

JUNE 23

2 Kings 4:18-5:27

2 Kings 4:18-44

Vs. 18-37 There are lots of good things to observe in this story, but the one thing I'm impressed with every year is the faith and determination of the woman. She knew that the power and presence of God was with Elisha. She wouldn't trust anyone else. He was the prophet. Even after Elisha sent Gehazi, she said in v. 30 that she would not leave Elisha. She recognized his authority and God's presence with him. She wouldn't leave or give up until Elisha had come. I read this morning about the Greek woman with the possessed daughter. Jesus tested her faith; but she never gave up, and finally Jesus said to her (I think with a smile), "Oh woman, great is your faith."

Vs. 38-41 This is where we get the saying, *Death in the Pot*. I wish doing this could improve my cooking. Again, you know what God was communicating by all of these small wonders, right?

Vs. 42-44 Where have you seen this before? Did you know this was here? It's interesting that when Jesus fed the 5000 men, he did it with barley loaves too, but he had five of them. Jesus also fed about 15,000 people, not 100 men. Still, this should have been a story all the kids knew.

You can see that these stories don't fit together, except to say that God was powerfully moving and people could have come to Him through Elisha at any time. And too, the 7000 were probably being encouraged in their faith.

2 Kings 5

This is a great event and full of stuff to observe. I just have a few things.

V. 1 Notice who it was that had made Naaman a success. Observe who the real heroes of the story are. The Spirit was moving things for this guy to be healed in spite of himself. God was sovereign in putting people in places where they could help. He had given Naaman victory, and He had allowed Naaman to capture this young girl.

V. 7 Talk about being spiritually blind. Note that the king could have called Elisha and sought his help. It shows that there wasn't real interest in God or respect for what God had done through Elisha and Elijah.

Vs. 10-12 Notice the test here. Elisha himself didn't even come to speak to Naaman.

V. 11 Naaman was expecting a healing service, not something that would really test and show his faith. Even Naaman's reaction to this seems to be designed by God for His glory.

V. 13 This reminds me of Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5, *Encourage him as you would a father*.

Vs. 17-19 Notice Naaman's confession of faith and his request. God approved it. Naaman, though extending a service to his king, would never again worship anyone other than Yahweh. He now knew there was no other God. Obviously Naaman didn't need the dirt, but he was a very new believer and thought that he would worship better if he built an altar on that dirt. God didn't mind.

It is very ironic, and God is presenting it as ironic, that the only leper ever to be cleansed in Israel was a Gentile from an enemy nation; and on seeing one miracle, he understood there was only one God. Israel by now had seen and heard of dozens of miracles, but didn't turn from idolatry.

In light of the dangerous, serious situation of Israel, hanging on the brink of exile, and because Elisha personally hadn't done anything for Naaman, he refused to take anything from Naaman.

Vs. 19-27 Notice the words to Gehazi in v. 26. This wasn't the time for such things. The dishonesty and greed were a product of living with an understanding of life and events driven by the flesh, not the Spirit. A spiritual view of life given by the Spirit would also keep us from many things that are OK, because this just isn't the time for them. For a disciple, we are following Christ in the harvest and there is an urgency. It is a time for disciples to choose to hunger now and weep now. Our reward is in heaven when the harvest is over.

What seems missing from this account about Gehazi is him pleading to the Lord for mercy. You can't blame Elisha for Gehazi's failure anymore than you can blame Jesus for Judas' betrayal. As makers of disciples, our job is to be with people, helping and encouraging them to be in the Word and following Christ in the harvest. There will be people who will fall away and those who still have to learn the hard way.

Acts 15:1-35

This is a very important portion of Scripture. It is the first church council.

Vs. 1-6 Notice that this was a huge deal. Here, the party of the circumcision is called the party of the Pharisees. They were converted Pharisees. Verse 6 shows that this was not an easy issue for them to see through.

Note that this clarification, council and the resultant blessing came as the result of a conflict generated from some rogue disciples who were creating dissent. Notice too that as Paul and Barnabas made their way to Jerusalem, they were spreading joy among the brethren. That is an interesting contrast between the real disciples and the fake disciples.

Vs. 7-11 God saved the day by the experiences He had given Peter. The special, visual way the Holy Spirit had come and the gift of tongues were the signs to the Jews that eventually broke down the walls that would have excluded the Gentiles. Peter came through here, but this really needs to be seen as something God did, anticipating this reaction from the Jewish believers who didn't believe the Gentiles could be saved without obeying the law.

Peter doesn't seem like the big imposing disciple from the Gospels, but in v. 10 he seems to have put the rogue disciples in their place.

V. 12 The *signs and wonders* were evidence of God's presence and working. The result was the salvation of the Gentiles. God gave these particular signs for the Jews (Jewish Christians), not for the Gentiles. And the salvation of the Gentiles was solely on the basis of faith, not works.

Vs. 13-21 This is James, the brother of Jesus. Notice that he mentioned that God had made the first move toward the Gentiles through Peter. Back in chapter 11 they had a mini-crisis conference over that event too.

Rebuilding *the tent of David* was the raising up of the king from David's lineage, Jesus, who would reign forever. The promise of the Messiah was the same as the promise of the salvation of all mankind. (Amos 9:11-12)

V. 20 Abstinence from raw blood. This was something God had said to Noah before the giving of the law and so was seen to be binding on all of mankind. I think the prohibition from eating what was strangled was the same as the raw blood. I don't believe this is saying that raw meat is forbidden, but this is talking about animals that have not been prepared and had the blood drained. An animal that has been killed and drained has been killed with a knife, not through strangulation. I think the issue here is ingesting raw blood by the cup or in freshly cut, unprepared meat.

Vs. 22-29 Notice that in this letter, the apostles wrote *Barnabas and Paul*, but outside the letter, Luke reversed their names.

V. 24 It was nice that they mentioned that the troublemakers were not sent out by them.

Vs. 30-35 The result was rejoicing in Antioch.

This council and conflict freed up the church to reach the Gentiles and it made the gospel simple. Still, the underlying conflict wasn't over. In Galatians, Paul tells of a run-in he had with Peter, possibly after this council as Peter was enjoying a pork chop. Also, when Paul came to Jerusalem for his last time, James gave Paul some advice to try to appease these very conservative, pharisaical believers. Now, however, the focus of Acts will be completely beyond Jerusalem, and this will be the last time in Acts that we hear from Peter.

Finally, just to make the point again: This issue wasn't resolved because they were super spiritual men with good people skills. It was resolved because God saw it coming and prepared for this conflict beginning at the day of Pentecost with the gift of tongues and the visual coming of the Spirit. These things all had a purpose that was very specific for Acts and the beginning of the church.

Psalm 141

What is interesting for me is that David didn't want to become like his enemies, running his mouth in an ungodly way.

Vs. 1-2 express the intensity of his need and his desire to have God help him.

Vs. 3-4 Apparently David understood the temptation to become like those who were cursing him. Hate and stress can do that to us. David was also leading men who wanted to kill Saul because of all the hardship they had to go through.

V. 5 David would have gladly endured physical discipline and verbal correction rather than become like his enemies.

Vs. 6-7 These verses are hard to understand in the Hebrew. It seems that David was saying that even when these men were judged and God vindicated him, David would only speak gently of them and not curse them. You can see how David did this when he learned that King Saul had been killed.

Vs. 8-10 David concentrated on God, not his enemies. David knew that God would protect him, but punish his enemies with their own punishment. David focused on the Word, the character and the love of God.

It's interesting that the Lord caught me on something like this while talking to my neighbor. Complaint and criticism is a common language, and there is no easier way to strike up a conversation than to find something or someone you and your neighbor can mutually trash. But our mouths are not supposed to be like theirs, because our Spirit is different and our Lord loves all men. Disciples in the harvest have to see a different world and have a different heart. We are to be recreated in our Lord.

Proverbs 17:23

This couldn't happen in the church, could it?