

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to talk. They talked about many things and covered various subjects, and when they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: “I don’t believe that God exists.”

“Why do you say that?” asked the customer.

“Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn’t exist. Tell me, if God exists, why are there so many hurting people? If God exists, why is there so much suffering and pain and evil in this world? I can’t imagine a God, a loving God, who would allow all of these things.”

The customer thought for a moment but didn’t respond because he didn’t want to start an argument. The barber finished his work and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked scruffy and unkept. The customer turned back and entered the barbershop again and he said to the barber: “You know what? Barbers don’t exist.”

“How can you say that?” asked the surprised barber. “I am here, and I am a barber, and I just worked on you!”

“No!” the customer replied. “Barbers don’t exist because if they did, there would be no people with long dirty hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside.”

“Ah, but barbers do exist! What happens is people do not come to me.”

“Exactly!” responded the customer. “That’s the point! God, too, does exist! What happens is people don’t go to Him.”

This morning, we are going to work our way through a story where a man learned there is a real God who exists – the one true God, the God who wants to be known. So, if you have your Bible turn to **2 Kings 5** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

¹ Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper.

² Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.”

In our passage, we are told about **Naaman** who appears to be an exceptional man of his time. He is the captain of the army of Aram, or better yet, he is the supreme commander of the Syrian army, described as a mighty man of valor, a courageous warrior, and according to Jewish legend, Naaman was thought to be the one who shot the arrow that killed the wicked King Ahab.

Naaman is a leader of men, highly respected – and in Syria, he is the king’s right-hand man. By all human standards, he is a success, he possesses great wealth, he’s accomplished everything there is to accomplish – he seems to have everything that life had to offer and all he could ever want, but he doesn’t have what he needs – for we are told – **but he was a leper.**

In those days, leprosy was an extremely serious disease with no known cure. It was terminal. If you don’t know, leprosy is a skin infection caused by micro bacteria. It starts with small patches on the skin but ultimately it progresses over time to cover large portions of the body, and the thing that makes leprosy so dangerous is that it attacks the nerves, and the nerve damage it can cause may result in the inability to feel pain.

Often times when we think of leprosy, we picture some terrible disfigurement and even the loss of body parts – and in time, that could very well happen, but it doesn’t come directly from the disease itself, rather it comes from the untreated injuries and the unnoticed wounds due to one’s inability to feel pain. For example, if someone stepped on a rusty nail, burned themselves, or broke a bone, they wouldn’t realize something was wrong until the infection set in and it was too late. That’s why it was terminal, but not only that, it was also very isolating in nature because those with leprosy were often stigmatized and ostracized by society. For example, the Jews considered those with leprosy to be unclean, cursed by God, and therefore they were to be kept at a distance and separated from all others.

Apparently, Naaman was in the early stages of leprosy with small patches appearing on his body because he was still able to move about in public and even have an audience with the king. The king knew about Naaman’s leprosy and so did those in Naaman’s household.

We are told that in the home of Naaman was a young Hebrew slave girl from Israel. We don’t know her name, we don’t know her age, but we know she had been captured during a Syrian raid into Israel when she was little, tragically taken from her family, taken from her friends, taken from her home – apparently a godly home and now she serves in the house of Naaman and one day she says to his wife, **“I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.”**

I want to pause here for a moment because there is much to learn from this young slave girl. What happened to her was a tragedy. She had lost so much. Surely, her life did not turn out as she had hoped. Like most Hebrew girls in those days, I suspect she had dreamed of being married one day – raising a family just like her mother and her grandmother before her. That was the hope, that was the expectation, but that’s not what happened. She’s a slave, and in those days, slaves were nothing more than human property – less than human, used as tools like a horse or a mule until they were no longer useful.

Here is this young slave girl in a foreign land, serving in the house of the enemy, and instead of becoming lost in *hatred* and *bitterness* – even bitterness with God, eventually she *bloomed* where she was planted, and she sought to make someone’s life *better*. Out of compassion for others, she told her captors about a prophet of God in the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel known as **Samaria**. Despite her own difficulties and failed expectations, her behavior revealed what she believed. She still trusted God, and I think she understood that – God is God, He works in mysterious ways, and He has the right to do what He wants. This young slave girl had faith in God, she had confidence in His prophet, and she shared what she knew with Naaman’s wife, who in turn spoke to her husband.

This young Hebrew slave girl set the wheels in motion so to speak, and then beginning with **verse 4** we are told this,

⁴Naaman went in and told his master, saying, “Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.” ⁵Then the king of Aram said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes.

Well sometimes, desperate people do desperate things, and on the basis of this slave girl’s faith, Naaman approached the king. The Syrian king valued Naaman’s service – he was the king’s right-hand man, so he approved the journey into Israel, going so far as to write a letter to the king of Israel. So Naaman is set, and he possesses things he believes will assure him of healing.

First, he would buy what he wanted from Israel’s God with his gifts of silver and gold and fine clothing. From his pagan mindset, with his gift of 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold, Naaman could hire the prophet of God to do whatever he wanted.

His second resource was power in the form of a **letter** from the king. Kings typically got what they wanted, and the king of Syria made his desire clear: I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may **cure him of his leprosy**.

So, Naaman seemed to have everything he needed for success and he ventured off into Israel. Let's follow along beginning with **verse 6**.

6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me."

The king of Israel – likely Jehoram, gets this letter from the king of Syria, and presumably over the next several days, the king of Israel is trying to figure out why the king of Syria would ask him to do something he knows he can't do. I suspect the king of Syria assumed the king of Israel was on good terms with the prophet of God – that's why the letter was sent to the king of Israel, but that wasn't the case, and when Jehoram received the letter, he comes unglued and **tore his clothes** in anguish. He's thinking, **how in the world can the king of Syria expect me, the king of Israel, to cure someone of leprosy?** That's impossible and he knows it. In his mind, Syria is trying to pick another fight.

Notice that Jehoram says, **"Am I God"** and yet the last thing he could think of was to call upon God or reach out to His prophet. All he could read in the letter was a reason for war. The king was totally blind to the hand of God at work, but fortunately, the prophet of God was not, and beginning with **verse 8** we are told,

8 It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha.

Elisha, the former protégé of Elijah, was the prophet of God in those days. He knew God. He followed God, and he spoke the words that God told him to speak, and Elisha tells the king of Israel to send Naaman to him.

So Naaman, the supreme commander of Syria, shows up with his chariots, and likely a small army, and he waits for Elisha to come out to greet him.

Now, in that day and culture, there were unwritten rules in how visits were to be made and how visitors were to be greeted, especially dignitaries like Naaman, so it would have been expected that Elisha would come out to personally greet this great man – that's what Naaman expected, but Naaman did not get what he expected.

We are told beginning with **verse 10**,

¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean.” ¹¹ But Naaman was furious and went away and said, “Behold, I thought, ‘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 cure the leper.’ ¹² Are not Abanah and 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.

Instead of being personally greeted and honored by Elisha, Naaman is greeted by a lowly messenger with some crazy instructions for healing, and as we read in this passage, Naaman was offended and insulted by this kind of treatment. This prideful man was humiliated, surely thinking –

*“Doesn’t this prophet know who I am? And if that’s not bad enough, I’m told to wash in the Jordan River seven times. This prophet wants me to take a bath in a river that is 25 miles away. I could have stayed where I was at and bathed in the **Abanah** or the **Pharpar** River. Those waters are clean and clear – much better than the muddy Jordan River. I’m not lowering myself to that. I’m not going to humiliate myself in that way. Elisha should have come out and showed some miraculous display of power from God – **waving his hand** over my spot of leprosy. That’s what Elisha should have done. That’s what I wanted from his God.”*

Naaman felt entitled. He wanted an explanation. He believed he deserved better. He expected that things would happen on his own terms – in his own way. Jumping in a muddy Jordan River was beneath him, plus it made no sense because he saw no connection between a muddy river and his problem. Naaman was humiliated and so he storms off **in a rage**.

Now, I want to say something before we move on. This had absolutely nothing to do with taking a bath in a muddy river and everything to do with simple obedience to God in spite of one’s circumstances. That’s the truth the humble Hebrew girl seemed to understand and the truth the prideful Naaman completely missed, and quite frankly, it’s what we often miss as well.

Let’s be painfully honest. Like Naaman, we expect God to act a certain way. Even if our expectations are biblical, we still tend to see them through the filter of our own ideas of how God is supposed to act – especially on our behalf, and when God doesn’t do what we expect Him to do – forgetting that God is God – we find ourselves disappointed and angry – storming off in a huff.

Chances are you know exactly what I am talking about. Life didn't turn out as you had hoped and expected. You asked God for something – something that seemed to be in His will, a request that God could have easily granted if He wanted to – but nothing seemed to happen – it didn't go your way, and here you are left wondering where's God and what is He doing in your life. Yes, you believe God still loves you, but you're disappointed with Him, maybe even angry because things did not turn out as you had hoped and expected.

Was there a failure? Yeah, I think there was a failure, but it wasn't God who failed, it was your expectations of God that failed.

That's what happened with Naaman. His expectations failed him and so he stormed off – but the story continues beginning with **verse 13**.

13 Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, “My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, 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 himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

Thankfully, Naaman's servants couldn't let him walk away. They said, *“If Elisha told you to do some awesome ‘guy thing’ like climb the tallest mountain or sacrifice 1000 animals you would do it. We know you would be willing to do the hard stuff, so why not do this easy thing? Naaman, you are in need and you have nothing to lose except for your pride by washing in the muddy river.”*

So encouraged by his own servants, Naaman obeyed the instructions of the prophet of God and six times he dipped himself in the muddy river. Six times he did the right thing, six times he did what he was told to do – but nothing happened. The leprosy was still there. It was only in humble obedience, that on the seventh time, he experienced a miracle in more ways than one. Let's continue with the story beginning with **verse 15**.

15 When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, “Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.” ¹⁶ But he said, **“As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.”** And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷ Naaman said, **“If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.**

After his healing, Naaman returns to Elisha and says, “*Now I know something I didn’t know before. Now I know something I didn’t even come here to learn. There is only one true God in all the earth.*”

In his moment of simple obedience, doing something which made no sense to him by washing in a muddy river, Naaman had a personal encounter with God – an encounter he wasn’t even looking for and that’s the reality of following God.

For you and me, there is an encounter we will never have with God until we humbly submit and decide to obey Him even when it doesn’t make any sense. There is an awareness of God, an intimacy with God that only comes when we decide we are going to obey.

Hours before, Naaman had despised the muddy river, but now as evidence of a changed heart, he asked for the most valuable thing he could think of – as much dirt as a pair of mules could carry back to Syria, and let me explain what that means.

Naaman held a common pagan belief that deities only had power over certain places and they could only be worshiped on the soil of those certain places, so in his pagan mindset, and granted he has a lot to learn, to worship the God of Israel – the only true God he now acknowledges, it had to be done on a piece of God’s land. As evidence of a changed heart, this is how Naaman would honor the one true God.

God is God, He works in mysterious ways, and He has the right to do what He wants, and sometimes like the Hebrew slave girl, God may put us in a place, in a situation, in a circumstance we don’t want to be in, or He may send us to a muddy river – to do something that makes absolutely no sense, but in humility, we need to obey Him because there’s more at stake than we might know, there’s something bigger going on behind the scenes, and there’s something greater hanging in the balance.

Source Material:

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