

We already have the greatest treasure!

Growing up, did you ever have that friend or classmate who had all the nice stuff? He had the newest toys, electronics, games, you name it, he had it. Maybe you went over to his house and it was twice as big as yours and was filled with even more things. Did you ever think, “wow, it would be neat to have all this stuff?” But did you let that go a little too far, and maybe get a little jealous about it? Did you think maybe you deserve some of it, that it wasn’t fair that he had so much more than you? Do you still get that feeling today? Do you see someone who works almost half as much as you and gets paid three times more? Do you get that feeling of jealousy, and think you deserve their possessions?

In the text for our sermon today, we see just where the sin of covetousness leads. Gehazi coveted Naaman’s possessions—and he paid for it. Gehazi ran after earthly things, and it corrupted his mind and in turn—his body. We should be more like Elisha, who had his mind on heavenly things of far greater value. Elisha knew that he didn’t need things of this world to be satisfied. He knew that WE ALREADY HAVE THE GREATEST TREASURE. Don’t run after earthly things. Receive your blessings with gladness.

Part One: Don’t run after earthly things

Now Naaman was a wealthy man and a servant of the King of Aram. The Arameans were seen as hostile towards Israel. They occupied the territory north of Israel, in what is modern day Syria. But one day, Naaman found himself stricken with leprosy. Leprosy was an awful disease in that day. It deteriorated your body from outside-in, and there was no cure, no matter how rich you were. However, one of the servant girls of Naaman’s wife was an Israelite, and said, “If he went to see the Man of God, Elisha, he could be healed!”

So, The King of Aram sent a letter to the King of Israel. The message made its way to Elisha and he told the King of Israel to send Naaman to him. So, Naaman went to Elisha’s house with chariots, horses, servants, and lots of valuables. When he got there, Elisha had one of his messengers tell Naaman to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times.

Naaman is angered by this. He’s expecting some kind of grand spectacle for his healing. “I was expecting him to come and lay his hands on me. Couldn’t he just tell me to bathe in the waters back home?” He goes off enraged, but his servants tell him, “if the prophet says, “wash and be cleansed,” why not wash and be cleansed?” No kind of spectacle or display could match the power of the word of the prophet of the True God.

Naaman does what Elisha told him, and his health and skin are restored. He is overjoyed and returns to Elisha. Naaman declares, “now I know there are no other gods but the God of Israel.”

Naaman offers a gift to Elisha, but he refuses. Elisha points all the attention to the Lord. He tells Naaman, “as surely as the Lord lives, I will take nothing.” Naaman then asks, “at least let me take some ground, so I can build an altar and worship only to the true God from now on.”

But Naaman also has another concern. Naaman asks Elisha, “At least let me be pardoned for my ceremonial duties back home, I do not believe in the idols I will bow to.” Naaman asks that the Lord acknowledges he sees the heathen idols in the temples of his homeland as nothing. Naaman will have to kneel to the idol of Rimmon as part of his duties as the servant of the King of Aram. This puts Naaman in a tough position even though he says that he wants to only worship the true God from now on. Elisha tells Naaman, “go in peace,” and Naaman leaves.

Elisha could have taken something that Naaman offered, but Elisha knew it would be best not to take anything. That way, Naaman could go with his faith fixed on God’s free and gracious gift of healing, instead of Naaman’s own actions. When we do something in service to the Lord, or for anyone, in that matter, it may be very tempting to have a covetous and entitled mindset. It’s not wrong to be paid for your work, but our mindset should be like Elisha. Pointing everything to God. We do our daily work, and we do it the best we can because in doing so we give glory to God. And why wouldn’t we? We love God. He loved us first, after all. He sent his son to be our savior. In praise and thanks, we live to serve him.

It is right that everyone should receive the payment for their labor, but it’s not why we work. We do not work our hardest because it’s going to get us more material possessions. We do it because it’s God’s will. So don’t run after earthly things! Have the right mindset about your labor and your earnings.

What are the ninth and tenth commandments? The Ninth—You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. And the Tenth—You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, workers, animals, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. The whole point of these are that we foster in ourselves a proper attitude about our possessions that the Lord has given us. These commandments tell us to be content with what we have. They tell us to have Holy Desires, and to have an attitude of generosity and gratitude, just like Elisha. He didn’t expect anything for what he did for Naaman, because he knew all was the Lord’s.

So, When the Lord blesses us, we should thank him and praise him. Be like Elisha, who valued God’s word as his treasure and most glorious possession. Elisha knew that this was not

the time to be receiving money, property, or servants. There was nothing any man could give him that is greater than the Word of the Lord. So don't run after earthly things! YOU ALREADY HAVE THE GREATEST POSSESSION OF ALL!

Part Two: God will give us our possessions as he sees fit.

Now Elisha's servant Gehazi saw all that happened with Elisha refusing Naaman's generous gifts. "My master must be mad. This foreigner from our enemies, just comes in and asks to be healed, and Elisha don't even take money from him? Not on my watch. I'm going to make sure justice is done. This is an opportunity to gain so much, and as the Lord lives, I'm not wasting it!" Gehazi runs after Naaman, and his possessions. Naaman's entourage likely was travelling around 3 or 4 miles per hour, so one man could have caught up—the text literally says that he ran.

Gehazi makes up this believable story, "oh, some men came, and my master needs supplies for them." Naaman thinks, "well that's entirely understandable. Here, take more than what you need, I cannot give enough to express my gratitude and thanks for what the Man of God has done for me."

So Gehazi takes Naaman's possessions. He makes sure to stop Naaman's servants outside the city so that they aren't seen, so no one suspects Gehazi of anything.

Gehazi returns to Elisha, and Elisha asks Gehazi where he went. You can almost hear the fact that Elisha knows when you read the text. "Where have you been, Gehazi?"

Gehazi continues his lie. He tells Elisha, "Your servant went nowhere."

You can almost hear Elisha's sigh of disappointment. Elisha chastises Gehazi for his greed. "Is this the right time to be taking money and clothes and material things? From a man young in his faith? Your let your avarice cause you to steal what Naaman had—so now you'll have his leprosy too."

Gehazi knew what he was doing was wrong. He had to hide his sin, and it only led to more and more deceit. Even when Elisha confronts him and it seems clear that Elisha knows his sin, he still continues his lie.

God gave Gehazi a lesson with his punishment. A constant reminder of his greed. Every time now that Gehazi looked at his skin, he would remember what his greed and covetousness had done to him.

Do we often tell lies like Gehazi? A lie just up to the limit of detection? In social life, in the commercial world, do we often tell lies that we think are just truthful enough to avoid detection, so we can gain something—be it status, wealth, or other things? It's a lie subtle enough to seem true so we can get what we want.

Maybe you could make all your bill payments this month if you just work an extra day—but you could ask your generous friend for some money, so you can have that day off to yourself. Maybe you broke your favorite toy, but you tell your friend someone stole it, so you can get his clingy hands to lend you his. After all, I'm just getting them to be generous and redistribute their things to people less fortunate—and by people less fortunate, I mean me, of course.

And then, when our lies pile up, and we have to keep lying, we try to hide it and even when confronted, you keep lying. You come home late and your parents ask, "where were you?" You know they wouldn't like what you were doing, so you just say, "Oh, nowhere."

People act like God's eye is not on them all the time. They act like God doesn't know what's in our hearts. He knows when we're running for possessions out of greed, and when we are working hard out of thanks for him. When we have greed in our hearts which leads us to lie and deceive, often times, we'll end up with a punishment like Gehazi's that makes all our scheming for nothing. All we can do then is look to God for repentance, and seek to cease our sins of greed, be content with what you have, and receive your blessings with gladness.

Gehazi saw the opportunity to gain wealth dishonestly and justified it in his mind. He even said, "As the Lord lives, I will run after [Naaman] and take something from him." He thought it would be God-pleasing to do what he did.

Do we try to justify our sins? Do we try to convince ourselves that we deserve something? Do we convince ourselves that we should have what someone else has? "They have so much more! Surely I can take something from them, they'll make it back." Is that any attitude a Christian should have? Is that an attitude that will help grow the community of faith?

Think of what Gehazi did. He was so full of avarice that he put a stumbling block in the way of a man whose faith was young. Elisha refused the gift from Naaman so that Naaman's attention would be entirely on God's free grace, so that Naaman would know that God is not a God who can or even wants to be bought. But rather, with his refusal to take a gift, Elisha made Naaman all the more focused on God's loving and caring nature. Naaman's faith was no doubt strengthened by Elisha's attitude.

But Gehazi risks undoing all the good Elisha did to Naaman's nascent faith. He could have caused Naaman to slip back into the mindset of those around him, thinking that gods need to be appeased with gifts, rather than the nature of the true God, who is a generous and loving God. An all-loving, all-knowing God who will give us our possessions the as he sees fit. So receive your blessings with gladness in your heart.

After all, God already gave us our greatest treasure. He worked through the Means of Grace. When we heard the Word, when we partook in the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts. He brought us to believe in the promised Savior, Jesus Christ, who redeemed us from all of our sin by his perfect life and perfect death, done in perfect love, all without looking to gain anything for himself, but to gain everything for us. Though we often let covetous thoughts into our head, we can be assured that our sins are forgiven indeed—because Jesus rose from the dead. Now we seek to live our lives emulating the generosity of Christ and his servants, like Elisha.

Don't be like Gehazi, who let's his greed and lust for possessions guide his actions. Be like Elisha, who had God and his people in mind. Elisha let God's word and God's love motivate him. Elisha's faith in the Lord guided his work. He knew it was not the right time to be receiving money and gifts. He knew it was the time to help a new believer grow and be nurtured in the faith. So don't worry about your possessions. Don't be worried about receiving wealth and property. Work and go about your labor like Elisha did—motivated by the grace of God. Don't run after earthly things. Instead, receive your blessings with gladness. Because WE ALREADY HAVE THE GREATEST TREASURE.