

Be Greedy for God

¹⁴ So he (Naaman) went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.”

¹⁶ The prophet answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

¹⁷ “If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.”

¹⁹ “Go in peace,” Elisha said.

After Naaman had traveled some distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, “My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”

²¹ So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

²² “Everything is all right,” Gehazi answered. “My master sent me to say, ‘Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.’”

²³ “By all means, take two talents,” said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴ When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left. ²⁵ Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha.

“Where have you been, Gehazi?” Elisha asked.

“Your servant didn’t go anywhere,” Gehazi answered.

²⁶ But Elisha said to him, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? ²⁷ Naaman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha’s presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.

One of the complaints made by unchurched folks on why they don’t come to church is, “All the church ever talks about it money!” Well, today, we are going to talk about money, and material possessions and wealth, because Scripture talks about wealth. Did you know that out of the 38 parables told by Jesus, 16 had to do with money and possessions? 1 out of 10 verses in the Gospels deals directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers about 500 verses about

prayer, 500 about faith, and 2,000 about money. The Scriptures address the topic of wealth for good reason. Because of our greedy sinful nature, how we obtain wealth, our attitude toward wealth, and how we manage it can ruin our spiritual life, it can destroy our relationship with God, it can take over our souls like a spreading disease, like the leprosy of Gehazi and Naaman from our story this morning in 2Kings 5.

Naaman was the commander of the Aramean army. The country of Aram occupied the territory of what is modern day Damascus. 2Kings 5 tells us that Naaman **was a great man, highly regarded by the king of Aram, and a valiant soldier... but he had leprosy.** Leprosy was a highly contagious disease, kind of like the swine flu, but this infection attacked the skin, eating away at the flesh until body parts, such as fingers, toes, noses and ears eventually fell off. You could imagine that contact with his wife, his soldiers, even with his master, the king, would be difficult. In today's story Naaman had led the Aramean army in a raid against a city in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During this border skirmish 2Kings 5 informs us that among the spoils of war a young Jewish girl was taken captive. She eventually served as a slave to Naaman's wife.

One day the young Jewish girl said to her mistress, **"If only my master would see a prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."** Even though she was far away from her family and friends, and served as a slave to a heathen woman, that young girl was very much aware of God's saving presence with his people, and she selflessly shared that knowledge with her mistress.

Naaman in turn told the king, and the king of Aram, not wanting to lose his best commander sent Naaman to Israel to seek out this prophet. You can almost picture the large entourage of chariots and donkeys and servants arriving at Elisha's modest doorstep. But when Naaman knocks on the door, he is greeted by a servant, who tells the great commander, "We've been expecting you. My master says to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times and you will be cleansed. Thanks for stopping by. Have a nice day!" Naaman went away angry! He expected the prophet himself to come out and greet him and perhaps do some magical performance to heal him. He even complained, "Aren't the rivers of my country cleaner?" But the commander's servants urged him to try it. So he washed seven times in the Jordan. And when he walked out of the river the seventh time, he was completely cleansed. The Bible says that his skin was like that of a young boy. His leprosy was completely healed!

Naaman rushed back to Elisha's doorstep with his entourage. "Please accept these gifts!" But Elisha replied, "No." He wanted to separate himself from the false prophets who, as the apostle Paul says, "...peddle the Word of God for profit." Elisha wanted to show Naaman that this was a free gift from the LORD. Elisha wanted to let Naaman know that this healing was not done by his own power, but by the power of the Almighty God.

Now enters into the story a new character; Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. After Naaman and his group began their trip north Gehazi had other thoughts. He says, **"Elisha was too easy on Naaman. As surely as the LORD lives, I will get something from him."** He swears an oath to God Almighty that he will line his own pockets at the expense of this man. Gehazi was willing to use God's grace to make personal material profit.

Secondly, he lies to Naaman, concocting a very believable story about two student prophets that just happened to drop in, and, by the way, it would nice to have something for them. Naaman graciously gives two sets of clothing and two talents of silver, approximately \$18,000 by today's standards. After sneaking around, hiding his loot, Gehazi returns to his master's home. But Elisha confronts his servant, "Where have you been?" Gehazi answers, "I haven't been anywhere." He lies again! Elisha replies, "**Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.**" **Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.** The leprosy that covered Gehazi's body represented the disease that had so thoroughly infected his own heart.

Some theologian somewhere listed greed among the seven deadly sins, probably because greed is one of those nasty sins that so quickly triggers other sins, as we saw with Gehazi, lying and needlessly swearing. So also, lying to parents, or concocting a cover up story to the boss starts with greed. Ignoring family responsibilities for the thrill of career pursuits, or stealing from siblings or aging parents in less-than-honest dealings starts with greed. Cheating on your spouse, clicking on porn, or plagiarizing a class paper starts with greed. Convincing yourself it's okay to disobey God just this once starts with greed.

That's the bottom line... disobedience to God. Greed begins by sliding God and his Word down from first place in your heart to second or third, or maybe not even in the top ten. It begins with a disrespect for God's First Commandment, "**You shall have no other gods.**" Luther explains the heart of this commandment in his Small Catechism, "**We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.**" Greed is an attitude of your heart that says, "I'm not going to trust what God has to say about how I should manage my wealth. He says to give the first and best of my wealth to him. I can't do that. I have to pay bills first. He says to trust him and he will give me all I need. I can't do that. I have to trust in me to get by in this economic climate. He says to honor him with my wealth. I'm going to honor to me with my wealth by getting what I want, when I want it. He says to be generous to him and to others with my wealth. I'm going to be generous to me with my wealth."

This disease of greed begins with disregarding God and his Word. Then it grows and creeps through the heart with little thoughts of discontent, like Gehazi. "We could have gotten these nice gifts from Naaman. Why shouldn't we have those nice things?" You see things your neighbors or friends have in their homes, or items in the store or online, things that you don't have, but you feel that you should have those things. And God says, "Be content with what I have given you. I will give you all you need and then some!" But you allow the disease of your sinful heart to push God's holy will out of the way. Then greed consumes your heart and all you think about it buying this or that and the other thing. And it's no wonder then that we are so maxed out on our credit that all we can do is complain about how tight money is. It's our own fault. And it's no wonder our children are so greedy. They learn from us! But, truth be told, we don't have to teach greed to our children. It's inborn. Walk a child down the toy aisle of a store and just listen and observe... or bring a candy bar home for one child and not the other. The other child will protest, "Why did she get one? Where's my candy? I should have some if she gets some!" The leprosy of sin is already there.

The Bible warns, **“Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors”** (Proverbs 1:19). God is greedy for righteousness, for pure and holy lives, and where he doesn't find it he goes for blood. For life. Find that hard to believe? Go ahead and look in your Bible and you'll find that greed pops up in the company of the vilest sins, **“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral ... nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy ... will inherit the kingdom of God”** (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Greed hurts not just the victim, but the perpetrator. God is the one who makes sure of it. Our unrepentant sinning could cost us the greatest riches; heaven itself.

It makes us shudder and tremble. We are not what God would have us be. What shall we do? There's nothing we can do, but repent! Repent of your greed! Turn away from the greed that has so fouled your heart. Cut out of your heart the leprosy that threatens to destroy your relationship with God! Fall down in sincere sorrow for your sin before your Maker and plead for his mercy! Turn to him who is greedy for your good!

A Christian mother saw her two little boys fighting over a toy. Seizing the moment for a lesson in Christian love she stepped between them and said, “How about if one of you pretends that he's Jesus and lets his brother play with the toy first?” The older, more street-wise of the two immediately turned and said to his brother, “You be Jesus.” The boy's statement reveals twin truths about greed: people are greedy for what is bad. God is greedy for what is good. Thank God that He is greedy for what is good.

God is greedy to satisfy his justice and exact his vengeance on every sin. So God punished your sinful greed in his own Son Jesus Christ. The physical torture of the cross, the suffering of the pains of hell, the anger of his Father burning against him, the anguish of death; all accomplished by Jesus Christ so that you would not be punished for your sins of greed. God allowed his Son's life to be taken away in your place, so that your life would be secure in heaven forever. Through faith in Jesus Christ you have received the benefits of his punishment. Like Naaman who washed in the Jordan River and was cleansed of his disease, so also the leprosy of your sin of greed has been cleansed through the blood of Christ, sprinkled on you in holy Baptism. Baptized into Christ Jesus, God no longer sees you as greedy in his sight, but as a forgiven child of God.

As you can see, God will not sit down and watch you sin uncontrollably. God will not stand by the side and let greed make a mess of your life. He is greedy for your soul, that it not be lost forever. He is greedy for your forgiveness, that you be declared innocent. He is greedy for your love! And he showed his love by punishing his Son as your substitute. In repentance, we turn away from our greed, and turn to the cross, there we lay the guilt of our greed on Jesus, as we sang in the first hymn this morning, “I lay my sins on Jesus...” We then turn away from the cross forgiven, and out of love for Christ, we return to being greedy for our God, instead ourselves.

So greed, if directed properly, can be good. We will be greedy for our friends to know that Jesus is our Savior, even when we're out partying. We will do anything to make Jesus look good in the decisions we make with our wealth. We will be greedy for our children to see caring, uncriticizing love. We'll be greedy for others needs so that we give up our own selfish desires. We will be greedy givers who are poor because our greed is for others to be blessed by our

generosity. We will be greedy disciples of Jesus having nothing because we choose not to accumulate too many toys of this world. Instead we will be greedy for Christian living, which is truly “possessing everything.” (2 Corinthians 6:3-10) Be greedy for good. Be greedy for God. For he is greedy for us through his Son Jesus. Amen.