

The Healing of Naaman: Based on 2 Kings 5: 1-14 February 11, 2018

The Healing of Naaman is one of my favourite O.T. stories; so many interesting characters and personalities in this story.

Naaman, the great and powerful military general from the country of Aram has contracted a skin disease that can potentially destroy his life as he knows it. The bible uses the term leprosy to indicate any number of skin diseases, some that can be healed; others like leprosy that can't. Those who had leprosy were removed from general society and lived in leper colonies, isolated from others as a protection to the general public. So leprosy as a diagnosis would be like a life sentence.

Naaman is also a personal friend with the King, he's financially very well off. So, a man who is used to having people do his bidding, and is accustomed to being in control and having control over many things. And now he has a disease will control him. It will irrevocably change his life—he could lose everything, social standing, family, wealth, body parts -- because of a white blotch on his skin. He will be an outcast, sent to a leper colony to live out what is left of his life. Imagine his sense of devastation, the losses he would have to accept. He could literally lose everything.

His wife tells him about a prophet who can heal who lives in Samaria. She heard about this prophet from her little slave girl, who was captured by the Syrian army during war with Samaria, Samaria was once part of the country of Israel.

Not surprisingly, Naaman seizes on this idea, and goes into full control mode, back in his comfort zone—now he can do something about this disease. First thing, he goes to his king, and presents the case. Of course the King says yes, he doesn't want to lose one of his best generals, if there's a chance of a cure. It makes sense to do everything in his power to make it happen! The king of Aram goes into full political control mode, writes a letter to the King of Israel, a much smaller and weaker country and makes the King of Aram makes available expensive gifts and money to give to encourage compliance from the Israeli King. When he receives the letter, the poor Israeli King is totally intimidated and frightened. He has no ability to heal this general from the stronger more powerful country! 'Who does he think I am', he says, "God?" and the king tears his own clothing in despair.

Now, Elisha the prophet hears of the encounter and tells the king: Send him to me, so "he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel". In other words Elisha will show him who and what God really is all about; who it is that is really in control. So Naaman pulls up in full military glory in front of Elisha's house, chariots, horses, soldiers and servants—the whole kit and caboodle, and then sends a servant to summon the prophet. And Elisha's response to the summons? He doesn't even come out of the house to greet him! He just sends his servant out to tell the fancy general to wash, not once but 7 times in the Jordan River. Ever seen pictures of the Jordan River? —not really much of a river in some places, more like a muddy creek actually.

Naaman is incensed, the impertinence of this prophet. He says to his servants: "I thought *for me* he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the spot and cure the leprosy."

Elisha is not intimidated in the least by this powerful military man. He not showing any respect for Naaman's position either! And to tell him wash in the piddly and muddy Jordan River! The rivers in Naaman's country were much bigger and fuller than anything in Israel. Naaman's enraged. This is just beneath his dignity. Who does this prophet think he is to 'diss' him this way.

His servants appeal to him to do it, appealing to his ego—if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn't you have done it? All you have to do is wash!

All Naaman's power and money had no effect on Elisha; so much for winning friends and influencing people. Naaman has to swallow his pride, give up control and give in to something that he felt was obviously beneath him and his station. Keep his pride and ego intact, keep the leprosy. Or let go of the ego, wash in the "creek" and be cured. Naaman gives in, washes 7 times in the muddy water and his skin is healed--like that of a young child. Now, we stopped reading the story at this point. And there's more to this story that's really crucial, in my estimation anyway. So what we didn't read was that Naaman and all his retinue return to Elisha's house, and this time Elisha comes out to see him. Naaman is a smart man, he understands what has transpired, understands what Elisha has done and why. He tells the prophet that he now knows that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Naaman has had full a conversion experience.

Here's a story of a great man, someone who seemingly has everything, and one day his whole life turns upside down, he can lose it all—and for no reason that we can fathom, this disease just came upon him. We still hear stories like this. Sometimes there is no explanation as to why serious illnesses just happen, for no reason we can understand, and it can turn many lives upside down.

And when threatened to the extent that Naaman was, our first reaction is to try and get control of whatever it is that threatens us. It's an instinctive reaction, an 'oh so very human' response. We consider doing almost anything and everything, all we have at our disposal, to overcome whatever it is that's causing our disequilibrium, especially in cases of illness—our own or of a loved one. Naaman did that in spades, control was his great strength. Once he heard there was a chance of a healing, well, he went to the top—the king, then he literally mustered the troops and was going to power his way to this healer and be healed. That's the way he'd gotten everything else in his life—power and control. But that didn't work. Elisha paid him no mind – but did offer him an opportunity. It was up to Naaman if he wished to literally get off his high horse and do it!

Naaman was strong, proud and arrogant, but he was also wise enough and open minded enough to listen to the council of others, even those who were beneath him, so to speak—like slave girls and servants.

God uses many ways and many people to come to us. The voice of God may come through those whom we least expect, and at times when we think we've got it all under control, thank you very much!

Sometime we really need to 'let go and let God', as the saying goes. That's what Naaman had to do, he had to let go of the idea that he could control everything and everyone, he had get over himself, let go of his ego, and give in to what the man of God was telling him, and go and wash, not once but seven times in the muddy waters of the river Jordan.

God's power in us is strongest when we feel like we're the weakest, another one of those paradoxes of faith, things that don't seem to make sense at face value, are even the opposite of what makes common sense. Paul says it like this in his second letter to the Corinthians: Paul had a great pain, and when he appealed to God to relieve him of his pain, God told him; *"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."* (And Paul told the people of Corinth) *So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.*' (vv 9-10, NLT)

That's so hard to do. It's really difficult to let go of ourselves and be completely vulnerable—even with God. It can take years to get there, a layer at a time, like peeling an onion, every time we get a smidge closer. It is when we strip away all the pretence, all the egocentric power and control, break down those walls we build around us to protect us, and 'go to God meekly and upon our knees', to paraphrase the old Book of Common Prayer invitation to prayer, that's when God's power can do within us infinitely more than we can ever ask or imagine.

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