

The World Can't, But God Can!

¹ 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.

² Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, 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!"

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." ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 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."

¹¹ 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. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "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'!" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

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."

How many of you know all too well what this is like? Life goes and goes and goes, until all of the sudden it slaps you in the face. You're going and going, till all of the sudden you're struck with difficulty; going and going, till all of the sudden you're struck with disease; going and going till all of the sudden you're struck with death. Again, how many of you know what this is like? Most of you do, and if you don't, you will. This is where Naaman was in his life.

“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” (II Kings 5:1). Break this verse down: Commander! Great man! Highly regarded! Victorious! Valiant! BUT he has leprosy. See how life slapped him in the face?

It slapped him so hard, he did the unthinkable. He listened to a slave girl from Israel and went to Israel for a cure. No valiant commander of any nation, let alone Aram, would ever listen to an Israelite slave girl, and no one from Aram (also known as Syria) would ever go to Israel for a cure. The Syrians and the Israelites hated each other then as much as they do now. But Naaman listens, and Naaman goes. Why? Because life struck Naaman hard with a wasting disease that had no cure.

All of the sudden in Naaman’s life, the important things – “commander,” “great man,” “highly regarded,” “victorious,” “valiant” – are exposed and overridden by the harsh reality of life – our fragility, vulnerability, and mortality. You see, no matter who we are or what we have accomplished, WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL. No power or rank or money could have or would have prevented Naaman from being struck with leprosy. This is a wakeup call we all personally need to realize and understand. *(Let me repeat that: This is a wakeup call we all personally need to realize and understand.)* Like I said, life is life, and if it hasn’t slapped you in the face yet, it will.

Yet, as desperate as Naaman was, he still didn’t realize and understand this. Notice what he takes to Israel: **“So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and tens sets of clothing. The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: ‘With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy’”** (II Kings 5:5-6). Do you know what these words mean? They mean that, in spite of his leprosy, Naaman still thought that power and money and connections could purchase his cure. He went to Israel with all the same things that had not worked in Syria, and he fails to see that the world cannot give him what he really needs.

Dear friends, there are many different reasons that there is so much helpless and hopeless in the world. But the #1 reason is what Naaman is about to learn: The world cannot give us what we really need, but the true God can. *(Let me repeat that: The world cannot give us what we really need, but the true God can.)*

So Naaman goes to the king of Israel to request and purchase his cure. But instead of directing Naaman to the prophet Elisha for the cure, the king of Israel thought this was some cruel joke by his arch nemesis, the king of Aram. *(Which is super ironic, because an Israelite slave girl thought immediately to go to the prophet Elisha and the King of Israel didn’t. Pretty telling, isn’t it?)* Well, anyway, Elisha shows up and tells the king to have Naaman come to him. But notice why he has Naaman come to him: **“Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel”** (II Kings 5:8). Notice what Naaman doesn’t say, “Have the man come to me and I will cure him,” nor does he say, “And then he will know that I am a miracle worker.” He says, **“And he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”** That expression **“a prophet in Israel”** emphasizes that Elisha is a spokesman for God. His call, as prophet, is to proclaim the truth of God to the people.

So when you read between the lines of **“and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel,”** what Elisha is really saying is this: “Then Naaman will know the One who can give him what he really needs, and knowing him will be even greater than receiving a cure.”

Well, Naaman goes to Elisha. But instead of Elisha going out to Naaman, he simply sends a messenger to him with these instructions: **“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed”** (II Kings 5:10). Simple enough, right? But too simple for Naaman. Naaman is furious and can’t believe Elisha would have him do such a thing. Naaman expected that either Elisha would do something great and grandiose to cure him or Elisha would instruct him to do something great and grandiose to be cured.

By the way, as a quick aside, don’t you find it ironic again that if anyone should be outraged because their situation in this story, it’s the Israelite slave girl (emphasis “slave”)? But the one who is outraged is the commander, great man, highly regarded, victorious, and valiant, who is about to be cured of leprosy by following some very simple instructions. Pretty telling, isn’t it?

Well, by God’s grace, Naaman is surround by some really caring servants, and it’s a group of servants who had accompanied Naaman on the journey to Israel that talk some sense into 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!’”** (II Kings 5:13). The lesson the servants were teaching Naaman was this: There is nothing you can do to earn or purchase your cure. Otherwise, the prophet would have told you so, and you would have done it. Just humble yourself and listen to the prophet. *(One more time, let me repeat that for anyone who might think like Naaman thinks and needs some servants to talk some sense into you: There is nothing you can do to earn or purchase your cure. Otherwise, the prophet would have told you so, and you would have done it. Just humble yourself and listen to the prophet.)*

And that’s what Naaman does. He humbles himself, washes himself in the Jordan, and is cured. Then notice very carefully what he says: **“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel”** (II Kings 5:15). Do you understand what a profound, eye-opening statement that is? Do you understand what has really happened to Naaman? More than being cured, he has come to faith in the true God. At that moment, commander, great man, highly regarded, victorious, and valiant man did not matter. Power, rank, and money did not matter. What mattered is Naaman’s humble understanding and trust that the world can’t give him what he needs, but God can. He finally realized the most important lesson in life. And it is God’s desire today that we do too.

Life can slap us in the face with so many different problems. But if each of us are humble and honest with ourselves, nothing slaps us harder than sin and death. Nothing slaps us harder than knowing that **“all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23) and **“the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23a). And nothing slaps us harder than understanding that there is nothing we can do or the world can do to take sin and death away. But God can! The moment anyone comes to this humble realization is the moment that the simplest message, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31a), becomes the greatest miracle of one’s life. It is the moment you know that there is no other God in the all the world. Why?

Because,

**What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh! Precious is the flow That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.**

Because,

**There in the ground His body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain.
Then bursting forth in glorious Day, up from the grave He rose again.
And as he stands in victory, Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
For I am His and He is mine Bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

The world cannot give you what these hymns verses proclaim from Holy Scripture. But God can! And he does. The blessings of the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection from the dead are yours through faith. Never lose the humble need for these blessings, especially when life slaps you in the face. Amen.