

The Leper and the Prophet...

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This is an account of miraculous healing from 2nd Kings Chapter 5. It had a profound impact on me when I studied it several years ago which is why I want to share it with you now.

Enter Naaman. Naaman was the commander of the army of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of the king and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Aramean raiders invaded the land of Israel, took a young girl captive and gave her to Naaman's wife as a maid. 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." So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. "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 set out carrying gifts: 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. 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." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God? That I can give life and take it away? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me." (to start a war). 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." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha did not come out. Instead he 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."

But Naaman became angry. "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! 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?" Naaman turned and went away in a rage. His officers reasoned 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 only to, 'Go wash in the Jordan and be cured!'" So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed! 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." 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.

Let's examine this account shall we?

Naaman went to Elisha, the prophet of God, to be healed of leprosy, and clearly he had certain expectations about how it was going to go down. We know that he was expecting to meet Elisha in person, and we can assume that he was also expecting some sort of spectacle: possibly some hand waving, shouting, dancing, chanting, special cremes and lotions, thunder, smoke, lightning... But Elisha didn't even come out to meet him, and instead sent his servant to tell Naaman what to do. Let's put it in today's language: Basically Naaman got dissed. And he didn't like it. Why? Pride. Naaman was Commander of the Army, second in command to the king. He was a hero, a "rockstar". A man in his position got massive respect and anything he wanted. In this case he wanted his journey to the prophet to include 1) actually meeting the prophet, and 2) some sort of special healing ceremony other than bathing in the Jordan River.

Bathing seven times in a muddy river in enemy territory was not exactly the royal treatment. I think most of us would have had similar reaction: Really? I came all this way bearing gifts and he won't even come out and see me? And taking a bath is his best advice? Really? Nevertheless, after his officers talked some sense into him, he swallowed his pride; humbled himself; did it anyway; and was miraculously healed.

Human nature hasn't changed.

Just like Naaman, we all have preconceived expectations of the way things should happen in life. We expect God to do things a certain way and we submit our little prayer requests to Him. Then we get mad when He doesn't answer or solve all our problems immediately. This is the wrong approach. Instead we should bring our problems to God with a Thankful Heart, knowing that He cares for us we ask for His help; and Believe and Trust that He will solve our problems in His own way and in His own time. That is exercising faith. The next step in the process is to ask Him for direction; to lead you in the way you should go. Be warned, you may not like where He leads you initially, but you have to trust that He is working everything out for your good in His perfect time. Naaman didn't like the directions he got. In his rational human mind a clean river would have been better to bathe in, but it wasn't about the river and he was missing the point. The point was to humble himself and trust and follow God's instructions even though it didn't make sense at the time. Many times we "give" God our problems, then we pick them right back up again. We worry about them and keep trying to figure out a way to solve them on our own. If you are worrying about a problem, you haven't completely given it to God. Every time I would start to be afraid and worry about cancer, I would prayerfully give it right back to God. God is no respecter of persons. We are all equal in his eyes.

Naaman thought he was special. He wasn't. Guess who else isn't special? You. Ok Ok I know that sounds harsh, here's what I mean. We are all unique, and other people may think you are special in superficial ways, but God doesn't see you that way. He looks at your heart. God demonstrates perfect love in that He loves us all equally and unconditionally. This is hard to imagine, but despite all the "good" things you've done in your life, God loves the thieves, rapists, and murderers just as much as He loves you. Don't get me wrong, He hates evil, and there are still consequences for sin, but nothing we do can ever change His love for us. He loves us in spite of what we've done. Pride is thinking of yourself more highly than you ought. True Humility is seeing yourself as God sees you, and realizing that nothing you can say, do, or possess will ever make you better than anyone else in God's eyes. Knowing this gives you a whole new perspective on how you should treat the people you encounter every day. Pride comes naturally and humility is hard. Knowing what to do and actually doing it are two very different things. Humility is something we all have to work at constantly.

God doesn't always do things the way we want him to. Clearly this wasn't the healing ceremony that Naaman expected. God often uses the people we least expect to accomplish His will. He used a lowly servant girl, a slave, to tell Naaman about Elisha. Then He used Elisha's servant to give Naaman his healing instructions. He uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He used two servants! I believe God's desire is always to heal, but He heals in different ways. Sometimes it's instantaneous, and sometimes "Everything in life happens for a reason, but sometimes the reason is you're stupid and make bad decisions" -Unknown. I love that quote! Even though God knows our future, we aren't robots making preprogrammed decisions from birth to death. He gives us freewill to choose how we live our lives. And as a result, many of the problems we face in life are our own fault and require a change of heart or habit, or both. God heals us the way we need to be healed, not necessarily the way we "want". If God had healed me of cancer instantly I would have continued my unhealthy diet and lifestyle, burning the candle at both ends, eating junk food, not taking care of myself, and not depending fully on Him. Instead, my healing was gradual and it taught me to rely on Him, to trust Him completely. He led me in the path of healing and it required a lot of faith and lot of action; making radical health changes and sticking with them for a long time, even now.

Naaman's encounter with Elisha after being healed beautifully demonstrates God's grace, mercy, and love for us. Elisha offered healing to his undeserving enemy and refused any reward because he knew that it was a free gift from God.

I wrote everything you just read on Saturday morning. I saved the draft, but didn't publish it. It just didn't feel finished. Then the next day this happened: Sunday afternoon I pulled into a restaurant parking lot to meet my wife and kids for lunch after church. As I was walking across the parking lot a small SUV pulled in front of me and the driver waved to get my attention. When I approached the vehicle an older woman in the driver seat put her hand to her throat and began to speak. There were no teeth in her mouth and she had a tracheotomy in her throat. She had to push a button to alternate between breathing and speaking. The windows were down and in the car with her was another woman and three young girls from elementary to junior high age. I assumed it was a grandmother, a mother, and her three kids. The grandmother spoke to me in a whisper between breaths, and with great difficulty. She told me they had been kicked out of their duplex the day before and only took what they could carry. They had spent the night in a shelter. They had no money and were hungry. She asked me if I could help them get something to eat at the McDonalds around the corner. My wife and daughters were waiting for me inside the restaurant and to be honest I didn't really feel like helping these people. In spite of that, I said, "Yes, let's go". They followed me to McDonalds's and I went inside with the mom and the two youngest girls. One of the girls looked at me and said, "What can we get?" My heart melted. I told them, "Get anything you want, whatever you want". And boy did they ever. The total was \$37.29. I'm pretty sure that's the most I've ever spent at a McDonald's and I didn't even eat. After I paid, the mom turned to me and said, "Thank you, God bless you." I said, "You're welcome. I want you to know that God has blessed me. That's why I'm able to do this for you." When I walked outside I said the same thing to the grandmother sitting in the car. She began to recite a poem to me. It was long and she was difficult to understand, but I caught a few lines, "...I can hear without ears...I can see without eyes...this body is only temporary...this world is not my home..." the poem was clearly about her trust and dependence on God to supply her needs. She told me she wrote the poem in 1995, and that in 2005 she was diagnosed with cancer. She said they took out her teeth so they could do radiation. I imagine her tracheotomy was also a result. She said, "God delivered me from cancer". I surprised her when I said, "He delivered me from cancer too." It was a sweet and powerful moment.

I drove back to the restaurant where my wife and daughters were waiting. We both teared up as I told Micah what had just happened. I was so choked up I had to stop several times to get through the story. I'm literally tearing up now as I finish this post! What can I say, God is so good. He has changed my heart and now I'm a big softy. I'm so thankful that He used me to show a family in need that He cares for them, and to make this post even more awesome!
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