

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 291

But Gehazi!

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 4th October, 2009**

Text: “*But Gehazi ...*” (2 Kings 5. 20).

Surely this must be one of the loveliest chapters in all the Old Testament, but it has a sad end; it has a tragic end. We read of a Syrian saved; we read of an Israelite lost. It is a terrible ending to this beautiful chapter, and the one stands out in stark contrast against the other.

So this morning I would like briefly to go through the wonderful events at the beginning of the chapter in the salvation of Naaman, and then afterwards come to this dreadful event and the awful punishment which attended it. May one be an encouragement for us; may the other be a solemn warning to us.

This is a wonderful chapter. The mysterious providence of God: Syria, the inveterate enemy of God's people, Syria, a heathen nation, and the Lord has a vessel of mercy there foreordained to glory, and everything is right in his life apart from one thing. He is a great man, he is honoured, “but he was a leper.”

And then you think how the glorious tidings of both natural healing and spiritual healing come to him. There he is, a stranger to Israel, a stranger to Israel's God, and a sad event takes place. There is a war. A young girl is taken captive. She is snatched away from her home, from her family. She is taken to a far-off country. You see divine providence line by line opening the book. She is found as a slave, as a servant in the house of this very Naaman to whom God has a purpose of love and mercy. Nothing can stop the purposes of God. But this young girl, it is a wonder that she took something with her. We do not know her name; we do not know how old she was; we do not know anything about her; but the fear of God was in her heart and she was not afraid to speak up very definitely in that heathen land: “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.” You see, “God's providence unfolds the book.” You might have thought they would have smiled – she is only a child; it is only superstition; we do not want Israel's religion – but they listened. Naaman's wife listened. Naaman listened. The king of Syria listened.

But you see the ignorance of them all. Naaman set out on this journey, and the treasure that he took with him – if you think of it, ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, ten changes of raiment – this enormous amount of wealth. He would give anything, pay anything. Nothing was too much. You have the wealth of Syria, the riches of Syria being sent. Nothing too much to pay for this cure.

Religion had sunk so low that the king of Israel did not know what to do, but Elisha did. “Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.” So you see this great man coming, and the emphasis: “with his horses and with his chariot,” and with his servants, and that chariot full of treasure. But Elisha did not go out to see him, to pay him any honour. He sent a message: “Go and wash in Jordan ... and thou shalt be clean.” And this great man was offended. Now the gospel does offend, the truth of God does offend. There is not the slightest notice taken of all this gold and silver, all these garments. God’s favours can never be bought. Salvation can never be bought. If there is one emphasis in this chapter, it is this: the freeness of the gospel, the freeness of salvation, outwardly and inwardly, body and soul. It is all of mercy. It is all of grace.

Naaman was offended. He expected some kind of wizard to come out with a magic wand and wave it over him and touch the place and do all kinds of antics. He was offended. The prophet did not even show his face. “Go and wash in Jordan ... and thou shalt be clean.” Well, it was a strange cure, a strange remedy, but it was the only remedy, it was God’s remedy, and it would avail. But Naaman was offended by it, and if you and I are honest, the gospel of the grace of God offends us. We like to bring our talents of silver and our talents of gold and our raiment and come in our horses and chariots.

“Mercy never can be bought;
Grace is free; and all’s the Lamb’s.”

“Go and wash in Jordan ... and thou shalt be clean.” And Naaman was offended. He said, “Behold, I thought.” He had it all planned out. But that spirit still prevails in Strict Baptist chapels, this “Behold, I thought.” How many people are planning the way in which the Lord is going to deal with them? Now He will not! If only you could be shaken out of this, some of you. When I was a teenager, I knew the doctrines as well as anyone and I listened to the preaching and I knew the usual way of

sinners being called by grace. I thought, if the Lord ever deals with me – I had it all planned out, the way it was going to be. And what happened to me? An old Arminian got hold of me in the street and said, “Brother, have you made the great decision yet?” I was offended. I thought, “This is not Strict Baptist religion.” He said, “Brother, have you made the great decision?” I said, “We believe in election.” He said, “Well, leave all that. I am going to pray for you. Have you made the great decision?” Like Naaman, I was offended, but I had an arrow in my heart that I could not get rid of until the Lord in love and mercy took it out.

O but beware of planning out the way. I think of all these people since I came to Bethel who have come to tell us their little tale of what the Lord has done for them, and we have not had any two the same, but they all come to the same place: no hope but in Jesus as the Saviour of sinners. Now it is still to go as a sinner, wash in the blood of Christ by faith and thou shalt be clean.

“‘Tis Jesus’ blood, that crimson sea,
That washes guilt and filth away.”

It still stands: “Go and wash ... and be clean.” The fountain is the blood of Jesus, a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,

“And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

“Go and wash ... and thou shalt be clean.” And Naaman 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. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” Well, I suppose they were. “May I not wash in them, and be clean?” And the answer is, No. God has appointed one way: for Naaman to wash in Jordan, which was a despised stream, for a sinner to be willing to be saved by the blood of Calvary, to be saved no other way.

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” This is you, this is me by nature. We do not like God’s way. We do not like the gospel. It humbles the flesh. It will not do anything for our pride. But he had some faithful friends, some faithful servants. What a blessing these people are today in our congregations, in the church of God! They spoke to him so kindly, and you do not know what they were risking, because these eminent men in

ancient times usually had the power of life and death. “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?” There are people today who are willing to spend all the money they have to go on a pilgrimage to Lourdes or to Rome.

It was through the Lord’s mercy Naaman fell under it, and he went and dipped himself seven times in Jordan and he obeyed the word of the man of God. His pride has gone now. Do you know why? Because his case was desperate and this was his only hope. It is that which will shut you up to Christ and the blood of Christ and Calvary, when your case is desperate and you have no other hope. He was a dying man. “What shall the dying sinner do?”

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” You know what it means, like the flesh of a little child. Older people normally have a spot here or a scar there or something else. Now the flesh of a little child – smooth, or without any spot, or without any blemish. “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church.” Now this is it: “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

“The blood of Christ, a precious blood!
Cleanses from all sin, doubt it not,
And reconciles the soul to God,
From every folly, every fault.”

Now here you have Naaman. He was a changed man. It seems clear that he was healed in body, and it seems clear there was a work of grace in his heart. He returned. He was so happy. He would give anything he had; he was only too pleased to give all these talents of silver and gold. “He said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” Now this is it: Elisha said, “As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” It is the *freeness* of the cure. It is the *freeness* of the gospel. It cannot be merited. It cannot be bought. It cannot be paid for. It is entirely on the ground of grace. But Naaman urged him. “He urged him to take it.” But Elisha stood firm. It was the honour and glory of Israel’s God. “But he refused.”

“But Gehazi.” Gehazi could not understand it. He was completely a stranger to the spirit of the gospel. He was completely a stranger to the spirit of Elisha, the man of God. He was completely a stranger to grace, the way the God of Israel works. He possessed the spirit of the world. He just could not understand Elisha. He thought Elisha was a foolish man. He thought it was a senseless thing he was doing – this man with all his wealth and he would not take a penny from him. But he said, “As the Lord liveth, I will.” Gehazi is one of the solemn characters in the Word of God. He reminds us of Judas Iscariot. He was a hypocrite.

But you see the mystery of it. There were a lot of the sons of the prophets about at this time. We read of the schools of the prophets. There were many young men there. Yet this was the one Elisha had picked, chosen. He must have had a good outward appearance, and he must have been able to say all the right things and do all the right things. But he was out of the secret. He was completely a stranger. Why he wanted to be a servant of Elisha, we do not know; but at one time Elisha was a great man in Israel and he was performing some wonderful miracles. It seems perhaps in the preceding chapter that Gehazi thought he would have the ability to perform some wonderful miracles himself. But you have this amazing account and then, “But Gehazi” – the very opposite of Elisha, and the very opposite of Naaman.

“But Gehazi.” This is brought before us as a very solemn warning, how close we can come to the things of God and yet never be a partaker, and in our hearts never know them and be a stranger to them and perish in our sin.

“But Gehazi.” I often speak to you about a black background and how divine truth shines out very gloriously. Well, here you have a glorious background and then you have this black event standing out starkly against it at the end. It is a solemn thing to be so close to the people of God, to have a name. He had an office in Israel, a sacred office. He was a servant of Elisha, the man of God, and yet he perished in his sin. He was so close to holy things. He had actually seen the dead raised to life, the Shunammite’s son. He had actually seen a leper cured, yet all he possessed was the spirit of the world, materialism, what he could get out of it, covetousness, making a name for himself, gathering wealth, being a great man in Israel.

“But Gehazi.” So there is a solemn warning to each one of us here this morning, and we have these scattered throughout Scripture. You cannot help thinking of Lot’s wife. She was there with Abraham when the angel appeared, when there was that pre-incarnation appearance of the Son of God. She saw all these things. She heard the voice; she witnessed it; she actually saw the angels come down in Sodom. But she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. So we have these characters scattered throughout Scripture: Lot’s wife, Gehazi, Ahithophel, Saul, and then you come to the New Testament and you have Demas and Judas Iscariot. What is it? “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Now you find that time of temptation came and the inclination was there already. It is a sad thing when the inclination and the temptation come together. It is even so with God’s dear people. That is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” If your carnal heart is leaning one way and the opportunity and the temptation comes and the two meet, how you need to be held fast and kept then. But with these who just make an outward profession, longing for the world, materialism, a longing for a name, longing for wealth, when the temptation, the opportunity comes, they fall.

First of all, it was covetousness. When you think what had happened, these glorious happenings, the honour and glory of God, and then Gehazi is thinking what money, what wealth he can get for himself. And then one sin always leads to another. Watch that. If you are guilty of something, then you will try to cover it up, and one sin leads to another.

“The way to ruin thus begins,
Down, down like easy stairs.”

So he began to tell lies. This great man Naaman hears it is Gehazi running after his chariot. He stops, he jumps down, he goes to meet him. Is everything well? Gehazi just begins to tell a few lies. “Behold, even now there be come to me [Elisha has said] 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.” He said two poor men have come. Elisha has not anything to give them. He wants you to send something for them. Of course, Naaman in the gratitude and love of his heart gives him double, and this happy young man is thrilled; he is delighted. He has got what he wanted and nobody knows, no soul on earth knows! He takes it along and hides it, conceals it, while Naaman goes on his way.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” It seems Gehazi went brazenly straight away to his master Elisha, and Elisha put that searching question. Elisha knew what was happening. He had the spirit of prophecy. The Lord revealed it to him. “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” He tried to brave it out. He said, “Thy servant went no whither.” O but that word, “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” It is like that word in the Garden of Eden to Adam: “Where art thou?” May it ring in some consciences this morning. Where have you been? What have you been doing? Where have you been coming from? What about that secret deed? What about that thing that no-one knows anything about but the all-seeing eye of God? And He has promised to bring these things to light, and if not now, in the judgment day. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked.” You cannot deceive God. Elisha said to him, “Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?” He had seen it. God had revealed it to him.

“Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments?” Now this is an interesting point. Elisha said, “Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?” Elisha knew, God knew, what was in this man’s heart. He wanted to be a great man. He wanted to be famous. He despised Elisha. He despised Elisha’s religion. He despised Elisha’s God. He wanted to be this great man, this eminent man. He had what he wanted from Naaman, but, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

“The 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.” If we are honest, our immediate thought is that this punishment was severe, very severe. If any of you read the great German writer, Krummacher, he said, Well, I am not willing to go and reason with my God about it. He said, I know my God, that what He does is right. He makes no mistakes. He said, If you want to argue with God about it, you can, but I never will.

But beloved friends, let us be clear: there were very important reasons why this was counted such a great sin and why it was punished so severely. The first thing was this: he compromised Elisha’s integrity. Elisha said, No; in no way can I receive anything from you. And then

Naaman urged him, but still he refused. This was something freely done, freely given, lovingly bestowed, not Elisha's work, but God's work; and in Gehazi going and saying, Now Elisha has changed his mind, there was a compromising of the integrity of the man of God. Beloved friends, be very careful if you ever say anything to dishonour one of God's people or one of God's servants. That is the first reason why his punishment was so severe.

But the second is more important. He compromised the gospel of the grace of God. The great point is that the gospel is free, that salvation is free. Now Naaman had to learn this lesson naturally and spiritually. He came with all his gold and his silver and his raiment and his chariots and his horses and he was willing to pay anything, but he had to learn this lesson: it is "without money and without price," that grace is free, that salvation is free. Really much of the New Testament is a commentary on this vital point in 2 Kings chapter 5. Really the whole of the Epistle to the Galatians deals with this. You cannot add anything to the gospel. Mind you, it will have a gracious effect, a sanctifying effect. But,

"Bring no money, price, or aught,
No good deeds, nor pleasing frames,
Mercy never can be bought;
Grace is free; and all's the Lamb's."

And Gehazi awfully compromised the glorious truth of the gospel, that grace is free, that salvation is free. That is the reason why he was this standing witness, a living witness, a dying witness. How solemn it is ever to compromise the gospel! O but that truth must stand to the end of time, that glorious truth that God Himself has safeguarded in so many ways, that "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

"But Gehazi."

* * *

The gospel brings tidings to each wounded soul,
That Jesus the Saviour can make it quite whole;
And what makes this gospel most precious to me,
It holds forth salvation so perfectly free!

The gospel declares that God, sending His Son
To die for poor sinners, gave all things in one;

This, too, makes the gospel most precious to me;
Because 'tis a gospel as full as 'tis free!

Since Jesus has saved me, and that freely too,
I fain would in all things my gratitude show;
But as to man's merit, 'tis hateful to me!
The gospel – I love it; 'tis perfectly free!