

A Picture of Salvation in the Cleansing of Naaman

2 Kings 5:8-19

2 Kings 5:8-19 - *“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.

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

So Naaman said, “Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing.” Then he said to him, “Go in peace.” So he departed from him a short distance.”

Background Notes

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was a great military leader - but he had leprosy. He had come down to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, because one of his captured slaves, a young Israeli girl, had faithfully witnessed about the power of one true God. She had told Naaman’s wife that the God of Israel could heal her husband, through the ministry of the prophet Elisha.

So Naaman went to Samaria in all his military splendor, with lots of money, and a letter from Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. First he went to the king of Israel, Jehoram, who couldn’t believe that Naaman expected the king to heal him! In despair the king tore his clothes, a sign of great distress. But Elisha sent a message to King Jehoram and said, *“Send him over to me.”* So Naaman arrived at Elisha’s house - but Elisha didn’t even come out of the house! He sent a messenger out to Naaman with a simple message: *“Go wash seven times in the Jordan River, and you’ll be healed.”*

Well, Naaman was furious. I imagine he swore in the Aramaic language! He was a proud and important man, and he couldn’t handle this treatment. “What is this? I expected that this prophet would at least come out and lay his hands on

me, or go through a ritualistic ceremony, calling on the God of Israel! Wash in the Jordan River? No way! Aren't the rivers in Damascus better than the Jordan? At least they're clean. I can't believe I was told to go down to the muddy River Jordan - and then to actually dip myself in the river **seven times!**" And he drove away in a rage.

Fortunately cooler heads prevailed. Basically, his servants said, "What's the big deal? If Elisha asked you to do something great and heroic, wouldn't you do it? Why not be willing to dip in the Jordan River – that's no big deal. We're going to cross it on the way back to Damascus anyway." Naaman finally gave in. He swallowed his pride. He submitted to the God of Israel, and obeyed Elisha's message. And as a result he was cleansed – completely healed!

In his gratitude, he wanted to give Elisha a gift, but Elisha said "No!" In verse 17, Naaman said, "Then at least can I take two loads of soil from Israel back to Syria? I can't worship the gods of Syria any longer. The God of Israel, He is God and I want to worship Him. I want to worship on ground from Israel." And Elisha said, "That's OK."

One more background note. Verse 18 might be a little confusing. In verse 18 Naaman asked Elisha, "Could you grant me just one request? I'm going to worship the one true God of Israel; He's the Lord, for sure. But occasionally I have to go with my master, King Ben-Hadad, into the temple of the pagan Syrian god, Rimmon. I'll have to go through the ceremonies and bow down to that pagan god. Is it OK if I do that?"

I want you to specifically notice that **Elisha did not approve**. No way. You might think from the end of verse 19, when Elisha said, "*Go in peace,*" that Elisha was saying it was OK for Naaman to pretend to worship the pagan god. No. Elisha was neither approving nor disapproving. Basically all he said was "Go home in peace, in God's peace."

Doctrinal Points

1. A humble and obedient faith is required for salvation.

In the cleansing of Naaman the leper, we have a wonderful picture of salvation. Throughout the Bible leprosy is a picture of sin. Leprosy is a systemic disease - a disease that infects the entire system. You don't get "leprosy of the leg" - you get leprosy. In the same way, sin is a systemic disease. We are sinners by nature. Sin affects our entire system. It's a systematic disease.

Furthermore, in the early stages leprous areas can be covered up. The disease can be hidden. Sin is similar. "Look at that sweet little baby! You don't really mean to say he's a **sinner?**" Well, it's not long before the sinful nature will show itself in actions, right?

And ultimately, if nothing is done about the disease of leprosy, the person will die. Sin is the same - it leads to spiritual death.

Naaman was very successful. He was at the pinnacle of his career. He was wealthy, and apparently he was happily married. Furthermore, he was an honorable man, well liked by his superiors and subordinates (v1). Naaman had everything going for him - but he was a leper. And all his successes and honorable behavior could not cure Naaman of leprosy.

There was only one way that Naaman could be cured of his leprosy. He had to obey the word of the Lord. He had to submit to the humbling experience of dipping in the River Jordan, obedient to the command of the God of Israel through the prophet Elisha. It was simple - but oh so humbling.

Naaman is a great picture of the natural person at his or her best - humanity at its best - a person with everything going for him or her - but still a sinner! And there's only one way we can be healed of the disease of sin: **God's way!** It's simple and straightforward – we are saved by faith in Christ. *“No other name is given under heaven whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:42)*. There's only one way - but it's oh so humbling. We've got to realize there's absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. We must swallow our pride.

Naaman had to renounce his pride and humble himself, submit, and obey. In order to be cured, Naaman had to get down out of his chariot, strip off his military garb and all the honors that he wore, and obey. And in order to have salvation and be cured from the disease of sin, we have to come the only way there is - **through Christ**. We have to renounce our pride. We have to submit. We have to obey, and come to God by Christ alone!

I want you to notice that faith is definitely emphasized here. Naaman had to dip seven times. Can you imagine what he thought if he looked at his skin after dipping six times - and still no change? Not change at all? He had to continue to obey completely, by faith, and go under the water seven times.

Have you taken that step? A humble and obedient faith is necessary for salvation.

2. A new heart and a new life are the results of salvation.

What a change we see in Naaman! This is a great picture of the results of salvation. His cure was immediate and complete. Naaman's skin was like a baby's skin. No more tattoos and no more battle scars! But this comparison emphasizes the important point - **no more leprosy!** Naaman was completely cured. He was brand new. And that's the way salvation is.

The picture here is that salvation means a brand new life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed, the new has come.”* And look at the change in Naaman's heart. He was happy and thankful. He went back to thank Elisha, and to give Elisha a gift. Not in payment (v16), but as a gift of thanks. And Naaman was determined to eradicate idols from his new life.

That's the way it is when a person becomes a Christian. A Christian should be characterized by joy and gratitude and love for the Lord alone. A new heart and a new life are the results of salvation!

Practical Applications

1. Expect all kinds of reactions when you present the simple gospel.

Look at Naaman's reaction to the simple solution to his problem. “Just dip seven times in the River Jordan” (v11-12). Naaman didn't like that solution. He was mad! He thought, “That might be all right for some people, but not for me! I'm

the commander of the Syrian army.” He reasoned logically - but wrongly. “At least let me take the clean waters of the rivers in Damascus. Why should I wash myself in that muddy Jordan?” That sounds logical, right? But it was wrong!

Some people today react in just the same way when the simple gospel is presented to them. They might reason logically, “Well, salvation through Jesus Christ is all right for some people - but can’t I get to heaven by being a really good person? Can’t a sincere Muslim or a sincere Hindu, make it? Don’t ‘all roads lead up the same mountain’?” That seems logical, doesn’t it? But it’s wrong!

Naaman turned away mad, and it’s just the same today. Expect all kinds of negative reactions when you present the simple gospel to people.

But notice - Naaman changed his mind. He came back! And the same thing may happen when you present the gospel. It’s great to see that reaction in Naaman, and it will be great to see in your experience as well - whether it’s a kid to whom you present the gospel in a camp cabin, or a fellow student, or a neighbor, or a colleague at work. They may reject the gospel at first – but they may change their mind and come back!

But don’t be surprised. You can expect all kinds of reactions when you present the simple gospel.

2. Be extremely careful how you handle money in the Lord’s work.

In verse 16, when Naaman came back to present a gift to Elisha, Elisha refused the gift! It wouldn’t have been wrong for Elisha to receive that gift. He could have used it for his ministry. If I had been Elisha, I can think of lots of ways I would have justified accepting the gift: “Sure, I’ll accept it. I can funnel this money from Syria into the Lord’s work!” But Elisha refused, because he didn’t want to risk any wrong ideas to ripple out. He didn’t want anyone, either in Israel or in Syria, to get the idea that Naaman’s cure had been bought. So he refused.

We, too, must be extremely careful how we handle money in the Lord’s work. We need to be careful to avoid all appearances of evil in how donations are used. We need to be careful not to show favor to those who contribute. We need to ask, “Who is the donor? A true believer? Are there any ‘strings’ attached to this donation? Will the donor try to negatively influence the biblical teaching or mission of the ministry?” All these things have to be thought through.

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