

Naaman - Kings 2 Ch 5

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2013

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] If you throw a stone into a pond, there are two things that happen.

The first is when the stone hits the water, there is a noise and there is something of an explosion within the water. But the second thing is what happens after that, the ripples that extend out from that explosion.

There are several of them and they extend further and further and further outwards until you can't see them anymore.

We all know what this story is about. If you're accustomed to reading the Bible and coming to church, the story of how Naaman was cured miraculously from his leprosy is one of the best known stories in the Bible.

Certainly one of the best known stories in the Old Testament. I'm not going to speak about the center of this chapter, which is, of course, the healing of Naaman.

[1 : 18] Not because I assume you know it, but because we've just read it. There are so many implications in this story. And often it's used as an example of how Jesus cleanses us from our sin by his death on the cross.

It's an example. It's a marvelous example of how by faith we can be cleansed just like Naaman, who in obedience to the command that God gave him to go to the Jordan seven times and wash in its waters.

And God miraculously cleansed him. So in like manner, when we come to Jesus, when we listen to God's word telling us that there's only one way to be cleansed from sin, and that's to wash in Jesus' blood.

So we are cleansed. And God changes us. And he transforms our lives and makes us free, sets us free from the guilt of sin.

Well, that's how normally we would come to a chapter like this. We would come to the center of the story, which is the stone hitting the water, which is Naaman being cleansed. What a marvelous story it is and how it sticks in our minds and it displays to us the goodness and the grace and the willingness of God to forgive people when they come to him in faith.

[2 : 49] But what I want to do today is to look at the ripples. And there are several of them. Four of them in particular.

You might expect me to start with the young girl with which the story starts, but I'm not going to. Not because she doesn't deserve it. She does.

It's absolutely marvelous how a young girl who is taken captive from Israel, taken into an enemy land, and finding herself in the most frightening of environments, how she's able to focus her mind enough to be able to talk about the prophet in Israel.

It was because of what she did that this whole story happens in the first place. And it's one more demonstration that you can never be too young to serve the Lord. You might think that you're too young.

I'm only 10. I'm only 5. I'm only 15. I can't possibly serve the Lord. He's got nothing for me to do. That's not true. God calls young people.

[3 : 57] Very often, it's the young people that God uses in the Bible to do what older people are too scared to do. There's something about what a young person can do that God comes to and he takes that person.

But we have to be willing to stand up for him. But I'm not going to talk about the younger. I'm going to talk about the four other people in this chapter. I'm going to start with the king of Israel.

The king of Israel. Let's go through the story. Remember how Naaman was a mighty man. He belonged to the enemies of Israel, the Syrians. He was the captain of the army of Syria.

He was next to the king himself. And yet, he was a leper. He had this awful, wasting disease. Which eventually, I guess, would have claimed his life.

Whatever kind of disease it was, it wasn't enough. It wasn't bad enough for him not to carry on as the captain of the king's army. But it must have been bad enough for him to long to be set free from it, to be cured from it.

[5 : 07] You remember how that young girl had told her mistress and she had told the king that there's a prophet in Israel who could cure Naaman from his leprosy. And how, on the strength of that word, the king had sent him and said, Go and see the person in Israel who's able to, by whatever power, make you better from your leprosy.

So off he went, not just by himself, but he took, I don't know how many people he went with him. And all the royal pageantry, all the royal procession, all the way from where they lived to the palace of the king in Samaria.

Because naturally, he thought that it was the king himself that could cure the man of his leprosy. So, being a royal representation, he took the letter to the king and he stood before the king and he opened up the letter.

And the king, as soon as he saw it, he went into a blind panic. So he went and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and he brought the letter to the king.

And when this letter reaches, you know that I have sent you, Naaman, my servant, that you cure him of his leprosy. But when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes. That's what they used to do in that culture when they were into a blind fear.

[6 : 33] And he 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's seeking a quarrel with me.

I find that absolutely fascinating. This is the first ripple that we're going to look at. This is the first challenge which Naaman's visit brought to other people, not just to Elisha the prophet, but to other people starting with the king.

And it was a challenge in which God was testing him to see where his heart was. And he tested him by this letter, which he reckoned was a threat, but in actual fact wasn't any more than a simple request.

But because the king's heart was not right with God, everything fell apart. The real problem was the king was not where he should have been.

And there was no excuse. He belonged to the children of Israel, God's covenant people. He could look back over his history. He knew that there was no other God except the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

[7 : 50] He could look back over those marvelous episodes in Israel's history where Moses parted the Red Sea and where the children of Israel crossed the Jordan. They traveled in the Jordan, led by God's pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, like we were talking about earlier on, where he fed them with manna and quail and he provided them with water.

That was his history. He knew that they belonged to the living and true God. He didn't even need to go back as far back in history as that. All he needed to do was to go back to his predecessor, Elijah, who had done the most marvelous things.

Or rather, I should say, through whom God had done the most marvelous things. Like when he gathered all the prophets of Baal and when he soaked the altar and soaked the sacrifice with water. And then he prayed and fire came down from heaven and consumed the whole altar and the stones and the sacrifice and everything.

That was only a few years back. The king knew perfectly well who the living and true God was. And yet he chose within himself not to serve him.

Now, if you don't know anything about the Bible today, that's one thing. It's still not an excuse for you to just not have anything to do with it.

[9 : 11] But if you know the Bible today, and if you know what the truth is, and if perhaps you have at one time been there, and your life has drifted, and today you are not where you should be, you've taken your eyes off the Lord.

You've wandered away. If things are going well for you, well and good. Can I tell you something?

It's not going to continue that way. It's like the wise man and the foolish man who Jesus told his disciples about when he said that, therefore, everyone who hears those words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on a rock so that when the rains came and the wind blew and beat against that house, it stood still.

But when the foolish man who built the house on the sand, when the rains came and when the floods came and when the wind beat against that house, it collapsed in a heap.

Here is a house collapsing. Because up until now, he's a king. He's got nothing to worry about. Everybody does what they're told, what he tells them. That's all very well.

[10 : 37] That's when the going is good. But now the going, the things have turned. He was getting this letter. He didn't even understand the letter. He didn't take the time to understand the letter. But more importantly, he knew that his heart was not in the right place so that when something like this happened, he had nobody to turn to because he wasn't in the right place with God.

He had drifted and he had chosen not to serve God. When you drift away from God, you're choosing not to serve God. But don't wait until something like this happens, something that freaks you out, something that just takes away all the props from you.

Come back to where you should be so that when the threat comes, that you discover in actual fact, like this man, that it wasn't a threat after all.

There was nothing to the letter. There was no reason for him to fear. And that was why Elisha wrote to him when he saw what was happening. He said, it was rather mockingly, I think, that when Elisha heard that the king was panicking and everything was crumbling around him, he sent him this message.

Why are you tearing your clothes? There's no reason for you to tear your clothes. And if we're in the right place today, there's no reason for us to tear our clothes either.

[12 : 05] If our hearts are right with the Lord and we are in the right position, the right place with him, and there is no excuse today where if we aren't there, why we shouldn't make this the opportunity of returning to him.

Make today the moment when you come back to the right place with the Lord. The second ripple is the prophet himself, Elisha.

Elisha was a great man, one of the great heroes in the Old Testament. Elisha and Elijah lived in the most awful times when it appeared like the whole of Israel had turned against God.

That must have been hugely difficult. I know that Elijah, he suffered greatly within himself because he felt so alone. He felt as if he was serving God for nothing, that God wasn't ever going to restore the people back to himself and that his work was going to come to nothing.

Well, in actual fact, he was wrong. And he goes down in history today, thousands of years later, we go back and we look at this man with such respect and admiration because he was so prepared to stand for the Lord on his own.

[13 : 28] Elisha was not quite the same, but he still was prepared to stand for the Lord. And that meant knowing the way that God wanted him to live so that when Naaman, first of all, he went to the king, gave the letter to the king, the king tore his robes and he said, what can I do to cure this man of his leprosy?

This man's trying to pick a war with me. So Elisha wrote to him and said, don't worry about it. There is a prophet in Israel. You should know this. This is not something you're ignorant about.

You should know this. So send him to me. You should have done that in the first place. If your heart was in the right place, you would know what to do with this letter. You would look to the Lord. You would trust in him.

Instead of that, you're just, you don't know what to do. So he did. He sent him to Elisha. He rolled up in front of Elisha's house with all his retinue and his servants and his soldiers.

And Elisha didn't even come out to see him. Sent a message to him. And the message said simply this.

[14 : 42] It said, go and wash seven times in the Jordan River and you will be clean. Now there's two ways of looking at that. There's the right way, which is, which is, which actually what happened eventually.

And it was only Naaman's servants that perceived the right way, which is, what's the problem? All he's telling you to do is to go and wash in the Jordan River.

There's nothing difficult about that. But yet the wrong way, Naaman chose the wrong way at first, which was, who was outraged when he said, that man should have come out to me.

At the very least, he should have come out to me. I find that fascinating as well. The second fascinating ripple. Why did Elisha not come out to at least talk to him?

Wasn't it discourteous of him not to come out and to at least address him in person? After all, here's a man who is coming and to all intents and purposes, he's coming in faith.

[15 : 42] He's asking something of the God of Israel. Surely, the very least he can do is to speak to him personally. But he didn't. He didn't open the door. He stayed in the house. Why was that? Well, because there was a good reason.

The reason was this. Because God had commanded him not to come into contact with the disease of leprosy. Simple as that.

And for Elisha, his very first priority was living by the Word of God and nothing was going to change that. And so, here's a man who is a shining example of what it means to be determined to live according to what God wants because he knows that his ministry, his witness, everything depends on his own life because that's what people see before they hear him.

If they hear him telling the people this says, thus says the Lord, and if they see in his life something that is different, then they're not going to believe him. And it's the same with us, isn't it?

There must not be a dichotomy between what we believe and how we live. What we say is we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 03] We're Christians. We follow him. We love him with our whole heart. He is everything to us. But if we go out and if we live something different, something that gives the opposite message, then what are people going to think?

Now, in this case, initially, Naaman was absolutely outraged. And sometimes people do get outraged when we decide that we're going to obey God.

Especially in the kind of world that we live in where obeying God seems to be so different from how everyone else is. But that's the way it's to be.

Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand. Alone. It wasn't easy for Elisha to obey God rather than do what was expected of him. And it's not easy for us to obey God rather than do what's expected of us.

But there are times when we have to do it nonetheless. And that's when God blesses. God blesses obedience. That's the second ripple. The third ripple was Naaman himself.

[18 : 13] When he eventually went to the Jordan after the conversation with his servants, after initially deciding in his heart that he wasn't going to do this and his servants caught up with him and they said, what are you doing?

You've come all this way. Why don't you just do what the prophet tells you? It's the easiest thing in the world. Let's go to the Jordan right now and we'll see what God does.

So off he went and seven times he dipped. Once, twice, three, four, five, six, seven. Sure enough, when he looked at his skin, there wasn't a trace of leprosy.

It wasn't just a healing. It was a miraculous healing. It wasn't that there was some magical power in the Jordan. There wasn't. Neither was there any particular power in Elisha.

There wasn't. He was healed because God healed him. And what happened to Naaman was much more than a sense of surprise.

[19 : 19] As soon as he stood up in that water, not only was his skin cleansed and changed, but his whole life was changed because his heart was opened, his eyes were opened, his mind was opened, he realized everything fell into place.

And he now realized that there was a God after all, that there was only one God, what the Israelites called the living and true God.

He was the true God and the only one in the universe that would deserve to be worshipped because he had revealed himself to Naaman.

But there was something more than that. Not just that he discovered that there was a God, but that this God actually was gracious and kind and loving and he did as he asked him to do.

Why should he? How did he deserve God's mercy and his kindness upon him? He didn't. He was an enemy of Israel. He worshipped another God called Rimmon.

[20 : 25] He had spent his whole life and yet now he comes over to Israel and impudently, impertinently asks the God of Israel who he had never given the slightest thought to in his whole life.

He asks him to heal him and he did it. So he's not only discovering that there is a God, but he's discovering how marvelous and gracious this God is.

Have you discovered that today? Have you discovered not only that there is a God, but have you discovered what he's like? You'll only find out what he's like when you read the Bible, when you listen to him, when you come to know him in the person of Jesus.

Can I tell you what he's like? I'll tell you in one or two sentences what he's like. I'll tell you this. God so loved the world. Why should he love the world?

I don't understand why he should do so. A world that hates him. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, the son that he loved from all eternity and that son came into the world as a baby and that son grew up and gave himself on the cross the cruel, painful suffering of the cross.

[21 : 49] Six hours of utter darkness and agony that son of God in our nature suffered for us in order to be the sacrifice of our sin to cleanse us and to wash us and to change us and to bring us to himself.

That's the kind of God that we are worshipping. I don't want to worship any other God first of all because they don't exist. It's not a very PC thing to say nowadays but I want a God that exists otherwise a waste of time.

That's logic, isn't it? But I want more than that because if that God that exists doesn't want anything to do with me then what good is it to me?

But if the living and the true God loves and has sent his own son into the world to give himself for me then that's different.

He deserves my worship. He deserves my life. He deserves my everything. So that was the moment when Naaman's life was completely changed.

[23 : 01] It wasn't just his skin that was cleansed he was cleansed on the inside as well and he said to he went all his first thing he wanted to do was to go all the way back to Elisha to give his testimony.

That's what he does. He says now I know that there's no God in all the world except the God of Israel. That was his testimony. Now I know what testimony from a man who was a heathen and who had spent his whole life but I want you to notice that this was the biggest challenge that he ever faced.

Because on the one hand in his heart he now knew he could never worship his old God again because he knew that the old God didn't exist. Rimen was no more as far as he was concerned.

He was never going to worship Rimen again because it would be an insult it would be an offense to the living and true God whom he had come to know. So he organized that he wanted two mule loads of earth not that the earth was going to do anything but they were going to be something that symbolized for him where he had been and how he had found the Lord so he could take them all the way back to Syria and so that he could be reminded on a day by day basis of the God who he worshipped in all his heart.

That was on the one hand. On the other hand though there was going to be a massive challenge. What was he going to do when his master the king he wanted him to go with him and it's obvious that the master the king was an old man and he depended on Naaman to go with him into the house of Rimen to worship.

[24 : 36] He says I'm going to still have to do that even though I am not going to worship him I'm still going to have to do that. And he says to Elisha do you understand the dilemma that I face?

You know each one of us is faced with the easy challenges and by easy I don't mean that they are comfortable the blacks and whites of this life the things that we know are wrong which we must refuse to do.

There is wrong that God's people must refuse to do because of what they are and who they are and we have to have the courage and the bravery to say who we are and to say no.

And there is right that we must choose but in a complicated world the reality of being in a complicated world means that sometimes we find ourselves in places that we are not comfortable with with people that we are not comfortable with and there are times when we have to commit that to the Lord and we have to be prepared to be led by the Holy Spirit in those individual choices that we have to make but make sure that God comes first.

I am quite sure that Naaman when he went home that it did not take long before the king who knew him very well he would have said to him Naaman you are different since you came back it is not just your skin that is different there is something different about you I am quite sure of that and I am quite sure that would have been the opportunity for Naaman to say well what can I I mean it is logic isn't it I mean this the God of the Israelites the invisible God he cleansed me Roman never did that for me so what can I do except I mean I want to worship him because of his kindness and his love towards me now who knows what that would have done to the king the king could have ordered his execution at that moment in time I don't know or else the king could himself have started a journey of discovery of who the God of Israel who knows what happened but one thing was sure that Naaman had to live a balanced life in which his heart belonged to the Lord in which there may have been choices that he would have had to stand just like Daniel because for Daniel to eat the king's food involved him in an act of worship now what Naaman is telling us here is that all he had to do was to stand next to the king he was there for the king's sake he wasn't there because he himself wanted to worship

[27 : 23] Reuben he was there because of the king because of his loyalty to the king and his service to the king and Elisha said go in peace the world the world that you and I live in is not an easy world it's one in which we are wrestling with all kinds of different issues let's make sure that we put God first let's make sure that when we're required to do something which is directly sinful we say no but there are times and occasions when it's not as easy as that and when we have to work things out according to what the bible tells us and according to how we're praying about things and how we're led by the holy spirit we have to leave that to the lord to work out with us now if that's where the story had ended it would have been a great story wouldn't it but there is one last ripple if the man whoever wrote this book we don't exactly know who wrote the second book of kings

I'm not suggesting for a moment that he wasn't inspired I believe that the whole bible is the inspired word of God but it was written by human beings I don't know who wrote the second book of kings but if he had wanted to gloss over the bad news then he could have ended it right there and then and going on to another story of good news but that's not how real things happen this story ends badly because there was one final fourth ripple another man whose heart was clearly not right with God and you would never have been able to tell because he was always in the right place he was always in the right company he was always listening to God's word and yet his heart was not in the right place Gehazi

Elisha's servant he wasn't a heathen didn't come from as far as I know anyway but he had spent years with Elisha listening to him serving him as far as we know he was a faithful a good servant and in the silence of the Bible up till now then we have to assume by looking at him well he must have been a man of God he must have been his heart must have been until he was tested and the test was when Naaman came as a result of his cleansing to Elisha and said look look at what's happened to me this is worth more than anything I ever have please take this please take these wonderful lovely expensive clothes please take the gold and the silver and Elisha said no I will not take any of it and Gehazi for one thing his eyes were hitting the ceiling because his logic went completely different the opposite from Elisha's law why was it that it was so important for Elisha not to take any of the money or the clothes that Naaman offered him well because again it would have given out a message had he taken payment for what had happened he would be giving out the message that somehow

God can be bought or negotiated with and that God has a price and that's the wrong message that's not what God is like grace is free there is no cost to your salvation you can't earn it you can't work your way to it you can't pay God anything for what he has done for you it's all been done in the past it's all done already not according to Gehazi that is who was listening all the time and it was that it was that at that moment that the real test that he had to face probably the biggest test in his whole life he could have argued it religiously he could have said what's wrong with having things after all

Abraham had things he was a wealthy man Isaac was a wealthy man Jacob was a wealthy man why can't Elisha become a wealthy man you could have argued that this is God's providence towards us what's wrong with the man coming to us and offering to change our lives all these years we've been struggling to make ends meet every day waking up in the morning wondering where the meals were going to come from oh I know that always everything has been provided I can't deny that but now here is an opportunity for our lives to change and for us to become a little bit more well off no a big bit more well off surely there's nothing wrong with that we're getting old after all we have to provide for ourselves and so on you can argue anything can't you if you're determined enough and Gehazi was determined enough because he was covetous covetousness is one of the most insidious deceptive temptations that there can ever be it's the one way in which our minds can be drift can be distracted away from where they should be it's the one way it's the one instrument which our enemy uses to take our focus away from heaven and on to things which we can have here in this world and the more we're trying to increase them the more our hearts are set on what we can gain in this world the less focus we'll have for what

[33 : 54] God is providing for us in heaven which is the real treasure and that's why Jesus said seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything else he says everything else will be given to you everything that you need so if anything else is taking your mind away from Jesus and it's not for me to say it's not for me to talk about how much we should have and how much we should spend and all that kind of thing but the danger of covetousness is always wanting more and trying to get more that's what the Greek word says that's what it means having more ness covetousness you can argue it any way you want but if it takes your mind away from God like the apostle Paul tells us it is idolatry that's what he says covetousness is idolatry it consumed Gehazi Gehazi lost sight of everything that God had done and all his aim was focused only on what he could have if only he could have this money and these clothes how different his life would be he had to have it he became a slave to it that's the problem with it you become a slave to it and you end up not trusting in God you might think well

I'm going to close with this time has gone you might think that his punishment was severe when he went and he confessed to Elisha what had happened and when God brought Naaman's leprosy on him you might think well surely surely it's not as severe as that well yes it is I'll tell you why because by Gehazi accepting what Naaman had brought for Elisha he gave out the message that God can be bought and God's glory in the eyes of those who saw it would be tarnished and undermined and God always protects his own glory that is why Gehazi became a leper because God was speaking making known his displeasure at any threat there was to his majesty and his power and above all his grace there's nothing more precious than the grace of

God in Jesus Christ let's pray together our father in heaven bless your word to us today may it go with us and may it have the same effect upon us as the Jordan river had on Naaman as he surrendered himself to your power and your goodness and your grace may we do the same here and now in Jesus name amen we're going to turn to psalm next next on like the see you