

A Ray of Hope

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in 2 Kings, chapter 5. And it's a well-known story of Naaman, Naaman the leper.

But it's verse 2, well, we'll read verses from the beginning. It's verse 2 really I want to focus on. 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. Now the Syrians and one of the raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

I suppose we can read verse 3 as well, but she said to her mistress, Would that my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure him of his leprosy.

We read through this chapter, and we see that there are four main characters in it. There is Elisha, the prophet of God.

[1 : 07] And while Elisha didn't display the fiery zeal that was characterized the life of Elijah, yet Elisha was also a mighty prophet of God.

And his zeal for the glory of God was just as great, although there wasn't maybe the same passion, the same outward display, but he was still just as much a great man of God.

Then there was Gehazi, Elisha's servant. We don't know enough a lot about this man. He was very committed to his master and did many work. We find him involved in work with Elisha.

But he had a problem, and his problem was covetousness. Covetousness is we're not content with what we have. It's a very subtle sin, very dangerous.

And as often, the Bible highlights these issues and problems in very graphic ways and shows to us not only the problem, but also the result of these problems or what these problems can lead to.

[2 : 19] And that was true with Gehazi because we find him, and this, of course, was the great problem with Gehazi, is that he went off after Naaman and pretended that visitors had arrived.

And he said, oh, after all, Elisha does want some of the presents that you have. And his great sin and his covetousness was also idolatry.

And, you know, this is what we're told in the Bible. New Testament tells us that covetousness is idolatry. And you may say to yourself, well, how is it idolatry?

Well, here we have a very, very clear example of it. Because what Gehazi has done in his covetousness is he has detracted from the glory of God.

Elisha was determined that he was going to take nothing and that he was going to show Naaman that the healing was by God alone.

[3 : 26] But Gehazi then gets into the picture. He thinks that by taking some of the riches that Naaman had and some of these things, that was neither here nor there.

But it was because it was taking away from what God had done. And it was, you can see there that it's taking away, detracting from the glory of God.

And this is idolatry. So we want a clear picture of how covetousness is idolatry. As the New Testament tells us, we go and look at this very clear picture that we have in the Old Testament of this man, Gehazi.

And, of course, we know that although Gehazi got what he wanted, he also got what he didn't want. And he got Naaman's leprosy. And then, of course, there's Elisha and there's Gehazi.

And then there's Naaman. And, of course, Naaman is this man who is the all-action hero of Syria. He was a great man. We're told that. He was in high favor with his master.

[4 : 41] We're told in another translation, the word is honorable. It would appear that despite the fact that whatever he may have been with regard to, and I would imagine he would be fairly ruthless as a leader in the Syrian army, that he was honorable.

There was an honorable quality about him. And yet, despite all that he had, and I'm sure he was the envy of many a person within the land because he would have the best house and he would have the fastest chariots and he would have the best of everything because he was at the very top of the tree.

He had probably what so many people crave, power and fame and fortune, many of the things that people in society say, oh, they want men.

What motivates, an awful lot of people are motivated by power. They want power. A lot of people, you'll find that at work. Those of you who work, particularly if you work in a large place, you will find that there are often conflicts and these conflicts come about for a desire for power.

People want fame, right? A great hunger to be famous. People want wealth, want all these things. Naaman had them. But I'm quite sure that Naaman would have parted with everything if only he could be healed because Naaman had a problem.

[6 : 07] And that's what it tells us at the very end of verse 1. It tells us all these glowing things about him. But then at the end, it tells us he was a leper. He was a man who had everything.

But he was a leper. And you know, in a sense, Naaman stands at this particular juncture as what the world is and what the world offers.

And I'm not for one moment sort of saying that there aren't great things to be found in this world. Of course, this world gives us lots of great things.

But you know this, at the end of the day, it's God who gives us. Because when we look, and this is how sin has distorted everything.

God, we're told in the Bible, has given us everything. Every good and perfect gift is from above.

[7 : 06] You must never lose sight of that. Remember that. All the good things in this life are from above. The Bible tells us that. And all our ability and capacity to enjoy has also been given to us by God.

God has made us. So all the abilities with our senses, our eyes, our ears, our taste, our mouths, our sense of feeling, all these things, everything, God has given us so much and given us to enjoy.

And yet we know that sin, of course, has spoiled and twisted and marred. So that we now appreciate and love the gift far more than the giver. Our eyes are focused upon what we can get rather than upon the one who has given.

And this is where sin comes into it. And again, this is idolatry. That was a great problem in Romans 1. The focus is all wrong. And if our focus is wrong, then everything is wrong.

And that is why people do not get the ultimate satisfaction out of so much of what they crave. They may get it, but it's got something missing.

[8 : 25] Of course it has, because there isn't the enjoyment that there should be through the one who has ultimately given. And even when people may say, well, I got this myself.

I, it's out of my work and my industry and my ability, God also says, I'm the one who gave you these abilities to get. So we can never turn around at the end of the day and say, well, it's me that did this.

Because God says, actually it's not. It's me. I gave you the ability to do these things, to have these, to, to work towards these achievements.

So we've always got to see behind everything that God is the one. And so Naaman really, in many ways, is a picture at this stage of what the world is.

It gives so many things, but, but, but, but, there's always this problem. And you know, that's what the world does. Because, because at the end of the day, whatever the world gives you, the world has to take back from you.

[9 : 30] You only get it on loan. Because there comes a time when we have to leave this world, however long we're in it, whether it's 20 years, 50 years, 80 years, or 100 years.

And it doesn't matter how long, it's fairly short. But we have to leave everything behind. We even have to leave our body behind. But that's only for a while.

But one thing will continue, and that is our soul. And if we have Christ, then we have what death cannot sever.

We have the one person who will remain with us into death, through death, and into eternity. And that's why it's so important that we focus.

And that's part of what we do when we come to worship God on the Lord's Day, is we try to restore our focus. Because we live in a world that is so busy, places so many demands upon us, and it's easy to become clouded, and lose track, and lose the vision, lose the sight.

[10 : 39] And so when we come back to worship God, it's restoring our focus. So we're beginning to see again who we are, and above all, who he is.

And again, when we look at Naaman, we see this leprosy as a great picture. The Bible highlights that as a picture of sin. And sin is that destructive thing within us that clouds everything.

It darkens. It distorts. It perverts. And it's within us all. Sin is that sin that causes all the anger and frustration.

And every time we react by what we do and by what we say in a wrong way, it is because of the sin that is within us. And sin needs to be dealt with in the very same way as leprosy needed to be dealt with.

And we see here that the leprosy, it was something that needed to be cleansed. We're told that in verse 10. Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.

[11 : 47] Made clean. So it needed cleansing in the same way as sin. Sin needs forgiveness. It needs cleansing. God's pardon and God's forgiveness.

You know that these two words, forgiveness, or what we would say, to be pardoned. And God's forgiveness and God's pardon at the very center of what it is to be a Christian.

The word pardon actually means to carry away. And that's what God has done in Christ. If your sins are pardoned, you know when we ask God to pardon our sins, that's what we're asking God to do.

to take our sins and to carry them away. I can't think of anything more wonderful, liberating, than that.

And that's what God did in Christ. And that's what all these things, that's a beautiful link of the Bible all the way through. All that was foreshadowed and typified in the sacrificial system and the day of atonement of the sin carried away.

[12 : 59] And again, we ask the Lord to blot out our sin. That's to wipe it clean. Isn't that wonderful? So that even although we remain sinners, our sin has been dealt with in Jesus Christ.

So Naaman is this person and we see that he stands for the world and he stands for the sin, his leprosy stands for sin.

But there's another person here, the fourth person. And she brings, as it were, a ray of hope into this home. Because there would be a lot of difficulties, unseen difficulties, a lot of problems, a lot of difficulties go on behind closed doors.

And I'm sure this little girl, although she would see all Naaman's power and all his mighty, probably had a lot of achievements and maybe things on the wall, maybe different swords and trophies that he may have been given.

I don't know what kind of trophies he may have gotten these days, but I'm sure his house would always have been a kind of a museum of things. And she might have seen all that and seen the public man, but she also saw the private man and she saw the upset of the home, the anxiety that his leprosy would bring.

[14 : 23] And she was seeing this both with regard to Naaman himself and with regard to Naaman's wife. And this girl, and we see something of this wonderful, she was really, really a wonderful young girl.

Just a little girl. We read what happened. Now the Syrians on one of the raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel. So at that time there were these kind of border raids and like guerrilla type things and they would go in and often there would be killing and pillaging and stealing and taking back.

And often young boys and girls were taken back and they would be sold off as slaves. And can you imagine this poor little girl? We don't know anything.

We don't know her name. But she's ripped away from her family. Maybe her father and mother were killed. We don't know. Maybe she had brothers and sisters. Maybe they were taken.

Maybe they weren't. We don't know. All we know is that she was taken in this raid. And she ends up by God's grace and God's providence in Naaman's house.

[15 : 33] We see two or three things about this girl which speaks to us. I believe about God's grace in her heart and in her life. And the first thing is this.

There is love in her heart. How do we know that? Because love forgives. We're told in the Bible that love does not keep a record of wrongs.

If this little girl had kept a record of wrongs, she wouldn't have opened her mouth about Elisha and about the God of Israel.

She would have taken great pleasure in Naaman's condition of leprosy. She would be rubbing her hands and saying, he's got what he deserves.

I hope he gets worse and worse and worse after what he and his people have done to me. And she would take a perverse delight in his misery.

[16 : 32] But love doesn't operate like that. Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. grace within her heart. And so we see that this little girl is obviously, there is love within her heart.

Because that brings us to the second thing. Not only does love forgive and love pardon, but love is positive and love seeks to try and help.

That's what love does. And so we can see the evidence of that grace within her heart. And this is how love works or how grace works in love.

When a person has come to know in their own heart the love of God in Christ, you want others to know the same for yourself.

Isn't that true? You see it, for instance, in the woman of Samaria. The moment she came to discover Christ, she went all throughout the whole community saying, come on, come with me, come see a man who told me all things that ever I did.

[17 : 40] This is a natural response within a person's heart. When Rahab was saved, immediately she went, oh, I want all my family saved. And so this little girl who knew something of God's grace and God's love, she says, I wish that my master would come to discover this for himself as well.

And so we see that this, which is in our heart. Now, it's very obvious from this little girl's actions that she was brought up in the way of the Lord.

And that is so wonderful. If she had grown up in a home that was ignorant of God and the things of God, she would never have spoken like this. But she was brought up.

See how important it is to train up a child in the way that they'll go and when they're old they won't depart from it. God's love is placed within that young heart.

And then we see, we could also say the loyalty to that faith. Not only is she not bitter against what has happened, but even although she's in another land with another religion, she has obviously remained steadfast to what she was taught.

[19 : 10] it would have been very easy for her to say, oh well, God has forgotten all about me. I'm now in another land with other customs, with another culture, with another religion.

I will just follow what they're doing. No. She's pointing them back to the true God. And you know, this is where we see the great loyalty to faith.

And you know, the wonderful thing was this. God honored that little girl because Naaman, not only was he cured of his leprosy, but it's very obvious that there was some form of change that took place in Naaman's own life.

Because it tells us in verse 15, then he returned to the man of God and he came and stood before him and he said, behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. And then he asked that the Lord would forgive him because part of his work was he had to take the king into the house, into the temple for idolatry and to worship there.

And he said, I don't want to do that anymore. And when I bow myself in the house of Ruman, I want the Lord to pardon me because he knew straight away that he was being led into idolatry.

[20 : 33] You see, there was a change in his heart. And I think it's wonderful that here's this little girl who was not so long ago in total isolation in that house with nobody who could understand her ways or her faith.

And now, the most powerful man in the land, apart from the king, was going to be with her and side with her and identify with her and her faith and her God.

See, that's the way God works. And if we do our duty, let me say that he will far more than to his God will always be faithful to his word.

Well, may we, all of us, then seek to embrace this Lord and to follow him with all our heart. Let's pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks for being around the word and we pray that the word will be blessed to us.

May we hear it, understand it, may we be enriched by it. O Lord, do us good, we pray. Take away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

[21 : 47] Amen.