



THE BAPTISM OF NAAMAN

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, July 12, 2020

Do you need a miracle?

Perhaps you need a miracle, but...

You're stuck in your old ways.

You need an attitude refresh.

You don't really expect your religion to do anything significant for you.

If there is a God, you expect Him to work in ways that make sense to you.

And when other people's behaviors don't make sense, you get upset.

What if the world actually works in ways that you haven't encountered, and don't yet understand?

Would that define a "miracle"?

For some reason, we want a miraculous outcome, but we want it accomplished in an utterly ordinary manner that makes sense!

A genuine miracle doesn't make sense. It is life-changing—it shatters your sense of normalcy. Your routine gets changed.

Let's see just how, from 2 Kings 5.

In the days of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Ben-Haddad was king of Aram (modern Syria, to the northeast). This story can be found in 2 Kings 5.

2 Kings 5:1 The king of Aram (Syria) had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy.

This introduction to the story tells us several significant facts about Naaman: he was an effective leader, greatly admired by his boss for his outstanding work, he was a strong man, but he suffered a terminal illness.

The narrator lends us the insight of faith: “through Naaman the Lord had given great victories.” Even though he himself was a heathen, not a worshiper of Jehovah, still the Lord could use him, and did so, to position both the man and the nation, where He wanted them. We have been given a glimpse of the Sovereign Lord working through an unsaved individual to effect His will.

We have also been reminded of a common reality: Physical strength is not synonymous with personal security, and worldly success is not a guarantee of wellbeing. Bad things still happen to good people.

But that doesn’t mean that God is asleep. His providence always takes the long view, as He works behind the scenes to prepare for our future salvation and blessing.

2 Kings 5:2 At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young Hebrew girl who had been given to Naaman’s wife as a maid. ³ One day the girl said to her mistress, “I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.”

Here is another providential arrangement. Through one of the battles Naaman had won, a young Hebrew girl was taken captive, and she was given to Naaman’s wife to be her maid. The girl had compassion on her master, knowing that God was able to heal him. So, she suggested that he might find his miracle at the hand of the prophet Elisha.

With great respect for his king, Naaman told him what the young girl had suggested, seeking his favor and help.

2 Kings 5:4 So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. ⁵ “Go and visit the prophet,” the king of Aram told him. “I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel.” So Naaman started out, carrying as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter to the king of Israel said: “With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy.”

King Ben-Haddad showed compassion for his servant, and offered a king-sized gift for King Jehoram of Israel, with a short note: “Here is my servant, Naaman. I want you to heal him.” I suppose the king of Aram assumed that the “healing prophet” was the servant of Israel’s king, to do his bidding, just as Naaman was to him.

2 Kings 5:7 When the king of Israel (Jehoram) read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, “Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? Why is this man asking me to heal someone with leprosy? I can see that he’s just trying to pick a fight with me.”

When someone puts you on the spot by expecting you to demonstrate God's power, it would not surprise me if you, too, thought they were trying to pick a fight with you. "Who do you think I am—God?!?" It's a natural reaction. We haven't the power to work miracles at will.

But we do know the One who can, if we have the will to seek Him...

2 Kings 5:8 But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to him: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel."

Elisha knew His God, and he knew his relationship with God, and what God had given him to do.

If you are a born-again follower of Jesus Christ, you also have a commission from God—to make reconciled disciples (converted followers) from among all people. And that job description comes complete with the appropriate and necessary gifts for its success. You already have what you need—at least the seeds of the gifts and knowledge. They may require attention, care, and development, but God's providence prepares your way to success.

*2 Kings 5:9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house.
10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy."*

Here is another example of Naaman's studied humility. He showed up and respectfully waited at the door of the prophet. Elisha's servant delivered the prophet's message, for he only had to "say the word" for the miracle to take place.

We might think this leader of men would understand the operation of spiritual authority, but not everyone can see the parallel connection between the spiritual and the natural realms.

Jesus Christ was once approached by a soldier whose servant was at the point of death. Jesus offered to accompany him to his home to heal the servant. The soldier objected, saying that he was unworthy to entertain Jesus in his home, but that if Jesus would simply "speak a word," he was confident that his servant would be well, for he understood how authority worked. Just say the word.

Elisha's instructions were simple and to the point, without hype or fanfare: "Go and wash."

2 Kings 5:11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!"¹² Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

You see, even a person who behaves humbly, still has personal pride lurking within. What it takes to flip the switch is unique to each person, but the switch is there.

Naaman's pride got in the way. "I thought he would acknowledge me, do something special for me!" What was his objection? "What's so special about the water in the Jordan River?!?"

Sometimes, the sense of familiar tradition, or of nationalism, or any other form of natural thinking (in contrast to simple obedience) can get in the way of God's work in our lives. Naaman was overcome by his emotions, and the work of God's Spirit was undermined. At least for the moment.

That's when you need a friend who isn't afraid to encourage you with a reality check. Thank God for common sense!

2 Kings 5:13 But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!' " ¹⁴ So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!

Naaman relented of his tantrum, drew a deep breath, shrugged off his tension, and obeyed the man of God. You might have thought it was too late, that his initial outburst and disobedience lost the opportunity God had given. But you would be wrong. God is bigger and better than that. Again, He showed mercy, and again, He worked a miracle!

One time, as Jesus entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who cried out to Him to have mercy on them. He healed them all. One of them, a Samaritan, was overcome with gratitude and returned to give Jesus thanks and praise. Jesus said, "Didn't I heal ten? Where are the other nine?" Only the foreigner—the despised Samaritan—returned to thank Him. Naaman was like him.

Naaman was not only healed; he was spiritually awakened. He became convinced of God's existence, and of His generous kindness.

2 Kings 5:15 Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

¹⁶ But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused.

Unless you are broken inside, when someone has done something kind to you, it is natural to express your gratitude. It's an appropriate response.

But to want to repay them somehow is over the top. Especially with our God. Why? Because it's your pride at work. It's your pride that finds it difficult (and even humiliating) to receive something for nothing.

You probably know how heart-warming it is to provide something for someone that they truly need and enjoy. But you can't always be on the giving side of that equation. Sometimes you need just to be the receiver and let others have the joy of giving. Especially with God.

No one can outgive God. To try to repay His kindnesses is to try to add something of self to God's grace. And to add anything of self would be to dismiss, dishonor, and besmirch God's grace. Instead, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you in due time.

Elisha refused. "I will not accept any gifts." You cannot buy God's mercy; it is by grace alone you have been saved. Just be thankful.

2 Kings 5:17 Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord."

He was standing on holy ground, and he knew it! So, he took some of it home with him to build an altar to the Living God. He could see his whole inner life transforming, because of God's goodness.

But, even though you're saved now, *everything* doesn't change. *You change!* But many things around you remain the same. Naaman, for example, would have the same job when he got home. And he immediately saw how that might challenge the expression of his newfound faith.

In reverence for God, he anticipated the need for latitude and mercy, as he fulfilled his tasks for the heathen king.

2 Kings 5:18 However, may the Lord pardon me in this one thing: When my master the king goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, may the Lord pardon me when I bow, too."

¹⁹ "Go in peace," Elisha said. So Naaman started home again.

Naaman could foresee that part of his regular duties for the king (staying at his side and supporting him with his arm as the king worshipped his god) could be viewed as offensive to Almighty God. So, he requested a variance—a pre-approved exception. He thought, “I’ll just be doing my job, respecting my boss, not worshipping his god.”

You may be thinking right now of the story of the three Hebrew youth, who refused to bow to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar. How is this different?

It is different because they were commanded to worship another god; this, they would not do. And neither would Naaman anymore. He would serve his king, but he would not worship another god. I think the point is this: your job does not need to compromise your faith. In most cases, you can keep your job and keep your faith alive. You can even serve an unbeliever, faithfully.

Naaman, whose name means “pleasing,” was basically a humble man, a faithful servant. But he was completely unaware of the Living God. And he suffered what was usually a “terminal” illness. And he had issues with pride at the same time. But none of that precluded God working in his life. In fact, it set the stage for God, and He provided for Naaman in some amazing, unanticipated ways.

In fact, God used all of those details to reveal Himself and His great goodness to Naaman. God wastes nothing. He is able to work ALL things together for our good, if we just love Him and humbly follow His lead.

And, if we do this, in the end, we will be pleasing in God’s sight and we may go in peace.