

2 Kings 5 A Great Man Healed, a Greedy Man Judged

There are not too many accounts of conversions in the OT. We don't find many Gentiles who became Jews. There are several notable converts—Rahab and Ruth immediately come to mind. One of the only other converts from paganism to the worship of the true and living God is Naaman.

Any child who's spend much time in Sunday school or at VBS knows the story of Naaman the Leper. This is probably one of the best-known episodes in the life of Elisha.

In this passage, we have an interesting contrast between a pagan Gentile who becomes a believer and a professing believer who acts more like a pagan Gentile. God tends to be quite tolerant and lenient toward those who don't know any better, but he's quite severe on those who do know better. The warning for us is that God might bring down severe chastisement upon us if we behave like the unsaved world.

Primarily, the passage shows us the great power of God that is available for those who believe his word.

Let's consider several lessons/principles from the story.

- I. .1b The Lord is sovereign over the whole earth.
 - A. Note that “the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria” by the work of Naaman. Syria is a pagan country, and yet the author tells us that it was the Lord who had allowed Syria to be victorious in their battles.
 - B. Most of the pagans of that day believed in regional gods. Every country had its own gods, and the gods didn't act on behalf of those outside their region. But the God of Israel is not a regional deity; he created the world and controls all things everywhere.
 - C. So if the armies of Syria were victorious through the leadership of Naaman, it was because the Lord—the God of Israel—had caused that to happen.
 - D. And remember that Naaman was a pagan, an idolater, and a leper. He was unclean in virtually every way that a person could be. He had no connection to the God of Israel or his law. And yet God is pleased to heal this man and bring him to salvation.
 - E. We also see God's providence in the fact that the little girl wound up in Naaman's house, and she knew about Elisha.

So there are several elements of the story that show God's sovereign control of the circumstances.

App: There is nothing that happens in the world that is outside of the providential control of almighty God. From the largest world events to the smallest personal details, God is in control. When the world seems to be spinning out of control, it's good to know that God is still on the throne.

Even among those who don't know the Lord, God is firmly in control. Even in times like ours, we believe that God has a purpose and is moving history to its God-ordained destiny.

II. .2 Make the most of a bad situation.

A. The little servant girl had been taken from her home by a raiding band of Syrians and forced into service in Naaman's home. So this little girl had suffered much tragedy in her young life.

B. Yet she doesn't seem to be bitter about this. She seems to care about Naaman and wants the best for him. She could easily have counted Naaman and his wife as her enemies and told them nothing about Elisha.

C. I think it's evident that Naaman and his wife had treated this little girl quite well. I don't think she'd much care about what happened to Naaman if he had mistreated her.

D. And this little servant girl also seems to have retained her faith in the God of Israel and his prophets. She's living in a pagan land with an idol-worshipping family, yet she remembers the prophet of God. The entire story is based on the statement of this little girl. So she exemplifies faithfulness in the midst of paganism.

App: Few of us have experienced the kind of tragedy that this little girl had; we've not been kidnapped and forced into slavery. But we have our own set of tragedies. Almost all of us experience difficulties and disasters in our lives. Yet the Lord can use these difficult events for his own purposes, for his glory and for our good. That little girl was there by the providence of God, and it was a good thing for Naaman that she was. Something good came out of that tragedy—Naaman was healed and saved because of this little girl.

As we face the tragedies of life, instead of focusing on our own sorrow, we should look for opportunities to advance God's purposes. This little girl is, in a way, responsible for Naaman's healing and his salvation. She was the means of a great good.

So we see that good things can come out of tragic situations. We have to look for those opportunities to make good out of bad.

III. Words are powerful

- A. .3 We see the power of words in the words of the little girl. All the little girl did was tell what she knew about the prophet of God. Out of that brief message came a huge miracle.

App: You never know what a brief message about God might do. Perhaps God has put you where you are just so you can deliver such a message. We ought to be looking for opportunities to speak for God.

All of us ought to be looking for opportunities to share the Gospel.

- B. .6 We see the power of words in the letter the king of Syria sent. This letter almost started a war.

- C. .8 We see the power of words in the words of Elisha. ... *let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.*

App: Words are powerful, whether spoken or written. The Bible tells us to be very careful with the use of our words. We ought to use our words to uplift and bless, not to curse or insult.

The most powerful words are Gospel words (Rom 1:16). We should always be looking for ways to speak for the Lord or direct people toward the Lord. Maybe all you can say is, "Go see the prophet/preacher." But it's at least something.

IV. Have reasonable expectations. .11 "Behold, I thought..."

- A. .11 He expected a direct interaction with the prophet.

1. Naaman was a highly respected, accomplished, honorable man. He had a letter from the king and a king's ransom to bestow on the one who was able to heal him.

2. .9-10 His large entourage is standing at Elisha's door, but Elisha didn't even go out to talk with him. He sent out a servant to tell him what to do. Naaman perhaps took this impersonal treatment as a personal insult.

- B. He expected to be healed by means of a spectacular miraculous display of God's power.

- C. He was disappointed when he was told what to do to be healed. He was supposed to wash/dip in the Jordan seven times. But if washing in a river was all that was required, they had better rivers in Syria.

App: People often become disappointed when their expectations are not met. People are disappointed in preachers because they fail to meet expectations. People have a certain idea what preachers should do, and when they don't do it, they are upset.

People are disappointed in God when he doesn't meet their expectations. I can't tell you how many people I've talked to who are angry with God because he did not do what they thought he should do. When God did not conform to their expectations, they became angry or disillusioned.

The only expectations we can legitimately have of God is that he would do what is consistent with what he has revealed about himself. I.e., God will act according to his eternal purpose and will. He cannot deny himself or contradict himself. He will do only what is right.

Our expectations of God should be biblical and reasonable. Just because we think he's going to do something doesn't mean that he will. His timetable is not our timetable. His priorities are often not our priorities. Rom 11:34

It's always dangerous to expect from God something outside of his revealed will. We must conform our expectations to God, not vice versa.

Note: An interesting transition from vs. 11 "Behold, I thought..." to vs. 15 "Behold, now I know..." Naaman had to drop his own expectations and submit himself to Elisha's commands. We must submit our thoughts to what we know about God through the Bible.

Part of the walk of faith is to drop our own expectations and submit ourselves to the will of God. What unbiblical or unreasonable expectations do you have of the preacher or of God? Don't get upset when your unbiblical expectations are not met.

- V. .13 Be willing to take good advice.
- A. Naaman was ready to go back to Syria without being healed because he was upset that his expectations were not met.
 - B. But his servants gave him good advice. Would Naaman have been willing to do some great thing if the prophet required that for his healing? Yes, he would. So why refuse to do a small thing if it would result in his healing.
 - C. Naaman could not deny the logic in that argument. He saw that it was good advice.
 - D. Because he followed that advice, he was cleansed/healed.

App: Even when we are angry and disappointed, we must be able to recognize good advice when we hear it. And we should count ourselves fortunate if we have people around us who will give us good advice. We need people around who will point out the errors in our thinking.

I'd rather have someone point out my error than to continue in my wrong thinking.

How about you? Are you open to good advice and correction?

Especially when you are upset or disappointed, it's important to follow good, godly, biblical advice. I hope you have people in your life who will give you that advice.

VI. .15 Miracles may serve a redemptive purpose.

- A. Because of his healing, Naaman concluded that "there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." This was Naaman's confession of faith, and he came to that faith because of his healing. The miracle validated the claims of the God of Israel and his prophet, Elisha.
- B. Of course, the cure was not in the waters of the Jordan River. The cure was in the power of God and in the faithful obedience of Naaman. When Naaman obeyed the words of the prophet, God graciously healed his disease.
- C. The result of the miracle is that Naaman became a believer in the true and living God. He turned away from paganism and embraced the God of Israel.

App: We can't facilitate salvation through miracles, but we can facilitate salvation through proclaiming the word of God.

The NT tells us that "faith cometh by hearing..." Faith doesn't usually come through miracles; it comes by exposure to the Word of God. Rom 1:16; 10:14 "how shall they hear without a preacher?"

We don't expect God to do spectacular miracles to convince people of their need to be saved. We trust that the HSp will use his word to convince lost people of their need of salvation.

I want to be a part of that process. I want to be planting the seed, watering it, helping it grow, pulling weeds, and/or bringing it to harvest. What about you?

VII. .17-19 God extends special grace for unique circumstances.

We see this in Elisha's allowance for Naaman to go with the king into the temple of Rimmon, the false Syrian god.

- A. Naaman is a newly-converted pagan, yet he knows that he should not continue worshipping the false gods. He determines to recognize no other God than the God of Israel. He's now committed as a follower of YHWH, not Hadad Rimmon/Baal.
- B. .17 Two mules' burden of earth—Naaman wanted to take some dirt back with him to create a sort of mini-Israel within Syria. He apparently thought that he needed the soil from Israel to worship the God of Israel. God is in Israel, so taking the soil with him guaranteed that God would be with him. Maybe he planned to build an altar with the dirt.
- C. Naaman is obligated to go to the temple of Rimmon with the Syrian king. That's part of his job as the commander of the army. When he goes back home, he'll have to do that.
- D. So Naaman asks forgiveness when he has to do this. From here on out, he'll worship the God of Israel on that soil he's taking home. But when he is obligated to accompany the king, he asks pardon, and Elisha gives him permission.
- E. We might expect Elisha to tell Naaman to stop going into the temple of a false god. But that's not what he does. Elisha gives him permission to accompany the king into the temple of the false god Rimmon. Elisha seems to understand the quandary that Naaman now faces in Syria as a worshipper of the true God, so he gives him an indulgence or a special allowance to do something that normally would not be OK.
- F. What this shows is that God is gracious, merciful, and even lenient to his people. He recognizes that certain circumstances may compel us to do things we would rather not do. Given the circumstances, we do the best that we can. The Lord knows, and he understands when circumstances conspire against us.
- G. This is not an excuse to sin; it's an allowance to do something one would not normally do because of a unique set of circumstances. It shows that God understands the practical realities of life.

VIII. .20f Beware of the dangers of covetousness/greed.

We could almost wish that the story would have ended with Naaman's healing, but it doesn't. The other main issue here is Gehazi's greed and his attempt to gather some money and possessions for himself. The prophet cares nothing about money, but Gehazi does. If Elisha won't take anything from Naaman, Gehazi will.

- A. .25 You'd think Gehazi would know better than to lie to the prophet of God, but that's what he does. Elisha immediately recognizes Gehazi's greed and lies, and pronounces a severe judgment on him—he will inherit Naaman's leprosy.
- B. Vs. 26—I think this is what Gehazi envisioned for himself; this is what he planned to do with the money. It was enough to buy all this stuff, to set up a very nice home and property.
- C. .27 Naaman went home *healed* because of his faith and obedience, while Gehazi went home *diseased* because of his lies and his greed. The Gentile convert was acting like a believer, and the professing believer was acting more like a pagan Gentile.

App: The Bible repeatedly warns us to beware of covetousness.

Jesus tells us that our lives do not consist of the abundance of the things that we can acquire (Luke 12:15).

Paul tells us (1 Tim 6:9-10) that

those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and [into] many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all [kinds of] evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

.20 Gehazi had gone to seek “something” from Naaman, and he got more than he bargained for. He got his money, but he also got a disease. God's judgment on Gehazi was very severe, but it was an appropriate punishment for what he'd done.

Greed, covetousness, and materialism are incompatible with the Christian life. We can enjoy the material blessings of this world, but we must not love them or set our hearts on them. We must never lie or deceive to get money. We must choose to serve God rather than money. Don't give in to greed.

I wonder if, when Naaman got home, he freed that little girl and sent her home. We don't know if that happened, but I wouldn't doubt that Naaman might have done that.

We can learn many practical lessons from this episode in the life of Elisha. Most spectacularly displayed here is the power of God to heal and to save. Those who come to God in humble obedience find satisfaction and healing beyond anything money can buy. God values simple obedience.

God is sovereign over the details of our lives, and we should seek to be faithful in the places he puts us. If you end up working in the midst of a bunch of pagans, use that position to serve God and to help others.

God can be very severe in his judgments and discipline, especially on those who should know better. Gehazi found out the hard way that sin has serious consequences, even for a believer. Our concern should be for God and his people rather than for money and what it can buy.

God is merciful and gracious, extending salvation to the most unlikely people. We should desire that God would use us to bring his word to the lost.