

Elisha 9 - The Abuse of 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 and Elisha:

- How we minister within whatever circumstances we find ourselves
- How we must maintain a purity of ministry with integrity

Today we are looking at Elisha's servant Gehazi. After Naaman's healing, Elisha refused to accept any payment. However, Gehazi was not going to let this opportunity get away.

2Kgs 5:20-27 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.
21So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is* all well?
22And he said, All *is* well. My master hath sent me, saying,

Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

23And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him.

24And when he came to the tower, he took *them* from their hand, and bestowed *them* in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.

25But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence *comest thou*, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

26And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee*, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?

27The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white* as snow.

We can compare the self-centered motivation of Gehazi to the maid and Elisha who had exhibited a selflessness in ministry. The maid could have been spiteful out of self-centeredness. Elisha could have compromised his integrity out of self-advancement. Instead, they were focused on fulfilling the ministry need of Naaman. Gehazi's greed and focus on self-enrichment was his downfall.

1. False profits in ministry -

The first thing we want to look at is false profits in ministry. That is not *prophets*, but *profits*. Gehazi might be

considered a false *prophet* but that was because of the false *profits* he expected from ministry. Serving the Lord is very profitable if what you seek is *spiritual* profit. *Material* profits are false. Paul admonished Timothy about true, spiritual profit.

1Tim 6:6-11 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

8And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10For 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.

11But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

The biggest benefit of ministry is not what you receive, but what you give.

Acts 20:33-35 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

34Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Luke 6:31-35 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil.

A rewarding Christian life is not all about what we can get but what we can give. The church is here to give people an opportunity to serve. Churches are often judged by what they have to offer. Parents want a ministry for their children to join. People often want a slick TV presentation rather than a humble singer with a message from the heart. People are impressed by elaborate VBS productions. Having a great Sunday School, music, and VBS ministry are great. They are looking for their self benefit. If you find a church lacking, that is not a reason to turn your nose up at the church. If you want more, then go to work and make it happen. If what you are looking for is entertainment with its physiological excitement, understand that that sense of excitement fades away.

When you lust after what the world has, you *get* what the world has. Don't compare the riches of the Spirit with the riches of the world. People in the world discover that when you get the world's riches it is not all that it is cracked up to be. For example, a mansion in this world comes with property taxes, zoning restrictions, maintenance repairs, discovery of bad workmanship, more maintenance cleaning and painting, a job to afford it, the taxes that go with the job, the accountant to file the taxes, and, if you have a stream on the property, federal regulations that keep you from improving the property. This is not to say that a mansion is sinful in itself, but

lusting after the mansion *is*.

The mansions Jesus has prepared for us in glory accompany our true richness in Christ which can't be bought at any price. The Gospel can't be bought, sold, or paid for because Jesus paid the complete price when He gave His life on the cross for our sin.

2. Levels of ministry abuse -

What happens at church fits into a mixture of two categories: ministering, or receiving ministry. When someone is a visitor they are mostly *receiving* ministry. Those who are ministering are blessed both by getting to minister to others and by the mutual benefit from others who are ministering. When Christians lose a sense of balance between giving and receiving ministry there are various levels of abuse of ministry. Gehazi falls into the first mistake of ministry, but there are two others we are also going to look at that are born of self-profit.

- The hireling

The most obvious mistake that Gehazi made was his lust for filthy lucre. Lucre is from Old English and simply means monetary word. It is related to the word *lucrative*, meaning profitable.

1Pet 5:1-3 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

John 10:11-13 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12But he that is an hireling, and

not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

We are used to seeing hirelings as ministries that are obviously all about money. They not only prey on the people, but preach that wealth is righteousness. They are really preaching covetousness. Their reasoning includes that God deserves the best and so God's man or woman deserves the best. Although it is not sinful to be rich, how one *attains* wealth or *uses* wealth is often problematic. However, this is not the only way to be like Gehazi, abusing ministry by seeking to profit from it.

- The perpetual visitor

As a Christian, we are called to do good works. Make no mistake, our works have nothing to do with earning points to be able to get into heaven, but that does not mean that we are to ignore good works. It is great to have people visit. Those who visiting should take a little time to make sure this church is doctrinally sound, but as a Christian you will be greatly blessed when you give yourself to serve the Lord with your brothers and sisters in Christ. There are some who never grow past being a visitor. They will go to church, smile, be very pleasant, but never get committed or involved. Christians like this want to profit from what the ministry of the church has to offer but don't support the work personally or faithfully. This kind of abuse of ministry involves being dead weight on the church by shirking or rejecting responsibility. They want to be part of the ministry, but only as recipients of ministry. They are takers, not givers.

- Ministering on one's own terms

We know that being self-centered is

wrong, but there is a way that someone who is *generous* can be self-centered. There are those who are generous, but *only* on *their* terms. We have to be careful to note that we have to be able to say "No" sometimes because we actually are limited in what we can do, but that is not what I am referring to. Good stewardship is a virtue. But, some are so careful to *protect themselves* that they turn this virtue into a vice. This is possibly borne of the fact that we don't like to be criticized or judged. We don't want to be called to have to give an account. But this is *also* a part of ministry. God will call you into account. A fear of commitment that is borne of being focused on self is falsely and conveniently called good stewardship.

3. The obligation to minister -

We actually have an obligation before God seek the blessing of others and minister to them.

1Pet 1:18-19 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers;

19But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

1Cor 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Salvation was given to us freely.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Salvation is not given to the highest bidder. There is no application fee. There are no pre-requisites other than to repent toward God. Salvation is given to *whosoever* would receive Christ as their

Savior.

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

Seeing that it cost us nothing, we give the Gospel at no charge.

Matt 10:7-8 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Modern Christian musicians present an interesting case. Some can be so loose morally and call people who are pursuing holiness, legalists. Yet, they can be so concerned about legalities themselves and zealous about the copyright law and the royalties they are owed. Are such people more interested in profit or truly serving God? It is so interesting that as copyrights have been sold, there is much of our Christian music that is owned ultimately by companies that are mere worldly publishers. Praise God that no matter how much the world would like to regulate your speech and very thoughts, you are free before God because Jesus paid the ultimate price for us.

With our purchase, there is an obligation that goes with it. We have freely received, we must now freely share the Gospel. Paul expressed that obligation in Romans 1.

Rom 1:14-16 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Luke 12:48 But he that knew not,

and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Jas 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

Matt 5:38-48 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also.

41And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

43Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so?

48Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

There are those whose concerns are more about themselves. There are those who can't be tied down to service. There are those who thoughtlessly are looking for what the benefit to them is. The ministry itself *is* the benefit. We shouldn't look at it as we *have* to serve God, but we *get* to serve God. If someone is so centered on self that they insist on staying in rebellion against God so they won't have to be accountable, God will let them. Unfortunately that means they get to have their way all through eternity when they go to a Christless Hell. The irony is that avoiding God because you don't want to have anything expected of you by Him leads to a meaningless existence. The true joy is in knowing God by being born again and embracing His kingdom.

Matt 16:24-26 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Take God's offer of salvation and join in the exciting work of His today. You might not know what that is going to exactly look like, but know that it is wonderful.

If you are saved, have you been avoiding an area of service? Is there something that God wants you to do? Do you need to join God's church and discover what God has for you? Are you discouraged in ministry because it doesn't seem worth it and need to give God the glory for getting to serve Him?

2Kgs 5:20-27

1. False profits in ministry - 1Tim 6:6-11, Acts 20:33-35, Luke 6:31-35
2. Levels of ministry abuse - 1Pet 5:1-3,

John 10:11-13

3. The obligation to minister - 1Pet 1:18-19, 1Cor 6:20, John 3:16, Rom 10:13, Matt 10:7-8, Rom 1:14-16, Luke 12:48, Jas 4:17, Matt 5:38-48, 16:24-26