

Undeserved Mercy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

- [0 : 0 0] 2 Kings chapter 5, starting at verse number 24 and down through 27. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and deposited them in the house.
- And he sent the men away, and they departed. But he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, Where have you been, Gehazi? And he said, Your fervent went nowhere. Then he said to him, Did my heart not go with you when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?
- Is it a time to accept money and to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, and male and female slaves? Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.
- So he went out from his presence, afflicted with leprosy as white as snow. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for preserving it for us.
- Thank you for seeing to it that we would have it in our own language, in the English language that we can read. You are so kind and good. We know there are other people groups who do not yet have copies of your word in their language.
- [1 : 0 8] And we pray that you would continue to advance the spread of your word across this world. Thank you for giving us copies of your word, multiple versions.
- Thank you that we can read it and understand it. Holy Spirit, would you come, please, and be with us as we spend this time together in your word. Help us to see those things that you would like for us to see.
- Help us to ignore the things that I say that are unhelpful or distracting, that it would anyway take away from the message that you want us to hear this morning. We want to hear the things that you want to say to us.
- So, Holy Spirit, please do that work in my heart and in the hearts of those who are listening. We ask all of this, giving thanks in the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Amen. I read the book, Les Miserables, when I was in my sophomore year at Moorhead High School.
- [2 : 1 0] And one of the first things that I had to learn about this book was how to pronounce the title. It looks a lot to us like Les Miserables. That is not how you pronounce it.
- It's Les Miserables. But the people in the book are very miserable. And so that does actually work pretty well in our English language as a translation for what's going on.
- Les Miserables, as some people refer to it, is the story of a man named Jean Valjean. And we meet Jean Valjean at first when he is imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread in order to feed his starving family.
- After 19 years, if you can believe it, in a French prison, Valjean is released on parole.
- But for most of the remainder of his life, a man named Javert, an inspector, who for us would be like some kind of a special agent, pursues him, hunts him, tracks him, follows him, makes his life very difficult because he constantly feels as though he is looking over his shoulder.

[3 : 30] Years pass. We don't know exactly how many, but a number of years pass. And there is a point in the story where Javert, this inspector, this special agent, infiltrates the revolutionary army that has gathered at the barricade.

And when Javert's treachery is exposed, and it's revealed that he is the inspector and not at all a part of those who are rebelling against the government, Valjean has an opportunity to execute him.

Javert has hunted Valjean for most of his adult life and has made him miserable. And now he has this opportunity to execute him for what he has done in committing treason against the people.

But instead, this man, Jean Valjean, fires his weapon into the air and lets Javert go free. Javert is guilty of treason.

He's guilty of making Valjean's life more miserable. He's guilty of injustice, imprisoning Valjean for 19 years, for stealing a loaf of bread.

[4 : 54] But Valjean demonstrates mercy. And mercy takes pleasure in pardoning the guilty.

Last week, Ryan served us by preaching about the dangers of loving money. After Naaman had been healed, he comes back to Elisha and offers him a tremendous gift.

But Elisha will have none of it. He is not in any way going to taint this free grace that Naaman has received by taking from Naaman some sort of an offering, some sort of a gift, anything that could be confused as payment for what Naaman has received.

But Elisha's servant Gehazi feels like Naaman should have to pay something for this miraculous cleansing that he has received.

Ryan explained to us how Gehazi is guilty of breaking three of the Ten Commandments. And Ryan started at the end. And so I want to just review those with you.

[6 : 17] He is guilty of coveting. He wanted something that was not rightfully his. He wanted this gift of gold and silver and clothing.

And so he accepts this gift of silver and clothing. He's guilty of coveting. He's guilty of bearing false witness, telling lies. He tells Naaman this wonderful story about people showing up, and we're going to need to take care of these people who have showed up.

And Elisha didn't know they were coming. And now they're here. And we could really use some funds to help care for these people who have showed up. He has borne false witness. He has lied.

Thirdly, he has stolen. He has taken something from Naaman that did not rightfully belong to him. And he got it by ill-gotten means. The way that he got it was inappropriate.

And so therefore it falls under that category, that command of stealing. I think Ryan was kind to Gehazi. Because as I thought about the way that Ryan approached that, I wondered about the remainder of the Ten Commandments.

[7 : 24] And I think Ryan was kind to Gehazi. Here's why. Continuing from the end, number five says, Honor your father and mother.

Certainly Gehazi looked up to Elisha as a fatherly figure in that culture. And he certainly dishonored him by weaving this tale and telling this lie about Elisha's sudden need for help.

He has dishonored Elisha. But he has also profaned the Lord's name. And that's the third commandment. We sometimes say he took God's name in vain.

Remember when Elisha says to Naaman that I am not going to receive this gift. Elisha says, As the Lord lives, he takes a sacred vow before God and says, If the Lord himself were standing here, I would never accept that.

Gehazi uses the same language and says, As the Lord lives, Naaman should have to pay something.

[8 : 36] He has profaned the Lord's name. And I think perhaps worst of all, he has broken the first commandment.

He does have a God other than the Lord his God. And Gehazi's God is money and fancy clothes. Chapter 5, verse number 24.

When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the gifts from them, the gifts that he has received from Naaman, these ill-gotten silver and clothing that he has received, and deposited them in the house.

And then he dismissed the men and they left. Gehazi came and stood by his master. Where did you go, Gehazi? Elisha asked him.

And he replied, Your servant didn't go anywhere. I wonder if Gehazi knew he was in trouble when he came into the room.

[9 : 49] You can't keep secrets from Elisha. I wonder if he knew he was in trouble. Sin leads to hiding.

Do you remember Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? They have broken God's command. They have taken what did not belong to him. They followed, ironically, or perhaps not, this same pattern of behavior that Gehazi has followed.

He sees something that does not belong to him. He covets what is not his, and he takes it. Adam and Eve do the same thing. They see this fruit that has been forbidden rightly by God.

They covet it. They want it. They take it for themselves. But now having taken it, what do they do? They go run and hide. And when God mercifully comes looking for them, do you remember what Adam said?

Do you remember, Evan? Yeah, Eve did it, but that's true. Even before that, God says to Adam, Why are you hiding? And Adam said, I realized I was naked.

[10 : 53] I was thinking about that this week. You know what's so strange about that? Did he think that God didn't know they had been naked all along? God knew that. That was no surprise.

But sin leads to hiding. Gehazi hides. Adam and Eve hides. Sin is irrational.

It makes us act crazy. It reduces us to the level of wild beasts. We go out of our mind when we sin. Sin leads to hiding.

And sin leads to lying. Do you remember when God said to Cain, Where is your brother Abel? Cain's like that meme.

It's one of my favorite memes. I use it all the time at the office. It's the guy with his hands in his pocket. He's got the long trench coat on. He throws up his shoulders, and he's like, I don't know. I don't know where he is.

[11 : 55] What a lie. He lied to God, as though God didn't know where his brother was. And Gehazi does the same thing. Elisha says to him, Gehazi, where have you been all morning?

And pious Gehazi says, Your servant, your servant, your humble servant didn't go anywhere. Sin leads to hiding.

Sin leads to lying. Because sin is irrational. Elisha is not deceived by this. Because by the power of the Holy Spirit, Elisha saw the whole thing.

Elisha saw the whole event with perfect detail. We get that in verse number 26. Elisha says this. It's a little cryptic as the language comes over from Hebrew into our language.

But look at what Elisha says. And my heart didn't go when the man got down from his chariot to meet you. It's as though Elisha is saying, Did you think that I wasn't right there with you?

[12 : 59] That I couldn't see exactly what was happening when the man got down from his chariot? When you caught up to him? When he got down and then you started telling him this wild tale about my need?

Did you think that I wasn't right there with you? And then Elisha talks about, Is it time to accept silver and clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, flocks and herds, and male and female slaves?

What comes to mind, kids, if I were to say to you, cows and fields of corn, what would you think I was talking about? If I said cows and fields of corn, where would you go to find cows and a field of corn?

A farm. I think that's what's happening here. I think Elisha may be exposing Gehazi's intentions for the silver.

Gehazi, is now the time to accept this silver so that you can leave my service and go establish your own farm?

[14 : 13] Is now the time for that? I love this rhetorical question that Elisha asked.

Didn't my heart go with you? Is now the time to accept silver and clothing and orchards and vineyards and all of this is now the time for this? And of course, it's rhetorical because the answer is obviously no.

This is not the time to be accepting those things. This is a time for healing, not stealing.

This is a time for new birth, Gehazi, not new clothes. This is a time to celebrate grace, not to fall into the trap of greed.

Have you served with me for all of these years, Gehazi? And don't you know, we are not in this for the money. Do you somehow still not understand?

[15 : 21] We're not in this for the money. A pagan idolater has come to believe and worship in the one true God.

And you have perverted the freeness of the grace that he has received. Is now the time for this? How did Gehazi feel, I wonder?

Well, how do you feel when your sin is exposed? Do you feel guilty? You feel ashamed? Do you feel speechless?

Because there's really no rebuttal, no defense, no excuses, no rationalization that you can offer? Gehazi has broken more than half of the Ten Commandments, and so we are right to expect that there will be a punishment for his behavior.

The punishment is in verse number 27. Therefore, Elisha is speaking, therefore, Naaman's skin disease will cling to you and your descendants forever.

[16 : 43] So Gehazi went out from his presence diseased, resembling snow.

Gehazi got Naaman's leprosy. This devastating consequence highlights the severity of perverting grace.

It highlights the severity of profaning God's name. It highlights the severity of lying and stealing and dishonoring those in authority over you.

It highlights the severity of betraying. The little slave girl whose pure, selfless love, compassion, faith led to this healing in the first place.

And it stands in such stark contrast to that because Gehazi's behavior is marked by greed and covetousness and self-centeredness.

[17 : 55] But it seems to me that this judgment is also a mercy. Notice at the very end of verse 27, these key words, I think, that Gehazi's leprosy, this skin disease that he now carries, resembled snow.

How is this a mercy? Well, way back in Leviticus chapter 13, when God gives his people the laws concerning skin diseases, God has something very interesting to say in two verses, and we should be careful and notice this.

This is Leviticus chapter 13 and verse number 12. Leviticus 13 and verse 12. But, if the skin disease, if the leprosy breaks out over all his skin so that it covers all the skin of the stricken person from his head to his feet so far as the priest can see, the priest will look, and if the skin disease has covered his entire body, he is to pronounce the stricken person clean.

Since he has turned totally white, he is clean. a person's leprosy could progress to such a point where it was no longer contagious.

You no longer had gross, bleeding, pussy, oozy wounds all over you that would infect other people around you. Your disease could progress to such a point where you were covered head to toe with flaky, white-like snow skin.

[20 : 11] And if you progress to this point where your skin resembled snow, you were now clean. This is why I suspect that there is mercy tucked into the judgment for Gehazi.

Because the writer of 2 Kings takes pains to tell us that his skin disease resembles snow. that's mercy.

He is not banished. He is not set off from the rest of the people because this skin disease that he now acquires has progressed to a point where he is not unclean but now clean.

No longer contagious. There's a second reason why I suspect that this is probably what's happening here. Although I should add this. I don't know this for sure.

I'm saying carefully that I suspect this. Trying to piece some things together. Here's the second piece of evidence that I would offer. In 2 Kings chapter 8 Gehazi is mentioned again.

[21 : 29] It's on the screen. I'm not going to read it. Gehazi is mentioned again as the attendant or the servant of Elisha. Now it is possible that this text in 2 Kings is out of chronological order.

But if it's not then Gehazi is still serving Elisha three chapters after this story. And that would make sense if his leprosy that he had has progressed to a point where he is not unclean and is banished from society.

It would make sense that he would continue to serve Elisha. If we assume that this story is in chronological order and if Gehazi's case of leprosy really was covering him like snow such that he was clean rather than unclean then perhaps Elisha keeps Gehazi on as his servant in which case though he is unnamed Gehazi is also in the second story that I want to share with you and it is in 2 Kings chapter 6 and verse number 8.

2 Kings chapter 6 verse 8 when the king of Aram the same king as before but notice no mention of Naaman the king of Aram was waging war against Israel and he conferred with his servants my camp will be at such and such a place but the man of God Elisha sent word to the king of Israel be careful passing by this place for the Arameans are going down there consequently the king of Israel sent word to the place that the man of God had told him about and the man of God repeatedly warned the king so that the king would be on his guard okay so get what's happening here the king of Aram is consulting with his generals his servants his army and so on and he says this is where we're going to go and we're going to make an attack on Israel here and Elisha tells the king of Israel hey heads up the king of Aram is going to make an attack there and the king of Israel says smart guy that

Elisha sends his army there and repels back the forces of Aram now you would be rightly frustrated if you were the king of Aram thinking you're telling your army where to go and you've got these surprise attacks planned and every time this happens your plans are foiled and you don't know why that would feel very insecure you would begin to think that there's perhaps a traitor in your army and that's exactly what the king of Aram thinks verse 11 the king of Aram was enraged because of this matter and he called his servants demanding of them tell me which of us is for the king of Israel one of his servants this took a lot of courage one of his servants said no one my lord the king Elisha the prophet in Israel tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in your bedroom it's a little weird but I think you get the point right he's saying there is no privacy for you don't you get it

[24 : 57] Elisha knows exactly what's happening he knows what you're saying all the time verse 13 so the king said go and see where he is find Elisha so I can send men to capture him when he was told Elisha is in Dothan he sent horses chariots and a massive army there I love that little detail in the text they went by night and surrounded the city so he finds out where Elisha is the city called Dothan and he sends a massive army at night and they surround the city sneak attack I know he's there and now we've snuck up on him verse 15 when the servant of the man of God got up early and went out he discovered an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city so he asked

Elisha oh my master what are we to do and Elisha said don't be afraid for those who are with us outnumber those who are with them verse 17 then Elisha prayed Lord please open his eyes and let him see so the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha so get this picture the king of Aram has surrounded the city of Dothan at night Elisha's servant gets up in the morning maybe he's going to get fresh water he realizes we have a serious problem there's a massive army out there we are surrounded perhaps he wakes up Elisha to say what are we to do

Elisha reassures him those who are with us are more than those who are with our enemy ask the Lord to open his eyes and when God opens the eyes of his servant he sees what is really taking place that although there is a city and although the city is surrounded by this massive army surrounding the massive army is the army of the Lord do you see it there horses and chariots of fire verse 18 when the Arameans came against him because remember they don't know they are surrounded when the Arameans came against him they attacked the city they're going to take

Elisha captive Elisha prayed to the Lord please strike this nation with blindness so he struck them with blindness according to Elisha's word then Elisha said to them this is not the way and this is not the city this reminds me a little bit of when Elijah Elisha's master is up on the hill with the prophets of Baal and he begins to taunt them that perhaps their rock god is too busy to pay attention to them indisposed he can't come right now he's eating lunch perhaps Elisha has picked up on a little of Elijah's humor this is not the way and this is not the city follow me and I will take you to the man you're looking for and

Elisha led them to Samaria I have no idea what this looked like but it must have just seemed so ridiculous this massive army blind blind being led by the servant of God to a completely different city he led them to Samaria and when they entered Samaria Elisha said Lord open these men's eyes and let them see so the Lord opened their eyes and they saw that they were in the middle of Samaria they were in the capital city of Israel they had gone to little Dothan to get Elisha and Elisha had led them into the capital city of Samaria and they now know they are surrounded verse 21 the king of

[30 : 12] Israel the king of Israel saw them and he said to Elisha should I kill them should I kill them my father sin makes us irrational all he is eager to kill and steal and destroy this reminds me of the story in Luke chapter nine where a village of Samaritans ironically refused to welcome Jesus into their city as he made the way his way to Jerusalem and onto the cross and two of Jesus most prominent disciples James and John say this to the Lord Jesus Lord do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them can we kill them can we kill them now if

God shared the human desire for victory by crushing enemies and seeing them driven before you and hearing the lamentations of their women if God shared the human desire for victory by domination and control if God shared the human desire for victory by establishing an earthly kingdom by any means necessary any human strength at any cost any majority rule you can get if God shared that human desire for victory in that way then this would make perfect sense the king of Israel's desire to kill and the disciples desire to kill it would make sense but apparently God's purposes and the way of Jesus are opposed to crushing domineering and overpowering others neither

Jesus nor Elisha cooperate with this sinful foolishness look what happens next chapter 6 verse 21 when the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha should I kill them should I kill them my father Elisha replied don't kill them do you kill those that you have captured with your sword or your bow is that really what you do when you capture hostages do you destroy them instead instead verse 22 right in the middle set food and water in front of them so they can eat and drink and go to their master this is like the feast you get at a big wedding reception where there are multiple courses you know and it's hard to keep your kids under control we've all been there but they're serving a salad and a soup and then a main course and then a dessert and then mince and nuts and coffee afterwards it's a feast do you know what's unfair

Naaman receiving a life saving miracle free of charge that's unfair do you know what's unfair serving a huge wedding feast to your enemies but as Ryan so beautifully taught us last week this is the beauty of grace grace makes life unfair grace gives without thought of return without thought of repayment without thought of reciprocation this is how grace gives this is the beauty of grace but hear this this is the beauty of mercy mercy takes pleasure in pardoning the guilty mercy relaxes the fist that is raised against your enemy until that now open fist is able to be filled so that you can serve your enemy with grace friends this is how

God relates to sinners sin makes sinners guilty and holiness demands judgment and God's wrath like a mighty fist delivers a massive blow but not against the sinners who deserve it but against his son Jesus mercy relaxes the hand that was raised in righteous holy anger against sinners so that now that hand is filled with every good and perfect gift and in grace God gives to sinners again and again and again and again what is it that we receive from God what is it that his enemies receive we receive salvation we receive peace with God we receive reconciliation we receive eternal life mercy takes pleasure in pardoning the guilty and then grace gives us

[36 : 50] Jesus himself notice the effect of Elisha showing mercy it's down at the end of verse number 23 so he prepared a big feast for them and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away and they went to their master notice this sentence the Aramean raiders did not come into Israel's land again do do you remember how this story arc began with the little slave girl it began with Aramean raiders entering into Israel to pillage and to destroy and to steal everything valuable and now in a lovely way this story arc has progressed and now come to an end because of

Elisha's mercy towards this massive army by official policy no more raids by the Arameans into Israel how should we respond to this how should we respond to God's mercy well let me ask you have you experienced God's mercy or maybe you're not convinced that you need God's mercy perhaps you consider yourself a pretty decent person and perhaps by cultural standards you are well above average but notice what the scripture says in Romans chapter 3 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God see here's the thing about mercy if you think that you're good enough if you think that you are worthy if you think that you have earned or otherwise don't need salvation then you will never experience

God's mercy because mercy is only for those who know they are guilty those who know that they have fallen short of God's glory mercy but hear the good news of the gospel as soon as you admit your guilt as soon as you are willing to humbly acknowledge I am a judgment deserving sinner God's mercy will flood into your soul and rather than feeling the guilt that you have just confessed to God you will experience this peace that passes all understanding rather than feeling shame you will be forgiven rather than hiding from God or trying not to think about him or worrying about whether there is an afterlife you will revel in the comfort of the Holy Spirit's promise and of his presence with you unlike what you may feel in that moment from other people in the moment that you will confess your guiltiness before

God God will not shame you for admitting my sins are many instead God will take pleasure in declaring over you my mercy is more believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved followers of Jesus consider Zacchaeus he was not looking for God's grace that day he's a guilty sinner but Jesus calls to him and he responds recognizing his great sinfulness evidenced by his repentance and confession that the things that I have stolen I am going to make reparations consider the woman caught in adultery thrown at the feet of

Jesus she knows she is guilty she knows what the punishment for her crime ought to be consider the Samaritan woman that Jesus so kindly and gently spoke with near a well she knew her sinfulness consider the blind man outside of Jericho I love this story and sometime Lord willing I'll tell you this he's outside Jericho and Jesus I believe has passed him by on his way to Jerusalem to die and this blind man can't have that and he begins to cry out son of David have mercy on me he recognizes that he has been left behind and he recognizes to be left here is exactly what I deserve but I don't want to be left here would you have mercy on me each of them admitted their need for mercy and

[42 : 40] I suspect none of them ever forgot their encounter with Jesus but I suspect even more importantly their encounter with Jesus changed them forever see when you watch with eyes that have been open to spiritual realities when you watch the fist of holy anger relaxing into a gift filled hand when you remember that my sins are many but they are forgiven by a God whose mercy is always more than you are prepared by sovereign grace and the Holy Spirit's power to be a conduit of God's mercy don't think of mercy as sweeping sin under the rug that's not mercy mercy acknowledges that there is guilt that's mercy if you think in your head well I don't want to do that because that would be sweeping something under the rug first of all don't do that don't sweep sin under the rug but also don't call whatever you think that is mercy that's not mercy mercy does not overlap does not overlook a lack of repentance and confession mercy does not settle for it's okay no big deal whatever that is it's not mercy by definition mercy means someone is truly guilty mercy recognizes the grossness of sin that there is no rug thick enough to hide it and it is in that honesty about sin that mercy shines so beautifully because mercy takes pleasure in pardoning the guilty may

God help us as his redeemed children to remember our ongoing need for mercy and in that remembrance that I still am a sinner deserving of judgment but constantly receiving God's mercy and an open hand of grace in that remembrance let's ask the Holy Spirit to give us soft hearts hearts that are ready to forgive when repentance and confession have come hearts that are ready and watching like the father of the prodigal son eager for a change of heart and the moment he spots his son running to him throwing his arms around him welcoming him back and celebrating the lost that has been found the dead that is now made alive let's join our father in heaven by taking pleasure in pardoning the guilty for

Jesus sake let's pray good father we are grateful to receive your word please help us as we have received it to carefully consider the things that we have heard to compare what we have heard scripture with scripture to see whether these things are so and by your kindness and by your spirit's power as we discover that they are true would you help us to believe and obey your word to us oh father please draw today to faith in Jesus someone who came this morning not at all expecting to have an encounter with the gospel and yet here they are and your spirit is at work in them and you are calling out to them like you called out to Zacchaeus oh good father grant life grant faith so that there is repentance and belief in the

Lord Jesus Christ make some sinner whole today we pray for their good and your glory father we ask that you would help us!

it is hard to show mercy it is hard to lower our fist when it has been raised in anger it is hard to relax that fist in such a way that it can be filled with gracious good things and extended to our enemies would you please help us and make us more and more like Jesus oh father where our hearts have become hardened by a lack of repentance and a lack of true confession soften our hearts again so that we are eagerly waiting and anticipating!

[48 : 12] those who acknowledge their guilt those who have wronged us we are eager and ready to forgive and to love again we ask this good father for your glory for our good and for the sake of the spread of this gospel all over your world we ask this in Jesus name giving thanks to him amen