

Hope, Healing and Humility 2022  
2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-16

## 2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said.

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." But he said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused.

At the beginning of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5 passage, the character of Naaman reminds me of a story that John Ortberg told in a sermon one time.

The CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation was traveling with his wife, and when the couple stopped for gas, the man went inside. When he came back out, he noticed that his wife was having a lively conversation with the gas station attendant.

As they drove away he asked his wife about it.

She said that she had recognized the gas attendant, and he was someone she'd dated back in high school.

Feeling a bit smug, he turned to his wife and said,

"And I suppose you were thinking that had you married him, then you would be the wife of a gas station attendant."

She replied, "Actually no. I was thinking that had I married him, then he might be the CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation, and that perhaps you'd be a gas station attendant."

Naaman is introduced to us as a very successful, powerful and capable man of the world, a victorious leader, someone in control, and confidant of the king...

... but then as it turns out, none of that really matters, because he is also a leper, **which negates everything else.**

For all his success, accomplishment, wealth, influence and power,  
leprosy, considered incurable, would take away all that status.  
He was facing an absolute and impossible life-altering disaster.

As I reflect on this passage, I am fascinated by the young girl,  
a captive servant right where she was needed, and **where God put her**.  
A seemingly unimportant, marginal and unnamed character,  
and yet the story turns on her **words of possibility and hope**,  
**as God's gracious & healing purpose flows through humble channels.**

It can be taken as a sign of Naaman's desperation and abject need,  
that he heeds the words of an insignificant Hebrew slave girl. vs. 3  
She said to her mistress, 'If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of  
his leprosy.'

When Naaman shows up at Elisha's home with his impressive entourage,  
he is intending to send a message of influence and entitlement,  
for he still wants to be in control, to be cured on his own terms.

The incredible wealth he brings is a declaration of his status,  
to pay well and buy his cure, which the prophet rejects. vs. 9~12  
So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a  
messenger to him, ...

... But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, 'I thought that for me he would surely come out, and  
stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ... He  
turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman expected Elisha to be impressed & submit to his high position,  
recognize his special privilege, power, superiority & importance.  
He certainly deserved more than just sending out a messenger  
with ridiculous instructions to bathe in a filthy river.

**Surely Naaman was entitled & deserved much better and more than that.**  
In prideful anger, he's about to call the entire thing off  
and abandon the whole project of seeking healing, a cure.  
**Once again the story turns on a servant's words of possibility & hope**  
**as God's gracious & healing purpose flows through humble channels.**

It is again by the intervention of another lowly and unnamed servant,  
who urges Naaman to accept and follow Elisha's instructions. vs. 13  
But his servant approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something  
difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

Naaman reconsiders. He swallows his pride & privilege, & he submits.  
He gives up control, literally he goes down... **and he is healed.** vs. 14  
So **he went down** and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of  
God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Now the healing was about far more just curing Naaman's leprosy,  
but has led to a change of heart, as now in humble gratitude to God,  
**Naaman acknowledges that it was entirely by God's grace ...** vs. 15  
"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel;

That is a most significant and amazing major change of heart,  
as he recognized that the healing **was a gift, and not because**

he is a great man of accomplishment, determination & success,  
or by his power and influence with the king or with Elisha.

**It was not because** of some great healing power that Elisha had,  
or some inherent healing power of the muddy Jordan River waters.  
**It was entirely gift from God, just as God's grace heals our sin.**

**Yes, it's really that simple. It's difficult, but not complicated.**

God wants us to know him, to walk and talk with and enjoy him,  
to have a relationship with him as we journey through life,  
to know that we are uniquely created, precious and loved,  
and to live our lives as those who are loved by God.

**And if considered deeply, aren't we also like Naaman in our own way?**

We are born into this world helpless & unable to meet our own needs.

But from there on, the next years of our life are spent preparing  
to be as strong, self-reliant and be as independent as possible,  
to develop and become capable of providing for ourselves,  
so that as adults, we can make our mark in this world.

In our world,

**our sense of self** derives from the things we achieve and earn,  
**our human worth** is usually measured by our productivity,  
and **our life's meaning** is tied to our accomplishment and success.

As we grow up, we learn that the one who gives is the one with power,  
and that it feels weak to be in need and dependent upon others.  
But over time, the body's strength, vigor and capacity fades.

Old age can be a process that forces transition from the assurance,  
the self-determination, strength and independence of our youth,  
toward having to rely on and receive help from other people.

It is a humbling experience when we are the one having to be helped  
rather than being the one who is able to give and provide support.

**Most of us probably find it much easier to take charge & give  
than to surrender control & receive with humble gratitude.**

It can be very humiliating to be the one having to ask for help.

It can be very difficult to give up **our presumed status and power**,  
or our sense of self-determination and that we are in control,  
as we see in this 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings story about Naaman, the Syrian general.

That lesson and truth are emphasized after Naaman had been cured,  
when he returns to Elisha and wants to reward him and to repay him,

which the prophet refuses to accept, vs. 15-16

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present **from your servant.**'

But he said, 'As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!' He urged him to accept, but he refused.

This world teaches us to repay our debts and to balance the books.

But this motivation is also our human desire to be in control,  
which can trap us as Christians into an endless struggle  
of striving to earn God's love and self-defeating guilt.

The point is, in contrast to the ways and expectations of this world,

Naaman's healing came simply as God's gift and grace given to him.  
It was entirely and only by the gracious blessings of the Lord,  
which cannot be earned, cannot be controlled or even repaid.

And how tragic when our efforts to be faithful and to do good works  
are driven to deserve or by guilt rather than by love and gratitude,  
for that produces difficult, joyless & critical angry Christians.

It is a terrible, harsh, and destructive theology that attempts  
to balance the books through works of Christian accomplishment,  
for that can reduce the freely given gracious love & blessings of God  
into a set of rules & demands for living, tasks and cold judgment,  
that can lead to unhealthy shame when we fail, **as we all do.**

Our call is to serve the Lord with humility, joy and gratitude,  
for the incredible gift of God's grace, promise and blessings,  
for the one who loved us first, even while we were yet sinners.

The lesson for Naaman was about God's grace and God's healing love,  
that ultimately it has nothing to do with who we are or what we do,  
**and everything to do with who God is and what God does for us.**

The Gospel message Jesus lived, taught and gave us to proclaim,  
is that God loves us, loves us each and every one of us,  
regardless of our sins, failures and mistakes,  
regardless of our situation or the trouble we're in,  
**and that awareness of God's unrelenting love and purpose,  
has the power to transform our whole mode of living in hope.**

The promise is, that God's love for us will never change or grow dim,  
because it comes entirely as a gift, and not as the reward  
for our being faithful, moral, or for our doing good works...

... and this truth of God's unrelenting love has the amazing power  
to transform & rebuild everything about our lives and living...  
... as God intervenes **and grace intersects with our lives.**

This passage is a lesson to help remind us  
that sometimes God uses troubles, set-backs and adversity in life  
to realign and reset our attitude and refocus our perspective  
by bringing people, events and circumstances to reshape us-  
because Jesus loves us too much to let us just wander remaining lost.

The message is all about God's grace, & our call to humble gratitude,  
to a healthy, thankful & faithful perspective, **that we can choose.**  
**And that appropriate humble gratitude can completely  
change how we perceive the world & live out our lives.**

**Today we have come to share the Lord's Table of gracious love,  
the gift of sacrament and mystery, of God's presence and blessing,  
where we remember and celebrate our hope & life in Jesus Christ...**

... and as the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:6, 14

... I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.