

The story of Naaman Sermon given on 7th February 2021.

Today I am preaching on 2 Kings chapter 5, the story of Naaman who through Elisha was cured by God of leprosy.

Now Elisha, who had succeeded Elijah when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, had by the time of our story performed many miracles.

Elisha had shown amazing prophetic powers in the name of God, as recorded in 2 Kings.

The first was in chapter 2: 19 to 21, where he made the rancid water sweet in Jericho, and later in chapter 4 restored the life of a rich woman's son, to name but two of his miracles.

But before we go on a few words about Naaman. Naaman was an Aramean pagan Gentile living in what is now Syria in about 800 BC. He was the commander of the king of Aram's army, which would have made him a rich man probably with estates. like the Duke of Wellington and his estate at Stratfield Saye who was given his by the crown in recognition of his victory at Waterloo.

Naaman had a wife who had servants of her own, one of whom was a young girl from Israel who had been captured in a battle by Naaman.

Naaman would be known by the king and all his officials; and he and his wife, would be in demand at the king's social gatherings and functions, because as we are told he was in high favour due to his victories in battle.

Then he contracted Leprosy! Suddenly all this honour and social gatherings would cease, he would have to declare himself 'unclean' so that people could keep a safe social distance from him, and he would be in lockdown which would make our lockdown be like freedom in comparison, because his lockdown would only cease at his death.

Then in verse 3 this young captive girl from the land of Israel tells Naaman's wife, "If only my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Now the young Israeli girl is undoubtedly talking about the prophet Elisha.

Now normally a man in his position would not have listened to a servant girl, but Naaman and his wife are different, they were kind people who loved the young girl from Israel, and treated her well, and she loved them in return; otherwise, she would not have tried to help Naaman in his distress.

Now the young Israeli girl had probably spent time talking to Naaman and his wife about the God of Israel, and Naaman had understood what she had been saying and beginning to have faith in God rather than in his pagan idols.

So, when she spoke about Elisha a man of God, Naaman, through his faith in God knew that through Elisha her God could cure him, and Naaman's faith in God was certainly the key to why God decided to cure Naaman of his disease.

Now Naaman as defender of the realm, would not have been allowed to leave the country without the king's permission, so he goes to the king and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

So, the king of Aram, who had now been told of Naaman's affliction, and who clearly still wanted to help Naaman, said go to the king of Israel and I will give you a letter of introduction for you to give to the king of Israel.

We are told in the second half of verse 5 that he took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of Gold, that is about 2 million pounds. The clothes too would have been specially made for a king so they too would be expensive.

I wondered why he took so much but the Arameans and the Jews had recently been at war, so they were not on the best of terms, so the king of Israel was unlikely to help him unless he was given sufficient incentive.

Now when he presented himself to the king of Israel the king would have known who he was, so the king was already on his guard at the arrival of an Aramean army commander.

Before we go on too far just a short note about the king of Israel. In Elisha's day there were two kings Joram for the first seven years of Elisha's ministry and for the rest of Elisha's life king Jehu was on the throne of Israel. So, it was likely to have been king Jehu who Naaman saw.

Then Naaman presents the letter to king Jehu from the king of Aram which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

And we are told that directly king Jehu read the letter, that in his anguish he tore his clothes, and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." And the king is probably waving the letter about in front of his courtiers.

Now I can understand the king's response, because for me the letter from the king of Aram was somewhat brief to say the least and had no mention of the girl's statement about a healing prophet in Israel the very reason why Naaman was there.

The king's reaction also suggests that the king did not know that Elijah had passed his mantle on to Elisha, and consequently did not know of a prophet in his land who might be able to cure diseases otherwise he would have said, "I will pass you on to Elisha."

Now, Naaman may also be having some doubts that the servant girl had got it right in her statement about a prophet; this was a difficult time for both the king and for Naaman.

But then Elisha hears about Naaman so he sent a message to the king asking why the king had torn his clothes, and added, "Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So, the scene now changes from the king's palace to the entrance of Elisha's house.

Now Naaman did not go to Elisha's house on his own but with all his companions, Naaman was an important man with numerous attendants, and one would have expected Elisha to come out of his house to greet them and make them welcome, after all he knew they were coming.

But instead of that Elisha sent a messenger out to him who told him to go and wash in the river Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.

Naaman could not believe it, the king of Israel had invited him into his palace, but this fellow does not invite him into his house, nor did he come out to greet him, but sent a messenger out to say, "Go and wash in the river Jordan seven times."

Naaman was angry and said, "I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy."

And he continued, "Are not the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman had risked a lot to get to Elisha's house; he had told the King of Aram that he had leprosy, not knowing what reaction he would get from the king with such a confession, fortunately for him the king valued Naaman and helped him.

He had gathered a huge sum of money to give to the king of Israel and confessed to him that he had leprosy; so, after all the risks he had taken Naaman, as we have heard, expected a great deal more from Elisha than just to be told to bathe in the river.

Then his servants approached him and said, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?" "How much more when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean,'" The servants who were not so emotionally involved had summed up Naaman's situation correctly.

But here also is an expression of love and equality between Naaman and his servants, his servants who were with him did not address him as Lord or master, which was normally expected of servants or slaves in those days, but as 'father', a word of familiarity and endearment.

Not only that, even when Naaman was in a rage they were still not afraid of him, they approached him with words of encouragement and advice about his mistake in not doing as the prophet had told him.

Here the commander of a great army calms down and listens to his servants, accepts their advice, and does what Elisha told him to do.

This great commander valued other people no matter what their station in life, yet another occasion demonstrating Naaman's regard for other people.

So Naaman went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Naaman's faith and consideration for others reminds me of the Roman centurion in Matthew chapter 8 who cared so much for his servant that he went to seek out Jesus, a humble Jew, a member of conquered Israel, rather than let his servant die.

Now of course it was not the water of the river Jordan that cured Naaman of his leprosy, it was his submission to God, that despite his anger he humbly bathed in the river 7 times, it was his faith in God that cured him.

Now although our reading did not go down to verse 17, it is important to know that in verse 15 Naaman wanted to reward Elisha for what he had done, but Elisha replied that he served God, confirming that it was God who had done the healing not him, and refused to accept anything; and in verse 17 Naaman pledged himself, before God and Elisha, to only worship the Lord in future.

Now Jesus had words to say concerning Naaman as recorded in St Luke's gospel at chapter 4 verse 27 where ST Luke wrote, "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

In the following verse 28 of Luke's gospel, we are told that all in the synagogue were filled with rage at what Jesus had said, this was because they realised what Jesus had meant, that Naaman a Gentile was the only one in Israel who had enough faith in God to be cured, and that they were no better than their ancestors.

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