

# Turn Your Helmet Around

II Kings 5:9-16, 22, 25-27

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I know, you're wondering where I got such a crazy sermon title. Please bear with me and hopefully you'll see how the story connected to it fits beautifully with today's text. So here it is: Two soldiers were engaged in the Vietnam Conflict. One day as enemy fire was coming in overhead both soldiers dove into a ditch for protection. As they did so, the one soldier exclaimed, "I can't see I must have been hit." He wasn't hit, thankfully, but his helmet shifted in the dive into the ditch and for him the lights were out. His buddy said, "You're alright, turn your helmet around." Sometimes our helmets get turned around too. Not literal helmets, but our heads and hearts.

In those moments we lose perspective. We can find ourselves suffering from spiritual blindness. We become absorbed in our own little world, our own little needs, and our own little lives. We become oblivious to the needs of those around us and assume we are better than we really are.

Consider our scripture lesson for this morning. There's a little slave girl, a Hebrew, captured in Israel, transported to Syria, now serving the wife of the commander of the entire victorious Syrian army. The master of her house is a wealthy man and highly respected. He's a leader, he stands number one with his king. There is only one problem... he has leprosy.

So this Hebrew slave girl takes it upon herself to tell her mistress, "If your husband, the commander of the great Syrian army were to go to Israel, there is a prophet there who would cure his leprosy." Note the faith on the part of this young girl, not he might, not he could, but he will be cured.

Then there's the reaction of the king of Syria. Naaman is my main man, the commander of my army. I want him cured. I'll tell that puppet king in Israel that I want it done. And I'll send him a big check that will smooth things over, that's how we kings operate.

So Naaman heads out on his mission. He eventually gets to the home of Elisha, the prophet of God. He stands there before the door waiting to be greeted and for the prophet to do his thing and get him well again. Plus he's got that big check as a thank you. And Elisha doesn't even come to the door, but instead sends 'the commander'- a command to go dip yourself seven times in the Jordan. Can't you just feel the hackles coming up on Naaman's back? He had to be furious! Surely we've been there at one time or another. We know our reaction, who do they think they're dealing with? Hopefully a sinner saved by grace.

So Naaman's preconceived ideas are not lived up to. He is amazed at the whole scenario. On top of it Gehazi, an understudy of the prophet Elisha says to his master, "Don't you think we ought to let him pay? The guy has money; he has a big check." "I'll have none of it," says Elisha. Finally convinced by his slaves, Naaman does as Elisha instructed and he's clean.

Then Gehazi decides that Elisha didn't get what was required of this non-Jew, he should have paid. Have you ever felt that way, that someone was getting a blessing they didn't deserve and that if anyone should be getting a blessing it is you? We all have those feelings at times. However, it is helpful for us to remember that we are not God and as good as our judgment may seem at times we are still not God.

Well you know how this story concludes. Gehazi meets Naaman on the trail and hits him up for the money and then hides it. And the account closes with an interesting twist. Elisha says to Gehazi, "Where did you go?" "Nowhere Elisha." "Are you sure of that?" "No I didn't go anywhere." "My heart went with you," Elisha says. "You stopped the chariot and you asked for money. Is this to you a time to take wealth? Is this to you an opportunity to capitalize on? Because of what you've done, you and your descendants forever will have leprosy." And Gehazi turned white with leprosy on the spot.

The passage, among other things, talks about perception and how if it is misguided, it can bring about tragedy. Just by looking at characters like Naaman, or Gehazi, or the king, one

can quickly see how our preconceived ideas that we are special or that we are owed by others simply because of our own perception can be misdirected and troublesome.

Look, for example, at the role perception has in the world of the media. How many women anchors and for that matter men anchors do you see on the evening news that are not, by the world's standards, attractive? Does that mean that if they were not among so called "beautiful people" that they could not do a worthy job of reporting the news? Of course not. Look at the world of politics. If you're not well off, effective on the TV cameras, and not among the "beautiful people" you may have a hard time getting elected to national office.

Perceptions, both our own and the false perceptions of others can send us down a stony pathway. Look what it did to the king of Syria. He thought he could write a check and his main man would be taken care of.

God is not impressed with our money, our looks, our cleverness or a host of other things that we may hold dear. Instead he is pleased with a contrite spirit and a heart of gratitude.

Take the opportunity later today or some time soon to read through the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10. You will note that Jesus has a big place in his heart for those who are not on easy street, for those who put others before themselves, for those who do not suffer from the Gehazi syndrome of always looking out for number one. And perhaps you say, but listen, it is not hard to be envious of others. It's hard not to let our own ambition get out of control. There is so much pressure to keep up with others. There is so much pressure to have more than the next guy. There is so much pressure to get ahead. Let me ask who puts that pressure on us? Does God, or the Bible or even our neighbor? Who told Gehazi he had to have that money? Who told the king that he needed to write a big check and show off for God? Who told Naaman that listening to the simple instructions of the prophet of God was too much to ask of a commander? The answer is NO ONE!

In the race for power, wealth, fame and fortune, there is another option; it is the spirit-filled life, a life lived in the shadow of Christ.

Do you think of yourself first today as a spiritual person? The reality is that you and I fall into one of two categories. Having or not having forgiveness. Do you realize that the whole world can be divided into two categories? The guilty and the forgiven, those who have forgiveness and those who do not yet have forgiveness?

Well Rev., "I've always thought of the haves particularly in terms of politics and economics. And you know in life in general I've thought of it as wealth." Well then, let me ask you this question. Who has the most, the one that has the wealth of Bill Gates or eternal life and no money at all?

It's spiritual blindness if we evaluate contentment in life based on power fame and fortune. It is a perception that is misdirected and misguided. If you are headed in that direction at all, stop, turn your helmet around, turn your life around. And remember that God is always there to help you and love you.

Don't judge life by whether it's lived up to your preconceptions. Judge life by whether you live up to your Christ.