

(Gaining God's Approval) 8. the Testing of Elisha and Gehazi

by Zac Poonen

God tests us to see whether we are satisfied with what we have already received or whether we will press on to God's highest, and we must seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first.

Scripture: Genesis 28:19-22, Joshua 5:8-9, Joshua 6:20, 1 Kings 19:19, 2 Kings 2:1-14, 2 Kings 5:27, Proverbs 10:22, Matthew 3:13, 1 Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 10:20

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Covetousness"

Description

Zac Poonen explores the contrasting lives of Elisha and Gehazi, emphasizing Elisha's faithfulness and persistence in seeking God's highest calling, which led to his anointing, while Gehazi's unfaithfulness and greed resulted in his downfall. Elisha's journey through Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and ultimately Jordan symbolizes the stages of spiritual growth and the tests believers face in their faith. Gehazi's failure to resist temptation and his pursuit of material wealth serve as a warning against covetousness and the consequences of prioritizing earthly gain over spiritual integrity. The sermon highlights the importance of recognizing God's tests in our lives and the need to remain steadfast in our commitment to Him. Ultimately, Poonen calls believers to seek God's approval and blessings rather than the fleeting riches of this world.

Transcript

At a critical time in the history of Israel, God raised up the prophet Elijah to be His witness to the nation. Elijah had a servant called Elisha whom God selected as the next prophet to the nation.

Elisha had a servant called Gehazi.

It is an interesting study to see the contrast between Elisha and Gehazi.

Elisha's Faithfulness

God anointed Elisha with a double portion of the anointing that Elijah had. This was God's seal of approval on Elisha's life. But before God anointed him thus, he had been tested.

As in the case of all true servants of God, Elisha too was called to the ministry, while he was faithfully doing his secular duties.

"Elijah found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him."(1 Ki. 19:19).

Thereafter, Elisha spent many years doing menial jobs for the prophet Elijah. He was known as the one "who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah."(2 Ki. 3:11b).

He did not seek great things for himself, but God had great plans for that young man.

Before Elijah went up to heaven, Elisha had to be tested. And so Elijah told Elisha to stay on in Gilgal, while he himself went on to Bethel. Elisha refused to stay back but was determined to go with Elijah. At Bethel, Elijah again tried to shake off Elisha by saying that he had to go to Jericho. But Elisha stuck on like a leech. Finally, at Jericho, Elisha was tested once more in a similar way. Again, Elisha passed the test of persistence and accompanied Elijah to Jordan. It was thus that he got the double portion of the anointing - God's best for his life (2 Ki.2:1-14).

What is the message here for us? There are various stages in our spiritual development at which God tests us to see whether we are satisfied with what we have already received or whether we will press on to God's highest.

Gilgal stands for the place where our sins are forgiven.

"The Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day."(Josh. 5:8,9).

Many Christians get thus far and stop there.

Some press on till Bethel (meaning 'the house of God') - which stands for fellowship with believers in the family of God.

"And Jacob called the name of that place Bethel. Then Jacob said, 'This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house.'" (Gen. 28:19,22).

Some stop here.

But a few go still further to Jericho - which stands for the manifestation of the supernatural power of God.

"The people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat.....and they took the city (of Jericho)."(Josh. 6:20).

This is as far as most Christians ever go.

Very, very few go all the way to Jordan - which stands for identification with Christ in His death, as symbolised in baptism.

"Then Jesus arrived at the Jordan, coming to John, to be baptized by him."(Mt. 3:13).

Very, very few are willing to walk the way of the cross - "the new and living way that Jesus has inaugurated for us through His flesh." (Heb. 10:20).

But it is these few, who are wholehearted enough to press on to total death to Self, who receive the double portion - God's best.

All of us are being tested today, as to what stage we will stop at.

Gehazi's Unfaithfulness

Even as Elisha had succeeded Elijah as the prophet, Gehazi could perhaps have succeeded Elisha as the next prophet, if he had been faithful. But Gehazi had to be tested first.

This testing took place when Naaman, the Syrian general returned to Elisha after being healed of his leprosy. Out of gratitude for his healing, Naaman offered Elisha silver and gold worth nearly a million rupees and ten fancy Syrian suits of clothing. What a temptation for a lesser man than Elisha! But Elisha turned down the offer without a moment's hesitation. Naaman was an unbeliever and a compromiser and Elisha would receive nothing from him.

The fact that Naaman was a compromiser is clearly seen in what he said to Elisha after he had been healed. He said that he was compelled to worship idols, because of his official position. Naaman knew that idolatry was wrong. But he was unwilling to sacrifice his job for the sake of the truth, just like many today.

Naaman told Elisha, "In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter." (See 2 Ki. 5:18).

Elisha would not receive anything from such a man.

The early apostles followed the same pattern. "They went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles." (3 John 7).

Gehazi had observed Elisha's attitude towards Naaman's money. But he felt that Elisha had been foolish to refuse what Naaman had offered so freely. He ran after Naaman therefore (just like many Indians today run after Western Christians), told a few lies and collected forty thousand rupees worth of silver and two of those Syrian suits.

Elisha who could see through a crooked man easily, immediately exposed Gehazi's covetousness. He told Gehazi that since he had grabbed Naaman's money, he would get Naaman's leprosy as well.

He told him, "'Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and to your descendants forever.' So Gehazi went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." (2 Ki. 5:27).

Instead of getting a double portion of Elisha's anointing, Gehazi got leprosy instead.

Little did Gehazi realise that he was being tested by God that day. If only he had known what tremendous issues were at stake, he might have been more careful.

But as we have seen repeatedly, we don't usually realise when God is testing us - particularly in the area of mammon.

There is a word written concerning King Hezekiah that at one time "God left him alone to test him so that he might know what was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31).

This was true of Gehazi too. God allowed him to be in a situation where no-one was watching him. Only thus could he be tested.

The End-Result of Covetousness

It was the same with Achan in Jericho, many years earlier. God allowed Achan to be alone in a house with no-one watching him, in order to test him to see whether he would take what God had forbidden or not. Achan failed.

Achan describes his fall thus: "I saw..... I coveted..... I took..... I hid....." (Josh. 7:21).

The same sequence was repeated in Gehazi's case.

Achan and his family thereby missed their inheritance in Canaan; and Gehazi thereby missed the calling that God had in mind for him.

Both Achan and Gehazi followed in the footsteps of Esau who "sold his own birthright for a single meal." (Heb.12:16).

The contrast between Elisha and Gehazi is striking. While Elisha pursued after Elijah for a double portion of the anointing, Gehazi pursued after Naaman for a little bit of wealth. They are both representative of two types of Christian workers today - and each of us know which category we fall into!!

Gehazi would no doubt have been familiar with the story of Balaam. Yet he never thought that Balaam's end would be his too. Balaam was a prophet on whom the Spirit of God had rested at one time.

We read that at one stage "Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe, and the Spirit of God came upon him." (Num. 24:2).

He went astray, not because he was unrighteous in money matters, but because he loved money. The love of money and the love of honour from an earthly king so blinded Balaam that he could not even see that he was going against the will of God. God tested Balaam to see what was in his heart.

When Balaam sought God's will at first, as to whether he should go with king Balak's messengers to meet the king, God had given him a clear answer : "Do not go with them." (Num. 22:12). The answer could not have been clearer.

But when Balak offered more money and greater honour, Balaam was tempted to ask for permission again. When God saw that Balaam really wanted to go, He told him to go. But Balaam suffered the consequences.

God may at times grant our request, even though it is not His will, just because He sees that we desire that thing so greatly. But the spiritual result will be just as it is written concerning the Israelites in Psalm 106:15 : "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." (KJV)

Little did Balaam realise that he had been tested and that his love for money had led him astray. He continued to prophesy, but he had taken the first step downward on the slippery slope of seeking earthly gain and it was just a matter of time before he reached the bottom. He who had once known such intimate communion with God ended up as a sorcerer and was slain by the Israelites.

The record says, "The sons of Israel killed Balaam the diviner." (Josh. 13:22).

Gehazi failed to take such a warning for himself.

But what shall we say of multitudes of Christians today who have the examples of both Balaam and Gehazi to warn them and who have still gone astray.

The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. God has allowed material things to attract us in order to test our faithfulness and our devotion to Him.

Jesus never intended that any of His disciples should get material things by pursuing after them. We are called to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first. All the material things that we need will then come falling into our lap, as and when we need them.

God never intended that any of His children should accumulate material goods beyond their needs. Neither has He intended that any of us should chase after wealth. If we trust God He will give us what He sees is best for us - and then we won't be ruined by money.

When the Lord blesses us, all that we need will be provided, and there won't be any sorrow that comes along with it.

"It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it." (Prov. 10:22).

"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19).

However, the wealth that we acquire by chasing after it will come to us along with many sorrows as well.

Paul warns Timothy about this danger saying, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. Some by longing for money have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows" (1 Tim.6:10).

We cannot serve both God and Mammon (material things). We have "to love one and hate the other and hold on to one and despise the other" (Lk.16:13).

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

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