

A Big Man Becomes God's Little Child

Sermon for August 28, 2022

2 Kings 5:1-17

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We are studying the New City Catechism this year, because it is a great summary of what we believe as Christians. I will read the question 35 and then we will read the answer together.

Question 35: Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

All the gifts we receive from Christ we receive through the Holy Spirit, including faith itself.

This question and answer are about the mystery of faith. We must choose to trust in Jesus and put our faith in God. But where do we get that faith? It is a gift, delivered by the Holy Spirit. In this way, God alone receives the glory for our salvation. The Father sent the Son to die a sacrificial death in our place. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see and believe in Jesus. And when we do, the Father counts us as holy and the Holy Spirit helps live holy lives.

In other words, salvation is the work of God in our lives. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is about the amazing work of God in someone unexpected. We are going to meet a Syrian General. He was an enemy of Israel, but God brought him into covenant community. We are going to look at how God does that, focusing on the following details:

Point 1. Three ways that Naaman's pride is an obstacle to his salvation;

Point 2. Three ways God teaches Naaman humility so he can receive grace;

Let's read God's Word, from 2 Kings 5:

1 "Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria.

He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

2 Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

3 She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria!

He would cure him of his leprosy."

4 So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel."

5 And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

7 And 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 sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?

Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes?

Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."

9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying:

"Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

11 But Naaman was angry and went away, saying:

"Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

12 Are not Abana 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.

13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it?

Has he actually said 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.

15 Then Naaman returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him

And Naaman said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel..."

17 from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship you because you are full of mercy and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Point 1. Three ways that Naaman's pride is an obstacle to his salvation.

General Naaman was a "great man." He was talented, wealthy, connected, and successful.

But Naaman did not know his Creator who had given him these many blessings. Did you notice in verse 1 that it was God who made Naaman victorious? Naaman does not know and worship the one who deserves the credit for Syria's success. Naaman does come to faith eventually, but three things get in his way:

position; 2) possessions; and 3) power.

Think about successful people who have influential positions, many possessions, and considerable power. Did you know they can also have deep needs? In fact, sometimes God is merciful enough to allow problems to enter the lives of comfortable people, to wake them up. In Mark 10:25 Jesus said:

25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Did Jesus mean that God has shut the door of heaven to wealthy people? Of course not. I think the problem for the wealthy they are cushioned from reality. Human beings don't want to admit we need a Savior. I didn't want to admit that because I was too proud. Human pride is always a problem. But the wealthy have the added problem of being comfortable. Without many material needs, they don't feel needy.

Material comfort and earthly success are like packing peanuts that protect us from the hard shock of reality. Revelation 3:17 has a strong warning for comfortable people:

17 "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Naaman was rich and prosperous. But he lacked one thing: A cure for his leprosy. This need in his life was the opening for the gospel into Naaman's heart. But first, God had to kill Naaman's pride. Leprosy caused numbness in Naaman's fingers and toes, but Naaman's pride numbed his heart. When Naaman gets the word to go to Elisha, he instead goes to two kings. To get a powerful cure, he goes to powerful people.

Naaman uses his position of influence to get a letter from one king to another. I don't know how many of you can pop into the White House and ask the President to write a letter for you, but Naaman can do that. He wants to be sure he gets the attention he deserves in Israel. Second, Naaman uses his possessions to get his cure. He brings along \$4 million--that's how much the silver and gold he brought are worth today. Naaman will spend whatever necessary to acquire a cure for leprosy. He is prepared if he might need to pay Elisha or bribe someone.

Third, Naaman uses his power to get his cure. He arrives at Elisha's house with his horses and chariots and demands to be cured. When Elisha sends out a servant instead of appearing before Naaman himself, the great General is furious. Naaman says: "I thought that he would surely come out to me." Naaman is saying, "doesn't this little man know who I am? How dare Elisha send a messenger to a man like me!" Naaman uses his anger and a show of military force to bully Elisha and demand his healing.

But God wants Naaman to be healed by grace alone. That's why every one of Naaman's strategies fails. The letter only puts the King of Israel in a self-centered state of panic. Naaman's money is rejected by Elisha. And the General's shouting and demands get him nowhere. In the past, Naaman's position, possessions, and power were enough to get what he wants. In a city like Washington DC, many people rely on position, possessions, and power to get what they want, don't they? It doesn't work this time for Naaman. Think how hard that must have been for him to accept.

But God is loving Naaman here. You see, God is not going to allow this successful, proud man to be healed by his own resources. Naaman's body and soul are restored by grace alone. That's the only way God heals people. God's grace is amazing because it is free and cannot be earned. That is why only the humble can receive grace.

Point 2. Three ways God teaches Naaman humility so he can receive grace.

Naaman's first lesson in humility is his disease. When everything is going well in life and we are enjoying success, we often forget the God who blessed us. Instead we devote ourselves to enjoying His blessings. But when your child is sick, or you lose

your job, or something like that, you discover that a big tv and nice car aren't much comfort, are they? Suddenly, that crisis is what captivates your attention. All those things that satisfied you before and captured your heart begin seem meaningless. And then you cry to out God for help.

For Naaman to understand his helplessness, he needed something he was helpless to solve. God used Naaman's leprosy to make him aware of his mortality. The man who seemingly had it all had one problem that his position, possessions and power could not solve. We all hate to be needy, but God only saves those who see their need for him. Through our need, God makes Himself visible to us.

Yahweh and Jehovah are two ways of saying God's name, the name I AM. It's an unusual name, an unfinished sentence. I AM is like a blank check, and God fills it in with our needs. Our needs are like eyeglasses that help us see God's character clearly. Jehovah-Shalom means: I Am Your Peace. Jehovah-Jireh: I Am Your Provider. Naaman doesn't need peace, or a provider. Naaman is a leper, with a disease that humbles the man enough so God can reveal Himself as Jehovah-Raphah: I AM Your Healer.

Naaman's second lesson in humility is a little messenger girl. There is a clear contrast between the "great man" in verse 1 and this "little girl" in verse 2. Naaman is powerful and rich. She is powerless, and penniless. Naaman is a man with great freedom, living independent of God. She is a slave with no freedom, she is completely dependent on the Lord. But she is precisely the instrument that God chose to use in this place and time. My friends, don't ever think that you don't have something God can use, wherever and whoever you are. The Holy Spirit gave this girl faith to say something when it was risky. We will spend some more time talking about her in next week's sermon.

For now, we should look at Naaman's third lesson in humility: An unexpected bath. Because Naaman is a big man with a big disease, he wants a big expensive cure. But God tells Naaman to do a simple, humble thing. God tells him to wash himself in the Jordan River. This is hard on Naaman's pride. Receiving healing purely by grace through faith means our position, possessions and power are useless. But it has to be that way, because then we don't get any of the credit for healing. It's all by grace.

That's why people struggle to bend their knees and receive their Savior. We would much rather have a salvation that we earn, because then God will owe us something. If we believe we did something to earn God's love, then we can look down on people who haven't found their way into the family of God yet. But Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9:

8 "by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

When you decide to give your heart in Jesus, it is because the Holy Spirit gave the gift of faith to you. You are just like Naaman, my friend. You can't heal yourself, and neither could Naaman. God arranged everything about Naaman's healing so he and everyone else could see that Yahweh alone deserved the praise and glory. Naaman must depend on God's word completely to be healed. Naaman receives no explanation for why he must go to this muddy little river to wash seven times. It seems ridiculous to Naaman.

When I was an atheist, it seemed foolish to me to believe in some Jewish guy who died on a cross 2000 years ago. It seemed ridiculous to think that Jesus could offer forgiveness for my sins, lasting peace, and eternal life. It sounded crazy, but it's true!

Look at what Paul says about the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:22–25.

22 "It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven.

And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.

23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength."

God uses what seems weak, and foolish. He uses a weak slave girl to help strong Naaman. God uses the foolishness of bathing in a dirty foreign river. God uses these things to show Naaman his pride so he would be humble enough to receive salvation by grace alone. Naaman finally stops fighting, and gets his bath. His flesh is restored, and he is made clean. These are two separate things that Elisha mentions in verse 10. Naaman is restored and he is made clean. Naaman is healed on the outside, but he is also purified on the inside. How do we know that Naaman's healing was internal as well as external? I see at least three things. First, Naaman returns to thank Elisha. From Elisha's house Naaman travelled east to the Jordan River. After his healing, he could have continued going east back home to Damascus.

Instead, Naaman goes out of his way to return back to Elisha and thank him. It reminds us of when Jesus healed 10 lepers, and only one came back from the temple to thank Jesus, in Luke 17:16-19.

16 "The leper threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan...

18 Jesus asked, "Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"...

19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Naaman and a Samaritan are two foreigners healed of leprosy, by grace, through faith. And both men responded with gratitude. When Naaman returns to thank Elisha we see the second sign of his conversion. In verse 15 he says to Elisha: "Please accept now a gift from your servant." The arrogant man who demanded that Elisha come out and acknowledge him, is now calling himself the servant of Elisha. Naaman calls himself "your servant" five times in this chapter, because he has been humbled.

Naaman's pride blinded him before, but now he can see clearly. Now Naaman is ready to worship the only true God. Did you hear what he said in verses 15 and 17?


15 "Naaman said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel...

17 from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord."

This happened hundreds of years before Peter went to Cornelius in Acts 10 and the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit. God has been bringing the nations to himself throughout human history, and God often does it in surprising ways. The work we are doing today at One Voice Fellowship is a continuation of this same story we saw today. God is using the Holy Spirit to reveal to sinners from every country that they need of a Savior. The Holy Spirit shows us all that power, possessions, and position are false idols that cannot save us. Next week we will continue looking at the story of Naaman, with a focus on this young girl from Israel. I think she is the quiet hero of the story, so I hope you will be here next week to see what God wants to teach us from her example.

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to help us understand the Word of God today. We are amazed when we think that you want to rescue and save people like Naaman. He was a foreigner and an enemy, but now he is your son and beloved child. And so are we, if we have put our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for the gift of faith that opens our eyes so we can believe. We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord, amen.

 One Voice Fellowship