

Who Was Elisha And What Can We Learn From Him?

Do you remember, from my last post about Elijah, the last task given to Elijah when hearing from God on Mount Sinai?

From **1 Kings 19: 16** "... anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet."

In verse 19 Elijah meets up with Elisha:

19 So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.

Here we see Elisha at work, in his soon-to-be previous career. Yes, Elisha, the great prophet that goes on to perform many works of God and establishes a reputation similar to that of Elijah, was a farmer. He was an ordinary man, hardworking, and loved his parents. When Elijah recruits him, however, he's ready to go:

20 Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"

Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."

21 So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

Elisha was not looking back, he was fully committed.

I'd like to focus on one of Elisha's many encounters and highlight a few lessons that we can learn today from this most revered man of God.

Expectations and obedience

2 Kings 5: 1 The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy.

2 At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. 3 One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy."

We haven't even gotten to Elisha and the story is already interesting. Right away we know a lot about Naaman, what he's done for Aram and this major health crisis he's facing. What I love about reading this is that here we have this commander of the Aramean army who is willing to follow the advice of his foreign servant girl. So Naaman goes to visit Elisha:

9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. 10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy."

11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! 12 Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

That didn't go well, did it?

But why? It seems that Naaman expected to get healed, but how? It wasn't going as he expected. In verse 11: *"I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!"* He first expected to meet this great man of God face to face, instead, he met his servant. When you're the commander of an army, you usually aren't meeting with someone's servants, much less taking instruction from them. On top of that, he expected instant healing. With the instructions he did receive, it involved the Jordan River, which in his eyes was not nearly as good as the Aramean rivers. He was angry at this point, but watch this:

13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"
(ESV)

You gotta' love those words "Wash, and be clean".

I think for a moment Naaman allowed his pride and expectations to keep him from thinking straight. He forgot why he was there and that he was at Elisha's mercy. His servants pointed out the obvious and saw it for what it was a "great word" from the prophet. Again, we see Naaman's not above taking criticism and listening to his subordinates. I don't think he's your typical, modern-day "mighty warrior". So he listens to his servants...

14 So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed!

Lesson: *This is a very important lesson for all believers to learn and that is to be flexible with our expectations. When we have preconceptions of a result or outcome that we're*

hoping for we are often met with disappointment and sometimes anger. The second part of this lesson is to be obedient when we know what God tells us to do, just do what He says rather than argue with Him.

Above all else, our purpose is to glorify God

God's fame and reputation are what really matters and Elisha understood this.

7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me." 8 But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to him: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel."

The letter is sent to the king to go before Naaman, giving him safe passage. But when the king reads it he's dismayed because he thinks it is for him, and he's not in the healing business. Notice what's on Elisha's mind? He sees an opportunity to let it be known that Israel has a true prophet. And here is the result of God's mercy on Naaman:

15 Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

Naaman became a believer!

In his joy he offered a gift to Elisha, and what how does Elisha respond?

16 But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged

him to take the gift, Elisha refused.

The works of God are not for sale. Elisha understood that as a servant of God, he was not to accept anything in exchange for the works of God. Elisha was not concerned about earning an income, but he was concerned about God's reputation. Naaman's experience did not disappoint as he vowed only to worship the Lord:

17 Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord.

Lesson: *As a servant of God, stay focused on the main objective, which is to love God more than anything, including our well-being. Put Him first and He'll take care of all else. Sound familiar?*

Matthew 6: 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Be content

After Elisha declines to accept the gift, which he does in front of his servant Gehazi, Gehazi starts to scheme...

20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting any of his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him." 21 So Gehazi set off after Naaman.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha thinks he knows better than his master. He second guess's Elisha's decision and where does this lead?

When Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, he climbed down from his chariot and went to meet him. "Is everything all right?" Naaman asked.

22 "Yes," Gehazi said, "but my master has sent me to tell you that two young prophets from the hill country of Ephraim have just arrived. He would like 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing to give to them."

Liar, liar, pants on fire!

It leads him into a web of deceit as he conjures up this fictitious story and lies on behalf of Elisha. That's not cool.

23 "By all means, take twice as much silver," Naaman insisted. He gave him two sets of clothing, tied up the money in two bags, and sent two of his servants to carry the gifts for Gehazi.

Although this is not a problem for Naaman as he was happy to oblige, what about when he comes back to Elisha?

24 But when they arrived at the citadel, Gehazi took the gifts from the servants and sent the men back. Then he went and hid the gifts inside the house. 25 When he went in to his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?"

"I haven't been anywhere," he replied.

26 But Elisha asked him, "Don't you realize that I was there in spirit when Naaman stepped down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to receive money and clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and cattle, and male and female servants? 27 Because you have done this, you and your descendants will suffer from Naaman's leprosy forever." When Gehazi left the room, he was covered with leprosy; his skin was white as snow.

Apparently, Gehazi was not content.

His master declined the gift offered by Naaman. It was not the time to accept donations. Elisha's instructions and God's power led to Naaman's health being restored. This was a work of the Lord and it is a great example of God's grace. The healing was freely given after Naaman humbled himself and submitted to Elisha's instruction. And how discontent was Gehazi? So much that he lied to both Naaman and Elisha. His lie to Naaman allowed him to receive what he shouldn't have and his lie to Elisha was immediately rebuked. It was bad enough that he secretly sought after material gain, but he lied at both ends to attain it. He sold his soul. The end result was not only leprosy for himself but a legacy of leprosy.

This is the danger of not being content.

*John 4: 34 Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. 35 You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36 **The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!***

Lesson: *Be content with what you have. Accept what God has given you and don't go secretly scheming around because deep down inside that which God has provided you with is not enough.*

I hope you enjoyed learning about Elisha and the lessons found in the text concerning him. I think this might be the most important lesson here. **If God can take an ordinary farmer such as Elisha and make him into a great representative of God, he can do it with you.** What Elisha had that God was looking for is a willing heart that was fully committed to Him. That's

what He desires most.

Are you fully committed?

2 Chronicles 16: 9 The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

“Dear Lord, thank you for teaching us from your Word. Thank you for the story of your servant Elisha so that we may be inspired to be faithful servants as well. Lord, help me to be as willing as Elisha was. Help me to live my life as fully committed to you as he was. I know that you are my provider and that your wages are good. Thank you for the work you’ve given me and for the future you’ve put in my path. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

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