

“IT PAYS TO OBEY”

(II KINGS 5:1-17)

INTRODUCTION

1. So often in reading the Old Testament it is hard to see the forest for the trees. Many people steadfastly refuse to read any of the Old Testament because they think it is so old that it cannot possibly be relevant in the Twentieth Century.
2. But the story that we read here in II Kings chapter five is as up-to-date as today's newspaper. It is a simple story about a man named Naaman, a four-star general in the country of Syria who was afflicted with an ancient disease called leprosy. On the advice of the prophet Elisha he goes to bathe in the river Jordan seven times, and his leprosy completely disappears.
3. Now to show you just how relevant this story is to you, in verse one substitute your name for Naaman. Substitute the word sinner for the word leper. Then in verse ten substitute the phrase blood of Jesus for the word Jordan. Unless you are completely in spiritual blindness you will see very quickly how this story relates to you and to me.
4. Now let's dive into this story and see how we can gain some spiritual insights.

I. Naaman's Prestigious Position

1. Now on the outside you would not think that Naaman had any problems at all. He was a virtuous citizen. He was "a commander of the army of the king of Syria." (v.1) He was a four-star general in one of the most powerful armies in all of the world. He was the Norman Schwarzkopf of his day. He had the prestige and prominence that went with such a powerful position.
2. But more than just being a military general, he was the king's right hand man. For we read, "he was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master." (v.1) He was highly respected by his people. His name was a key that could unlock any door in the country.
3. He was also a victorious captain. For "by him the Lord had given victory to Syria." (v.1) That is, he was a war hero. He had probably earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Everybody likes a winner, and Naaman had never known what it was to lose a battle.
4. But he was also a valiant commander. "He was a mighty man of valor." (v.1) He was known for his courage and his bravery under fire. He had not earned his spur sitting in some desk pushing buttons, but out in front with his men fighting the enemy. He had all of the awards, the accolades, the applause, the approval that his king and his country could give to him. He was a man that every mother would want their daughter to marry.

II. His Painful Problem

1. Everything looked great on the outside, yet there was a problem on the inside. Notice that little three-letter word "but." - "But he was a leper." (v.1) That one little word can make all the difference in a life.
2. Jesus told about a man in the twelfth chapter of the gospel of Luke, a rich man, a man who had so much that he had to keep building barns to hold all of his wealth. This man thought he was going to take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you...'" (Luke 12:20)
3. As valiant, as virtuous, as vigorous, as victorious as Naaman was, he was still a leper. Now leprosy is not a disease common to us today, but it was a serious disease thousands of years ago. But there is a deeper truth here than just the fact he was a leper. For you see, in the Bible leprosy is a picture of sin. In Psalm 38:11 David describes sin as "a plague." It is the same word that is used here for leprosy.
4. It is interesting to note that the Bible never speaks of leprosy being cured or healed. It is always cleansed. Because leprosy is the biblical picture of sin. We are never cured of sin, or healed of sin, we are cleansed of sin.
5. This is not just a story of the healing of a leper. This is the story of the saving of a sinner. Naaman's problem was not just his leprous skin. It was his lost soul. His sickness was a picture of sin.

ILLUSTRATION

Jim Valvano, the former N.C. State Basketball Coach, who died of cancer several years back, had a spot on the air talking about cancer, in which he said, "Cancer may touch my body, but it cannot touch my mind, it cannot touch my heart, and it cannot touch my soul." But that's exactly the parts of you that sin has touched. Naaman was not just sick, he was sinful. His body was eaten with leprosy, but his soul was rotten with sin, and he needed to be cured.

6. He had tried every ointment, every medicine, every doctor, every hospital, every cure, every remedy, but to no avail.
7. Then a little slave girl, a foreigner, suggests to his wife that he go to a foreign land to a prophet he had never seen, to receive a cure he was not even sure was there. "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. 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.'" (vv.2-3)
8. Now normally, Naaman probably never paid any attention to his little slave girl. But you see, Naaman was not only a diseased man, he was a desperate man. Just as a person will not go to a doctor until they realize they are sick, a person will not seek to be saved until they realize they are lost.

III. Naaman's Perilous Presumption

1. Naaman had come to the end of his rope. He had tried everything else. So he goes in to his master, the king of Syria, and tells him of his problem.
2. In return he receives two things: the king's ransom, and the king's recommendation. "So 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. 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.'" (vv. 5-6)
3. Now the little girl didn't mention anything about money, nor did she mention anything about a letter. So why did Naaman take these two things? Why did he go to the king of Israel instead of the prophet in Samaria? Why did he go to the wrong place with the wrong price to talk to the wrong person?

He Presumed God Could Be Bought

1. Naaman had in his pockets roughly the equivalent of four million dollars. He evidently thought that his healing had a price. He thought his salvation was for sale, so he took the king's ransom to buy his cure.
2. You know there are some people today who think that even God has his price. Well I want to make it plain that God is not for sale. Listen, you not only cannot buy God, God wants to buy you. The Bible says, "You have been bought with a price." (I Cor. 6:20)
3. The richest person in all of the world does not have enough money to buy one square foot of heaven. You cannot buy what is not for sale. The first lesson Naaman had to learn was that his healing was not something he had to buy. It was something that was being given away.

He Presumed That God Could Be Bribed

1. I can just imagine what was in that sterling letter of recommendation from the king. He had been voted Man of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce; he was in Who's Who; he had medals, awards, decorations, and trophies coming out his ear. Now he even had a personal recommendation from the king himself. But it was all absolutely useless. "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, to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.'" (v.7)
2. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not put poor Naaman back together again. You cannot buy God with money, and you cannot bribe God with morality. Neither your gold nor your goodness is going to get you anywhere with God. Someone has said, "You might as well try to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a paper boat as to get to heaven by your good works."
3. If you want to be saved and go to heaven, you don't need a recommendation from a king. You need a recommendation from the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father unless he goes through Me." (John 14:6)

IV. Naaman's Powerful Prophet

1. The real hero of the story now comes to the forefront, a prophet by the name of Elisha. He was exactly what Naaman needed.

He Was A Man Of God

1. Elisha is paid the highest compliment that anyone can ever be paid in v.8 where he is called "Elisha the man of God." "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.'" (v.8)
2. You see, Naaman did not just need a man to do God's work. He needed a man to preach God's word. He didn't just need a man to call on God. He needed a man who was called by God.
3. You know why Elisha was called the man of God? Well, first of all, he was a faithful man. Here was Naaman, one of the most powerful men in all the world, and most preachers in Elisha's situation would have said, "Let the king handle that problem, that's what we are paying him for." But not Elisha. He sends word to the king and says, "What Naaman needs is not a politician. What he needs is a prophet and a preacher. Tell him to come to me."
4. He was also a man of God because he was fearless. Can you just imagine the scene. Naaman rides up to this little prophet's cabin on his beautiful white stallion, surrounded by his powerful troops, his medals are gleaming in the sun, his uniform is spotless. He is surrounded by an array of the finest soldiers in the world, and Elisha won't even come out and talk to him. Elisha feared no one but God.

5. Naaman wanted to be heard. He wanted to be honored, but he needed to be healed. This man of God paid no attention to his position, his power, his prestige, his possessions. Naaman came as a general who happened to be a leper, but he was treated like a leper who happened to be a general. Men of God do not shy away from confronting men without God with their need for God. It takes a man of God to confront a man without God about his need for God.
6. But he was also forthright. He did not tell Naaman what he wanted to hear, but he told him what he needed to hear. He said, "Naaman, I don't care about your reputation. I don't care about your recommendation. You are sick, you are sinful, you need to be healed, and you need to be saved."

He Had A Message From God

1. "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.'" (v.10) Elisha's message is simple and straight forward. Go and bathe in the river Jordan.
2. We have a message today that is simple and straight forward-
-"Jesus Saves!" Now you would think such a simple, sweet, straight forward message would be well received. But notice Naaman's reaction. "But Naaman became furious." (v.11) You know, there are always two sure-fire marks that a man is really preaching the word: First of all, you will always hear what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. Secondly, you won't always like what you do hear.
3. Well Elisha realized it wasn't his job to make Naaman happy. It was his job to get Naaman healed. Naaman had come to the right doctor. He had gotten the right prescription, but he almost missed the cure.

V. Naaman's Paralyzing Pride

1. "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.' 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." (vv. 11-12)
Naaman was furious. He pleaded, he begged, he scolded, he threatened, but Elisha stuck to his guns. He said, "It's my way or trailways." If you're going to be healed it will be in the river Jordan or you will not be healed at all.
2. Naaman wanted to be healed, but he wanted to be healed on his terms. He didn't mind washing in the river, but he wanted it to be his river. The river Jordan was dirty, muddy most of the time, yet the Abanah and the Pharpar were sparkling blue and clean. He wanted to get clean his way.
3. He was like a little three year old boy named Richard who hated to take a bath. He just despised soap and water. Every time his mother would try to get him to take a bath it was world war III. Well one day she thought she would approach the subject from a more positive angle, and she said, "Son, don't you want to be a nice clean sweet smelling little boy?" He said, "Yes Mama, but instead of taking a bath can't you just sort of dust me off?" There are so many people who just want to be dusted off; they want to be white-washed instead of washed white.
4. You see, Naaman thought that God ought to do things his way, and that his way was better than God's way. I want to tell you that when it comes to salvation, God only has one way, and it's His way. His ways may be different than our ways; His ways may be above our ways, but His ways are always better than our ways.

5. There was only one thing keeping Naaman from complete cleansing, and that was his rotten stinking pride. Naaman did not want to be washed in the river Jordan, but he did not understand it was not a question of water, it was a question of will.
6. He said to Elisha, "I will die if I have to bathe in that water." Elisha said, "You will die if you don't." He said, "I would rather die than to bathe in that water." Elisha said, "Naaman, you will have to die before you will bathe in that water." You see, Naaman had a choice. He could either die in his pride, or he could die to his pride.
7. I want to tell you the only thing that keeps a person from being saved is pride. The only thing that keeps a person from walking down the aisle of a church is pride. The only thing that keeps a person from getting into a baptistry is pride. The only thing that keeps a person from getting involved in Bible Study is pride. The only thing that keeps a person from selling out to the church is pride.

VI. Naaman's Purifying Process

1. Well his servants finally talk him into obeying God's prophet, and he goes down into this river and he bathes seven times and he comes up completely clean. "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'?" (v. 13)
2. When he did exactly what God told him to do God did exactly what he told him he would do. God has told us exactly what we need to do to be saved. The Bible says, If you will believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins and be baptized you will be saved." Believe, Repent and Believe--that's doing what God tells you to do. Then you will be saved--that's when God does what He tells you He will do.

VII. Naaman's Public Profession

1. As soon as Naaman is healed, Naaman is saved. He makes a public profession of his faith in God. You notice in v.15 that when he returns to Elisha it says, "He and all his aides came and stood before him." There before all of his soldiers, before all of the world, he professes his faith in God.
2. We see his assurance of God. "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." (v.15b) Thank God he didn't say "I hope" or "I think" or "I feel" he said, "I know."
3. But there was also his acceptance of God. "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.' (v.17). He wanted to take back some dirt for the land of Israel to a pagan country called Syria so he could build an altar and worship the Lord. I want to tell you when a person is truly saved, born again, trusts Christ as his Lord and Savior, he will have a hunger and a desire to come to the House of God and worship the Lord.
4. But see also his allegiance to God. He had been a pagan, an idolater, but now he says he will "no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods," but to the Lord. Naaman was clean. Naaman was complete. Naaman was converted, and Naaman was committed. He had learned the greatest lesson that you will ever learn and that is, when it comes to God, it pays to obey. It pays every day. It pays every step of the way.