



Naaman - doing it God's way (2 Kings 5)

I'm sure most of you know the story of Naaman very well - the Gentile captain who found healing and faith by washing in the Jordan. Tonight we're going to take another look at this story and what it teaches us about the process of redemption.

In the past two weeks we looked at Esau and Jacob and found that their dealings with God were on the basis of His grace - although they were so often unaware of the fact that God was favouring them. The same is true of Naaman. Even before he got his leprosy, he was a man in whose life God was working.

He was a captain of the armies of Aram. Older translations use Syria but at that time it was correctly called Aram - it's where the language Aramaic comes from. Aramaic has many similarities to Hebrew which is not surprising because from the period of the kings onwards, Aramaic was widely spoken in the Middle East, particularly in Israel, Aram, and also in Assyria right down into Chaldea.

This was the time of quite evil kings in the northern kingdom of Israel and the king of Aram, Ben Hadad was not much better. Israel was being punished and the Lord used the Aramites to do it and we see these remarkable verses: *Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram.*

Here we have a man who was a Gentile unbeliever - an idol worshipper - yet he was a tool God was already using to bring judgement on Israel. But as a God of grace God was working in Naaman's life too.

How? By intervening in Naaman's life as he was brought down with leprosy. Naaman didn't rationalise his illness in any way at all. He didn't blame God because he didn't know him. He probably sacrificed to his idols who couldn't help. His interest in being healed was entirely personal. His leprosy meant that he couldn't continue his army career and the fame it had brought him. His motives for healing were entirely selfish.

Was God responsible for Naaman's leprosy? We find later in the story that He is responsible for Gehazi's leprosy because of his sin, but this is just maybe an example of God's permissive will in Naaman's life. There was a lot of leprosy around and Naaman caught it. Yet it was through his catching leprosy that God worked His purposes.

Why do people get ill? It's a product of the fall. We get ill because it is part of the painful toil and existence that ends in death for human beings because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Expect to be ill at some point in your life either in mind or in body because that's part of your fallen nature. Yes it's true that we can live healthier lifestyles that will reduce health problems - but this is a world full of viruses and bacteria - or pollution - and much of them a product of the human race. And in the end we die. And God permits it because our flesh is all part of a creation that awaits redemption - *Romans 8: 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*

That will only be changed when Christ returns or when you are resurrected on the last day so your body is transformed to be like Jesus' body.

But we see the grace of God working in our fallen-ness. Naaman got ill so that he could find healing and hope. That was the grace of God at work. And we'll see that the grace moved beyond his sickness. The sickness brought Naaman to the point where he understood and received that grace.

But it was a process. By grace Naaman's household had an Israelite slave so he heard about Elisha and how the Lord used him to heal people. And that's where the problems started. He sought his healing the wrong way.

📍 He went to the wrong person

The first think Naaman arranges through his king is to send a rather rude letter to the king of Israel demanding that he heal him. It was just assumed that the healer belonged to the king of Israel. Fortunately it was something that Elisha heard about and crisis was over.

Where do we seek healing from. Is it from those who cannot give it? Do we go to the wrong place? Do we try to find a cure with the wrong doctor? By that I don't mean we shouldn't go to doctors and hospitals because they are places where healing is found. As people made in the image of God, we have been given the capability of working out how to be healers. All we have though is the ability to prolong life, not beat death.

But there are two issues here. Firstly only God has the ability to beat the inevitable and has eternal solutions. Secondly, man can't deal with the spiritual aspects of illness. It's a well known fact that people with hope in this life and the next live longer and have fewer ailments than other people.

The problem comes when people who have the longer term and more intractable or even terminal illnesses seek help from all sorts of "healers" whether they be pagan, occultist, Eastern or even "Christian" because they are desperate because conventional medicine cannot help them. This was Naaman and he nearly came to grief because he went to the wrong place.

📍 He thought healing was something he could buy

Of course, those who pay for expensive Harley Street physicians think that they can spend the money and get good health. It's the same with some who advocate spiritual healing. Like those so called "TV Evangelists" who say send more money and God will heal you. But there is a serious side to this. Because many "faith healers" suggest that it's by your faith that you're healed. It's their kop-out. If someone isn't healed then it's their own fault - they didn't have enough faith.

Think carefully here. How many lepers in Israel were healed in the days of Naaman - none as far as I know. Just the gentile Naaman who came plodding in demanding that he be healed as of right with no faith whatsoever. Why? Because healing is a sovereign act of grace by a holy God.

In God Himself is the prerogative to miraculously heal someone - and no-one else. We are encourage to pray for healing and elders encouraged to anoint with oil and lay on hands. And whether people go to a doctor or not, we need to pray for them and lay hands on them or whatever as necessary.

Most of the people with good quality healing ministries that I know aren't TV evangelists, but people who listen to God and have that perception they need to use their spiritual gifts according to the Holy Spirit. And also open to being called to go and see people and pray with them. And I know they make mistakes too and grave ones because they allow their flesh to take over from the Spirit.

Elisha was a man of God. he knew what the outcome of his encounter with Naaman was going to be. He had no hesitation in seeing Naaman. *When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."*

He thought that he could dictate God's will

Naaman arrives at Elisha's and much to his annoyance the prophet doesn't even greet him and commands him to wash in the Jordan. The Jordan? You must be joking. The rivers are cleaner in Damascus! Just a minute he was the one who wanted to be healed. Here we get to the heart of Naaman's problem. It wasn't the leprosy that was the issue but his pride. How could a great man like Naaman face up to the loss in his dignity that leprosy gave him. Healing would restore his life and dignity - his self-pride and haughtiness.

Whether we want God to heal us or get us out of a spot of bother: what's the reason for it? So that we can continue our lives in disobedience to Him? God wanted to change this man Naaman and He used this disease and encounter with Elisha to serve His purposes. The leprosy was a side show. This man had to be brought down to know who the true God was and all this was pretty drastic stuff to get him off his perch.

But we all do it don't we. We want life our way. We want things as we want them. Whether it is sickness or any other problem; when it comes we ask God to do something about it and say Why Lord? When He doesn't seem to be listening to us.

We cannot dictate the will of God. Sometimes we need to come off our perches before we see the will and way of God in what we have gone through. God just demands our obedience. Sometimes God calls us to live with the aches and pains of life because we then have to rely on Him and we are drawn closer to Him. Sometimes only eternity will tell why some people suffered so. All we know is that God deals with us according to the grace give us. So let's listen for His voice and do His will.

I remember many years ago when David Watson contracted cancer that there were huge prayer meetings for him and many people prophesied he would be healed. After all he was perhaps the most well-balanced and articulate of early charismatic leaders in this country. Surely his healing would be a cause celebre and many will be drawn to Christ.

Strange because that wasn't my judgement of it at all. When I heard about it I thought "He's going to die - he's being called home." You see, David Watson was so prominent that a void would be left. And because that void was left it meant God would raise up many others to fill it. From the death of one man, many replacements came out of the woodwork. David Watson's ministry was filled by one such person, Sandy Millar who was assisted by Nicky Gumbel. The rest they say is history because out of that partnership came Alpha. God's purposes are great.

He had the wrong attitude

I have already alluded to this. Here was a man that thought he was so great that he had a right to be healed and he nearly walked off in a huff because of it. But he was

persuaded to wash in the Jordan and he received not just healing but healing in style - his skin came up perfect.

By God's grace he was offered the healing, but it took a simple act of faith by Naaman to receive. How true that is of the things of God. And it was a change in life for Naaman. The issue wasn't the leprosy, but Naaman's need for redemption. God's healing of Naaman was linked to his redemption - but it was also linked to a change in his attitude towards the things of God. Naaman was not just healed of leprosy but received a wider healing. He said *"Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant."* 16 *The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.* 17 *"If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD.*

And Naaman's healing was far-reaching. Ben Hadad was replaced as king by Hazael who did have some knowledge of God. And who was there to serve him? Probably Naaman - someone of like mind.

This is just one story of healing in scripture. If you're sick don't make a theology out of it. I know many Christians that seem infatuated by healing. It's all healing this and healing that. So much so that they miss the fact that the vast majority of the population aren't sick - but they have ailments - broken marriages, addictions, compulsions, relationship problems, bondages unemployment and the rest.

And as the people of God we are not just called to be people that reflect God's grace in ministering to the sick, but are also people who are called to minister in a wide range of areas, some spiritual, some practical. But all of them have underlying issues of redemption and obedience.

And we believe in a Saviour who transforms lives today just like Naaman's was transformed. That transformation may have started with a healing, or a repair of relationship, or freedom from addiction or whatever - but it ends up with God's purposes being carried out and people coming to Christ - and all of it miraculous because it is of the Holy Spirit.

It's a challenge not to be Naamans but to be Elishas. To be people who are so in tune with God that when we are presented with people with the problems and difficulties or their sicknesses that we know what to do.

As we seek to reach out to people, that's what we've got to be like because the people we meet all have their issues and problems and we need to minister to them and through it they will know the presence and power of God as Naaman did and as a result come to faith in Him.