

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved, recipients of God's undepletable charity,

This is a helpful text as we consider our theme this Sunday of Christian charity.

It's helpful because it has 3 illustrative examples for us to consider many facets of this topic.

We have Elisha, the prophet of God, Gehazi, the prophet's servant,  
and Naaman, the new convert to OT Christianity.

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

---

And [Naaman] said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But [Elisha] said, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ... Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him." So Gehazi followed Naaman.... And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, 'There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'" And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." ... <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

---

We heard the first half of this story last week,

how Naaman, the successful, though leprous, Syrian general came to Elisha for healing  
based on the recommendation of his wife's Israelite slave girl.

He went to Elisha, who told him to wash in the Jordan 7 times.

After some encouragement from his servants, he went, was washed, and returned healed.

Naaman was the exuberant recipient of God's charity,

which is where we always need to begin any conversation on Christian charity.

Christian charity always starts with God's charity to the Christian.

There was nothing that Naaman had done to deserve such a healing.

In fact, you could say that Naaman deserved the leprosy... and much more.

As a successful general in the Syrian army, which at that time was making raids on Israel,

it seems very probable that he had obtained his believing, Israelite slave girl on such a raid.

If this is the case, then you could certainly have counted him among the enemies of God's people.

And more, his initial disbelief of God's prophet also showed his pride and hardness of heart.

That he was actually healed showed a great patience and desire on God's part to bestow His mercy.

Upon the healing, Naaman gave all credit to God and recognized Him as the only true God.

He could have left for Syria immediately, without returning to Elisha... but he couldn't.

He had to return and respond to the charity that he had so freely received.

His response was to offer a substantial gift to Elisha from his caravan of wealth.

This desire was good, right, and salutary on Naaman's account.

He desired to give thanks to God and wished to express that thanks with a gift to His prophet.

This is the same pattern of receiving God's mercy and our returning thanks through our offerings,  
our service to the Lord's house, and other such gifts and services.

It is not a due that you owe or pay, but a gift of thanks and support for future work.

And on other occasions, Elisha had accepted such offerings of thanks, but not this time.

It was “**not the time for attaining wealth.**”

Not from Naaman, the new convert from Syria. His situation was different.

Elisha wanted Naaman to return to Syria recognizing the free-ness of this gift.

That it wasn't a *quid pro quo* arrangement in any way, shape, or form, but a gift from God.

No doubt, this would have made a great impression on Naaman

who, according to their practices, had fully expected to pay a handsome price for such a miracle.

... So in Elisha, we have an illustrative example of God's mercy, His charity, upon us.

It is freely given. Not because we earn or deserve it, but because He desires to give it.

In Gehazi, however, we see a different side of charity, namely, the uncharitable side.

And as an OT Christian who served the Lord's prophet,

he serves us now as a reminder of the sin that still corrupts the hearts of God's children in this life.

We hear the thoughts of his heart, “**See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian.**”

Having seen the great treasure that Naaman had brought, his heart grew greedy and... uncharitable.

“How could charity be shown to a man of such wealth?

How could grace be given to a Syrian general of such wealth,

who had attained that wealth, no doubt, in part from the bloody raids against Israel?

No! He must not be spared!”

So with greed in his heart, he devised to deceive the unsuspecting Naaman, even using Elisha's name.

Cleverly he did not say that Elisha desired the gift, but it was for 2 sons of the prophets (pastors).

He didn't ask for the moon, but his request undermined the free-ness of the Lord's mercy,

and so undermined the lesson Elisha desired to leave Naaman with.

But behind this greed we see something even more sinister, a lack of love for his neighbor,

and now, even a lovelessness for one he could have called a brother in the faith.

He desired to use this fellow Christian, to take advantage of him, for his own enrichment.

He wasn't concerned about Naaman's faith, so new and delicate as it was.

Instead he cared about his own pocket-book and, as Elisha implied, his greed to attain wealth.

And so we can see temptations by which even Christians can be overcome.

That our hearts might be shut up toward the needs of our neighbors.

That we neglect to view each person as a blood-bought soul, needing God's free mercy and grace.

That we neglect to consider that we are all beggars, unworthy of any of God's goodness.

We think and act as if we have not first received mercy or charity from the Lord.

As if we have earned and deserved all that we currently call our own.

But this is to forget what we so often confess *that we are by nature sinful and unclean...*

*and deserve nothing... BUT HIS WRATH AND PUNISHMENT.*

And instead of considering how we might charitably administer God's goods to others,

we consider how we might profit or amass wealth for ourselves, thinking first and foremost

not only of our needs, but even prioritizing our wants and extravagant luxuries,

while neglecting to nurture a heart of love and charity for our fellow man.

And so, not only do we selfishly keep for ourselves what God would share,

but we also withhold/begrudge God's generosity, just as the priest and the Levite in today's Gospel neglected to provide aid for the man left for dead.

But just as Gehazi found when he returned to Elisha, these sins do not go unnoticed. They are all known by the Lord who gives to each of us our very lives & daily bread and desires that with a portion of them we provide for the work of the Gospel, with a portion of them we provide for the needs of our family, and with a portion of them we provide for the needs of others... what we often call charity.

That this is a warning for even mature Christians is also seen, not only in Gehazi's case, but also in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chap<sup>[4-5]</sup> of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, where Jesus warns the Church in Ephesus: **"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first."**

Your heart is known to God, even if others can't see it.

And to not seek forgiveness for a heart that has begrudged charity to fellow beggars, is to invite judgment upon oneself and to leave God's presence white, not in holiness, but with the leprosy of sin and the prospect of a long death.

And so, we must return to where we properly start every conversation about Christian charity. You must return to the Lord's lavish charity upon you as He displayed with Naaman through Elisha. --That you may know that there is a merciful God, He has sent His prophets (we call them pastors), to speak the Lord's powerful Words of healing upon you. Through that Word, He sends you to the waters of Holy Baptism where He washed your greedy and uncharitable heart in Christ's blood, and has given you His patient and generous heart of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. When your heart condemns you, the Lord sees this too and offers you, not crumbs, but a feast, the very body and blood of our crucified and risen God to remove your guilt and change your heart to be conformed to His perfect and patient will, a will that desires to share what has been shared with you. And through the absolution the Lord bids you to **"Go in peace."**

...

It was at these words that Naaman departed from Elisha.

He left a new man. Not just cured of leprosy, but alive in Christ and a child of God.

As Gehazi caught up to him, we see that his heart had softened.

No longer desiring simply to use the prophet, now he is concerned for him and asked, **"Is all well?"**

Upon hearing Gehazi's request, he couldn't help but offer more than asked,

not because he thought this was in some small way a repayment,

but because he was now freed from his sin and guilt and knew that what he had was truly God's.

With a merciful God like his, he was free to show mercy,

to reflect the same charity that he had received, for surely God's mercy can never be depleted.

Dearly Beloved, it made no difference to Naaman's act of charity that Gehazi had deceived him.

Naaman had given, not to Gehazi, but to the Lord.

And the Lord had received it from a clean, caring, and joyful heart, a heart finally at peace with God.

The same is true for you: your charity, freely and joyfully given is recognized by the Lord, regardless of its use or abuse by the recipient.

In freedom, then, be wise and discerning, be generous and not begrudging,  
for, as Solomon tells us, **Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord....**<sup>Proverbs19:17</sup>  
And **Go in peace.** Your sins are forgiven you.

**You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of Christ Jesus.**<sup>1Corinthians6:11</sup>

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*