

YOUR RÉSUMÉ IS NOT YOUR RECORD!

Today's Text: 2 Kings 8: 1-6

Extract:

“And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life” [vv. 4-5]

A doting mother was cleaning her son's room when she found some sheets of paper on the floor near his reading table. She read it and laughed. As soon as her son came in, she asked, “Son, I found this paper in your room. With the exception of your name on top of the first page in bold print, everything stated there belongs to somebody else.” The young man replied, “Mom, that's my résumé.” With a chuckle, his mother replied, “Lord, have mercy!”

The résumé [or curriculum vitae, or CV for short] is a document that we prepare about ourselves when we apply for a job or consultancy, among other uses. In it, we state our work experience, achievements and education, special honours and awards, etc. It is a marketing tool, to make us look good in the eyes of the prospective employer or client. We are usually silent on those things that we believe could hurt us, such as how we lost our most recent job [possibly by firing for poor productivity!]. Consequently, if all jobs or contracts were given on the basis of the résumé alone, it would not be easy to separate the wheat from the chaff!

Interestingly, some of us tend to equate our CVs with our records. That is why they use our CVs to prepare our citations when we win national honours or receive honorary doctorate degrees from universities. They talk about us in glowing terms, based on what we have said about ourselves! Yet, “whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and winds without rain” [Prov. 25: 14]. A better approach is to “let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. So, what is your record as “compiled” by others? Let us find out from today's lesson, which is based on the ministry of Elisha.

1. Your record today is how others see your yesterday!

Recently, Americans marked the 40th anniversary of the assassination of President John Kennedy. Opinion polls showed that *in terms of popularity over time*, Kennedy, the 35th President (1961-3) was only second to President Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President (1861-65). What is it that has marked out those two leaders, both of whom were assassinated while in office?

Abraham Lincoln was in office during the American Civil War (1861-65). While the generality of the people at the time saw the war as an attempt to prevent the Southern States from breaking away from the Union, Lincoln saw it as a moral war to uphold his religious convictions that all men are created equal. On 1 January 1863, he signed the *Emancipation Proclamation*, which declared free forever all the slaves within the Confederacy.¹ That was an audacious thing to do, given that the Civil War was still raging at the time that he did it. He did not wait for military victory, which came two years later. On Good Friday, 14 April 1865, Lincoln was assassinated at the age of 56.

At his election in November 1960, John Kennedy was the youngest American President, being just 43 years old, and the first Roman Catholic to be so elected. He was in office for barely a thousand days when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on 22 November 1963. In that short period, he launched economic programmes that put America on its longest sustained expansion since World War II. He took on the cause of equal rights and put America at the forefront for human rights crusade around the world. His Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps put American idealism in the service of developing nations all over the world.² That America could land a man on the moon in 1969 was the fruit of his vision.

The records about those two men come from their *works*, not their rhetoric. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees who opposed His ministry, “the works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me” [Jn 10: 25]. Let us examine aspects of the works in our own lives.

a) *What have we done with our calling?*

Whether we accept it or not, we have all been called for different purposes and all to glorify God. Some of us have been blessed with high intelligence. We have gone on to university, going all the way to the Ph.D. Some of us are immeasurably rich from hard work and careful investments. Some of us have been blessed with wisdom, knowledge and understanding for the creative arts, engineering, medicine, law and so on. By His grace, we have been exposed to enriching experiences on our jobs or in our professions. Some of us have won international awards for

¹ “Biography of Abraham Lincoln,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/all16.html>

² “Biography of John F. Kennedy,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/jk35.html>

research, or writing, or humanitarian service. The question is what we have done with such opportunities in order to leave the world a better place for those after us?

John the Baptist was in Herod's prison when he heard of the works of Christ. He sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" [Matt. 11: 2-3]. Remember that John's work was to pave the way for Christ's ministry. He was the one who had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Before his imprisonment, when some of his disciples had come to tell him that Jesus and His disciples were also baptizing people and that He was drawing larger crowds, John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" [Jn 3: 22-30]. So, why was he asking that kind of question now? Did he doubt Christ because He had not set him free from jail? Not at all! John wanted to be sure that he had completed his works *as the precursor of Christ* [Mal. 3: 1; 4: 5].

Jesus replied, "Go and shew John again those things which *ye do hear and see.*" He then listed the blind who had received their sight, the lame who could now work, the cleansed lepers, the formerly deaf, the dead now raised to life and the poor to whom had been preached the gospel [Matt. 11: 4-5]. Jesus did not send John His CV but His achievements *as recorded by John's disciples.*

b) *Where is our integrity?*

In performing the works for which we have been called, it is possible to do so by using immoral or spiritually unacceptable means or methods. That is why it is possible for Jesus to say the following telling words:

Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity [Matt. 7: 22-23]

So, *who we are* is as important as *what we do*. That is why Paul has said, "whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are of *good report*; if there be *any virtue*, and if there be any praise, think on those things" [Phil. 4: 8]. When the Apostles were looking for deacons to take over the administrative chores from them, they looked for "men of *honest report*, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" [Acts 6: 2-3].

c) *Can we work with others?*

Some people are hardworking and honest but they cannot work with others. They will not tolerate any critical comments on their views nor do they respect other people's opinions. They will not mentor successors nor encourage the young for fear that they could overshadow them. Yet, Jesus took pains to select and train His disciples [**Matt. 10: 1-42**]. He promised them that they would do greater things after He would have ascended to heaven [**Jn 14: 12**]. Peter called Mark (Marcus), the Gospel writer, "my son" [**1 Pet. 5: 13**]. Even though Paul was an intellectual, he deferred to the authority of Peter and the Jerusalem Council [**Acts 15: 1-12**]. Peter the fisherman in turn called Paul "our beloved brother Paul" and recognized "the wisdom given unto him" [**2 Pet. 3: 15**]. The early church was characterized by unity and love: "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common" [**Acts 4: 32**].

From the forgoing, we see that, even though we make the record, it is others who keep and use it. So, since we cannot run away from our shadows [unless, of course we hide in the dark!], it is better to ensure that our record will be good after we have left the stage. Let us see Elisha's record as told by his discredited servant.

2. Elisha's record

In our lesson last week, we discussed the famine in Israel, which was miraculously removed by God through Elisha's intervention. In today's story, we now know that the famine lasted for seven years. Just before the famine started, the prophet had asked the Shunammite woman and her son whom God had raised from the dead through Elisha's ministry, to "sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn" [**2 Kgs 8: 1**]. She went to live among the Philistines. However, on her return, she had lost her house and land. She cried to the king for help [**vv. 2-3**].

At the time that she came to the palace, the king had asked Gehazi, Elisha's discredited servant, to tell him "all the great things that Elisha hath done" [**v. 4**]. You will recall that Gehazi fell out of favour with Elisha when he ran after Namaan, the Syrian general that had been cured of leprosy, and lied to him in order to obtain some of the gifts that Elisha had earlier rejected. For that, Elisha cursed him, that the leprosy would pass to him and his descendants forever [**2 Kgs 5: 20-27**].

Gehazi told the king of Elisha's *works*. As he was telling him about a woman whose son was raised to life, the woman walked in with the now grown-up young man. Raising his leprous hand presumably hidden under his garments, Gehazi told the king, "this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The king turned to the woman and asked if it was so, and she confirmed it [**2 Kgs 8: 5-6**].

According to an African adage, there are two types of lies that are difficult to prove: the one by a stranger and the one by an old man. The stranger begins the lie with “in my place.” If you do not know his place, you cannot verify his stories! The old man begins with, “when I was young.” If you are younger than he is, you cannot verify his story! In Elisha’s case, he was not even there to defend his record, but the vital *witnesses* were there. On the day of His Ascension to Heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; *and ye shall be witnesses unto Me* both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, *unto the uttermost part of the earth*” [Acts 1: 8].

What did the true record of Elisha’s ministry do for the king? He had just received a petition from the Shunammite woman for the restoration of her house and land. How would he have known that the woman was telling the truth? She did not have any legal documents to back up her claims. She did not come with any credible witnesses. Elisha was not there to confirm that he had advised her to leave the country seven years earlier. However, the king believed that if what had been confirmed about her was correct, then her claim would also be accurate. The king ordered one of his officers to “restore all that was hers, and *all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land even until now*” [2 Kgs 8: 6]. In other words, she would collect the rents on the house plus the interest plus the proceeds from the sale of the produce from the land *for seven years*! She became restored more abundantly!

3. Lessons

Many of us are ashamed of our records. They may believe that they cannot go back to fix them. Some people were very bad bosses. Now that they have retired, they may not be bold enough to visit their former offices for fear that they would not be well received. Some parents had abused their children who have now grown up and moved on. They have not been in touch and such parents are afraid if they would ever be forgiven. Some of us, teachers and counselors, had withheld correct spiritual advice from our wards because we wanted to be politically correct. Now, we feel bad to hear the low road that such wards have taken in life: jail, drugs, homosexuality, prostitution, domestic violence, etc.

Well, it is never too late to reconstruct your records. Here is how to go about it:

a) *Go to the Author of the world’s best record!*

Jesus did not write a single word, except perhaps the one He wrote on the ground when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Him [Jn 8: 8]. Yet, in talking about His record, one of His disciples, John, wrote, “And there are also many other things [beside what is recorded in the Gospels] which *Jesus did*, the which, if they should be written every one, I

suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” [Jn 21: 25].

The king of Israel believed Elisha’s record as told by Gehazi and confirmed by the Shunammite woman and he made the right decision. God has told us that Jesus is His only begotten Son and that if we believe in Him, He will adopt us as His own sons and daughters [Jn 1: 12; Rom. 8:15-17]. Therefore, stop doing immature analysis with your small mind! Accept and believe the word of God as recorded in the Holy Bible as the true record of the works of Jesus Christ. Then, accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour, the author and finisher of your faith.

Peter was a tempestuous man who could be a coward at crucial moments, such as when he denied Jesus Christ three times. However, the moment he received Jesus in his heart, as confirmed by the descent of the Holy Spirit on him on Pentecost Sunday, he became a brand new man. He preached Christ with boldness and authority. When the members of the Sanhedrin “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled and *they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus*” [Acts 4: 13].

b) *If you change for the better, people will forget your past bad record!*

Once you change for the better, whatever you were before now may no longer matter. Even on the day of Paul’s conversion, Ananias went to him in Damascus, on the order of Jesus Christ, and addressed him as “Brother Paul” [Acts 9: 17]! Thereafter, Paul could write to the Philippians, “Those things, which ye have both *learned* and *received* and *heard* and *seen in me*, do, and the God of peace shall be with you” [Phil. 4: 9]. He was not referring to his pre-Damascus record!

4. Conclusion

You cannot run away from your shadow. If your shadow is ugly, you cannot blame the light that casts the shadow. Rather, you should blame your ugly self! If you can spend as much time working on your salvation as you do on your résumé, you will leave a better record for posterity. So, start building a solid record of your life. God will be proud of you for that.