

Elisha 8 - Purity in Ministry

We have been learning about serving God from the model of the ministry of Elisha. So far, 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

We are camping for a while in 2 Kings 5 to examine various aspects of ministry performed in the healing of Naaman, the Syrian general. So far, through the young Jewish servant girl we saw how that we have to minister within whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Today, we are going to see purity in Elisha's ministry. This sense of purity is based on integrity, staying true to basic principles in ministry. It is possible to act with integrity *in our behavior*, and not be pure in our heart. How we exercise integrity and purity *will* help protect our heart for God and ministry.

1. Elisha's example -

The outstanding aspect of Elisha's ministry to Naaman is the boundaries that he kept with him.

2Kgs 5:8-16 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. **[We will look at how Naaman had first gone to the king in another sermon]**

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.

Elisha's ministry was certainly unbiased in that he did not give special treatment to Naaman because he was a general. He didn't do anything totally out of the ordinary as Naaman had expected. However, we have also noted that ministry is very *personal*, yet Elisha had *not* gone out to personally meet Naaman.

Ordinarily, not meeting Naaman would actually be understandable according to Jewish standards. Naaman would have been considered unclean according to the Levitical Law. The principle was that of national identity. There was a process for a Gentile to join Israel. It could not be said that Elisha was concerned about the problem of being unclean because he had had no problem dwelling in the Shunamite woman's house or his physical presence in the healing of her son. Apparently, Elisha had a *different* reason for not associating with Naaman. As we continue reading we will get an idea of why he kept Naaman at a distance.

13And 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?

14Then 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.

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.

Later we will look at the problem of a hireling and ministry for payment when we consider the role of Elisha's servant, Gehazi, in this miracle. For now, the fact that Elisha took no payment combined with keeping his distance from Naaman leads us to consider a different concern that Elisha had than uncleanness. By keeping his distance from Naaman and not accepting any payment for the miracle that he performed, Elisha could not be accused of having a conflict of interest. He was not for hire to the highest bidder, foreign or domestic. It could not be said that he allowed any undue influence or commercialization in his ministry. Elisha remained untainted, beyond reproach. Part of God's plan for all those who would come to be in Christ was that they should be holy and without blame.

Eph 1:3-4 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:

4According as he hath chosen us

in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Today, we are going to focus on the purity necessary for ministry that we learn from Elisha's ministry to Naaman and apply it to a number of areas in general.

2. Reckon -

The idea of setting boundaries is not done according to our emotional inclinations or gut instincts. Such carelessness can lead to bigotry. It can also lead to self indulgence which is the very opposite of what striving for purity is all about. Living a disciplined life takes thoughtfulness and planning, or reckoning.

Rom 6:11-14 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. **[We reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, which means we use reason to logically conclude that we are.]**

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither yield ye your members *a s i n s t r u m e n t s* of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *a s* instruments of righteousness unto God. **[By *reasoning* we *decide* to yield ourselves, not by emotion]**

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

1Cor 3:10-15 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he

buildeth thereupon.

11For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

We should use reckoning and planning for a spiritual life because we don't always *feel* very spiritual. This is where a commitment to integrity comes in. It is a matter of being a responsible person. We understand Biblical principles for living and then apply ourselves to them.

This is how it is with salvation, itself. We don't understand why God would love sinners like us. We don't understand why He would send His Son to die for us. We don't understand how the transformation takes place in our spirit. But we *do* understand how the Bible is God's miraculous book and that He promised eternal life to all who would surrender their life to Christ and accept His payment for our sinfulness. We then apply ourselves to these truths by embracing saving faith in Christ.

3. Boundaries -

Elisha exercised a boundary with Naaman. We should have boundaries that help us to purity. We are called to lead a life that is blameless, or beyond reproof and reproach.

1Thess 5:22-23 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

23And the very God of peace

sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice in this Scripture that there is a call for purity in *body, soul, and spirit*. One of the problems that people have with maintaining purity is that they reserve a part of their life for self. We have to be willing to completely surrender every aspect of our life to Christ. We have to be ready to give even *more* than 100%. Vs. 22 says that we have to abstain from even the *appearance* of evil, not just *actual* evil. We recognize that the reality of life is fraught with successes and failures. We are comforted by the fact that in the Rapture we will be finally completely free of temptation and sin. This leads us to the kind of boundaries and hedges of protection that we can exercise in the meantime.

- Spiritual purity

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1John 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Ps 119:10-12 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

11Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

12Blessed *art* thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

- Moral purity

1Thess 4:3-5 For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: **[fornication is all sexual activity outside of**

marriage]

4That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

5Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

Job 31:1 I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? **[Jesus pointed out that to even look on a woman with lust is considered adultery.]**

What are we watching on TV? Have you actually listened to the lyrics of the music we hear?

- Ecclesiastical (church) purity

We can't control what other churches do but we have to make sure that we are doing right we do not become entangled with other churches that deviate from the message of salvation and sound doctrine.

There is a false purity based on denominationalism. For the purpose of operations, we are happy to have the freedom to assemble in America. However, no one group can claim to be *the one* true church. In order to guard against even slipping off into false doctrine, we have the Word of God to help us.

2Tim 3:13-16 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

14But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*;

15And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

- Political purity

Elisha was not disengaged and completely disinterested in political figures which we have already seen as he challenged two kings. As a church we are keenly sensitive to the moral implications of social policies. Back in the 1960s, pastoral figures spoke out against nuclear weapons. They were not so concerned about the weapons themselves as much as that they hoped for peace through appeasement. The fact that nuclear weapons were so devastating magnified the significance of their cause. The problem with the issue stated in that way is that waging righteous war is an actual biblical function of government. What is harder to determine is the righteousness of a war. This was much easier to see in the case of World War II.

The moral causes that we face today that justify boldness in speaking out are clear. The promotion of the grooming and mutilation of our children in the false name of freedom demands an outcry from the pulpits of America. Politicians have long justified their policies in the name of the children whether it be clean air and water or poverty relief. They could always tug on our heartstrings, but today's issues over the children should be breaking our hearts. As Baptists we have always avoided becoming entangled with government while at the same time seeking to influence our culture. We still aim to maintain that political purity so that when we have social causes to speak out against we can rightly say that they are truly Biblical causes.

Matt 5:13-16 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

- Social purity

In our day we also need to speak out against false purity such as ethnic, national, racial purity, or any effort to isolate grouping based on such false purity. Instead, it is wonderful for those joining to be Americans. I marvel at the experience of discovering that if you are first generation American you are just as American as someone whose forebears came over on the Mayflower, the Amistad, a steamship docking at Ellis Island, or if they walked across the Bering Strait.

Gal 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

When we focus on our *general* social purity, we have to make sure to not lose sight of the *particular* purity of our fellowship within the church. The classic Biblical case of this problem is Euodias and Synteché. Their case is so interesting because they are *not* major Biblical figures. Big problems are easier to spot and analyze. Their problem was more like what you see in churches. It was small, like a 1/16" long splinter that doesn't paralyze you but is just irritating enough to ruin every second until you get it out.

Phil 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

Imagine that, you get to have your name mentioned in the Word of God, you get one line, and what is written about is that you are at odds with another believer. There is nothing mentioned

about their problem which makes me wonder that, in the grand scheme of things, it was possibly irrelevant and petty. No doubt it wasn't small to those two ladies. In the event that the problem *was* not petty, it still doesn't matter. We are called upon to be gracious *anyway*. It is conceivable that not everyone is easy to relate to, but Christian grace tells us to reckon a way to work with others so we can enjoy the overall blessing of our fellowship.

We come together each week to be challenged to examine our attitude and our lives. Don't assume that spirituality *just* comes naturally. Spirituality is achieved by setting up standards for our lives and then responsibly hold ourselves accountable to maintain the integrity of our commitment. When we are honest with ourselves, we will find recovery from failure a lot easier. What is the decision you need to make today? Are you ready to join in wholeheartedly as a member with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you willing to commit yourself to ministry? Even more importantly, is there someone who needs to turn their heart and eternity over to Jesus for salvation?

1. Elisha's example - 2Kgs 5:8-16, Eph 1:3-4
2. Reckon - Rom 6:11-14, 1Cor 3:10-15
3. Boundaries - 1Thess 5:22-23, 1John 1:9, 3:3, Ps 119:10-12, 1Thess 4:3-5, Job 31:1, 2Tim 3:13-16, Matt 5:13-16, Gal 3:28-29, Phil 4:2