

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 19, Part 2

2 Kings 5-6, Part 2

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Now, we turn to the next segment of this story. And I'm combining it, the story of Gehazi's sin, with the floating ax head. Now in the Bible, in our English Bibles, there's a chapter break between these two.

The ax head is in the first several verses of chapter six. But in Hebrew, the grammar carries straight on from chapter five into chapter six with no break. And I think that's significant.

And we'll talk about that as we go there. Again, I've said this so often, you're bored with it. But the narrator here is so in, just in a minimum of words, picturing the situation.

So Gehazi, Elisha's servant, says, wow, wow, half a ton of gold, 200 pounds of silver. And we didn't take a dime. This is crazy.

Maybe my master is dumb enough not to do this. But I'm not so dumb. My master has spared this Naaman, the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he has brought.

Now look here, look here. What did Elisha say? By God, I'm not taking a dime from you. What does Gehazi say? By God, I'm going to run after him and get something from him.

Oh, my. Oh, my. Gehazi has brought down the fire of God upon himself.

So, he followed Naaman. And again, look at the change in Naaman. When he saw someone running after him, he got down from his chariot to meet him and said, is everything all right? When you have experienced the grace of God, the unmerited grace of God, it puts you in your proper perspective.

It's not about you. It's about him. And that means you don't have to.

You don't have to parade around. You don't have to pretend to be somebody. You are somebody in the grace of God.

Now, again, Gehazi is really bright. If he had said, I want something, Naaman would have wondered about that. If he had said Elisha wants something, I think he would have wondered about that oath.

By God, I'm not taking a dime. But Gehazi says, oh, these two fellas have shown up, and my master wants to give him something. How slick we can be in the wisdom of the world, how we can play the game, how we can make ourselves look good.

You don't have to. You don't have to. You can live with the expensive perfume of truth.

So here, take it. He asked for one talent, 75 pounds of silver, and Naaman said, take two, take two. You got two guys; take two.

So very carefully, he laid them upon two of his servants. They carried them before Gehazi. When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house and sent them away and they departed.

There are five verbs there. Gehazi had been very, very careful. And Elisha said to him, where have you been, Gehazi? So mild.

It reminds me of Yahweh's words to Cain. Cain, sin is crouching at your door, but you must be its master. See, you don't yell at a person who's standing on the brink of a cliff.

Gehazi, where have you been? I've been nowhere. I've been right around the house. Liar.

Did my heart not go with you when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Now, this version that I've got here, which happens to be the revised standard, says, I went with you in my spirit. But that's not what the Hebrew says. The spirit says I went with you.

My heart was with you. Heart in the Old Testament is the core of the personality, where you think, where you feel, where you decide. I was vitally there.

You were blind. You couldn't see me. I was here, but I could see you there because I was there.

Oh, my poor blind Gehazi could not see. And again, the humor is so interesting. How long has Gehazi been running around with Elisha? And he thinks he can get away with this sort of stuff? He's thinking, Elisha can't see this? Oh, my.

I've said it before. I'll say it again. Sin makes you dumb.

It blinds us to the truth because we're not aware of the truth. We are blinded to the truth. Is this a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards, vineyards, sheep and oxen, men's servants, and maidservants? He's in Gehazi's head.

Gehazi's thinking, what am I going to do with 175 pounds or so of silver? Wow, I'm going to do, I'm going to do, I'm going to do, I'm going to do. Is this time? Elisha is right inside his head. Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman will cling to you and your descendants forever.

Again, the power of the narrative. He went out from his presence a leper as white as snow. Where Naaman began with his pride and his arrogance, Gehazi ended with his uncleanness and his loss.

I said a moment ago, truth is expensive. Oh, oh, but how precious, how precious. God wants to provide our needs and he will.

I love the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want.

How do you determine what want is? Let me tell you, without God, I don't care how much money you have, you'll be wanting, wanting more. It is said of J.C. Penney, it's quoted of him. When I got a million, I thought, well, when I get 5 million, that'll be enough.

When I got 5 million, I thought, well, when I get 10 million, that'll be enough. When I got 10 million and it wasn't enough, I thought, maybe I'm looking for something else. Oh yes, oh yes.

We in America, in all of our wealth, incredible wealth as compared to the rest of the world, are in want. Gehazi was in want, and this 150, 200 pounds of silver would not have been enough. But if we have found, as Naaman found, the God of the universe, who is our supplier, then bread and water will be enough.

You say, come on, Oswald. I mean it. I mean it.

We think we can define what enough is. No, we can't. He defines it.

And you can see the stories multiplied across the centuries of people overflowing with joy who have next to nothing, but they've got God and they can live in the truth, the blessed, clean truth. Now, how does that connect with the floating ax head? I think it connects again with this picture of God as the supplier. First of all, notice the different attitudes.

The sons of the prophet said to Elisha, see, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, and each of us get a log and let us make a place for us to dwell there. And he answered, go.

He's talking directly to them, isn't he? He's not using a servant. He's not using Gehazi. He went through the servant to talk to Naaman in his chariot.

He went through the servant to talk to the wealthy woman of Shunem. But here, it's face-to-face. These people are not living in their pride.

They're not living in their position. They're not living in their power. I think it's that way with God.

I'm so fascinated by the fact that it is not until Isaiah's lips are scorched with fire that he can hear God speaking. Pride is the barrier. I'm all right.

I don't need anything. And we cannot hear the life-giving voice of God. So here, Elisha speaks directly to these people, and they say, come and go with us.

And he said, I'll go. There's just a different flavor in these few words: fellowship, no barriers.

There he is. Now, here's the Jordan again. Notice the water; the water that can cleanse at the command of the prophet is the water that can swallow up and can give back at the word of the prophet.

Now, I don't want to push this too far, but I do believe that there is a sense in which we're talking about the world in which we live. It's a beautiful world. It's a wonderful world.

It's a world that gives life. But it's also a world that is death dealing. It's a world that can swallow you up where you lose everything, most especially yourself.

And so, the point is that to experience the blessing of the world, you need the hand of God. Again, it's Isaiah who says the whole earth is full of his glory, not mine, not yours, his. So, they go down to the Jordan.

Again, the details are so fascinating. By this time, we're about 200 years into the Iron Age. But 200 years in terms of the ages of humanity is not very long.

Iron is still very, very precious. Ironworking is still a very, very specialized skill. So one of these guys has borrowed an axe.

We don't know what those axes looked like exactly, but they were probably much like ours: a wooden handle onto which an iron axe head had been slid. Interesting, the Bible just calls it an iron. Growing up on a farm in Ohio, I remember when iron instruments were often called iron.

As we refer to that thing that you use to flatten cloth, we call it an iron because it used to be a chunk of iron. So here the guy says the iron flew off. Well, it was borrowed.

Alas, my master, it was borrowed. Now, presumably this prophet doesn't have a lot of cash money. He is in a bad situation.

What's Elisha going to say? Is he going to say, what's that got to do with me? Look, I'm the master. You're the slave. You deal with it.

No. Where did it fall? When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick and threw it in there. Now, again, we've seen all the way through these stories how Elijah, especially, but also Elisha, are mimicking the work of Moses.

As the nation began, so can it be renewed. Remember, the water was bitter, and the Lord showed Moses a tree, and he threw the tree in, and the water was clean. Again, the commentators bend themselves all out of shape trying to figure out what's the significance of this.

That's not the point. The point is the prophet, under the leadership of God, knows what to do. And the piece of wood makes it possible to find what is lost.

You know what I'm thinking, don't you? What's lost in your life? What's lost that doesn't belong to you? There's a stick that'll make it right. There's a piece of wood that'll make it right. It's called the cross.

Now, you say, do you think that's the real intent here? I don't know. But I do know that the Bible is a single story, and I don't think things are here by accident. I think it was a piece of wood that made the water clean.

A piece of wood makes what was lost found again. I don't know whether that's what this story is intended to convey or not, but I know that it's true. I know that there is a piece of wood on Calvary.

And because the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, hung there in death, what is unclean becomes clean. What is bitter becomes sweet. What is lost is found.

And he made the iron float. Again, there are commentators who say, well, what he did was he took a stick and stirred it around and moved the axe head close enough for the guy to pick it out of the water. Well, that's not what the text says.

The text says the iron floated. The impossible is possible with our God. What is lost in your life can be found again.

And he said, take it up. There's a theme there that's interesting. How often does Elisha, in particular, in response to a miracle, then give the person something to do?

Get it. Here's your son. Take him. So it goes.