

## 2 Kings 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: 19 July 2020

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] 2 Kings 5. I'm aware that we've missed out a little bit of a section at the end of chapter 4, but my plan is to go back to that in a while, so I haven't forgotten about it, and hopefully we can go back to it.

Now this is a really good passage, a famous passage, we did this at Holiday Bible Club, I can't remember which year it was, and there's a lot we could say in this chapter, so I've had to be quite selective.

But I've been struck by one simple theme really in this passage, which is the priority of grace in God's word, and how God feels about grace, if I even put it like that.

Because in the story of Naaman, the Syrian commander, he has this journey of faith, doesn't he, where he has to learn the centrality of grace in the way that God works.

Naaman is an outsider to God's people, with a need, his leprosy, and he is healed completely, but the lesson for him is that healing can only come through grace.

[ 1 : 10 ] And it's an awkward and humbling lesson that he has to learn, a difficult lesson that he has to learn. He has to learn in this passage that God is not like the gods he has back home.

He isn't the God that you can manipulate, or bribe, or earn a blessing with. It must be grace, given and not earned. And like him, we are in a need as well tonight, aren't we?

We are sinners in need of a saviour. We are deeply flawed, unclean people, with a need for cleansing. And it must be grace.

Because the first thing we see tonight is that God is very particular about his grace. Very particular about it. Let's cut to the chase in the story. The Syrian commander Naaman, he has a skin disease, leprosy, and he eventually follows a tip-off about healing, potential healing, in Israel across the border in Samaria through the prophet Elisha.

It's a hilarious scene, isn't it? He turns up with his entourage outside Elisha's house. He pulls up with his armored cars and his limos on what would have been the equivalent of Greenfield Avenue or something.

[ 2 : 26 ] It's a pretty ridiculous picture, isn't it? And look at the instructions that Elisha gives to him in verse 10. Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored.

Now, notice, first of all, how particular it is. There is a particular thing that he should do in a particular place and in a particular way.

It's almost picky, isn't it? It's almost as if God, through Elisha, is being quite fussy about how this healing is going to happen. And Naaman senses that in verse 12.

Are not Abana and Parpar, rivers of Damascus, better than the Jordan? Why can't I wash there and be clean? Naaman thinks, surely there are many, many ways to get blessing from God.

Many, many roads lead to God, don't they? But no. It must be this way and not that way, Naaman.

[ 3 : 25 ] It's very narrow, isn't it? Very specific. God is very particular. There aren't several equally valid approaches. Maybe Naaman is asking, well, if God is such a great God, why can't he bless me in other ways?

Is he that restrictive? But when it comes to God's work of healing and of salvation, God is very particular. He's very narrow-minded, if you like.

And the gospel of the Lord Jesus feels a bit like that, doesn't it? With its very exclusive claims. That Jesus is very particular.

No one comes to the Father except through me, Jesus says. That the gospel is very particular. There aren't several ways to know God.

It's very narrow. And Elijah needs to teach Naaman this fact. That, yes, it seems narrow, and in a sense it is Naaman. When Naaman says, well, we shouldn't put God in a box, should we?

[ 4 : 36 ] He can deal with me. He can deal with me in all kinds of ways that I like. But God says, actually, I put myself in a box. Salvation is in no one else.

There is no name, no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. It must be this way. It must be Jesus. If you want to know my blessing, God says, I vaguely give it in this particular way, and through my son, Jesus.

I'm very particular about this. Very particular about how I bless and how I heal and save. And it must be through my grace in Jesus.

But what does that mean exactly? Well, God is particular about his grace. Secondly, he is very precious about his grace. He is precious about what grace is.

It's a word we use a lot, isn't it? But God is precious about what that means and how it works. And I want you to notice how God refuses to be paid for this healing, for this salvation.

[ 5 : 49 ] He's very precious about that. That grace is a gift and not a wage. And Naaman has to learn this.

Naaman has an expectation of the gods that he knows back home in Syria, where blessings are earned and paid for. So did you see that twice Naaman comes with the offer of paying something for this healing, doesn't he?

So back in verse 5, he goes to Israel with 10 talents of silver and 6,000 shekels of gold and 10 changes of clothing. It is a small fortune in those days.

And then later, after the healing, did you notice, verse 15, he wants to give a payment. He wants to give a present to Elisha for what he's done.

And Elisha refuses point blank. He's so precious about how his grace works. I refuse to let you change how I'm going to bless you, Naaman.

[ 6 : 55 ] To change my grace as something given to you, not earned. And you can sense the awkwardness of Naaman.

Because we, like him, we just love to pay our own way, don't we? We love pay-as-you-go religion. We want to feel like we can earn it, control it, and master God's blessing.

Naaman expects bending machine blessing. And look at verse 11. Naaman is angry. I thought he'd surely come out and stand before me, call upon the Lord, wave his hand over me and heal me.

And this is what the other gods are like, isn't it? If you put this in, you bring the money, whatever it is, you can have the magic of God.

With your God. Where some holy man can perform the transaction for you, some cult priest. With a bit of razzle-dazzle, with a bit of waving their hands and doing some tricks.

[ 8 : 00 ] And he wants the blessings, doesn't he? And he also wants the right to tell God how he should give those blessings. And it's pay-as-you-go religion. Naaman is on his high horse, literally, isn't he?

Outside Elijah's house. But the whole process that Elijah takes him through is designed to get him out of this way of thinking. But look at how he does it.

First of all, see how standoffish Elijah is with him. Doesn't even come out of his house to meet his Naaman, does he? He sends out a messenger.

It's quite distant from Naaman. You think that's a pretty poor pastoral skill, doesn't it? He's having bad people skills. Doesn't even bother to welcome him for a cup of tea or whatever.

And then he sends him on a wild goose chase to the river Jordan. Why does he do that? Is it because the river Jordan's got something magic about it? To be blessed by the magic water of the Jordan?

[ 9 : 02 ] It's not that. Part of the reason, I think, is that the Jordan is both pretty unspectacular compared with the rivers that Naaman is used to. And it's also quite a long way from Elisha's house up north in Samaria.

And Naaman is going, isn't he? Well, what has the Jordan got to do with it? What has the Jordan got to do with you, magic man? And that is the point.

Elisha does not want to be associated with this healing. He wants to be distant from it, doesn't he? He is retraining Naaman in something to understand grace.

But God works by saving and healing his people, not through human efforts, not through some magic cooked up by a cultic priest, not through the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God alone.

In isolation from people and our efforts and our tricks and our skills. So, go to the Jordan and get away from me, Elisha says.

[10:20] Because you think that it's about me bringing a blessing for you, but you have to learn that it is God alone who is going to heal you. And neither me or you and all your horses and chariots have got to have anything to do with it.

And he had to go to the Jordan to see that. He had to experience the indignity of being fogged off by Elisha outside his house. He had to experience the exclusivity, the particular way that the good news was to be received.

He had to experience isolation from the means that he expected blessings to come. He had to experience the narrowness of it. Because God is so precious about his grace.

Grace alone. Yes, I will bless you, Naaman. But without your chariots and without your horsemen, without your cash, without your suggestions and your instructions and your expectations, I will bless you alone in a way that seems completely insufficient to you.

Isn't that often why so many people get disappointed with the Christian gospel? Why people get put off by the gospel? We imagine what God should do for us, don't we?

[11:44] We imagine how God should do it for us. And often it involves some kind of human effort. Some kind of self-assertion so I can feel good about myself.

Paul says exactly that in the Apostle Paul. He says, Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. In other words, we've all got our expectations of how God should help us and of what God's work should look like.

And most of those ways involve human wisdom and skill and power. But he says, we preach Christ crucified or a crucified Christ.

A slumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. No pizzazz. It's not entertaining. It's not self-affirming.

It's quite demeaning at first, actually, isn't it? Go and watch in the Jordan seven times, David. What folly. Go and believe in a crucified Saviour.

[12:47] What folly is that? But that's the strange thing about it, we're still. We're called to receive this particular, simple, undeserved promise.

And we receive it in a world that is so broad-minded and existential and therapeutic and entertaining and moralistic, don't we?

But that's the difficult lesson of grace that we've got to learn. In order to be wise, we're called to be fools in the world's eyes. To go and dig in the Jordan. To be cleansed by a crucified Christ.

Who says, I will bless you and I will clean you. But it must be this way. Where you are to stop being your own Saviour. And you need to let me clean you.

The disciples couldn't have that, could they? Especially the disciple of Peter, who couldn't have all that. You won't wash my feet, Lord, he said. Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.

[13:56] Quite humiliating, wasn't it? Being washed by the master. But unless it's by grace, you have no part in me. He's so particular about it.

He's so precious about it. And thirdly, God is so protective over his grace. So protective. Jump with me to the latter section of verse 20 to the end.

And we get this little additional story of Gehazi, don't we? Elisha's servant. He's sort of there in the background, but then he comes into the foreground. The story now is that Nahum now has been healed in the Jordan.

And Elisha, in order to safeguard Naaman's understanding of grace, refuses a gift. He refuses a payment. He's so precious about his grace.

He refuses twice. Now, that is interesting in itself, isn't it? Because it's not that giving things to God is wrong. In fact, last Sunday we saw that Elisha commends it.

[14:59] In the Shunammite woman, she builds the loft conversion, doesn't she, for the man of God. And he's fine with that. God's law is full of ways that we are to give in thanksgiving to God.

Jesus himself received some very expensive gifts. Didn't he? Like the woman who poured expensive ointment on his feet and washed his feet with her hair. So it's not that God refuses gifts.

But what he does refuse is payment. He refuses being repaid for what he's done.

And that is the particular lesson Naaman is learning here. Because that is what he's used to. Naaman, the Syrian. Still learning about this alien concept of grace.

That blessing is given, not earned. I refuse payment. So Elisha sends Naaman back in peace without payment. And where bet I anyone who distorts that for Naaman?

[16:06] This new believer. That's where Gehazi fits in. Gehazi sees an opportunity. He sees Naaman disappear with all of his riches.

None of it has been given for what's happened to him. And Naaman thinks, Gehazi thinks to himself, I'll have a little bit of that. Thank you. So he chases him down.

He gives him a story about some unexpected visitors. And the need of some provisions. So Naaman, would you mind please just giving a little bit.

A little token. Just one talent of silver. Out of all of these talents of silver you've got. And a couple of changes of clothes. Gehazi tends those things to himself.

And later Elisha confronts him. Verse 26. Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants?

[17:11] In other words, was it a time to think about your wallet? Was it a time to ask for payment? Was it a time for Naaman in his spiritual infancy?

He's learning grace for you to put a price on it. Gehazi. Notice how the episode starts with the outsider, Naaman.

He is healed of leprosy. And then it ends, doesn't it, with Gehazi, the insider, the one who should know better, contracting leprosy. He goes up as a leper.

And maybe we think to ourselves, well that's pretty harsh, isn't it? It's only a little token, isn't it, of what Naaman would have given Elisha anyway, had he not been so scrupulous.

It's just a little something to pay for the work that I put in, being Elisha's servants. I deserve it. But the problem was that it left Naaman just with a little suggestion, didn't it?

[18:16] Just a little hint that God was just like the gods back home after all. That he was a taker and not a giver.

And Gehazi was undoing, he was unpicking grace from Naaman's heart. But Gehazi wanted to put a price tag on it, even if it was a small one, when it was free.

The salvation and the healing was free. It was just a little distortion, wasn't it? But with a larger effect. The story's told of a woman touring across Europe.

It's a pretty old-fashioned story, so bear with it. She sent a telegraph to her husband. The telegraph read, Have found wonderful bracelet. Price, £75,000.

May I buy it? It's old-fashioned. Her husband immediately responds with a message. No price is too high for you, my love. But the telegraph operator accidentally adds one small detail into the transmission.

[19:27] An unintentional false stop after the word no. So she gets the reply, No, price too high for you, my love. When she returns home, she's so disappointed, and he files a lawsuit against the telegraph company, and wins.

True story, apparently. But it just shows, doesn't it, a little distortion. Just something added removes grace. And it distorts the God who is a giver, and not a taker.

So the punishment is severe for Gehazi, because God is so protected about his grace. This is the God he wants to be known as. And anyone who distorts that, or won't tie him on her, the Lord will not be manipulated to make room for human pride, to be repaid for his goodness.

He is a giver, not a taker. He's protected about his grace. Again, there are places where Paul, the apostle, speaks like this, in this protective way, because Paul is the apostle of Jesus Christ, isn't he?

He is the messenger of Jesus Christ. One example, in a passage dealing with the rights of gospel workers, the rights of payment for work, in one case actually, he refuses to call upon that right, in order to guard the grace of the gospel, in the understanding of his hearings.

[21:08] He says in 1 Corinthians, what then is my reward, that in my preaching, I may present the gospel, free of charge? Very protective over that grace, for the Corinthians.

In Galatia, it's the same, we saw a few minutes ago in Galatia, grace is being distorted, isn't it, by some who want to say, well, you've got Jesus, but you need to have circumcision as well.

But Paul is so protective about it, he's so precious about grace. He says, if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary, just with a little distortion, to the one that we preach to you, let him be accursed.

Let him go to hell. That is how precious and protected God is about it. He's so eminent. People need to understand that it is free, without payment or price.

It must be grace. Imagine how Naaman felt with his entourage, headed down to the Jordan, imagine him cutting. And muttering under his breath, that's a couple of weirdo, Elisha.

[ 22 : 22 ] Sending him down here is ridiculous. But his servants step in, they urge him, verse 13, my father, don't be hasty. It's a great word, the prophet has told you, but when will you do it?

And eventually Naaman gets off his high horse, gets into the Jordan, and he slides his pride. Trust in Jesus, in an Old Testament kind of way.

So I just want to close on how we respond to that. And how we respond, really, thinking about two groups. Now first, those of us who are new to these things, maybe this is the first time you've heard the word, grace, peace.

The question is, are we willing to do what Naaman did back then? Are you, like Naaman, perhaps now, before he went to the Jordan, and you want blessing from God, but you want to say how it should be given to you?

And to do it his way, it's just beneath you, really. And if you're honest, you're on your high horse of it. And it's just too below you, to accept a simple word of promise from him, to trust in Jesus, in particular.

[ 23 : 43 ] And you'll look like a fool, won't you, to others, if you do that. But the king told him, you'll be wise, actually.

Because there is no other way. It must be grace. God's gift to you, distanced from your own effort, free to you through Jesus.

But then also, to those of us who are familiar with these things, church members, regulars, there's a warning for us here too.

You know, the character Naaman, he reappears one time in the Bible after this, in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 4. And in that chapter, Jesus is in Nazareth, his hometown, and he's going around different synagogues, preaching.

And he's in a synagogue, he's in a church, if you like. And he says in chapter 4, verse 27 of Luke, there were many lepers in Israel, in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them were cleansed.

[ 24 : 51 ] But only Naaman, the Syrian. And Luke tells us, when they heard him say that, they were filled with wrath, towards Jesus.

Now why were they so angry? The scandal isn't so much that, God healed an outsider, they were kind of expecting that, I think. The scandal was though, that he healed an outsider, by bypassing Israel.

That's the point, isn't it? There were many lepers, in Israel at the time, but they weren't healed, only Naaman was. So while Naaman, the Syrian leper, was cleansed, and many, many Israelite lepers, staked lepers, God cleansed the pagans, not you, his head.

God bypasses many lepers in Israel, to give grace to outsiders. And that is why they're so good. Because in the end, they realise, that an outsider, has learned the lessons of grace, far better than they did.

Because Naaman, isn't just healed of a skin disease, is he? But of the disease of pride. He's not just given a clean skin, but a new heart, and a new life, and new attitudes.

[ 26 : 14 ] And that's what's going on here. And in Luke 4, there are people in church, whose problem isn't just their sins, and their uncleanness, but it's their self-righteousness, and their self-cleanliness, if you like.

And they're not propelled, to get their feet wet, with Jesus really. To suffer the indignity, of being cleansed by him. An inexperienced idol worshipper, learns what grace is, and it's healed.

A single man, from a non-Christian background, hears the gospel, and it's healed. A druggie, hears the gospel, and it's healed.

A selfish, foul-mouthed yob, learns about grace, and it's changed. But the privilege, and the experience, church people, remain aloof, from Jesus, and his cleansing.

That's the shame, isn't it? So it's a warning to you, and to me, that we don't just need to repent, of our sins, but repent, of our righteousness.

[ 27 : 26 ] To repent, of our own self-cleanliness. Of our urge, to save ourselves. To confuse, giving to God, in thanksgiving, with refunding God.

Because the price, for our plenty, is already settled. And the only thing, we can add to that, when we want to dictate, how God, should heal us, that is to pour scorn, on the value, of what has been paid, by Christ.

And you do not, want to get in between, God and his grace. Because he's so particular, about it. He's so precious, about it. He's so protective, about it.

And actually, when we see that, this evening, we are so glad, aren't we? We're so glad, that we can be like, Naaman tonight.

To leave this place, like Naaman, leaves the presence, of Elisha, in peace. Knowing that we, can't do enough, and that we haven't, done enough.

[ 28 : 30 ] But, but God has done it, without us. Knowing his precious, grace. Again. Let's pray together.

Thank you.