

Pentecostal Pastor Shares How We Can Respond to #BlackLivesMatter With 2 Kings 5

Police shot and killed two black men recently in incidents that did not appear to justify force. To retaliate, snipers killed five police officers, wounding about a half-dozen more. Suspect Micah Johnson's reasoning? He wanted to kill white police officers.

If headlines tell us anything in the past year, it is, unfortunately, that these are not isolated issues.

I have read and heard people justify the killing of the black men, and others justify violence against police. Both sides refuse to acknowledge the wrongs that their opponents have identified with their position.

Decades ago, I served as policeman with the Air National Guard in Birmingham for six years. Most of the men and women in my unit were policemen or prison guards or connected with law enforcement in some way.

When we reported for duty, white soldiers sat together and the black soldiers sat together. Many times, I intentionally sat in "black section" of the room.

On one deployment, I patrolled with a young black man who played music all night about killing white people. We both carried loaded M16s.

Most of the people I served with were decent police officers, but two were pure evil. They bragged about sexual favors they received when they pulled over certain types of people. They

boasted about the way they would shirk their responsibilities. I have no illusion that some police officers operate in evil.

I hear and agree with cries of men and women who have been abused and harassed by evil police. In the last seven months, 136 black people have been killed by police officers.

On the other hand, I know evil men and women who would kill a policeman if they had an opportunity. Every traffic stop or response to a call could end in a hostile confrontation. This year alone, 21 police officers were shot to death, and 32 died in the line of duty in other ways.

How can we confront the evil and violence that our country is going through?

It is my conviction that Satan and demons are exploiting the evil that is in people's hearts. Jesus told his disciples that Satan comes to kill, to steal and to destroy. Paul told the Ephesians that we battle against evil spirits in wicked places. When Jesus was confronting Satan, he stated that man should not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God.

The life of Elisha found in 2 Kings 5 gives us insight about how to confront the violent issues our country currently faces.

Take Namaan as an example. He had power and authority, much like today's police. He had favor with the king and God-given battle victories.

Then, we are introduced to one of my favorite heroes in the Bible. We only know her as a young girl. She was a victim in society's eyes. A raiding party captured her, so we can reasonably infer that her parents were probably murdered.

She was made a slave to Namaan's wife. We don't even know her

name, but we know this: She refused to embrace the role of a victim. This young girl—who actually was a victim—refused to have a “victim mentality.”

Rather, she chose to share hope with the man who was ultimately responsible for her slavery:

“She said to her mistress, ‘If only my lord were before the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would take away his leprosy from him’ (2 Kings 5:3).

I do not want to leave the young slave girl without acknowledging that she probably went through a time of grieving the wrong that had been done to her.

As Christians, we often skip the grieving process. We are quick to forgive, but in so doing we may only forgive in a superficial way. Until we allow ourselves to acknowledge the depth of our pain, we cannot heal.

I believe that, too often, those in the white Christian community want this superficial forgiveness without the experience of the grief.

One of the healthiest things we could do as followers of Christ is to mourn with those who mourn (Rom. 12:15), and bear the burden of those who fear they will face violence from those who should be their protectors, simply because their skin is darker than ours.

You must grieve completely so you can forgive fully.

But back to the story.

Naaman went to his king, the leader of Syria who wrote a letter to the king of Israel basically saying, “Here is the commander of my armies. Heal his leprosy.” The king of Israel responded that he had no power to heal, only God could do this, and he feared that the inability to heal Naaman would lead to war.

This parallels our current situation.

African-Americans are looking to our government and demanding that they heal the violence and racism.

Those who support the police are looking to their allies and government and demanding that the police be protected.

Listen to what the Holy Spirit had the king of Israel say: "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?"

The king of Israel acknowledged that healing was needed, and that it was not within his ability to bring about.

As I drove to work last week, I listened as NPR discussed the shootings of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and the police officers.

One of the panelists said that no politician, including the President, had been able to solve this problem: People of color are terrified of being pulled over by the police. And the police are extremely nervous to stop a person of color. Both fear violence.

Oh, that we would listen to the king of Israel and understand that this is not within our ability to solve!

Just as in Bible times, we cannot look to politicians for the solution to injustice.

In the midst of the turmoil, the prophet Elisha enters the story.

He hears that the king has received an impossible request. Elisha sends a message instructing the king to send Namaan to him, that the prophet will deal with it himself.

I believe that Elisha represents the church—the men and women of God who have been empowered by the Spirit to bring about reconciliation.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation. God did not give the government the ability to bring about reconciliation. God did not give business the skills to bring about reconciliation. This is the both the mission and responsibility of the church.

Until the church takes up reconciliation, it will always be incomplete. We must own the responsibility and the mission of reconciliation.

When Elisha sent word to Namaan, the prophet didn't tell him what to expect. Rather, Elisha followed the instructions of the Holy Spirit.

Those instructions infuriated Namaan, and he staunchly refused to obey.

He was angry that the prophet did not perform a ritual. He was angry that he was not seen in person. He was angry that he was asked to do something beneath him. He wanted to leave, but his friends challenged him to be obedient.

Namaan listened to his friends and was healed.

I can tell you that many men and women in authority want respect. They want to be honored for their position. If they are in charge, they want others to recognize they are in charge.

What if people in authority valued the end result more than they valued their need for respect and dignity?

It will not come naturally.

Only through the counsel of friends will those in authority set aside their power and need for dignity, and submit to obedience which then leads to healing. We need to set aside our desire to be honored and respected.

Out of a grateful heart, Namaan returned to Elisha and offered him money. Elisha turned it down, as the power of God was not for sale.

As a result, Namaan became a worshiper of the only true God. He took some dirt with him back to Syria and followed the God of Israel from that moment forward.

But the story doesn't end there.

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, coveted the money Elisha turned down. Gehazi chased Namaan down and lied in order to get money. God revealed Gehazi's actions to Elisha in a vision. Elisha was grieved, and cursed Gehazi with leprosy for his greed.

The takeaway here? Our motives matter.

If we are being used by God for reconciliation, then we cannot have money as motive. We cannot have power as a motive. We cannot have prestige as a motive.

Our only hope is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
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