

2 Kings 5:1-20

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[0 : 00] The story is told of a physically challenged young boy. He had only one arm and he was often picked up by his class bullies both verbally and physically.

! And this had a negative impact on him and on his self esteem as it will have on anyone else. And he would come home crying and that troubled his mom.

So she thought of an interesting solution. Why not have him trained in martial arts? That will enable him to at least put up a fight against his bullies at school and maybe rebuild his self esteem.

So the mother took the son to meet a martial arts instructor. The first one she met flatly refused to enroll her son. The reason he gave was his disability.

Her son would injure himself and he would not be able to practice all the needed moves. So not wanting to give up the mother went up to all the martial arts instructors in the town and everyone turned her down.

[1 : 07] And they all offered a variety of reasons but it could be traced back to him being physically challenged. The fact that he had only one arm. Finally, the mother did succeed to find a sifu as they said in the east.

A martial arts teacher who was more than willing to take him under his wings. So the young boy finally finds someone to instruct him. So on the first day, being very excited, the young boy arrived early for his class.

And so he stood with all the other students and bowed when the instructor walked in. The instructor looks at him and calls him over and he takes him to one end of the room and shows him one martial art move.

It was quite complicated but it only required the boy's one arm. And he asked the boy to follow after him. The instructor spent the whole evening with the boy.

And of course the other students had other instructors training them. And the boy went home very excited and pleased. You know, he felt special and he felt accepted. He couldn't wait for his next class.

[2 : 14] So the next time he went, the instructor pointed him to the corner of the room with the same instructions to continue the practice of the one move he had been taught using his only one arm.

And that happened at every class. All the other students were given further instructions. But this boy was told to practice that one single move.

Now this went on for a whole week, a whole month and almost a whole year. And this troubled the boy but he followed the instructions. At the end of the year, there was a martial arts tournament.

And the instructor enrolled the boy for the tournament. The boy was very worried and he protested to his instructor. How could he, with only one arm and with his knowledge of one martial art move, face other experienced fighters?

The instructor only said these words to calm his fears. Do you trust me? So the boy goes into the tournament. He wins the first round and then he wins the second round.

[3 : 23] The quarter finals, he wins the semi-finals and finally he does win the finals. You know, he was victorious. And all the fights ended very quickly. And so he was very, very confused. How could he, a physically challenged boy, a boy with only one arm, with the knowledge of only one martial art move, which he has practiced less than a year, be able to be more seasoned and experienced fighters?

His coach or his instructor finally explained it to him. And this is what he said to him. There are many moves in their form of martial arts, from the basic to the more dangerous.

And there are a number of ways to block each move. But the move that the coach had taught him, using his only one arm, was a dangerous move. And it had only one way to block it. His opponent must grab his other arm. And this young boy did not have the other arm. So his opponents were powerless before him.

The young boy's weakness actually became his strength. That enabled him to be victorious. It's not too different from the famous words of Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

[4 : 39] When I am weak, then I am strong. Now our passage this evening is going to introduce us to another man. Who would learn the lesson the young boy learned, that the Apostle Paul had learned?

That every Christian are learning. When we are weak, then we are strong. And it allows us to appreciate these words God spoke to the Apostle Paul.

The lesson of strength through weakness. My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in your weakness. Naaman the Syrian will learn that in and through his weakness.

He shall experience God's grace and power. Now Naaman lived about 800 years before Christ. That's more than 2800 years before us. That's a long, long time ago.

Yet we shall find Naaman not too different than all of us. And that's because human hearts have not changed when confronted with the grace of God.

[5 : 46] We might assume we are more intelligent than the people that lived before us. Or our standards of living might be higher and better. We are more sophisticated. We are more advanced scientifically.

But when it comes to our relationship with God, we all stand on equal footing. We are all sinners with rebellious hearts in need of grace. We all have to repent of our proud hearts.

So in our passage, if you look at our passage, Naaman's entire life is summarized in only one verse. The first verse. It says, 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 a law, but he was a leper. Now there's a mouthful there. He was a military general and a very successful one.

He was looked highly upon by his king. So these words could have described him. He was honorable. He was victorious. He was mighty. And he was valorous. And the Bible tells us the cause of his military success.

[6 : 50] It was the Lord himself, the guard of the Bible. Now Naaman was the military general of an enemy nation. Yet God had given him success. Because the guard of the Bible is a sovereign guard.

He's sovereign everywhere and he's sovereign over everyone. Even those over those who did not know him, do not know him or do not acknowledge him. Now there's something else we are informed about Naaman, that he was a leper.

Now despite all his outer success, his great social standing, he suffered physically. And we know what time a slave girl appeared in his household and she took pity on her master and she said to her mistress, would that were my Lord, were with the prophet who's in Samaria, he would cure him of leprosy.

And just on her words, Naaman sets off for Israel. Naaman was both a very needy man and a man in a hurry. Naaman first goes in to consult his master, the king of Syria.

And the king was very agreeable to the idea of Naaman going to Israel to seek healing. And he offered to write a letter to the king of Israel. One king writing a letter to another king.

[8 : 00] So a spiritual pilgrimage, if you can call it, has now become a political issue between two nations. Now Naaman knows, you know, in his mind he's going to encounter some sort, some form of divine power.

You know, for him probably Israel was just another deity like the gods of Syria. And since his Syrian gods had failed to heal him, why not try the God of Israel?

What's the harm? So as Naaman sets out for his journey to Israel to seek healing, he makes a careful preparation. Naaman brings with him four essential things.

At least that's what I see. You know, reading from my Eastern perspective, he brings four essential things with him. So the first thing he brings with him was the piece of paper that the king had given him.

You know, Naaman takes with him the letter of his king. Now the letter states, of course, who Naaman is and with instructions to the king of Israel to arrange for the healing of Naaman, his servant.

[9 : 01] You know, this perhaps is what we call a reference letter or a character letter. Last week I was asked by someone to write a reference letter because that person was applying for an indefinite leave to remain in this country on the basis he has been here for more than 20 years, which allows him to live here legally, permanently.

And despite that, he needed letters to vouch for him that he has been a good person and will continue to be so. So perhaps my position as a pastor of the local church carried some weight over the home office.

Now Naaman brought reference from the most important person in his country. And who would be able to ignore that reference? You know, if you got a reference from the queen, who's going to ignore it?

Not even the king of Israel, the neighboring country, which I believe was at that time politically and militarily inferior to Syria. And what else does he bring? He brings gifts in verse 5.

Here are ten talons of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Now the gold itself would run into millions of pounds. So he brings some of his possessions.

[10 : 11] So first a paper and then his possession. Thirdly, Naaman does not come alone. He brings his entire circus with him. His entourage. Verse 9 tells us he comes with his horses and his chariots.

Now it must have been quite a scene. A visiting dignitary of a more powerful nation. And his entourage befitted his status. Important people don't move around alone.

So he comes in his prestige. The first three items that he brings with him. The paper, the possession, and his prestige.

All points to his place and his status in his world. Naaman wishes to impress upon his audience of his importance, his greatness and his power. Now the final thing he brought with him.

I have all peace so I just made it up. It's his point of view. His theology. And this is what he says.

You know, he thinks he knows how he should be healed.

[11 : 11] Or what Elijah should have done for him. Naaman says, Now I do not know where he got that idea from that Elijah should wave over him.

The writer does not tell us. But I could only speculate. Maybe he had been watching God channel on cable TV in Syria. But Naaman does explain his logic. He says, Are not Abana and Farfar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?

Could I not wash in them and be clean? If I only had to dip myself in a river, why not the beautiful rivers in Syria where he is from? Which supposedly are better than the river Jordan.

Now Elisha could have sent him the healing manual through the email. By now Naaman is already very frustrated. You know, the writer tells us at the end of verse 12, he turned away and went away in rage.

Naaman must have been thinking, since he arrived to Israel, everything has been going against him. His initial meeting with the king of Israel was a disaster. The king of Israel thought the request was a proxy for war.

[12 : 30] The prophet he was sent to refused to come out and meet him. Instead he sent his servant with the simplistic instructions. Is he being mocked? Now thankfully the passage tells us that his servants spoke some sense to Naaman.

Instead he asked him a question. Now I feel there is a lot of wisdom in that very question. In fact I believe their question opens up the whole story before us.

It gives us a glimpse of Naaman's inner motivation. The inner motivations of his heart and also other hearts. This is the question they asked.

My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean? Why would Naaman had obeyed if the instructions would have been something great?

Or something difficult? Why is that? Because it appeals to our pride. We don't want anything free or anything easy.

[13 : 38] So that we can boast. Now the apostle Paul writing about a thousand years later to the Ephesians church. He says this. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. Not the result of works so that no one may boast. Naaman is being confronted by God's grace.

And grace attacks and dethrones human pride and achievements. Everything about Naaman is under siege. Who he is as represented by the letter from the king.

What he possesses. You know his wealth as shown by the gifts he brought. His social importance as could be seen through his entourage. His theology, his wisdom on how God should act.

Everything is being attacked. And everything would crumble if he took the step of faith. And steps into the Jordan River. And he does take the step of faith.

[14 : 43] He goes down and dips himself in the Jordan seven times. Naaman has to meet God in his weakness. Naaman has to humble himself.

He has to be isolated from who he think he is. His identity, his achievements, his knowledge. And it's all in the presence of everyone.

In the presence of all the people that is inferior to him. He has to be stripped both physically and metaphorically. And throw himself to the grace of God to be healed.

We know what happens next. Naaman is healed. He is not only healed. Verse 14 tells us his flesh is restored like the flesh of a little child.

He receives the new flesh. And when Naaman comes out of the river. There is a transformation that takes place in him. Naaman now is a humbled man.

[15 : 42] Now how do we know that? In just two verses. Verse 17 and 18. He refers himself as Elisha's servant.

He calls himself as I am your servant Elisha. And he says that not once but five times. Naaman's transformation points to the ways of God and to his grace.

Now God has a way to humble us without humiliating us. And lift us without flattering us.

Unlike the ways of this world. You know how are we humbled in this world? How do we put people in their place? You know we when we meet proud people.

Sometimes we have to lift ourselves up. And say you know if you think you are rich I am richer. Or we have to point them to someone better than them. Someone who would take the superior position.

[16 : 42] Only then we can humble people. We have to humiliate them. But God of the Bible. The God of the Bible does not do it that way. In bringing Naaman to humility. God never at all took a superior position.

And there are four things in this passage. That will point God and to God's humility. Firstly. The God of Israel is the God of the weaker nation.

Israel is both weaker militarily and politically to Syria. So God is saying I am the God of this weak nation. Secondly. The preaching of the word as we called it.

If we called it. You know Naaman gets the information about the existence of God. Through the words of a slave girl. The least important person in his kingdom. God allows Naaman to know of his existence.

Through the word of the slave girl. You know today in this world when you are doing business. And if you want to promote your business. If you want to market your business. You get very important people to model for you.

[17 : 44] To model your products. To be brand ambassadors. The brand ambassadors for God was a slave girl. A nobody in his kingdom. Thirdly. When Naaman was going to give up.

In his rage. God uses the counsel of the servants. Not of the wise people. The strong people. The counsel of the servants. To bring him back. To try. To be in the wise people.

And fourthly. If he is going to be confronted by God's grace. By God's power. And healing. It has to be. In the not so beautiful Jordan River. But God is saying.

If you want to meet me Naaman. You have to come down to where I am. Not to where. Not up where I am. But down to where I am. You have to come down to your high house. And meet me. Where I am with my people. Uh.

The apostle Paul tells us. In the. First Corinthians. He says. For since in the wisdom of God. The world did not know God through wisdom. It pleased God through the folly. Of what we preach. To save those who believe.

[18 : 40] For Jews demand signs. And Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to Jews. And folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called. Both Jews and

Christians. As Christians. As Christians. As Christians.

As Christians. As Christians. As Christians. As Christians. As Christians. As Christians. and Greeks, prize the power of God and the wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. After all this, Naaman still attempted to pay for his blessing. Now what actually was the sin of Gehazi? We know, you know, he got greedy, and Naaman's leprosy went on him, but his actual sin was this, he put a price on the grace of God, and Naaman was more than happy to pay. We would do anything to earn God's grace. It's contradiction in terms, but we would do anything. We would pay more, we would suffer, we would make resolutions, we'll be good, we'll read the Bible, just let me know, how can I pay you back? Because we are confronted with God and our pride is attacked. This healing was free, but it was priceless. Because this story points to the humble Messiah, our Lord Jesus, who would die on the cross to pay for all other sins. Paul speaks about the humility of Christ in his epistle to the Philippians. He says, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who do he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And our Lord Jesus himself says this in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, he says, all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is slight. So I believe there are, you know, a number of takeaways from our passage this evening. I have three. Firstly, if you look in the life of Naaman, you know, salvation is both a decision that Naaman took when he came out of the river. You know, he confesses that there is no God, but the God of Israel. But salvation is a process. You know, God is the one who pursues and does not give up. You know, it seems to me that God was wrestling with Naaman's heart so that he would come to salvation. So salvation is both a journey and a decision. In Naaman's case, God has been working in his life even before he acknowledged God. You know, the passage clearly says it. You know, his social life, who he is socially, God has prospered him in his social life.

And then as we see, he was healed physically. You know, he experienced God's grace on his body. And then finally, God works in his heart spiritually and he receives salvation. And then after that, he makes this very strange request for some of us to Elisha that, you know, if I go back, I will still have to serve my king and I might have to go into the idol house and I'll have to bow down.

[22 : 34] And Elisha doesn't stop him. Because Elisha realizes that grace has started working in Elisha's, in Naaman's life. Because grace starts from the outside, it gets into our heart and he works out for it again.

Because one day, Elisha, he believes that Naaman will come to a point where he will trust God fully. And as we see, God is interested in every area of our lives.

Secondly, this text is also both a reminder and a warning for all of us. There is the insider and the outsider issue, the high and the low. If you look at the text, Naaman was the outsider. By the end of the story, he's the insider.

Gehazi, the insider, has become the outsider. The slave girl, who is the most powerless person in the story, has more faith than the king of Israel, who is a powerful person.

And we see an upside down world here. And you see two kings. One king trusts the words of the slave girl. The other king, who is the king of God's people, completely is faithless.

[23 : 41] And then we see the stories of the servant. There is Gehazi, a servant, and there's Naaman's servants. Thirdly, the values of the kingdom of God is completely opposite to the values of this fallen world.

When I was in India, a young minister was telling me, a young preacher said, someone asked him, what's the difference between God's kingdom and this world? And he said, look into the values of this world.

Turn it upside down. It's God's kingdom. And that's why Paul tells us, and I'll finish with this passage from Paul in Corinthians again. For consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to the worldly standards. Not many were powerful like Naaman. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the

wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring nothing, things that are. That no human being might boast in the presence of God.

[24 : 41] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. So that, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Let us pray. Amen.