

Naaman is Healed from His Leprosy

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, I've got a few words for the younger folk here, and this is also for maybe those who are still young at heart, but older.
- I've got a photograph to show you, and I hope it's clear enough from where you're sitting. It's a picture of a pussycat.
- I hope you can all see the picture. Now, this was our cat.
- Unfortunately, she died a number of years ago, but we keep a picture of her as a memento. Now, she actually belonged to our daughter, Ruth. She was a very happy little cat.
- She used to enjoy sitting on your lap, and she purred a lot. In fact, sometimes she was a bit of a pest, because if you wanted to sit down for only a short time, she was on your lap and assisted you sitting down.
- [1 : 0 0] She was also very good when you were ill. She could tell when you were ill, and she would give you extra cuddles. When you were lying in bed, I think often she could tell you had a fever and were nice and warm, so she would then lie on top of you, showing her love.
- There was a problem, though. There was a problem that we ran into. We left our daughter. That was her seventh birthday when the cat arrived. We said to our daughter, you choose the name of your cat.
- And for days and days and days, there was no name. And eventually, she decided not on a name like Fluffy or Pooce or anything else, but she came up with the name Cuddles.
- Cuddles. And the sad thing is, when people would come and visit the house and we would explain the cat's name, they would smile politely, or they would laugh, and some people would even mock.
- And we wanted to make sure that Ruth didn't hear that. And the worst of all was, when she was out of an evening, we would have to stand at the back door, and we would shout her name.
- [2 : 0 9] And we would shout, Cuddles! Cuddles! And this caused consternation, especially when a local minister was walking his dog past. And you realised he walked a bit faster.
- But what I want to say to you is that she was precious to us. Her name was also precious. And we used to feel sorry when her name was misused.
- I hope all of you can see her. And what I want to say is, there's another name, a very precious name, that we're given here in the Bible.
- And that's the name of Jesus. It's the name of someone very precious. Someone who has risen from the dead. Who's alive now in heaven. Someone who knows when we're ill.
- Someone who knows when we're suffering. Someone who extends his love to us. And the sad thing in this modern world, his name is often used in a very bad way.
- [3 : 1 1] In a name that hurts us. A name that we feel if only people would understand. And a bit like what I said about little cuddles.

There's something really important about the name of Jesus. That name's precious to us. And we should be prepared to say to people why his name is precious to us.

And why he's precious to us. And to tell people about the wonderful thing that he did for us on the cross. And to never be embarrassed or ashamed.

So will you hold that in your hearts? We had a lovely little cat. That we remember well. But there's something far more important.

In the way that her name was misused. Jesus' name is misused as well. And we've got to be prepared to say to people why. He's so special to us.

[4 : 14] Will you remember that? Now we're going to sing again.

And this time in the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 85. Which is on page 113. So that's 113 of your Sing Psalms books.

We're going to sing verses 8 to 13. So that's 8 to the end. The tune will be, Come Thou Fount. So I'll read it through before we sing.

I will hear what God the Lord says. To his saints he offers peace. But his people must not wander and return to foolishness. Surely, for all those who fear him, his salvation is at hand.

So that once again his glory may be seen within our land. Love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace embrace. Righteousness looks down from heaven.

[5 : 17] From the earth springs faithfulness. What is good the Lord will give us. And our land its fruit will bear. Righteousness will go before him. And his royal way prepare.

Shall we stand to sing these wonderful words of praise to the living God. I will hear what God the Lord says.

To his saints he offers peace. But his people must not wander and return to foolishness.

Surely, for all those who fear him, his salvation is at hand.

So that once again his glory may be seen within our land.

[6 : 18] Love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace embrace.

Righteousness looks down from heaven. On the earth springs faithfulness.

What is good the Lord will give us. And our land its fruit will bear.

Righteousness will go before him. And his royal way prepare. Shall we now open our Bibles to read God's word?

We're going to read from 2 Kings chapter 5. That's on page 372 of the church ESV Bibles. 2 Kings chapter 5.

[7 : 23] And we're going to read from verse 1. Through to the middle of verse 19. And this is the familiar episode of Naaman, the Syrian general, being healed of leprosy.

So that's on page 372, 2 Kings chapter 5. And I normally like to give the younger folk here a challenge.

It's an important word. You'll have heard me mention it before. It's the word behold. As we read through it, I want you to make a mental note of how many times the word behold is used.

And then on the way out, when I'm at the church door, tell me how many you found. So, reading God's word. 2 Kings chapter 5 verse 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.

[8 : 27] He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. 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.

She said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet who was in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy. So Naaman went in and told his lord.

Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. So Naaman went, taking with them ten tons of silver, that's in modern measurements a third of a ton of silver, and six thousand shekels of gold, which is about seventy kilograms of gold, and ten changes of clothes.

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.

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?

[9 : 45] Only consider and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me. 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. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

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. 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.

Are not Abana and Farpar, 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.

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?

[11 : 00] Has he actually said to you, Wash and be clean? 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. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all of his company, that's all of his horses and chariots, 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. So accept now a present from your servant.

But Elisha said, As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, If not, please let there be given to your servant two new loads of earth.

For from now on, your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord. In this matter, may the Lord pardon your servant. When my master goes into the house of Rimen to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimen.

[12 : 18] When I bow myself in the house of Rimen, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter. Elisha said to him, Go in peace. Amen.

And may the Lord bless to us this reading from his own holy, infallible, inspired, and inerrant word. Before we come to study what we've read, shall we sing again, this time in the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 25, which is on page 29.

We're going to sing verses 4 to 11. I'll read through the first four lines and the last four lines before we sing. So that's on page 29, Psalm 25, reading of verse 4.

O Lord, reveal to me your ways, and all your paths help me to know. Direct and guide me in your truth. Instruct me in the way to go. Then picking up the reading of verse 10.

To those who keep his covenant laws, he shows his love consistently. For your name's sake, O Lord my God, forgive my great iniquity.

[13 : 28] Shall we stand to sing these wonderful words of praise to the living God? Amen. O Lord, be built of me your ways, and all your paths help me to know.

Direct and guide me in your truth. Instruct me in the way to go.

You are my Savior and my God. All day I hope with you alone.

Remember, Lord, your love and grace which pompous ages you have shown.

Do not recall my sins of you or my rebellious evil ways.

[14 : 57] remember me in your great love for you, O Lord, our good always.

Because the Lord is just and good, He shows his path to all who stray.

He guides them in what is mine and teaches them his holy way.

To those who keep His toughness and loss He shows His love consistently For yearn is safe O Lord my God forgive my great iniquity If you'd like to have your Bibles open at the passage we read 2 Kings chapter 5 and we're going to look at the verses that we've read.

Now this is the well-known episode of Naaman, the Syrian general coming to the land of Israel. It's an event many of us have known about since childhood.

[16 : 47] It often is one that's used in children's Bible story books partly because of that lovely contrast where the very pompous Naaman comes to the door of Elisha's house and Elisha won't even come out to see him.

But let's today move on from children's Bible story books. Let's try to understand what's going on here. This is set in what we would now call the Middle East.

Naaman comes from Syria sadly a country that's in the news for all sorts of reasons at the moment because of a brutal civil war going on there. And the trouble is when we look at news reports no matter which television news company it is we often start off with a sense of bewilderment as they try to explain to us what's going on and by the end of the report we're often left as bewildered as we were at the beginning.

And that's the nature of sadly the Middle East and sadly I think our modern news reporters they're often saying they don't really understand the complexity of the problems there and also our politicians also don't seem to understand the complexity either.

but I would hope in this sermon as we look back to a much earlier time in history although we might be bewildered by some of the things we read here we're not left bewildered by the end.

[18 : 21] If we are bewildered I apologise for that. This episode is set in about the year 850 BC so that's 850 years before Jesus was born.

Two countries are mentioned here Syria and Israel both names you'll find on the map nowadays. But as we come to study our passage by the end I want us to have looked at three things and that will be in the latter part of the sermon.

The three things we're going to focus on near the end are the state of the little girl that's the little girl who advised Naaman's wife that he should go to Israel.

Then we're also going to look at the state of the nation of Israel as it was at that time and then the last thing we're going to study the state of Naaman the Syrian.

So three things the state of the little girl then the state of the nation of Israel as it was at that time and then Israel as mentioned in our passage and then also the state of Naaman the Syrian.

[19 : 34] But before we begin studying these things two things we've got to look at first. First is there are some interesting points in our reading that we have to take into account and the second is we need to understand something of the background something of the background of what's going on here.

A bit like modern news reporters trying to make sense of what's happening in Syria today we need to make sense of what's going on who's this man Naaman what's this victory that he got why has he ended up in Israel why has he been welcomed in all sorts of things so first we'll look at some interesting points from the text and then secondly to look at something of background and that's before we come to the state of these three the little girl the nation of Israel and Naaman.

so some interesting points in our reading in verse one we're told that because of Naaman the Lord had given victory to Syria but it leaves things hanging it doesn't say who the victory was over we always make an assumption that because only Syria and Israel are mentioned it must have been a victory over Israel but was it hopefully that will become clearer when we get into the background the next interesting thing to note is in verse 9 and verse 15 it tells us that Naaman brought a large body of troops with him when he turns up in verse 9 at Elisha's house it says Naaman came with his horses and chariots and remember they'd also had to pull a third of a ton of silver with them so this is quite a big military force and in verse 15 it says

Naaman and all his company came and stood before Elisha now this was quite a big military force if we look at a map of where the border was in those days between Syria and Israel he's had to travel a hundred miles from the border to get to Samaria a hundred miles and he's not challenged he seems to go to Samaria first and then to wherever Elisha's house is and he's not challenged troops don't stand in the way to stop him in fact you get the impression that he's welcomed now that doesn't make sense if we think that the victory he won was over Israel so that's the second conundrum the third one is in verse 11 even before he's healed he knows the proper name for the God of Israel because he actually refers to the God of Israel as the

Lord in verse 11 it says Naaman speaking behold I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God remember God's name was unique to his people anyone else wouldn't use it anyone else would just talk about the God of Israel but Naaman actually uses it here how did he know to use it why did he use it even though he was angry at that point he used it appropriately and he didn't sin against God how did he know that now that's our first bit dealt with of looking at the interesting points in the text things that need answers let's now look at a bit of background so this is going to sound a bit like a news report where someone is trying to explain to you what's going on in the background here we're going to look first at

[23 : 38] Israel itself Israel as we find it here and then we're going to look at the international situation of the time I'll try not to make it complicated let's look at Israel the name Israel properly refers to God's people only later did it become the name of a place a bit like us here when we use the word church we'd actually referring to the people not the building the original word church in Greek refers to the people and that's why you can actually take a body of people and still call them a church even if they don't have a building so they're a church but only later did the name transfer to the actual building so Israel refers to God's people only later on it became the name of a place now God's people Israel they'd been rescued from Egypt by the

Lord through Moses 400 years before this episode that we're reading about here as they then escaped into the wilderness through the Red Sea God made a covenant with them that meant a relationship with them at Mount Sinai and they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before Joshua was chosen by God to lead them into the promised land they were then led by Joshua after that judges and then kings and ultimately King David and his son Solomon now when Solomon died the kingdom split so what was one nation of God's people Israel split in two and that took place 80 years before our reading here the northern part broke away and kept the name

Israel the southern part where David's descendants ruled was known as Judah so as you read through 1st Kings 2nd Kings 1st Chronicles 2nd Chronicles you get two kingdoms a northern one called Israel and a southern one called Judah the Israel that we're reading about here is that little northern state that little bit that kept the name Israel but broke away to be its own nation and the problem is that nation fell away dramatically from their covenant God if you look both of these nations Israel and Judah they were around at the same time they had kings and here's a test for you to do especially the younger folk go through 1st Kings and 2nd Kings write down the names of all the kings of Israel and all the kings of

Judah and then do this notice God's comment on them in the scriptures it'll either say he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord or he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and if you organize it into the different kingdoms I would suggest when you look at Judah you will find although there were lots of kings many did evil there were eight who still did what was right in the eyes of the Lord if you look at the northern kingdom of Israel and do the same exercise you will find none are said to have done right in the eyes of the Lord not a single one what they did instead was they pursued the gods and the ways of the nations around them now God's reaction to this was to send that northern little kingdom two prophets one called Elijah and the other called Elisha and they went in to the northern kingdom this little kingdom of Israel to call everyone back to a proper covenant faith in their father the God the one true and living

God and many of the ordinary people did remain faithful although as I've said none of their leaders did none of their leaders did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and the most poignant thing is at this time of Elijah was the incident at Mount Carmel and if you read it carefully later Elijah meets King Ahab and King Ahab does not address Elijah by name he calls him you troubler of Israel what's poignant there is that Elijah's name when you work out the Hebrew when you actually say it it's Eliyahu and what that means is Jehovah is my God Jehovah that's the covenant God of Israel is my God and Ahab is in such a bad mood he won't even say that so that anyone can hear him say

[28 : 54] Jehovah is my God he would rather just taunt Elijah and say you troubler of Israel that's how bad things had got in the north none of the kings did what was right in the eyes of the Lord so for our reading today Israel mentioned here is that northern kingdom and all of the kings had rejected their covenant Lord but among the ordinary people there were still those who were in a proper and right relationship with their covenant God now I said the next bit of background is to look at the international situation Syria and Israel as we have them here were tiny little states they weren't very big and around them were other tiny little states as well now to the north of them at this time in history an empire was growing a brutal and wicked empire which we come across in the scriptures it has a very similar name it's called

Assyria so what I'll do is for the sermon we'll call it the empire of Assyria and that's quite different from the kingdom of Syria it often causes confusion but the empire of Assyria was wicked absolutely wicked it was brutal its emperors were arrogant and what it would do is it would conquer these little countries and take them over and it would often kill thousands of people for sheer sport and at this time in history 850 BC this empire was now beginning to pressurize both Syria the kingdom of Syria and also Israel and these little countries could see the countries around them being slowly taken over so these small kingdoms came together they came together in an alliance curiously and we know this from evidence in the

British Museum at this time in history Israel and Syria actually allied themselves together and the evidence comes from a strange place it actually comes from the empire of Assyria an Assyrian emperor if you go to the British Museum you'll see a translation there of a big stone and the name Israel is mentioned there and Syria and he mentions the alliance that was against him and it was led by Syria and you find that Israel contributed thousands of chariots to the alliance now the trouble is if you put an alliance together it's very difficult to get everyone to work together and this alliance against the big wicked empire of Assyria had twelve little countries in it twelve little countries and if we think about it a week on Friday will be the commemoration of the D-Day landings and that was a time in history when an alliance of countries had to take on an empire one empire

Nazi Germany and the difficulty was how do you get an alliance to work together and do the most difficult thing you can which is an invasion across water that's resisted a brilliant general was needed and the American Eisenhower was chosen and he commanded Americans British Canadians French Polish and many other nations and he got them to work together he got them to work together and to win so if we go back into history now here's this problem 12 little countries are facing the empire of Assyria we know from that stone of the British Museum something remarkable the emperor of the empire was Chalameneser the third and he talks about great slaughter that he caused there was a battle in the year 853 BC great slaughter he came up against this alliance he fought them hard he claims all sorts of things except one he does not claim victory he was actually stopped in his tracks and not just once but four times and a bit like modern politicians they're delighted to tell you about the things that they've done well in but the things that don't go well get missed out he lost four times over a period of ten years so the question then is who was the commander who pulled this alliance together who was the commander who got

Syrians Israelites and other nations all working together the historians tell us it was probably this man Naaman and the victory mentioned here wasn't over Israel it was over the empire of Assyria here was the one man the one man of the middle east who struck fear into the brutal wicked empire of Assyria this one man and a bit like Eisenhower in 1944 Naaman back then had to understand each of the countries that was in the alliance each of the peoples he had to understand their ways and also their gods which probably explains why he used the name of the Lord appropriately instead of saying the God of Israel he says the Lord is God that means

[34 : 47] Jehovah his God he actually uses the name even before he's healed now you might say this historical study it's interesting up to a point but you've left me as bewildered as a BBC news report but how is it relevant to us today well what I want to do with all that we've said let's now look at the three things I said we would study each might be brief but the state of the little girl the state of the nation of Israel as it was then and the state of name the Syrian so what about the little girl she was one of God's covenant people she was a slave in a foreign land do you notice we don't even know her name she was regarded as so insignificant we don't even know her name and yet she does the most significant thing of all in the whole of the text she had probably not seen her family in years and if you think about it life for her was not what she would have liked it to have been like and isn't that so much like our circumstances today when we think of all the sadnesses and the challenges and the difficulties we face we sometimes say in our prayers oh

Lord why does it have to be like this but for this little girl despite everything she remains faithful to her covenant God the Lord Jehovah and she witnesses for her Lord to the mightiest military commander in the Middle East and she loves him she actually loves him she shows this by wanting him to be healed she knows the significance of leprosy she also knows he can't fix it so she gives him the one solution there is and a bit like little children she wouldn't have said it once she would have gone on and on and on about it contrast this with Jonah do you remember when he was sent to Nineveh he was sent to bring a message of doom and disaster and he said to the Lord yes I'll do it when he eventually went but I want you to carry it out and he was really angry when

God didn't because he wasn't showing any love to the people in that city here's this little girl who is showing love now what about the state of the nation this northern kingdom of Israel they were 400 years on from their covenant at Sinai the covenant that Moses had mediated with the Lord and the trouble is this nation Israel now is in a mess their leaders are not interested in the Lord the covenant God of Israel Jehovah they pursue other gods and the ways of other nations although some of the ordinary people in the nation are still faithful like the little girl shall we compare this with modern Scotland here we are we're 400 years on from one of the great movements among people in the nation the reformation the Bible in our own language a time when the nation came together in a covenant not in a biblical term but a covenant

Scotland is the only nation in history which has tried to do something that ancient Israel did which was that every single person who had capacity to think signed up to a covenant in the 1630s to pledge themselves to the Lord quite a remarkable thing the trouble is since the 1630s there has been a long steady retreat and if we look at modern Scotland or the modern UK we've got leaders who don't seem to be interested in the Lord of the Bible or his righteousness we only have to look at the laws of the land especially those past the last 50 years and compare them with his righteous expectations to say something's gone wrong here something has gone seriously wrong for a nation that was once so blessed and where individuals not just the elite individuals everyone who could think signed up to a covenant with the

Lord but like ancient Israel's ordinary people we are being asked to remain faithful to the Lord no matter what the state of the nation is now we're coming to a close we're going to look at the state of Naaman Naaman the Syrian this general a mighty military commander victorious over we can work out it was the empire of Assyria from one little country he defeated the mightiest military power in the world of those days and Israel this little kingdom of Israel is grateful to him for that this man now has high status wherever he goes among this alliance he's given honors but he has leprosy leprosy something that he cannot fix and all the medical treatments of the day could not fix and no matter what status he had no one could fix this and for us that's a metaphor for sin here is something that clings to

[40 : 36] Naaman and the way that sin clings to us and only the intervention of the living God can heal this the thing is Naaman is so desperate absolutely desperate he he he accepts the advice of a little girl on what to do can you think about all the things they might have tried before they even thought of going to Israel all the things is doing what a little girl told him to do and probably when they fell in with

Israelite troops who escorted them they would have conversations because remember they'd fought in significant battles together against the empire of Syria and the Syrians would say we're here because of one of your people a little girl told our commander that someone in your land could heal them of his leprosy and the Israelite troops some of them would say well that is a bit odd they would all maybe be rather private about their doubts but on they went eventually they end up at Elisha's house and Elisha wouldn't even Naaman with status beyond measure and Elisha won't recognize it he won't come out now he won't come out because he's observing God's law which is about not being the proximity of leprosy but he does actually give Naaman the solution and it's interesting look at the way

Naaman's own servants speak to him they plead with him just to do what Elisha had said they plead with him to do to follow through with what the little girl actually said to do and what we've got to see here is that Naaman realizes that he must have the same attitude to the Lord as the little girl he must have that same child like trust in the Lord that little girl who sent him on this mission and this little girl who ultimately arranged that Naaman meets the one true God in his healing because when his skin was restored it says it was like a little child but his heart too became like the heart of a little child there was now no more for Naaman thinking of his high status his victories his honors his third of a ton of silver there was now for him only a humble right relationship with the covenant

God of Israel the Lord Jehovah now we're like Naaman we're Gentiles and like him we're invited to become part of God's covenant people and we're invited through the covenant that we live in which is the new covenant in Jesus which we'll be commemorating next Lord's Day morning in this place Jesus the risen Lord Jesus notice as well he tells us to come when we come to faith in Matthew 18 verse 1 to 4 he also tells us to come like little children but like Naaman discovered and in coming for the first time or in coming to worship or in coming to communion table we must realize that we must go back to that original humility that we found that we discovered in our repentance and confession we've got to have that same attitude of humility and utter reliance and dependence on

Jesus throughout our lives so as communion comes again that significant event in the life of any congregation just to rediscover that humility that first brought you now we're at the end of the sermon if we recap to close remember there were three people we looked at there were three states we looked at but let's sum it up like this there was a little girl who remained faithful to her lord there was a nation where none of the leaders were faithful to the lord and there was a gentile general called Naaman who came to a very humble and simple faith in the one true and living God who are we when we compare ourselves to each of these Amen shall we bow our heads for a short prayer sovereign Lord thank you for your word thank you for speaking to us through it and please in that mystical way that you touch our lives please do that during this day as we consider some of the things we've looked at in your word and please Lord through this week to come may there be something that we have learned anew of you and your word please bless us in our time of worship bless our brothers and sisters in the different congregations around the town bless the high fellowship and also bless our brothers and sisters in the Gallic part of the service the congregation as well what show for us Lord please be with us in our final singing as we go from this place we ask all of this in Jesus name Amen our final singing our final singing