

# The pattern for cross-cultural mission

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[ 0 : 00 ] There, and we'll leave the reading there acknowledging that God's timing is perfect in God's providence. This is our passage from 2 Kings, and it's a great story for Mission Month.

! What have we got here? We've got the Lord working behind the scenes to bring a young girl to a foreign country, to Naaman's house, to do the work of cross-cultural mission.

That love for her God and love for Naaman, who she could easily have treated as an enemy, leads to Naaman discovering God's power and saving love. Again, some more great timing.

This week, a report came through from Edinburgh UniCU about an international cafe that meets here every Thursday. And the email report was full of great excitement because since term has begun, there have been so many people having the chance to hear about Jesus for the very first time in this place.

There are folks who in September knew nothing about Jesus, who are now visiting churches all around our city with their friends, and God is answering prayers, and cross-cultural mission is happening.

[ 1 : 09 ] And I hope that as we listen to the stories, we're drawn into the story, that we would recognize that God is in the business of doing this kind of thing.

That God places us in specific places for specific purposes. He's placed us in our houses, in our communities, in our circles for the sake of His kingdom.

And imagine if we thought of our lives in that way. God has placed me here for the sake of His glory and mission. Imagine if we lived everyday life with eternal purpose.

God has placed us in our lives in our lives. The story can help us. So, let's get into the story. Let's think, first of all, first three verses where we get to meet God's missionary.

But before we get to meet the missionary, notice how the author of 2 Kings places two portraits side by side. Here is Naaman and this unnamed servant girl.

[ 2 : 18 ] They're living in the same house, but they're operating in two different worlds entirely. If you watch Downton, it's like the upstairs-downstairs thing, isn't it? But God in His providence brings them together so that Naaman might discover God and His grace.

So, in verse 1, we meet Naaman, the guy who has it all. He's a great man. He's highly regarded. He's been given victories. Notice victories by the Lord. Valiant soldier. Power, greatness, honor, status, success, wealth.

But one day, he spots the spot. He spots that he has leprosy. He spots the sentence of death. And then we're introduced in verse 2 to this young girl taken captive at a young age by Aramean raiders.

She has nothing. She's been stolen from her home. She has no freedom. She has no family. She has no status. And she hears Naaman's news.

[ 3 : 27 ] And surely she is someone who has every reason to hate Naaman. After all, he is the victorious army officer who has led these raiding bands that has led to her becoming effectively a prisoner of war.

She has every reason to celebrate his downfall. But instead, she chooses to love. She longs for his healing.

And she knows where that healing is to be found. She is a girl of strong, humble faith in the God that she worships. And so she goes to her mistress.

If only my master would see the prophet, he would cure him of his leprosy. What do we learn about this girl as the unlikely missionary?

And what do we learn about God's mission even at this stage? I think one thing we're reminded of is that God delights to use unimportant people to accomplish his purposes.

[ 4 : 32 ] It's a scripture principle. 1 Corinthians 1, 27. God shows the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God shows the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God does it so that he gets the glory. And so you and I, we should never downplay the significance of ordinary, faithful, humble witness and service for Christ.

Whether we think about the relatively ordinary thing of opening this church to let international people come in to share some food and to share some language learning and friendship.

Whether we're thinking about our own day-to-day of seeking the best for others, of using the gifts and talents that God has given us. Or whether we're thinking about our sometimes faltering attempts to give testimony to Jesus Christ and what he has done.

We should never downplay that because God for his glory delights to use it and to use people like us. So we should never say, this kind of chimes in with what Moji was saying, we can never say, and we should never say, God couldn't use me.

[ 5 : 48 ] For our children, for our teenagers, we should never say, God couldn't use me, wouldn't use me, because after all, God used this girl. Are there people in your school that you could invite, that you could invite, that you could talk to about Jesus?

If you're here tonight and you're away from your home, from your home culture, this story, Moji's story, also reminds us that there is no barrier to God using you and your friendship and your witness.

we look around the city that we live in and maybe we find ourselves thinking the people around here seem really far from God and they seem really disinterested in worship him worshiping him think about Naaman and the nation of Aram and we are reminded that there are no limits to how God works this story also reminds us of another biblical principle that God wants his grace and his salvation to spread far and wide in God's providence even through the hard providence of being taken captive by some raiders God was working so that his glory and salvation would be experienced by Naaman God is still moving people all over the world and as he does so he is creating opportunities for mission I think it's one of the wonderful things about living in Edinburgh and for our church to be where it is we don't need to leave home to go on mission as we look around we see the number of different cafes and restaurants from different places and we recognize people from different cultures and and countries as we understand that there are loads of people living here in countries that if they were back home they would really struggle to to have access to the church or to the gospel but when they're here there's opportunity and freedom think about our connect ministry that meets every Monday another opportunity to welcome and to share Jesus with people from different places because God wants his grace to spread far and wide or maybe we just reflect on the fact that there are many people in our lives with stories somewhat akin to Naaman in a crisis of some kind or another and to understand that God would want to use us to be a light in their lives to bring something of Jesus and the hope of salvation to them and so we pray and we act for God's spreading glory and goodness seeking that boldness and love of the apostles so others can meet Jesus and we recognize and here's another principle that we find in the Bible God's love is a love powerful to break down barrier you know how do we explain the fact that this girl who's experienced so much trauma and so much loss in her life and Naaman is the primary cause how do we explain the fact that she is willing to show love and kindness and seek his best the only answer is because she knows the God of love the answer to the barriers, to the hate, to the division, is the message of the gospel.

It's to recognize that while we were God's enemies, God chose to love us and send Jesus to die for us. That in Christ coming to pay the penalty for our sin, for dealing with that problem, the dividing walls of hostility come down between us and God, but then between us and others.

And because God's love in the gospel is powerful enough to break down barriers, as God's people, as a church, we don't need to follow the fear and suspicion that we all often hear in the news about the people who are not like us, who are coming to our country.

[ 10 : 20 ] But by God's grace, we have the opportunity to be good neighbors, to show love and welcome. God loves for His church to show love across difference, and our communities need that.

They need a different voice in a different way. So we meet God's missionary. But secondly, we also hear God's message of grace. The central part of the Naaman story is really Naaman being invited to discover this.

So Naaman speaks a particular language, the language of power and achievement and influence, but he needs to learn that God speaks another language, the language of grace. What is God's

grace?

God's grace is His loving kindness towards sinners. God's grace is Him showing us a love that we don't earn, that we don't deserve, that we don't pay for. A gift that is free to us, but a gift that comes at infinite cost to God, as His own Son bears the penalty and bears the wrath in our place.

It's a gift of God's love that forgives our sin, that deals with the problem of evil and death, that brings us home to our God. That's God's grace. And Naaman's story then shows us something about ourselves, I think, that naturally we do not speak the language of grace, that we usually operate with a different set of vocabulary.

[ 11 : 43 ] You know, we live in a world where the vocabulary is very much prove yourself, or you're worth it. That requirement to achieve and to perform.

Naaman takes that into the encounter with the prophet. He wants healing, he wants salvation, but how will he find it? The story's really instructive. He won't find it through his money.

Did you notice the grand entrances of Naaman? In verse 4 to 6, we find the first one. He gets this letter from his king, and he heads off with his great retinue, and he's there with his chariots and such things.

He arrives at the king of Israel's palace, because he imagines, of course, a prophet is going to be connected to the palace, power is connected to the palace, so he thinks.

And so he arrives with this huge gift, looking to earn favor so that he can get the healing he wants. I like doing the math, or I like when Google does the maths that you get in the Bible.

[ 12 : 55 ] So we hear 10 talents of silver, and we say, I don't know what that means. That's 398,000 pounds worth of silver in our money. 6,000 shekels of gold, 6.7 million pounds on top of those 10 kind of off-the-designer reign suits.

This is a big gift, because for Naaman, money talks. Except it doesn't when it comes to God's salvation. We meet a king who is terrified.

He gets this visitor with all his power and wealth, but he knows he is powerless. Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?

We know that there is a true God, and he will bring back to life, and we're going to see it, but it's not through money. And so Elisha is going to help Naaman to understand that as well.

God's grace, God's salvation is not something that's bought and sold. Verse 16, when Naaman comes back healthy and whole, he wants to give a gift, and Elisha says, no. He wants Naaman to be absolutely clear.

[ 14 : 07 ] Our status, our wealth make no difference in God's eyes. All of us must come with empty hands, confessing our spiritual poverty to the Lord Jesus, to the one who paid it all.

So to receive healing and salvation is not about money, nor is it about our wisdom. If you look at verses 8 to 12, it's really interesting. You've got a king who's been tearing his robes, and he's terrified.

He thinks Adam wants to make war. And then Elisha comes on the scene. Make the man come to me, and he'll know there's a prophet in Israel. I will show him the true God of power and grace.

So Naaman gets on his horse or gets in his chariot, and then he heads to Elisha's house. And there's another great scene. There's the great entourage. But what happens?

Elisha doesn't even come out the front door. Rather, he sends another servant with a very simple message to Naaman, go have a bath.

[ 15 : 14 ] Very simple message with a very clear promise. Go wash yourself, and your flesh will be restored, and you will be cleansed. Great news.

He's got the answer he's looking for. But for Naaman, he is outraged. Why is he outraged? Because this does not meet with his expectations.

What did he want? Verse 11. I thought he would come out and stand and call the name of the Lord, wave his hand and cure me of leprosy. He wants a display of power.

He wants Elisha to work some kind of magic. And he definitely does not want to wash in a tiny Judean river. Again, it's the message of 1 Corinthians.

God's wisdom. For Naaman, God's wisdom would save him, but God's wisdom right now looks like folly. That's so often how God's wisdom is heard.

[ 16 : 09 ] Saved by a crucified Savior. That one moment in history, that one man dying in apparent shame and defeat, he is the source of my eternal destiny.

Seems like folly. Till we understand the wisdom of God by his grace. Naaman, like us, must discover that we need to exercise faith to be saved.

We cannot come with our own logic and wisdom. We need to be washed also. Washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. So healing and salvation doesn't come by his wealth.

It doesn't come by his wisdom, nor does it come by his or our effort. However, verse 13, we realize that Naaman, at the end of verse 12, is storming off in a huff.

And Naaman's servants know him, and they know his problem. And the problem is his pride. And so effectively, they say to him, Master, if you were asked to do a heroic act, or some display of a great personal achievement, or even some kind of painful self-sacrifice, you'd be all over it.

[ 17 : 26 ] You'd be there in a heartbeat. But when you're asked to do the humble thing, you won't do it. Why not go wash? Why not do the easy, humble thing?

Naaman needs to discover that God is no respecter of persons. That everybody must come into the kingdom through the low door of humility, by way of repentance.

And when he does, when he turns, when he dips himself, what happens? His flesh was restored and became clean, like that of a young boy.

He's healed, and he gets his life back. And the story of Naaman reminds us that the message of God's grace is always a message that is profoundly humbling.

And that really challenged Naaman's pride, and it challenges ours as well. When we think in spiritual terms, the Bible is saying that our sin problem is deadly serious.

[ 18 : 29 ] That by nature, we're not positive towards God. We're not even neutral towards God. By nature, we are rebels against God. We are enemies who turn our back on Him, who disobey Him at every turn, and we are by nature dead in our sin.

And more than that, we can't do anything about it. That we are way worse than we imagine, and we are way more helpless than we like to admit.

That's humbling. But so too is God's gracious response. Recognizing that we are utterly powerless and helpless, Jesus came to become one of us.

Jesus gave His life, paid the ultimate price, so that we might be freely forgiven. That we might be made clean. That we might be brought into God's kingdom. And we don't bring anything to the table.

And we don't do anything to earn it. All we do is we believe. And so we discover that what is impossible to us is not impossible to God through Jesus.

[ 19 : 48 ] And as Christians, this is the message that we believe. This is our hope. This is our joy.

This is our eternal promise and future. And more than that, this is the message we humbly, lovingly, boldly seek to share as we understand how urgent it is.

So we hear God's message of grace. Finally, let's think about how we see God's mission accomplished. Verse 15 to 19.

The Naaman that we meet now, we've seen kind of Naaman in three scenes. His leprosy stage, his struggling to accept God's way. And this time, we meet a very different man.

Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. He's humbled himself and he's been healed.

[ 20 : 54 ] He arrived, a warrior, but a warrior who is dying and he leaves as a worshiper who's truly living.

And we hear his worship. Now he knows that there is only one true and living God. And this is radical. This is what set apart Israel from all the other nations.

All the other nations were happy with multiple gods. But now Naaman understands God isn't just one among many. Jesus isn't an adidext, a one among many possible options.

He understands and he practices this exclusive worship of God, his Redeemer. And then we get to his witness.

It's a really interesting bit of the story. Verse 17, after Elisha refuses the gift, he says, please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry.

[ 22 : 00 ] And so you might wonder, why is it that Naaman, this great mighty commander who's come with all his gold and silver, why is it he wants to load his mules up with some mud?

And it's because he wants this physical, visible reminder. He wants to be able to build a mound to remind him, it was the God of Israel who saved me. And the God of Israel is the God who deserves

worship.

It's going to help him to show his loyalty. It's going to keep redirecting his worship to the true and living God. Because we're introduced to the fact that he's going back to a situation where it's going to be difficult to live for God.

Verse 18, may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing. When my master enters the temple of Rimen to bow down and he's leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also, when I bow down, may the Lord forgive your servant.

So he's sent back to his old job, his old sphere of influence. So he's still serving the king and the king is still going to go to the pagan temple and Naaman is going to have to go there.

[ 23 : 11 ] But now he's going to go and bow to the real and the living God. But he seeks mercy and forgiveness and help, I think, to know how to live for God in that kind of pagan environment.

And Alicia says to him, go in peace. And so he's sent home a worshiper. I like to think of him heading back to his home and finding that little servant girl and of telling his story and of them worshipping God together as God's cross-cultural mission is accomplished.

As we close, just a few lessons to learn together to remind ourselves. One, that God wants his glory to spread. You know, the image that we find throughout the Bible of God's people as a light to the nations, as a light to the world, that kind of centers on Jesus, but then he expands it to include the church.

As Christians, why do we support mission? Why do we go on mission? John Piper has a great answer.

Mission exists because worship doesn't. There is a day coming in the new creation when God's glory will fill the earth, when all God's people will worship perfectly in spirit and in truth.

[ 24 : 34 ] But until that day, as a church, as a Christian, we have a marching order from Jesus, our commander, to live and speak to make his glory known because God wants his glory to spread.

And a second principle, and we see this with Jesus and his disciples as well, God draws us in to send us out. I think it's really striking. You know, Elisha doesn't say to Naaman, do you know what? You need to stick here. You need to stick here among the people of God. God, but rather he sends him home in peace. Same place, same job, but different heart.

It's a great prayer when we think about cross-cultural mission, when we think about the students who come to the International Cafe, as we think about the thousands of people who come year upon year to our city for a certain length of time, that people would come to the city and find Jesus and would be sent back home to live for him.

That you and I, we would be drawn in by God's grace to trust in Jesus. We'd be drawn in to worship each week in our churches.

[ 25 : 55 ] We'd be drawn deeper into relationship with him so that we'd be sent out from here, into our places of learning, into our places where we work, into our roles and relationships, which sometimes are very local, sometimes will take us to the ends of the earth.

But that we would go as those who've experienced God's grace that heals and that saves, as those who know the only God, the only name that saves, that we would live to worship him.

This story ends very dramatically, but it all started with that one little girl who loved God and was willing to love her neighbor, who spoke a very simple message of hope and trust and an invitation to good news.

But it also started with a God of grace who would organize things such that that little girl and Naaman were in the same space, in the same house.

A God of grace who in the fullness of time would send his own son to turn enemies into children of God, who would remove the stain of sin by his blood shed for us.

[ 27 : 13 ] The one who came as the good news of great joy for all people.