

Elisha, a Shepherd of the Gentile Naaman

2 Kings 5:1-27

Key Verse: 5:10

“Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, ‘Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.’”

In the last passage we learned how Elisha was a shepherd for kings and people in Israel. Elisha helped each person according to their attitude, and based on their need. When someone cried out, Elisha was merciful, as God is merciful. When he was served well out of a pure heart, he blessed in return with a shepherd's heart. When someone was in agony, he shared their agony and struggled together. When someone was hungry, he gave what he had, and God worked a miracle through him. In this passage, Elisha shepherds a Gentile general, Naaman. Naaman was not easy to help; he was proud, and an idol worshiper. Elisha helped Naaman to overcome his pride, learn obedience, and experience the power of God, the true God of Israel. In this way he became a shepherd for the Gentile general. We learn from Elisha how to shepherd the people of our times, who are like Naaman. We also find a great contrast between Naaman and Gehazi, Elisha's servant. Naaman's leprosy was healed when he obeyed God's word. Gehazi became leprous due to greed and rebellion. Let's learn faith that obeys and is blessed.

I. Naaman was healed by the God of Israel (1-19a)

First, Naaman was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy (1-7). Verse 1 says, "Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy." According to history, Aram led an allied battle for independence against the Assyrians in 853 B.C. The Aramean alliance was successful in liberating the entire region, which included Israel. Thus, Israel was greatly indebted to Aram. According to history, Naaman had distinguished himself in this battle. That is why he was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded. However, it was really the Lord who gave them this great victory. Anyway, Naaman became an important general, known for his valor. But he had leprosy. Naaman fought courageously against enemy soldiers, but he could not fight against his leprosy. At that time leprosy was regarded as an incurable disease. Naaman was groaning day by day with his fatal disease. His power, wealth and honor seemed to be nothing. People struggle hard to obtain these things, but they cannot guarantee happiness. Though Naaman's problem made his life miserable, it was the opportunity for him

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to come to God. These days, many have lost jobs and face mortgage problems. It is a very real hardship. It is also the opportunity to come to God.

Look at verses 2-3. Bands of raiders from Aram were invading Israel. Just a few years earlier, Ahab king of Israel spared the life of Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, and set him free on the basis of a treaty. However, the Arameans did not honor that treaty. When Ahab tried to enforce the return of Ramoth Gilead, he was killed in battle (1 Ki 22:35). And now bands from Aram boldly invaded Israelite towns and took captives. One of them was a young girl from Israel. She became a servant of Naaman's wife. It seemed to be misfortune. But there was God's providence to send her as a lay missionary to Naaman's house. She could have complained to God and been bitter toward her captors. Instead, she had a compassionate heart toward her master. She said to his wife, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." This way of speaking, in a subjunctive mood, is very persuasive. More than that, her conviction that God was working through Elisha planted a seed of faith in Naaman's wife, who shared it with Naaman. It was the good news to Naaman! We can learn from the slave girl to share the good news in any situation. Then God can use us powerfully. If she had kept the good news to herself due to bitterness, nothing would have happened. But when she accepted her situation as God's leading to be a missionary, she could have compassion for her master, and share the good news with him. She became a history maker, though a slave girl. We have the good news of Jesus Christ. Whatever our situation may be, we must share this good news with those in need.

Naaman was humble enough to listen to a servant girl's words. If he had ignored her, he would have forfeited the chance to experience God's power. But in his desperate situation, he listened even to a slave girl's words. Then he found a possibility for healing. So he brought this matter to the king. The king sent him to the king of Israel, together with a letter, ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may heal him of his leprosy." It sounds like a command, not a request.

How did the king of Israel respond? He tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" (7) Leprosy was incurable, like bringing the dead to life; only God could do that. The king of Israel should have remembered God's deliverance from enemies through Elisha, the prophet of God. But he did not. With no sense of God's history, he interpreted the letter as provocation to attack. Since Syria was stronger than Israel, he was frustrated and became negative. So Naaman's costly journey seemed to end in vain.

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However, Naaman's act of faith did not go unnoticed by the Lord, or by his servant Elisha.

Second, Naaman was healed when he obeyed the man of God (8-14). Look at verse 8. "When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: 'Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.'" Elisha wanted to reveal the God of Israel to the anguished king and the Gentile general. He wanted to fulfill Israel's priestly duty. If Naaman met the God of Israel, it would have a great impact on his nation. So Elisha invited Naaman to come to him. Elisha was sure that God could heal him.

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots to meet Elisha. It was a large entourage. They stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha did not come out to greet him. He only sent a messenger to say to him: "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." (10) Why did Elisha not come out, and only send a message to Naaman? Elisha knew very well who Naaman was. Elisha wanted to help him curb his pride. Otherwise, it would be impossible for Naaman to be healed. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Ja 4:6). Out of a shepherd's heart, Elisha helped Naaman humble himself before God. Elisha asked Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times, the number of perfection. Naaman needed to obey perfectly.

In Elisha's words, we find two things: a command and God's promise. God's word consists of a command and a promise. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When we seek God first, he gives us his kingdom and all necessary things in this world too. God's command to Naaman was not too hard. But if Naaman was proud and rebellious, it would be most difficult.

How did Naaman respond? Look at verses 11-12. "But Naaman went away angry and said, 'I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?'" So he turned and went off in a rage." Here we see why Naaman could not obey. He had his own idea about how to be healed, rooted in his pride. When it did not happen according to his expectation, he was offended. Furthermore, he thought the God of Israel was just one of many gods. He was like modern people who mix different religions and virtually invent their own gods. Additionally, he had a strong national pride as an Aramean. In brief, he could not accept the direction of God's servant because he was proud. So

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he became angry and went away. The proud and angry cannot experience God's grace. God's grace is given to the humble. (Mk 7:29) Naaman was disqualified due to his pride and anger.

Naaman's servants were sorry to see their master making such a mistake. So they decided to help him. It was risky for any servant to advise his master, for they may be understood as presumptuous. Then they would be punished. Nevertheless, they advised Naaman, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" The servants did not blindly obey, but helped Naaman do right. They were really faithful.

When Naaman heard his servant's advice, he came back to his senses. He realized that he was going in a wrong direction due to his pride. So he immediately turned around. Instead of going to Aram, he went to the Jordan. He denied his own thoughts and obeyed God's direction 100%. This is true repentance. Then what happened? When he dipped himself in the Jordan River seven times, his rotten flesh was restored and became clean, like that of a young boy. Wow! He became young and very handsome. He became a new man. He experienced the power of the living God.

Here we learn important lessons about gospel truth. First, Naaman admitted that he had leprosy. Likewise, we must admit that we are sinners. If we deny that we are sinners, we will not receive God's grace. But if we confess our sins, Jesus promises to cleanse and purify us (1 Jn 1:9). Second, Naaman believed the good news that he could be healed. We must also believe the good news that Jesus heals us from sinsickness. Third, Naaman denied his own idea and obeyed simply. So must we. However, it is not easy for us to give up our own ideas. Some people think that just believing in Jesus is too easy, and that we must do something great to be saved. But we must give up this idea and accept God's idea. God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are above the earth (Isa 55:9). Jesus taught us to learn from Israel's history how to simply believe in him. Once, when the people of Israel spoke against Moses, the Lord sent venomous snakes to bite them and many died. (Num 21:4-9) Then the Lord told them to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. The Lord promised that anyone who was bitten could look at the bronze snake and live. That was all they had to do, "look and live." They did not have to fight with the snakes, but just look and live. Those who looked lived. Likewise, God sent his one and only Son Jesus to die on a cross for our sins. If we just look at the cross of Jesus, we will be healed. Whoever looks to Jesus will be healed. It is as simple as that.

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Third, Naaman's decision to serve God only (15-19a). What did Naaman learn about the Lord through this event? Look at verse 15. "Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.'" Naaman realized that the God of Israel was the only true God. In the past he thought that the God of Israel was just one of many gods. He thought that the god he was serving, Rimmon, was greater than all the other gods. When he contracted leprosy, he might have prayed to Rimmon to heal him. He must have asked others to pray for him and offer sacrifices for him. The whole nation may have prayed, beginning with the king. But there was no answer; nothing happened. Isaiah 44:18 says about idols, "They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand." Though Naaman did everything to be healed, there was no help from his god. But when he obeyed the prophet of the God of Israel, he was completely healed. So he realized that the God of Israel was the only true God. All other gods are nothing but man-made idols. Only the God of Israel, the living God, can solve our practical problems. How can we know this God? We cannot know God by intellectualizing. But when we simply obey God's word we can experience the power of God and know God very personally. When Naaman obeyed God he gained much more than the healing of his leprosy; he came to know the living God personally. He came back to Elisha to confess his faith and to thank God by giving an offering.

However, Elisha refused to accept the offering. Look at verse 16. "The prophet answered, 'As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.' And even though Naaman urged him, he refused." At this moment, Elisha thought it was better not to accept a gift from Naaman in order to teach him the value of God's grace. His healing came only by God's grace through his obedience. It was impossible to repay this grace with money or a gift. Then Naaman asked Elisha for some soil to take back to his own country. He thought that God should be worshiped on his the soil of his own nation. This signifies Naaman's decision to worship the God of Israel; he would not serve Rimmon anymore. However, there was a problem. From time to time he had to escort his master into the worship area and bow down to Rimmon together with him. He realized that this was not right in the sight of the Lord. So he asked to be forgiven in advance for doing so. Elisha understood him and sent him back, saying, "Go in peace." They had a wonderful spiritual relationship in the grace of God.

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II. Gehazi contracted leprosy due to his greed (19b-27)

After Naaman left, Gehazi said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him." Gehazi thought that Elisha should receive something because he had saved Naaman's life. To serve him freely, just letting him go, seemed foolish to Gehazi. He complained in his heart against his master, the servant of God. His root problem was greed. Maybe he was tired of living poorly. When he saw the tremendous gift, he went crazy with greed. He went to Naaman and lied, misusing Elisha's name (22). He got some silver and clothes and came back. When Elisha asked, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" he said, "Your servant did not go anywhere." He became a liar, like Satan (Jn 8:44). He deceived Naaman; he deceived God's servant; and he deceived himself. Furthermore, his conscience became numb. Elisha knew where he had been, but he gave Gehazi a chance to confess his sin. Gehazi did not repent, and disaster came upon him. Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or manservants or maidservants? Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi was leprous, as white as snow.

Gehazi was a servant of Elisha. He had a great privilege to learn the God of Elisha, as Elisha had learned the God of Elijah. But he did not. Instead he became greedy for material things. In our times, many people think that greed is good because it motivates capitalists to work hard and stimulates the economy. However, the Bible says greed is idolatry (Col 3:5b). Greed is a source of many other sins. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Gehazi's greed led him to gain a few dollars, but in fact, he lost everything: his spiritual identity, his conscience, his spiritual blessing, and his health. He also became a source of grief to his descendants.

Sin is more serious than leprosy. Sin robs us of God's glorious image. Sin makes us miserable. No material things can compensate for this. But when we come to Jesus and confess our sins, Jesus washes us with his precious blood. He restores God's image in us. So let's come to the Jordan of grace, denying our own ideas, and be washed in the blood of Jesus and cleansed of our sins. Then we can live a happy and victorious life.