

DOING IT GOD'S WAY

2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman's Leprosy Healed (Nay-uh-muhn)

"Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

This, to me, is one of the funniest stories in the Bible. It's on the same level of funny as the story of Balaam and his talking donkey. That story can be found in the book of Numbers, by the way. In our story today though, we have Naaman, the commander of the army of Syria, who had leprosy. That of course isn't the funny part. He must have been a great warrior for the king of Syria to have a man with leprosy lead his troops. In fact it says of him that he was a, "mighty man of valor." This story is one of those "wait for it stories." Anyways, here's our first "wait for it": we have a Jewish servant girl tell Naaman's wife that she knows of someone in Samaria who could heal Naaman. Then, once again, "wait for it": so Naaman tells the king of Syria this news and so, again, "wait for it one more time": the king of Syria eagerly writes a letter to the king of Israel, since Samaria was the capitol of Israel. Here it comes: the letter stated, "now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy." It's funny how sometimes not saying something just the right way can make for a whole lot of trouble. The king read the letter and tore his clothes and said, "am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." As yes, comedic gold. You just can't make this stuff up! The king of Israel looked at this as a mocking taunt from the king of Syria, and that he was just looking for a way to instigate a war with him. Instead, the king of Syria could have rephrased the letter and added an extra line of text to say, "now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, **that you will send him to the man of God that dwells in Samaria**, that he may heal him of his leprosy." This whole story speaks to the difference in how we perceive things, based on whether we are operating in the wisdom of this world, or whether we're seeking the wisdom that only comes from God. Are we connected to the source of wisdom that comes from God or are we just looking at the circumstances that come against us and making judgments based on our own wisdom?

This story though, is like how a lot of sitcoms on television or screwball or romantic comedy movies are designed. In one way or another there is a miscommunication or a false premise that leads to a wacky set of situations and outcomes. As you're watching the show you think, 'all this could have been avoided by a few words of explanation.' Ah, but what fun would that be. There'd be no room for silly comedic situations for us to laugh at then. But as in our story of Naaman, who had leprosy, this not really just a set of comedic circumstances that brought on a happy ending. It is only in the foresight, and with the wisdom of God, we can look back at this story and see the humor in it all. The king of Israel flies into a rage and tears his clothes, thinking that the king of Syria is "punking" him, or in today's internet lingo, he was "trolling" him. If you were watching that on tv you may be waiting for someone to say, "just

kidding, look over there at the camera, you're on candid camera!" Yet, in our story, there's no camera, and it wasn't a joke, just a horrible miscommunication. Elisha the prophet hears of the matter and sends a message to the king saying, "Why have you torn your clothes?" (if this were a sitcom this is where they'd likely cue the laugh track-as they show the king standing with his clothes all torn up and him having a stupid look on his face). But Elisha is led by God to send word to the king. He says, "Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Obviously, the king of Syria did not know the One who could heal Naaman of his leprosy, but Elisha did. As a side note, what seems to be Elisha pointing to himself in this story, by saying, "Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel", is really of how it was known that the prophets of God in those days, in what we refer to them now as, in the Old Testament times, were as though they were the mouth and hands and feet of God. There were though, as we read through the Old Testament, true prophets and false prophets. Ultimately, what the prophets remind us, in the stories of the Old Testament, is of the Sovereignty of God. God was, is, and always shall be on the throne, that He alone is the King of kings, and that He always had and still has a remnant of His people on this earth. Sometimes the remnant is rather small such as was the case in the days of Noah where God decided to flood the whole earth and only spare the family of Noah. It also speaks of how God continues to use His people to be His voice, His hands and feet. Why does God choose to do it that way? I don't fully know but He does. But we do know that "[He] created all things, and by [His] will they were created." (**Revelation 4:11**) There are plenty of times that God chooses to just do it Himself, as was the case when He annihilated 185,000 Assyrians in the days of the good King Hezekiah, and then there's other times God tells us, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." (**Deuteronomy 31:6**)

In our story today, we have a cast of characters that God uses for His purpose. Included so far, we have Naaman, who had leprosy, the Jewish servant girl, and then how she tells Naaman's wife of the prophet who could heal him. We have the king of Syria, who sent the poorly worded letter for Naaman, and then the king of Israel who reads the letter, just a bit too literally. Then we have Elisha the prophet who hears of the tragic comedy and tells the king of Israel to have Naaman sent to him. We are seeing in this story how God used different people for His ultimate purpose.

The next scene is that of the meeting with Naaman and the prophet Elisha's messenger. The way that the writer of this story tells it, it really seems to show us how ridiculously funny this whole story is. Fortunately for Naaman, this story turns out as most sitcoms do, in that all things straighten out in the end, and there's a happy

ending. It probably wouldn't have been the same kind of funny to us otherwise, as it could have turned out to be a tragic, shake your head in disbelief kind of funny. Elishah's messenger tells Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times and then he'd be healed of his leprosy. Naaman's response is priceless! "But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage." God Himself, through the prophet Elisha, was telling Naaman to just go wash 7 times in the Jordan River and he would be healed. That's it, just like that. Naaman could have even made a game of it. First time, a cannonball. Second time in he could do a jackknife. Then a back flip. Then a belly flop and so on—all the while rejoicing, knowing he was soon to be healed. But, once again, because of a misunderstanding, just like was the reaction of the king of Israel, Naaman went into a rage.

Time and again, we keep revisiting the same premise, we come to realize, as the Word tells us that, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." (1 Corinthians 3:19) "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Corinthians 1:20-21) The king of Israel and Naaman were looking at the messages given to them through the lens of the wisdom of the world, where the king's saying "I can't heal him!" and Naaman is saying "Why is this how I am to be healed?"

How can this story be applied to us? Just as in our story for today, it is the same with us. It is in what God's is intending to accomplish and what is God's ultimate purpose. It starts with the message that is preached to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

Later in the book of John Jesus spoke to the Jews saying, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you

convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? **He who is of God hears God's words**; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (John 8:42-47) Later Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (John 14:23-24) The intended purpose of God is spoken of by Jesus as being 1. those who believe on Jesus, 2. love Jesus, and 3. keep His commandments.

BELIEVE/LOVE/KEEP

1. We are called by God to believe on Jesus, whom God sent to teach what is the will of God, and He was sent also to make disciples, to get the ball rolling in the right direction, so to speak, and then to die on a cross for our sins, and then to be raised up from the dead on the third day, conquering death, and then giving the promise of eternal life to all who will **repent** (that is, to have a change of mind to do things God's way and not our own) and to **believe** on Jesus.

2. We are to also love Jesus. How can we love Jesus? He gave us a great reason to love Him because He first loved us. (**1 John 4:19**) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (**Romans 5:8**)

3. Then, Jesus also said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever." (**John 14:15-16**) Jesus summed up God's commandments by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (**Matthew 22:37-39**)

All three of those really are tied together. Believing on Jesus, loving God and our neighbors, and then keeping His commandments. It is God who gives us the measure of faith to believe. (**Romans 12:3**) It is God who reveals to us that He sent His only begotten Son Jesus, to die on a cross for our sins that we have committed against God, and then we are reconciled to God, meaning we can have a relationship with God as our Heavenly Father, as we are then a child of God, and that He raised Jesus from the grave on the third day and that we too will have eternal life in Christ Jesus. And in that, God has shown us His love for us. And then thirdly, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (**Philippians 2:13**) It truly is God who works in us to follow His commandments and to be who He wants us to be in Christ Jesus. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (**Ephesians 2:8-10**)

The great mystery to the world, as to who is a Christian, that is, who is a child of God, is this: they are the one who God leads to believe in Jesus Christ, to love Him as He loves us, and to follow in His commandments and His ways. It is those who are "born again" as Jesus put it to the Jewish leader Nicodemus. It is being born of the Holy Spirit, where God puts His Holy Spirit in us that " bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (**Romans 8:16**) "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (**Romans 8:14**) We are privileged in this time in history to have revealed to us the mystery of God's plan for salvation to His people. The people of the Old Testament looking forward to God's way of salvation only understood God to be their salvation. King David knew of who was His salvation. "In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God." (**Psalms 62:7**) Now for sure He knows that his salvation (and ours) comes from God, through Christ Jesus.

We are being called to, that is we are led by the Holy Spirit, to believe on Jesus Christ, to love God and our neighbors, and to follow His commandments. Believe, love, and obey. Just as the people of the Old Testament were told to "cling to [God] for He is your life", in similar fashion we are to keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:2**) It is God who works in us His Wisdom, His Righteousness, His Sanctification, and then His Redemption. (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) We can't take credit for any of it. It is God who even instills in us the faith that we need to believe and obey. But when He calls us to believe and obey we have to do just that. Doing the will of God is not to ensure our salvation, **Jesus alone is responsible for our salvation.** But doing the will of God, loving God and keeping his commandments is evidence that we are saved. We can't earn God's favor, His favor has already been bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus. But we do honor God in living in the faith He's given us, and obeying His commandments.

So what can we take away from this story today?

1. True wisdom comes ONLY from God. There's wisdom of this world, which is foolishness to God. Then there's wisdom from God, that doesn't always make sense to our carnal minds. The wisdom of this world told the king of Israel that the king of Syria was provoking him to war. But, the wisdom of God told him that He was being used of God to send Naaman to Elisha the prophet to be healed. The wisdom of this world told Naaman that washing in the Jordan River 7 times was foolishness. But the wisdom of God said, that was how Naaman was to be healed, plain and simple.

Similarly, the wisdom of this world says to do good works to please God to earn one's eternal salvation-to do more good than bad so that the weightier balance is in the good. The wisdom of God is that He sent His Son Jesus, to be born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit, to live a sinless life, and then to die on a cross for our sins, to shed His precious, sinless blood for us, for the taking away of our sins, and then to raise from the dead on the 3rd day, conquering death, so that we too, who put our hope and trust in Christ, will raise from the dead unto eternal life, in Christ Jesus.

2. The love of God extends to all of us to believe on Jesus Christ. In our story, Naaman was not of God's people, the Israelites. But God extended His mercy to Naaman by having a servant girl tell Naaman's wife of Elisha, Naaman then told the king of Assyria, the king of Assyria sent a letter to the king of Israel (a rather badly worded letter), and then Naaman was then sent to Elisha to be healed by God of his leprosy. You see how the love of God was spread by word of mouth, so to speak. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (**Romans 10:15**) Amazing things can come from God when we continue sharing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. It may not always make sense, but in the wisdom of God it always does.

3. Obedience always plays a part in our walk of faith. As it is written, "the just shall live by faith." (**Romans 1:17**) Instead of flying off the handle, the king of Israel could have sought the wisdom of God to know what to do with the letter that was written to him. Fortunately for all involved, God's providence and mercy went ahead of the king of Israel and word got to Elisha to have the king send Naaman to him so that he could be healed. Instead of going into a fit of rage, Naaman could have just shrugged his shoulders and said, "wash in the Jordan 7 times, ok, sounds crazy, but I'll do it." With us today, we are called to believe on Jesus, His life, His Words, and His death and Resurrection. We are to trust God in being led by His Holy Spirit to accomplish whatever it is that God wants to do with our lives and in our lives. In our wisdom, in the wisdom of the world it all seems like foolishness. But, the more we walk by faith, the easier it becomes to **trust God**. The more we continue to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more it becomes a **part of us**. That is where God is renewing our minds and changing our hearts, making us into the image of Christ-likeness.

Then, eventually, when it's time for Jesus to take us home, we have this Word from the Apostle John to comfort us, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." AMEN

Heavenly Father,
I confess that I have sinned against You.
I ask that You forgive me of my sins.
I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins,
I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord,
and I believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead,
so that I can have forgiveness of sins,
and be reconciled to You, God, My Father.
I now commit to You, that I will repent of my sins,
and live in the newness of life,
being led by Your Holy Spirit,
all this I pray, in Christ Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Thank You Lord!