

## Elisha 10 - Fruit of the Ministry

We have been learning about serving God from the ministry of Elisha. We have considered:

- How a calling to ministry can sometimes look merely like a promotion
- How faithfulness and personal involvement are significant in ministry
- How a balanced ministry ranges from blessing to cursing, or judgment, in rebuke, reproof, and exhortation.
- How ministry has to be unbiased, ready to bless whoever God brings to us with what they actually need.
- How we always minister out of the sufficiency of Christ to what people *truly* need.
- How the ultimate and highest priority ministry is soul winning

From the healing of Naaman, we have examined from the young maid, Elisha, and Gehazi:

- How we minister within whatever circumstances we find ourselves
- How we must maintain a purity of ministry with integrity
- How we must not abuse ministry either directly or by neglect

We could look at this ministry moment as the maid who *supported* the ministry, Elisha who *delivered* the ministry, Gehazi who *failed* the ministry, and now Naaman who *received* the ministry. There is a common mistake to point out whenever we take note of a miracle. Because we tend to be impressed by the sensational, we run the risk of missing a greater significance in God's work. It was truly a great miracle for Naaman to be healed of leprosy, but there is something more that is going on.

### 1. Naaman's presumption -

Naaman was like a lot of people who are first coming to faith. He didn't quite know how to approach Elisha. He didn't

really even know it was Elisha he was supposed to see. He had gotten a letter of introduction from his king and took it to the king of Israel. We will look at the kings' part in this ministry in another sermon. At this point, the king of Israel has heard from Elisha, who tells him to send Naaman down to him. We take note that, so far, Naaman was just forging ahead, guessing at what he was supposed to do or who he was supposed to see until Elisha started reaching out to him.

2Kgs 5:8-12 And it was *so*, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

9So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

10And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12*Are* not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman's presumption was revealed by his surprise at what occurred next. He had a preconception of what the work of God was supposed to look like. He had imagined some grand sensational display of a prophet's power. He expected Elisha to come out personally and strike his hand over the place. Dipping himself in the Jordan river seven times was certainly extraordinary. But one time

could have been enough as long as God was in it. But even this did not match Elisha's expectations. If all Elisha was going to do was choose a river, Naaman thought he might as well have stayed home because his home rivers were better than anything in Jordan.

All of this is so common to our experience, today. Interpreting our experiences according to our expectations is interesting. There was a time when people thought they were supposed to go into hysteria under hypnosis so they did. When hypnosis was something people expected to put them into a trance, then hysteria was gone and people went into a trance. Today, a new phenomena has developed especially because of the isolation imposed due to the pandemic and with the influence of social media. There has been a great rise in "functional tics," which mimic Tourette's Syndrome. Similarly, in certain kinds of church settings, we can observe people laughing, barking like a dog, falling down and shaking because that is what people think is *supposed* to happen. If it was *supposed* to happen then you should expect to see this in all churches. It is interesting to observe people when they first come to our church. People who are very new to Christianity are very considerate and stumble a little bit as they figure out what has become routine for us. People who come from other ministries only take a little bit of time to adapt. Some denominations have standardized the way they do things across all churches in their group. However, there *is* a specific way that is *the* way to worship God. The only thing that is actually critical to worship in the right way is that you worship in spirit and in truth.

John 4:23-24 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life.

If we are teaching the Word of God properly then we *put* the spiritual significance in what we do when we worship. For instance, there is a minor debate about how to sing properly. Such questions arise over whether all verses of a hymn should be sung. This could be a problem because many hymns were originally written with more verses than appear in our hymnal. Some think that the key a hymn was written in is part of the inspiration behind the music and shouldn't be changed. Some think that having musical instruments are worldly and sing only a capella. Some think that only the psalms should be sung. These things in and of themselves are not a problem and should not be used to *limit* our expression. They are all tools to *use* to express our worship to God. Sing psalms sometimes, spiritual songs other times. Sing all the verses or only the verses that fit what you are trying to express. Change the words as needed – they weren't given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Have the piano play, have the piano drop out, or sing totally a capella as is meaningful. Change the key, change the melody, or change the harmony as needed. The thing that you *must* make sure of is that what you are doing is according to the truth of God's Word. As long as doctrine and ethics are not compromised, do whatever brings people closer to God.

This brings us to the problem that Naaman and many people have. It involves a sense of presumption. We presume things about God according to our limited experience and understanding. Sometimes we interpret our psychological experiences according to our expectation of what we are supposed to think and feel. Sometimes we interpret our religious practice according to what we think it is supposed be. Those assumptions might or might not be problematic, but when it

comes to our understanding of salvation, we can't afford to interpret what God should be like, what He should do, or how we should stand before Him according to our finite and limited understanding and experience. There are all kinds of unqualified opinions people have about church until you start to explain things to them. People end up creating a god of their imagination.

Rom 1:21-23 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man **[like statues]**, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.**[like nature worship]**

We don't worship God as we *imagine* Him to be. We worship God as He *revealed* Himself to us. There are some people who refuse to submit themselves to God because they think that He should never punish anyone as a God of love. There are some who are just the opposite. They refuse to submit themselves to God if He saves people without making them pay for their sin. Which one is right? They are both right and they are both wrong. God *does* demand payment for your sin *and* He will *not* make you pay for your sin. This is a tremendous contradiction until you consider the fact that that is why Jesus came into the world. Our sin must be paid for. It's just that *we* don't have to pay for it because *Jesus* paid for it.

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Someone might not like the idea that there is a Hell as the judgment for being a sinner. Who *would* like it? *God* doesn't

even like it, which is why He made the way out of Hell by having His infinitely Holy, infinitely righteous, infinitely innocent Son take our place on the cross. We don't deserve heaven and we can't work to make up for our sinfulness to go there.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Naaman might not have known what to expect, but dipping himself in the Jordan didn't sound like that was the right thing either. Similarly, people might not have God all figured out, but they don't accept the terms of salvation that God offers. It doesn't match up with their expectations so they reject Him. Naaman let his unsophisticated perspective control his decision to put his trust in the God of Israel. There was no power in the water that healed him. It was in his willingness to trust God. This is what his men confronted him with, which shows they had more understanding than he did.

2Kgs 5:13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it*? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

They challenged him that he was willing to do much more, all he needed to do was humble himself before God and accept Him on *His* terms.

## 2. Naaman's obedience -

Naaman repented and did as he was

told.

2Kgs 5:14-15 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he 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 of thy servant.

His obedience made the difference, but obedience is a funny thing. If I were asked to build a cathedral to earn salvation, it would seem appropriate. A mighty work for God would seem to have to count for something. If I were asked to become a missionary to a cannibal tribe to earn salvation, it would seem appropriate. That mighty work for God would seem to have to count for something. But taking a bath for God? The power is not in the work performed, but in the attitude of the believer. The New Testament sheds light on this.

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament that are both translated "believe." One is used more to speak of mere intellectual ascent.

Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

When someone tells me that they believe in God, it doesn't tell me enough. When they say that, I can say, "That's good, but that makes you only at least as good as the devil." The devil believes in God because it was God Who kicked him out of Heaven. You might believe *that* God exists, but that is not necessarily *saving* faith. This is where the other word for *believe* comes in.

The other Greek word is sometimes translated *believe* but other times *obey*. What determines which way to translate

the word is the context. For instance look at 1 Peter 4:

1Pet 4:17 For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?

How do you *obey the Gospel*? If I were to say to you "Obey my command: jump!" you could easily do that. But if I said to you "Obey my command: gospel!" how do you *obey* that? This is where saving faith comes in. In Greek, the word *obey* in this passage is also the word *believe*, but a different kind of belief. It is not mere intellectual ascent. It is belief to the degree that you are willing to submit yourself to God.

For example, consider Romans 10:13.

Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

I could ask someone, "Do you believe that Jesus will save you eternally if you ask Him to?" And they could answer, "Yes, I believe that." If I then ask them, "Will you then obey the Gospel and ask Him to save you?" To which people have actually answered, "No, I will not." They believe that God *would* do it, but they don't want them to submit themselves to Him.

Why did it have to take seven times for Naaman to be healed? That was more for his sake than it was for the miracle to take place. God could have done it on the first dip in the river. There are times when God has healed someone and they didn't ask or even know Who Jesus was. There was nothing magical about the water or the number of times to dip into it. If there was, then all the people would be flocking to get there healing as if they were at the Ganges River in India. To do something seven times takes a little bit of conviction. Maybe the first time he went down he might have thought, "This is silly." The second time he went down he



might have thought, "But I was ready to anything." After the third time he went down, he might have thought, "Okay, I've come this far, I might as well go all the way." The leprosy was not taken away until the seventh time he went down into the water. It was that sense of commitment to God that made the difference.

Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sin? Yes? Be careful how you respond to this next question. *Will* you ask Him to be your Savior today? Will you believe to the point of acting on it and asking Him to take your judgment of Hell which is God's way of salvation?

### 3. Naaman's ministry -

But wait, there is more, like they say in the TV commercial. This is where we see a greater understanding of the significance of what Naaman received. The natural fruit of ministry does not stop at just receiving the miracle of eternal life. The fruit of ministry is to take your faith with you into the world and bear testimony. The fruit of the ministry is to make more ministers, not just beneficiaries of ministry. It is popularly said, "Shepherds don't make sheep – sheep make sheep." We have people who have gone out from here and are blessed when we receive word of how they used something from their experience here in their ministry. This is essentially what Naaman did.

2Kgs 5:15-18 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he 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 of thy servant.

16But he said, *As* the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take *it*; but he refused.

17And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of

earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.

18In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, *that* when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.

Naaman wanted to offer a payment for what just happened to him, but Elisha refused. He then asked for something that might seem a little strange. Naaman asked for some earth from Israel to go back with him. The earth would serve as a symbolic connection to remind him of the God of Israel. He wanted to make an altar where he would only make sacrifice to Jehovah God. He knew that he would have to attend to the king when *the king* went to his pagan temple, so he was concerned about that. What this indicated was that he knew he was going out into the world. You might make the mistake and think that it might be nice to live only around Christians and away from the world. The lesson from Naaman is that fruit of the ministry extends out from us to the world. We might not take a little dirt wherever we go as a testimony. But we do take the Gospel wherever we go. Getting salvation *and* becoming a soul-winner is the *full* fruit of the Gospel. The sacrifice we make daily is our whole self.

Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which* is your reasonable service.

What will your decision be today? Will you surrender your sin to God and let His blood be the only payment for you? Or, do you have your own terms that you think God should accept, instead? If you are a believer, are you

fully surrendered to God willing to share that salvation with the world?