha’s “microphone” in his discussion with the woman [vv. 12-15]. When the woman’s son had died and she came looking for the prophet, it was Gehazi that Elisha sent ahead to ask what was wrong. When the woman came to the prophet and attempted to hold on to his foot, it was Gehazi who tried to push her off until the prophet stopped him [vv. 25-27].

Elisha gave his staff to go and put on the dead child. We get the impression that Gehazi was not spiritually focused from the following instructions that Elisha gave him, “gird up thy loin and take my staff in thine hand and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again; and lay my staff upon the face of the child” [v.29]. Who knows what he did on the way! He laid the staff on the child but nothing happened [v. 31]. He was not called! Elisha lay on the child and he came back to life. Elisha was called!

So, what did Gehazi want out of his ministry as the servant of a strong prophet? He revealed his hand after Elisha had refused to accept Naaman’s tantalizing gifts. Gehazi said, “Behold, my master had *spared* Naaman this Syrian, in *not receiving at his hands that which he brought*; but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him” [v.20]. Is that not the language of a businessman? He was wondering why payment had not been received for service rendered! He went after Naaman, lied to him about his master’s change of mind and collected from the Syrian general silver and clothes that two of the general’s servants helped to deliver in Gehazi’s residence [vv. 21-24]. You know what he

had just done? He had discharged Naaman from his vow to worship the true God, having paid for the specialist treatment. How would he know that Gehazi had lied about his master?

Well, “the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” [1 Tim. 6: 10]. When Elisha came to know what Gehazi had done, he asked him, “Is it a time to receive money?” [2 Kgs 5: 26]. In other words, you do not receive money when the person healed will interpret it as payment for services rendered. The healing was meant to glorify God, not the minister of God or his ministry. He cursed Gehazi and the leprosy from Naaman went to Gehazi and his descendants for ever [v. 27].

4. Conclusion

What is the leper’s problem? S(he) does not feel pain. Therefore, s(he) is not sensitive to heat or cold. That is why when a leper’s foot is burning in the fire, s(he) will not feel it. When you turn your calling into a business, you risk the curse of becoming a spiritual leper. You lose touch with the Spirit of God. Your ministry dances to the tune of highest bidders who want to cover their sinful ways with pious endorsements from the pulpit. You begin to count church growth by the number of worshippers and the wealth of your bank account rather than by the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Naaman was a mighty man of valour but he was a leper [2 Kgs 5: 1]. He was prepared to give all he had to get rid of the leprosy. Gehazi took part of the material gifts that Naaman had brought but inherited *all* of his leprosy. That huge offering from an unrepentant drug dealer or that fat cheque from a gay lobby in response to your “passing the collection plate” could be transmitting points for the leprosy that can destroy your ministry.

Can you afford to take a chance with God? Is your ministry a calling or a business?