

Naaman: A Simple Faith
2 Kings 5:1-14

“Dear Diary, Today is the one-year anniversary of my healing. How different my life is today than it would have been had I not been healed.” One year ago today, Aug. 24, 840 BC. Hmm, I wonder what we are counting down to in this calendar designation of B.C.? And who is August named after, Augusta? Who’s that?

Oh, hello. Who are you all? (Response from someone: “We’re the congregation of Central Bible Church.”) Oh, well, how did you all get into my office? Well, no matter, I’m glad to have you all here anyway. Though with so many of you, if it gets a little stuffy, you can open a door.

You want to know who I am? [Stand up straight and tall.] I am Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram. Your Bible in 2 Kings 5 calls me a “great man” who is “highly respected” because I am a “valiant warrior who had brought a great victory to Aram,” my nation.

Yes, I was a “great man.” And, unfortunately, I knew it. I was so filled with pride my own dog growled at me. I was hard to live with. My wife could never tell me anything or give me any advice. At least she couldn’t until that day I became desperate.

I remember that day of desperation well. At first, it was just a little white spot on my wrist. I thought it was just a sun exposure blemish or something that would go away. I put Ale Vera Hydrating Moisturizer on it, but that didn’t work. I tried to ignore it, but instead of shrinking, it grew. Instead of staying alone, it multiplied. Instead of just being pale, those white blotches started to feel different, numb. I finally went to the doctor. Have you ever seen such a skin condition as this? I asked. The doctor’s concerned look told me he had, and his diagnosis was serious.

I remember that day of desperation well. I went back to my own mansion, shut the door, and wailed. Leprosy! Everyone heard me. My wife was terrified. What would this mean to her? Would she catch it too? Would we lose our prestige, our income, our friends? Would her husband die?

Everyone heard me, including a little girl who had been taken captive from the land of Israel, who was the personal slave of my wife. Now that I think of it, she was really quite an example. Even though she could have been so bitter toward us her captors, she wanted to help me. Imagine that. We had taken away everything from her—her family, her mom and dad, her land, her friends—and uprooted her to serve us in this strange land. We took everything away from her, except her faith. She still remembered the truths about her God, the God of Israel. She retained her simple faith.

Don’t tell me children can’t understand spiritual realities. Children can have a sincere faith that is more intense and just as accurate as the faith of adults. Do we have any children here who have faith in God? Stand up. Yes, yes. Don’t ever let us adults get in the way of your simple trust in God. God’s ways are so simple, even a child—especially a child—can follow them.

Well, this little slave girl spoke up to my wife. [Girl in audience says...] *“I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.”*

My wife rushed to tell me, and then I—grasping at straws, at anything—set about a plan to seek healing there. I went in and told the king of Aram what the girl and said, and I asked permission to go to Israel to seek healing. It was either that or fly to Mexico for a cure I’d seen on-line through my AOL account (that’s, Aram-on-line).

The King of Aram wanted me healed too. He gave me permission to go, and he also gave me a bribe to induce a healing—ten talents of silver and 6,000 shekels of gold and ten complete outfits from Nordstrom’s. He also issued a letter of introduction to present to the King of Israel. The letter of introduction read, *“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.”*

When I went to the King of Israel and presented the letter to him, I noticed his hand began to tremble. He didn’t give me an answer right away, but just asked I come back the next day. As soon as I was out of earshot—I found out later—the King of Israel burst into a terrified rage. *“Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?”* He speculated the King of Aram was just trying to pick a fight, to find an excuse to attack when he could do nothing to cure his general of leprosy. As a sign of his anguish and inability to cure leprosy, the King of Israel tore his clothes.

I heard about all this later, and so did the prophet Elisha. This was the prophet the little girl had suggested could cure me because he was connected to the true God, the powerful God, the God for whom nothing was impossible. Elisha sent word to the King of Israel, *“Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me and he shall know there is a prophet in Israel.”*

The King of Israel probably didn’t believe the prophet could cure me, but I’m sure he was relieved to have a temporary diversion.

And I was hopeful. Desperate, but hopeful. In my mind, I conjured up how the healing would take place. This great man, this prophet would come out of his house. He would come up to me, and recognizing my greatness would bow before me. He would count it a privilege to do something great for such a great man like me. And, he would see the silver, gold, and Nordstrom’s best on display piled up on my horses and chariots. What televangelist could resist the lure of such a donation to his ministry?

And so, I could see in my mind’s eye, how the prophet would heal me. He would “stand and call of the name of the Lord his God, and he would wave his hand over the place of my leprosy. And it would be healed.” I could see how it would be, how it must be, for such a great man as me.

But it didn’t turn out that way at all. The prophet Elisha didn’t even come out of his hut. He just sent his flunky out with a simple message. No prayers, no fanfares, no elaborate ritual. Just a simple message: *“Go and wash in the Jordan **seven** times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.”*

I was furious. I was insulted. The reality of the simple instruction clashed against the speculation of how God would cure me. “The Jordan River? Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” If healing was to come by washing in a river, could I not wash in Abanah and Pharpar—those clear rivers near my home. Abanah forms 20 miles to the north of Damascus, flowing down to that city. And Pharpar flows down from Mt. Hermon, fed from melting snow in the spring. Why couldn’t I wash in those refreshingly clear streams and be healed, instead of traveling all the way down to Israel to wash in this slow-moving muddy Jordan? [Display picture of the Jordan] The Jordan just meanders its way from one pond (the Sea of Galilee) to a stagnant pool (the Dead Sea). I turned to go away in a rage.

But one of my servants roused his courage to speak to me. Trembling, he reasoned, “*My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more ten, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?*”

Hmm, that made sense to me. My anger subsided. Even though it was an insult to my pride, my situation was desperate. My desire for a cure compelled me to faith and obedience. Faith, that it could work. Obedience, that I’d do what he instructed. My faith and obedience led me to the bank of the River Jordan.

I stepped down into the brown water. [Go down the steps of the platform, one for each dip.] I dipped once: No change. Twice: Still there. Three times: Spotted. Four times: Leper still. Five: Pale blotches. Six times: This seems hopeless. This seems useless. This seems embarrassing. What am I doing, acting like a fool bobbing up and down in a muddy stream.

I’ve often considered how miserably different my life would have been if I’d kept my pride and refused to submit to the simple instructions for healing. If I had not had **faith** in God’s ability or **obedience** to come his way.

People of your generation are just like I was. Some people don’t have faith. They are people who are so smart and proud and think ahead of time how God must deal with sin and heal us of our guilt. These people lack faith because they have other ideas besides or in addition to the Cross of Christ about how God must heal our sin and guilt. As you heard in the Scripture reading earlier today, “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

And then there are people who lack obedience; people who won’t come by simple repentance and trust. People who, in their pride, want to contribute to their salvation. People who want to mix into the bowl of grace, reforming their lives, or overcoming their addictions, or adding acts of service to somehow impress God enough to forgive them. We want to bring the 10 talents of silver and 6,000 shekels of gold, and 10 outfits to bribe God to save us. But God today, just like Elisha then, won’t even come out of his shack to receive a bribe. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling” is the only formula for forgiveness. That’s the only solution to the sin that clings to our souls like leprosy.

But I thank God I had **faith** in God’s ability and **obedience** to come his way. I took him at his word. I humbled my pride and did it his way. Down into the muddy waters of the Jordan River I went for the seventh time: Instantaneously, healed!

Jesus Christ—God appearing as a human—came to offer his life. “He himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by his wounds you were healed.” (1 Peter 1:24) Salvation is so simple. Even a little child can understand and accept it. “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” Faith and obedience. Faith that he has the ability to forgive you. Obedience, that you will submit to his method. God’s plan of salvation is by grace through faith. “And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Let’s bow our heads.

If you want to turn your life to God and be healed from your sin and guilt, will you right now by faith, obey his call to believe? Pray this prayer with me silently. Know that God, who knows everything about you, hears every thought that you think. So you can pray this prayer silently if you want to be healed of your sin and be freed from the penalty of your guilt. “Dear God, I believe Jesus is sinless man and eternal God. That he took my place and my punishment when he died for me. I believe he rose from the dead so he can be, not just my dying Savior, but my living Lord. Right now, I ask you to forgive my sin because Jesus took my penalty. And be my leader because I want to follow you; help me to do what you want me to do, to be what you want me to be. Forgive me and lead me, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

[Congregational Singing Response. “’Tis So Sweet to Trust”]