

God's little messenger of hope

Sermon September 4 2022

2 Kings 5:1-17

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Introduction

Last week we learned about a man named Naaman who depended on position, possessions, and power to succeed in life. This arrogant, self-sufficient Syrian general learned humility and received grace. But first God had to teach Naaman humility in three ways. The disease of leprosy was a humbling problem that Naaman could not solve. Naaman was also humbled when he had to trust the word of a foreign prophet and wash himself in the Jordan River.

The third way God humbled Naaman is by using a foreign slave girl to provide the answer no one else could. We only talked about her briefly last week. She can help us see two things in this story. First, no one is too far outside of God's household to be invited inside. Second, every one of you are useful to God, wherever you are, and whoever you are. You don't need to know the answers to the problems of your neighbor or co-worker. This girl didn't know how to cure leprosy, but she knew where to point Naaman: to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

I hope you will be encouraged by the example of this nameless servant girl. I hope she will inspire you to share God's message of hope with those around you. That is how God's community expands. People come into God's family when we tell them good news. God is the only one who can heal and give new life. But God uses us to point lost, hurting, and broken people to the source of life.

Now 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.

Our story begins with two very different characters in verses 1 and 2:

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."

We see a little girl, maybe a young teenager, working for one of the most-powerful men in the powerful country of Syria. This girl was different than the other slaves captured by the Syrians from other countries. This girl grew up in Israel hearing the Word of God. She was raised as a child of the covenant.

Therefore she had many of the same blessings that covenant children have at this church. When children are baptized here, it is a sign and seal of God's covenant promises in their lives. They grow up hearing about the character and love of God. This slave girl did, too. This slave girl in attended annual Passover celebrations when she was young. She heard about Yahweh's mighty deeds in the world. Then, when she herself was out in the world, she knew what to say to a Gentile General about her God.

It's interesting how the humble servants in this story are the ones who see things clearly, and the powerful who get things wrong. Naaman's servants see the wisdom in following Elisha's instructions, and gently encourage him to do it. Naaman and the King of Israel are foolish skeptics, but the slave girl and Naaman's own servants see wisdom and speak truth. God wants us all to be messengers of truth and hope to the people around us. You don't have to know the answers to the problems of your neighbor or co-worker. This girl didn't know how to cure leprosy, but she knew where to point Naaman.

She didn't want to be in Damascus, of course. Maybe you aren't excited about living in the DC area. Maybe your spouse's job brought you here, or your parents. Some of you came as refugees because of persecution or war in your home country. But you are not here by accident. This little girl was not in Naaman's house by accident, either.

As a child she grew up hearing about Joseph, just as our children do today. Joseph was brought as a slave to the strange land of Egypt. This girl knew that even in her slavery, her loving Father in heaven remained in control. She would know what Joseph said to his brothers, in Genesis 50:20.

20 "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.

He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people."

This young slave girl surely remembered how Joseph earned the respect and trust of the Egyptian leaders. Perhaps she followed Joseph's example, and earned the right to serve the wife of this powerful General. Nonetheless, she was an enslaved person. Her parents may have been killed before her own eyes during her capture. Or maybe her parents became slaves, also. This girl was forcibly separated from her family and homeland, never to return. She had lost very much, but by speaking up she could lose even more. What if Naaman and his wife decided she was too bold in speaking up about Naaman's illness/ What if the cure did not work? She could be in danger; she could lose her current job, or even her life.

Maybe you are too scared to speak up to someone. Maybe you are afraid of what you might lose, maybe the friendship or respect of others. But there are needy people all around you. Some of them are poor, weak, and helpless. There are also needy people who are good at hiding their needs behind their nice clothes and comfortable lives. People like Naaman, who are depending on position, power, and possessions to make life work. No matter how successful someone appears to be, remember that we all are broken inside in some way. Do you pay attention at school, at work, and in the neighborhood? You could be a messenger to broken people around you. Get close enough to people to be their friend and learn where they hurt. Tell them about the only source of real healing for bodies and souls.

This girl had faith in God when much of Israel had abandoned the worship of Yahweh, and chased after foreign gods. This girl knew about Elisha, the true prophet of the true God who can heal Naaman. Sadly, the King of Israel doesn't believe it, although he was supposed to lead his people in true worship. Instead, the king acts with disbelief and selfish concern for his own skin. Far away in Damascus, this young girl was a light of hope when she chose to love her enemy. She foreshadows what Paul writes in Romans 12:17-21.

17 "Never pay back evil with more evil.

Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge...

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; If they are thirsty, give them something to drink..."

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good."

This little girl loves her master and does good to him. She could have kept quiet to protect herself. And she could have been angry toward Naaman, the leader of the army that had captured her as a slave. She might even have enjoyed his suffering. If I were in her shoes I might be angry with Naaman and bitter toward God who allowed me to fall into slavery. Yet she speaks up with courage, testifying about the power of her God. And God honors her for it, immortalizing her by including her in the Word

of God. I look forward to meeting her.

The love that this girl shows to Naaman is "hesed" love. "Hesed" is a Hebrew word for "generous-loyal-love." It is sacrificial love, expensive love. Jesus is the best example of this kind of generous-loyal-love. When Jesus came to earth he knew that people would reject him, hate him, and kill him. Jesus was willing to give his life, to save your life. We did not deserve his love, but Jesus gave us hesed love anyway. The hesed love of Jesus says, "I care more about helping you than the price I will pay." When you understand and receive Christ's hesed love for you, then you can offer generous-loyal-love to others.

This young girl risked her own position and safety to show hesed love to her master. Naaman didn't deserve her help or the healing he received. But friends, remember that we have also received help when we were unworthy. The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 5:6-8:

6 "When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.

7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

God only saves those who understand they are sinners. Before Naaman could be healed, he had to see the sin of his pride. To be cleaned, Naaman had to come to God the Father like a needy child. The position, possessions and power Naaman was once so proud of were only temporary. Keeping them depended upon his performance. If he stopped winning battles, and lost the confidence of his king, he could lose all he had earned. That's true for us, too. All the earthly things we work hard to acquire will soon pass away. But there is a position of exaltation more valuable and permanent that cannot be taken away. It is the position of God's child.

Have you come to God as a needy child?

Have you come honestly, admitting that you need a Savior? I know that you aren't living your life the way God thinks you should. I know because none of us live the way we ourselves think we should! We are all guilty of the kind of sin we see in Naaman. We use our position, possessions, and power to make ourselves comfortable, so we won't see the reality of our situation. We all have a fatal disease, like Naaman--It is pride. Do you know what the opposite of faith is? It is not unbelief. The opposite of faith is self-reliance. The sin of pride and self-reliance is deeply planted in my heart, and yours. But when you humbly ask God the Father to forgive you, He will. Jesus surrendered his life to give you life eternal.

Satan tempted Jesus with position, possessions, and power in the wilderness. Jesus was offered the same three things that

Naaman depended on for his life. The same things we rely on. But they are false idols. False gods make promises they cannot keep. When you see that, and turn to Christ, new life begins. If you believe that Jesus died to remove the guilt and shame of your sin, then he will give you a new heart, and restore you from the inside out. Naaman became richer than ever before, when he stopped trusting in possessions and power. He received a new position when God became his King and Father. Do you have the security and peace of knowing that you are His beloved child, like that little girl? You can't lose that status, because it's a result of God's work and not your own efforts. Your position before God does not depend upon what you do but what Christ has done for you. When you understand that, it changes the way you live. You have both peace and courage.

And God will put you in places where you can speak up. God can use you like he used a little slave girl. We all must tell others about the hope we have found in Jesus. God the Father offers healing and hope to anyone who comes in faith like a little child, and trusts in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

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. We are also amazed that you can use ordinary people to accomplish your work. You used this young slave girl to do a big thing. Help us remember that when we are afraid about saying something about you. Give us courage and compassion to point people to you for healing and salvation, because there is nowhere else we can go. We pray all this in the name of Jesus our Healer and King, Amen.