

5. The general with leprosy

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Some people think that seeking God requires tremendous effort, like you have to go through a lengthy security background check, or you have to be a cousin of some special important person, or you have to be very religious or whatever.

What Jesus said totally blows the minds of everyone around Him while He was walking on earth, especially those Pharisees who thought that they were the ones since they were Pharisees, they were social elites, they were wealthy and they were circumcised Jews.

Seeking God does not have to be religious with a truck load of rules and regulations. To be exact, God despises men's rules and traditions of religions. Probably many of you have noticed that it seems like Jesus took a special delight in breaking the Pharisees' Sabbath traditions, because they were not of God.

The door to heaven is wide open for anyone to enter. The foot of the cross of Jesus is a leveled ground for anyone to reach up to Him. However, there is one string attached. The majority of humanity hates this particularly – faith in Him by His way.

This morning we find a Syrian general who was highly decorated, highly respected and highly egoistic facing the One whom he couldn't conquer, but eventually was pleased to be conquered by Him.

A. A GREAT GENERAL, BUT A LEPER

2 Kings 5:1 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.

I am sure that Naaman was a skilled warrior and brilliant strategist even though he was a pagan general. Even with all the respect, honor and prestige, he could not overcome one chink on his armor. He had a leprosy. We don't know what stage he was in, but obviously it was not at the beginning stage. But leprosy has a tendency to spread and if left unchecked, it ultimately kills. Only the power of the God of Israel could heal him.

Leprosy is known as 'Hansen's Disease' nowadays. It is a disease that attacks the nerve systems and rots flesh away to the point of limbs fall off. A person with leprosy loses sense of feeling, especially pain that a person could put his hand on a hot object and not even realize that he is literally burning his own flesh.

During the ancient times as well as now in third world countries, they usually live in isolated leper colonies where rats are infested. At night rats raid the colonies and eat still alive lepers' flesh and the lepers don't realize what happen to them due to no nerve system in their limbs even their faces.

The worst part of this disease is utter isolation from everyone, especially from the family the leper once had. However, Syrians did not isolate a leper like the Israelites did according to the commandment from the Lord.

B. THE TESTIMONY OF THE JEWISH SERVANT GIRL

2 Kings 5:2-3 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. 3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."

Who did God use to reach this man? Did He send the prophet Elisha, to come knocking at his door? Did God send an angel to reach him? No. Instead, God sent a young Jewish girl who had been taken captive and had been carried away to Syria. How easily this girl could have been bitter against God for allowing this to happen. Yet she spoke to Naaman's wife about the prophet Elisha, and Naaman's wife, in turn, spoke to Naaman.

Thank God for this girl who spoke up to Naaman and told him about the prophet in Israel. Thank God for every believer who speaks up in his or her home. Thank God for the believers who speak up in their schools and in their workplaces and tell people there is a God who can forgive sins. People today are seeking. They are in search mode, especially as they see such an uncertain future in our country, as well as the rapid changes taking place around the globe. People are wondering what is going on. They are questioning. God's Word has the answers.

C. THE ISRAEL KING BEHIND THE EIGHT BALL

2 Kings 5:4-7 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. 6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. 7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

According to the conversion rate for the weight, Naaman brought 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold, plus costly garments which would cost him about 2 million dollars. Somehow unsaved people think that God would be impressed with high valued gifts to Him or His people.

At this point, the king of Israel was not in the position to refuse in helping Naaman or the letter of the king of Syria since they beat him soundly not very long ago.

Israel king Jehoram's mind was blinded by unbelief and fear because he was not close to the Lord by his own choice.

The people who are close to the Lord run to Him when trouble comes, because the Lord is their Strong Tower where they can find peace and comfort in the midst of the storms of their lives. But the unbelievers frantically run in every direction except to God and think that somehow they can find some place to hide. It just doesn't work.

The idea that we must come to the Lord with gifts and offerings of money in order to receive His blessings and grace is reinforced everyday by the so-called "word of faith" message that crowds the airwaves and television channels. We are told that we must sow seeds of faith in order to reap a harvest of God's blessings. The discerning

know what they mean. The “seed” is money, the “ground” is their pocket and the “blessing” is whatever ails you.

D. NEED TO BE HUMBLER

2 Kings 5:8-10 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.” 9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house. 10 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.”

Elisha knew that Naaman had to be humbled before he could be healed. Accustomed to the protocol of the palace, this esteemed leader expected to be recognized publicly and his lavish gifts accepted with exaggerated appreciation, because that’s the way kings did things. But Elisha didn’t even come out of his house to welcome the man. Instead, he sent a messenger instructing him to ride another 21 miles to the Jordan River and immerse himself in it seven times.

Before sinners can receive God’s grace, they must submit to God’s will.

1 Peter 5:5b God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.

E. TOO SIMPLE TO FOLLOW

2 Kings 5:11-12 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.’ 12 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.

Naaman had it all figured out. In his great need, he anticipated a way God would work, and he was offended when God didn’t work the way he expected. The basic reason of his anger was pride, as the basic reason for the rejection to God’s salvation through Jesus is pride.

The Lord delights to surprise us with His goodness, if only we will unlock the door of obedience with the key of faith – which He has given us – and then push it open and walk through.

Great theologian late Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse so eloquently and simply described about the men’s choice for the salvation through Jesus Christ:

“Everybody has the privilege of going to heaven God’s way or going to hell their own way.”

Unfortunately more are willing to go to hell because they rely on their own goodness, riches, intelligence, or religion than those who simply are willing to believe in God’s way to heaven.

You all know that many people have visited our church for last eight years, but they choose not to come back. I can tell you this much. It is not because I don’t teach the truth. As a matter of fact, a good number of people choose not to come back because the truth from the Bible I taught them was too much to bear.

Until that time, they might have thought they were Christians and would go to heaven when they die. But the Bible says otherwise. So they choose to go to some other

churches where they don't hear about the only salvation through Jesus Christ. Or during my sermon they were told that they have to live according to God's way instead of however they want. They can run, but they cannot hide from the truth of God and the Spirit of the Living God.

Naaman had another problem:

He preferred the rivers back in Damascus to the muddy Jordan River. He thought his healing would come from the water, so it was logical that the better the water, the better the healing. He would rather have his own way and travel backward 120 miles than obey God's way and go forward 21 miles. He was so close to salvation and yet so far away.

F. THE GENERAL WAS HEALED

2 Kings 5:13-14 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?'"
14 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.

Only when the Syrian General abandoned his own idea about how God should work and submitted to His way did he receive the restoration he needed.

In the same way, we must recognize that God's methods of working out His plan in our lives sometimes don't make sense to us. That's why we need to be willing to turn from our own ideas of how God works and to follow Him, acknowledging that His ways are not our ways, but they are always best.

Isaiah 55:6-9 Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

I wonder some of Naaman's men scooped up several buckets full of Jordan River water to sell as "The Fountain of Youth from Israel". It was not the water that healed their general, rather it was God of heaven and earth.

Can you imagine this respected general Naaman stripping himself down to nothing in front of his own soldiers and stepping into the muddy Jordan River with a simple faith in the God of Israel? Wonder he was asking himself, "Am I so crazy enough to do this in front of my men?" while he was dipping himself for the seventh time? By his obedience he demonstrated his faith in God's promise, he was rewarded with the healing from the Lord of lords.

Faith requires actions of obedience and obedience needs a starting point of faith in God.

G. A NEW BELIEVER OF GOD IN SYRIA

2 Kings 5:15-19 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." 16 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. 17 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. 18 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." 19 Then he said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a short distance.

This was a fine display of gratitude. Naaman was like the one leper out of the ten Jesus healed who came back to thank Jesus in Luke 17.

In those days, people had the idea that the gods of a nation resided in that land, and if you left the land, you left the god behind. But Naaman had just testified that Jehovah was God in all the earth. However, taking that soil was a courageous act, because his master and his friends would surely ask Naaman what it meant, and he would have to tell them of his faith in the God of Israel.

In his second request, Naaman showed unusual insight, because he realized that his Syrian king would expect him to continue his official acts as the commander of the army. This included accompanying him into the temple of Rimmon, the Syrian equivalent of Baal. Naaman was willing to perform this ritual outwardly, but he wanted Elisha to know that his heart would not be in it.

Perhaps Elisha was convinced that the Lord would personally convict Naaman of this and give him the integrity and strength to avoid idolatry.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) We must acknowledge our own limited perspective.

Jesus came to call sinners to repentance, and before we can respond to His call, we need to acknowledge our own sin. Even as believers, our sin and narrow perspectives can blind us to the words and works of God.

2) Only when we hear the truth will we discover God's path.

God is not limited in one particular way. He uses a variety of means to bring us to salvation in Christ, closer fellowship with Him and greater knowledge of His will.

3) Only when we reach the end of our own way will we be ready to follow the Lord's way.

To receive the blessing God has for us, we can't follow our own way and ignore the Lord. We must be conformed by God to His way. Let's be humble and then turn from our own stubbornness.

4) Only when we do as God requires will we receive His blessing.

Was it God's will to heal Naaman? Yes. Would he have been healed if he had chosen not to respond to God? No. God made sure that Naaman's pride was broken first, so that he could receive the blessings God had for him. Similarly, when God leads us by means of His Word, His works, and His people, we need to listen and respond.