

Lecture V

"Naaman's Conversion, Gehazi's Greed"

by
Henry Blunt

"Then he said to him, 'Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you?' (2 Kings 5:26)

At the commencement of the present lecture, we find Naaman, the Syrian, once more retracing his steps from the banks of Jordan to the hill of Carmel--no inconsiderable journey--to testify his gratitude to Elisha for the miracle of mercy, which formed the subject of our last discourse. *"To him who has,"* says the word of inspiration, *"shall more be given."* One blessing rightly improved, one mercy thankfully and gratefully acknowledged, often leads the way to far greater and far higher evidences of the loving kindness and compassion of our God.

Of this, Naaman was about to furnish a striking and profitable example. He had come into the land of Israel only to be healed of his leprosy, and God sent him back into Syria healed of his corruptions; cleansed of an evil heart of unbelief, united in an everlasting covenant with the great Jehovah.

Continuing the history before us at the 15th verse, we read: *"And he [Naaman] returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him."* The lesson of humility, therefore (to which we alluded in the last lecture), had now been learned. The great man did not again expect the prophet to come down and stand beside his chariot while he sat to receive his miraculous benediction. He is willing, with the meek and lowly spirit of a little child, to humble himself; and while he acknowledges his temporal mercies, to confess also his spiritual change--his conversion to the God of Israel. *"Indeed, now,"* is the language of the lately idolatrous Syrian, *"I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant."*

But Elisha said, *"'As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.'* And he urged him to take it, but he refused. So Naaman said, *"Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD."* In this we trace probably some remains of his ancient superstition, although there were clearly none of his idolatry, for he distinctly promises to worship no other god but the God of Israel. Probably he thought that as God had commanded that altars should be built of earth, none was so proper for the purpose as that of the Holy Land itself.

However this may be, if it were a superstition it was clearly an innocent one; for the prophet leaves him in the possession of it, unreprieved. And Naaman thus continues: *"'Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon--when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing.'* Then he said to him, *'Go in peace.'* "

There are few points upon which commentators have evidently been more perplexed than in

reconciling this apparent reservation of Naaman in favor of at least a questionable observance--with the silence or permission of Elisha. Some, indeed, have entirely overcome the difficulty by supposing that Naaman is speaking of what is past, and that he asked pardon only for what he had already done and not for what he still intended to do, translating the passage thus: "When my master has gone into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and has leaned on my hand, and I have bowed myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." If the original would bear this construction, there is no doubt nothing could be more satisfactory. But the best Hebrew scholars question this, and all ancient versions and translations oppose it. In the face therefore of such testimony, we cannot adopt it but must consider the sentence as presented to us in our own translation.

If, however, you will only consider how much the new convert had already promised and how little the prophet favored his reservation of what still remained, we hardly think that any very dangerous lesson can be deduced, even from the most literal interpretation of the passage before us. Naaman had distinctly declared that he now acknowledged no other god in all the earth but the God of Israel. He had said more--he had promised that henceforth he would never offer another sacrifice to any but the great Jehovah. The reservation which he makes is simply this: that when the King, his master, takes him into the house of his idol as a matter of state, leaning on his [Naaman's] arm, if he bows himself when his master does so (not in religious worship, for this he absolutely disavows; not in hypocritical dissimulation, for that would be irreconcilable with the character of a man who could thus openly mention it to the prophet; but as a matter of courtesy and state service), he may find pardon from the Lord in this thing, which though not idolatry itself would obviously favor idolatry before others.

And what is the prophet's answer? Does he say it shall be so [pardoned]; or is his reply equivalent to it [saying that it will be pardoned]? We think not. He simply rejoins, "*Go in peace.*" Do not perplex yourself about this inquiry. It is not worth our entering upon at present. I neither approve nor condemn; in the end all will be well. He saw that the new convert was sincere. He saw that the great work, the change of heart, had been effected by the Spirit of God. And he knew, as his Divine Master in after ages so wisely and mercifully taught, that it was not good to "put old wine into new bottles," and to load the tender feelings of the weak disciple with duties most painful and difficult even to the strongest, or to expose him at once to the most trying of all opposition--the sneers and sarcasms of his companions.

Elisha foresaw that the time would come when Naaman would himself see the impropriety of even the slightest conformity to a guilty and an accursed idolatry; when he would refuse, even for the friendship of his king, to hazard the approval of the King of kings; when the seed so lately sown, and now scarcely in the blade, would become the strong and powerful tree. And he was content to wait for this. He therefore treated the tender plant with gentleness, and neither broke the bruised reed nor quenched the smoking flax.

Is it, brethren, "the day of small things," as the prophet terms it, with any whom I now address? Then may they gather much scriptural encouragement from the narrative before us. They cannot at present receive difficult doctrines or fulfill painful self-denying duties as many of their stronger brethren can. Cases are continually arising as perplexing and as harassing to them as the house of Rimmon was to Naaman. May I partake of such an amusement? May I innocently enter into such society? Will the Lord pardon such and such an act of conformity to the world?

It is impossible to lay down any general rule which shall meet all cases. But of this be assured:

that if you really feel the same anxiety to be guided by the will of God, and the same sincerity as Naaman, you will not long be left in difficulty upon any point of conduct which is material to your happiness, either here or hereafter. Many of these things will at first be doubtful to you, but they will soon be made plain. Resolve only, by God's grace, to act according to your convictions; to advance as they advance; to forsake everything offensive to God so soon as, by prayerful inquiry, you have discovered it to be so. And we venture to say, "Go in peace." You will never be left to perish in unknown or disregarded sin.

Be careful, however, that while you receive this example to your comfort, you do not take it to your injury; [that is,] that you do not allow it to satisfy you if [when you are] in the commission of any known transgression, or in the disregard of any positive commandment, or while lagging tardily and carelessly on the Christian course and ashamed of the Saviour whom you desire to serve. We dare not say to you, "Go in peace," if this be the use you intend to make of the example before us; for "there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." And few would more deserve that name than they who should endeavor to wrest such an example to such a purpose, to "sin that grace may abound."

But it may and ought to encourage you whose feet have but lately been planted on the road that leads to Zion, to walk on cheerfully and happily, not being cast down by little failures; not driven to despair by the slowness of your advances; not rendered wretched because you perceive duties which, with every desire most conscientiously to attend to, you are at present unable to fulfill. Only bear in mind that "the path of the just is," invariably, "as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." Recollect that what might satisfy the prophet in the first few hours of Naaman's conversion would have shocked him after as many years. [Recollect] that your Lord and Saviour, with all the tenderness which he so remarkably evinced during the whole of his earthly sojourn for the young believer, made no exception in their favor when he said, "If *any man* be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and with the holy angels." And, "*whosoever* shall deny me before men, him will I deny before the angels of God."

Naaman having, as we have seen, obtained the prophet's blessing, departed; and no doubt, like the Ethiopian in after ages, "went on his way rejoicing."

But the worst portion of our history yet remains to be told. Gehazi, of whom nothing we have hitherto heard has led us to form any very favorable opinion, appears to have been one among the many instances which mark [indicate], alas! *that proximity to grace differs widely from the possession of it*; that you may be the children of the most pious parents, or the servants of the most holy and religious families, or the constant attendants upon the most scriptural ministry--and yet remain as utterly destitute of all good as the veriest [utmost] outcast before whom the name of God was never named.

The manner in which Gehazi is now introduced acquaints us at once with his intentions and thoughts, for the inspired writer presents him while communing with himself. "*But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, 'Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him.'*"

"As the LORD lives." Yes, how lightly and how easily do the most solemn asseverations [emphatic assertions], the most awful oaths, drop from the lips of reckless, ungodly men. What is the

nature of the deed which Gehazi so unscrupulously calls God to witness? "As the LORD lives," he will follow the Syrian and deceive and rob him. He was shortly to be taught that what he thus said in thoughtlessness should be impressed upon his soul with an emphasis he little dreamed of; that he should soon not only know but feel that "the LORD lives," and should carry the proof of it in his countenance until his dying day. How many a man shall find hereafter that the horrible oath, the thoughtless imprecation, "the swearer's prayer," so continually heard in our streets, has been heard also by the God whom it insults, and "as the LORD lives" it shall have its full accomplishment upon the souls of the speakers.

"So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him." It is pleasing to observe that the humility of Naaman does not exist merely while standing before Elisha. He is as willing to descend from his chariot to greet the prophet's servant as he had once been unwilling to humble himself even in the prophet's own presence. And Naaman said, *"Is all well?"* And Gehazi said, *"All is well,"* and doubtless so he thought. It was well that his master had not seen him leave the tower. It was well that he was received thus courteously, and had so fair a hope that he should cheat this Syrian and grow rich at his expense, and escape detection.

And so the sinner says, "All is well," while hiding his guilty practices from those around him. And so [too] the adulteress in the Proverbs is represented: "she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wickedness'," each thinking that no eye has borne witness to the crime. But could Gehazi have seen the leprosy which even then was hanging over his devoted head, could the hardened sinner view the gulf which even now is yawning at his feet, we doubt if either of them would so readily reply, "All is well." No! All may doubtless be well in the prospect, and often in the committal of sin, but all will not be well when in the day of righteous judgment God shall smite the sinner until he destroy him. "The mill of God grinds late, but grinds to powder."

"My master has sent me," continues the false-hearted Gehazi, *"saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim,'"* inferring therefore that they had arrived quite unexpectedly and since Naaman's departure. *"Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments."* The grateful Syrian, no doubt rejoicing that he could out of his abundance make some little return to the prophet replies, *"'Please, take two talents.' And he urged him,"* even Gehazi having some hesitation, as it appears, to possess himself of so large a sum, *"and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him."*

"When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house." We can well imagine his anxiety while conveying his ill-gotten treasures to a place of safety. How cautiously does he ascertain whether his master had inquired for him during his absence. How carefully does he take them from Naaman's servants and *"let the men go,"* that there might be no witnesses of his guilt. And now "all" certainly "is well," for his project has thoroughly succeeded. So, *"he went in and stood before his master."* What a climax to his duplicity and effrontery! He returned from his robbery and falsehood as if nothing had happened, and *stood before his master.*

My brethren, we have all voluntarily come to God's house today to stand before our Master. Is there no one here present whose conscience, while viewing this point in the narrative we are considering, whispers to him, "Thou art the man!" You have come to stand before God after that act of dishonesty, after those words of falsehood, after those secret but habitual sins of

uncleanness, of uncharitableness, or of lust. How fearful is the guilt to stand before God with a countenance unabashed, but with unforsaken sin within the heart! God is not mocked. The habitual falsifier, the hidden thief, the disguised sensualist, the secret adulterer may all come to God's house of prayer and stand before their master, as Gehazi before Elisha. But that God who sees the heart sees through the flimsy veil of hypocrisy which hangs so loosely over it, and knows the guilt and corruption and deceit which are lurking there; and has himself pronounced, in reference to all such, "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."

Be careful, then, that you come not thus before the presence of a holy and heart-searching God; that you fall not low before his footstool with any unrepented, unforsaken sin. For be ye sure that so long as one sin is cherished and intentionally persevered in, it is deadening your prayers, hardening your heart, ruining your soul; and, after all, is in reality like Gehazi's--deceiving no one but yourself. Attempt not, then, to stand before your Master until you have deeply sorrowed for your transgressions, and earnestly and faithfully sought pardon at the hands of your offended God through the blood of the "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). For if our Lord himself could say, "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift," have not we, the ambassadors of that Saviour, great and urgent cause to say, First be reconciled to your Master, and then come and offer your prayers.

Continuing the history, we read, *"Elisha said to him, 'Where did you go, Gehazi?' And he said, 'Your servant did not go anywhere.' "* Miserable man. He attempts to cover his robbery with a direct and positive falsehood--of all sins at once the most despicable and, we fear we must add, the most common. It was the first sin which entered into the world, and judging by the experience of every succeeding age, will be the last to leave it. Yet if there be a sin which God has marked by the tokens of His Divine displeasure (in the shape of temporal judgments) more strongly than any other, it is this sin of lying.

To urge the people of the world to forsake it is utterly hopeless. It forms the very soul of their intercourse, it gives the last polish to their compliments, the last gilding to their courtesies, the last finish to their politeness. It is the strong chain without which their hollow society, as at present constituted, would fall to pieces. For who could tolerate sincerity where the truth would often be so bitterly distasteful? But, Christian brethren, "What have we to do to judge them that are without?" For "them that are without, God judges" (1 Cor. 5:12).

Let us who make some profession of religion judge ourselves and see that this evil cleave not to us. Let us avoid, carefully and prayerfully, every approach to a sin so utterly subversive of true Christian intercourse and so destructive to our Christian character. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth," is the testimony of the beloved apostle. "Wherefore putting away lying," as St. Paul says, endeavor as far as you are able to avoid every equivocation, every trifling evasion, exaggeration, or deception, and "speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

If Gehazi supposed that he could deceive the Spirit of prophecy and lie successfully unto God the Holy Ghost, a single moment was sufficient to convince him of his folly and to fix upon himself and upon his seed forever the due reward of his sin. Listen only to the withering remonstrance of his justly offended master: *"Then he said to him, 'Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?' "* All of which Gehazi had no doubt intended to purchase with the rich booty that he thought he had secured. *"Therefore the*

leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." How horrible and yet how just! The tormenting and loathsome and incurable malady fell at once upon the unhappy culprit. "And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow."

Brethren, there is not, perhaps, throughout the whole of the eventful history which we are reviewing a more awakening or a more instructive fact than that which led to this detection and punishment of Gehazi. His indignant master's eye had seen, and his heart had accompanied him through all the tortuous road of his dishonesty and falsehood. *"Did not my heart go with you?"* is the language which at once reveals the secret witness of his guilt.

Mark well then the lesson which is so plainly taught us. If the prophet had the power thus to follow his servant into his most secret retirements and to be witness of his most concealed and guilty actions, what must be the power of that Being who could communicate such a supernatural gift to Elisha? And while it magnifies the power, how forcibly does it illustrate the omnipresence of our God. *"If I ascend up into heaven,"* says the Psalmist, *"thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"* (Ps. 139:8-10).

How awakening a reflection. Go whither you will, you cannot go beyond the presence of God. You never withdrew into the most secret chamber and shut the door to meditate upon a scheme of wickedness, or to perpetrate an act of sin, but one person more was present than you bethought yourself; and that person was God. You never entered into scenes of immorality or profligacy, however unsuspected by those whose opinion you valued or whose displeasure you feared, that there was not one heart present upon which you little calculated. *"Did not my heart go with you?"* says the Lord.

But while we would thus suggest this consideration [in order] to awaken and convict the sinner, there is also much, very much, in it which ought powerfully and encouragingly to influence the people of God. Shall it be that the thought of an ever-present God is painfully oppressive to the world, and shall it not be sweetly consolatory to the Christian? Surely, of all God's attributes none can be selected that is calculated to afford those among you, who are desiring to live in all holy obedience to a reconciled Father, such strong and blessed consolation.

Only remember (while you dwell upon this great truth), that God is with you not merely in any *one* of His attributes--as His justice, His eternity, or His power, for this would fearfully distress the heart even of the holiest of his people--but recollect that wherever God is *all* His attributes are gathered together, all His perfections present, as they were in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If therefore you are in difficulties, think of Him as a God present in wisdom, and you shall secure a guide; in weakness, as a God of strength, and you shall not want [lack] a supporter; in sorrow, as a God of consolation, and you shall never need a friend.

Bearing this in mind, let us dwell for a few moments practically upon some of the encouragements of this high doctrine, the omnipresence of our God.

Are you engaged, and I trust that many whom I now address are so employed, in any good and holy work in the service of your heavenly Father? How strengthening and refreshing to your souls to hear, *"Did not my heart go with you,"* in that labor of love; in that work of self-denial; to the house of that poor sufferer where, while bestowing kind and bountiful relief to his temporal

necessities you did not forget to remind him of my blessed promises and soul-savings truths? "*Did not my heart go with you*" when you gave up hours of domestic comfort to assist my ministers, to teach in my schools, to instruct the little ones of my flock? "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."

When you retire (and I speak now to the poorest and lowest of my hearers), when you retire to your humble dwellings and take down the book of God and meditate upon its blessed promises, and pray perhaps in utter solitude over its life-giving doctrines and its holy precepts, and think that no eye can see and no heart can sympathize with you, is it not "a joy with which a stranger intermeddles not" to know, to feel that a Father's heart and a Father's eye are there seeing what the world cannot see and valuing highly, and hereafter rewarding openly, what the world (if it saw) would only despise and condemn? Yes, "*Did not my heart go with you?*" is an inquiry as cheering to you as it is appalling to the sinner.

Again, when the Christian wife or mother watches in faith and patience beside the sickbed of a beloved husband or a dying child, is it nothing to know and to experience that there is always present One who is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities"; who has declared, "In all their affliction I am afflicted"; and who will not and who cannot leave you; who will watch with you through those hours of lonely darkness, and give you strength for the most arduous duties and peace under the most afflictive and trying visitations?

And, at last, when the days of personal trial shall come (as come they must to the youngest, the healthiest, the strongest among us), "or ever the silver cord be loosed or the golden bowl be broken, and the spirit return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:6), who can tell how great and blessed will be the consolation which this high truth and attribute of our God shall bestow? At such an hour, perhaps, the memory of many an infirmity and sin, of which we now enjoy every hope that it is pardoned, will be forced back upon the conscience by the great accuser of the brethren, who is then almost invariably present striving to torment where he cannot destroy. How comforting will the feeling be that He also is with us, who has set his foot as conqueror upon the serpent's head, and who has said, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

You may be (for many are, at such an hour) unable to join together two words of connected prayer, or to give utterance to one holy aspiration. Then, again, how blessed is the fact that He is present, even Jesus the Mediator, "who ever lives to make intercession for you," and will pray for you when you cannot utter one syllable of prayer for yourself. And when all is over, and the fainting heart and the closing eye too plainly tell that the last struggle is ending, [and this is] the last victory to be won, words cannot [describe] (for words have never yet described) the blessedness at such a time of an ever-present Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who has said, My rod and my staff shall comfort you. And when your heart and your flesh fails, I am the strength of your heart, and your portion forever.

Brethren, be assured that the Christian's highest solace here will also be his highest joy throughout the ages of eternity--the abiding presence of his God; for it is this which alone can constitute heaven. "I go to prepare a place for you; that *WHERE I AM*, there ye may be also."

This is Lecture V of *Lectures on the History of Elisha* by Rev. Henry Blunt, A.M. (London: J. Hatchard

& Son, 1840). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided. For the text of 2 Kings, we have also substituted the New King James Version.