

SERMON 2 KINGS 5 – WAS THEIR PLEDGE IN VAIN?

June 30, 2024

This Thursday we will celebrate the Fourth of July which marks our independence and freedom as a nation. Many of us will celebrate this holiday with picnics, cookouts with family and friends, fireworks, watching ballgames, eating hotdogs and ice cream, remembering those who made this day of freedom possible, to just plain relaxing.

Anybody remember what last year's Fourth of July sermon was about? Does this penny give you a hint? The sermon was entitled "In God We Trust," and we discussed the fact that this statement is inscribed on all our coins. You find pennies lying all over the place. God drops this message right in front of us every day to remind us to trust in Him as individuals and as a nation. I ended last year's message by saying that the next time you see a penny laying on the ground, pick it up, read the words "In God We Trust," pray, pause and consider: "Am I really trusting in God at this very moment." This is God's way of starting a conversation with us. Lucky for us, God is patient and pennies are plentiful!

This morning, I want to build on that point by looking at a story from the Old Testament about a king and a country that had forgotten to trust in the Lord even though they were His chosen people. Our text for this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of 2 Kings, the first fifteen verses.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-15

Naaman was a great general, a powerful and wealthy man. From all appearances, he had it made, everything that a person could ever want; except for one problem, he had some type of skin disease. All the money and power in the world could not cure this disease.

Now it just so happened that one of the Israelites taken captive by Naaman's army had the answer to his problem, which through the kindness of her heart, she shared with his wife. There was a prophet in Samaria, Elisha, who could cure her master the general. Naaman was desperate, so he went to his king and asked for permission to go to the prophet. Of course, the king agreed, and even sent a letter to the King of Israel asking him to heal his general. He incorrectly assumed that his fellow king had control over the prophet and his God. So Naaman set out with his soldiers, a huge wardrobe, and lots of silver and gold.

When Naaman presents the letter from his king to the King of Israel, the king throws a temper tantrum and nearly has a heart attack. He suspects that he is being set up for a fight, because he has no power or ability to cure the skin disease.

Now enters Elisha; he sends word to the King of Israel asking why all the fuss; send him to me and I will cure him. So Naaman and his impressive entourage go to Elisha's humble home.

However, Elisha does not come out to greet Naaman, instead he sends his servant to tell Naaman to go dip in the Jordan River seven times and he will be cured. Now Naaman in his pride feels insulted since the prophet did not even honor him with his presence; he thought that at least the prophet would come out and wave his hand over the diseased spot and chant some mumbo jumbo; you know like your dermatologist does.

However, Elisha just sends word for him to go take a bath in the muddy Jordan River, but again Naaman's pride rises to the surface and he proudly states that the rivers in his own country are more beautiful and much cleaner. So Naaman goes away mad, refusing to follow Elisha's instructions. Fortunately, his servants intercede and convince Naaman to go dip in the Jordan River where he is cured of the skin disease. Wouldn't you have liked to have seen Naaman's face as he emerged from the muddy water the seventh time completely cured? Please note that by listening to his servants and following Elisha's instructions, Naaman was not only healed of the skin disease, but also of his pride.

There are many ways to look at this story, but this morning, as we celebrate the birth of this great nation, let's look at it from the standpoint of what we can learn as a nation – a nation that is supposed to be one nation under God. The verse in our text that really struck home to me this week is verse 7; when the King of Israel got the letter and went ballistic. His first thought was of his own well-being. He didn't realize that there was a God in Israel. He didn't think about God, only about himself. He had forgotten all the times that God had rescued His people throughout the years.

Are we as a nation and individuals guilty of the very same thing; forgetting about God and only turning to Him when we have a national crisis such as 9-11 or the coronavirus? Let's pause for a moment and seriously think about this. As a country and individuals, are we aware of God's daily presence in our lives or do we put God in a glass case to be opened only in case of emergencies, and then go about our daily lives without even acknowledging His existence? Do we as a nation and individuals put our personal interests and well-being ahead of God, shoving Him into the background, out-of-sight until we need Him? Like Naaman, do we need to be healed of our pride as a nation, believing that we don't need God; thinking that all we have to do is put our trust entirely in the government and our political leaders?

This question brings me to a second point. Naaman had it all - power, wealth, and a strong military, but he was still sick, lacking the one thing to make him whole and that was a belief in the one true God. I don't think any of us would dispute the fact that we might be the richest, most powerful nation in the world, but if we don't have God, believe and walk with Him, we are nothing. Like many great nations before us, if we don't follow and trust in God, we will cease to exist and only become a footnote in future history books. The choices we make today and, in the future, will determine if we continue our legacy or if we will fade away into the history

books like Rome, Greece, Persia and Babylon. In verse 15, Naaman gets his faith when he acknowledges that there is the one true God and that He resides in Israel. Can others say the same about America today, that there is one true God and that He resides in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the United States? Have we forgotten that we were created as “One Nation under God?”

As we discussed last year, let me give you a brief history of this upcoming day of celebration. On July 2, 1776, as the excitement of independence flowed through the streets of Philadelphia, John Adams sat down at a desk in his rented room and wrote the following to his wife Abigail: “The second day of July 1776 will begin the most memorable event in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the Day of Deliverance by the solemn acts of devotion to God almighty. It ought to be celebrated with parades, shows, games, sports, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other end from this time forward forevermore.”

July 2, 1776, was the day for the final debate regarding Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence. The document served notice to England that America would no longer live under its tyranny. It was officially adopted two days later.

However, as we know, just declaring a separation from England did not make it happen. Words are useless without action to back them up. As Congress met in Philadelphia, British warships already occupied the New York City harbor waiting for an opportunity for the British army to subdue the city and march inland to capture the members of Congress, now declared traitors by the English government. In his writings, Adams told his wife that he was aware of the “toil and blood and treasures that it will cost to maintain this declaration.” And of course, he was right on target!

While this happened over 248 years ago, it is essential that we pause this morning to consider the uncertainty that was facing our ancestors. I may have shared with you before that the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence immediately became outlaws, subject to hanging if they were captured by the British Army. Most paid dearly for their desire for freedom and self-government. Five were captured and tortured before their deaths. Two lost sons in battles; other sons were captured. Nine fought and died from the wounds they received. Most of the founding fathers wound up bankrupt; independence cost them everything.

The last sentence of the Declaration of Independence reads: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually **pledge** to

each other our Lives, Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” Was their pledge in vain? That’s the question for us this morning. Are we still one nation under God? Do we still trust in God?

Abraham Lincoln, in addressing the Illinois and later the New Jersey State Senates, used two phrases that came to be almost a hallmark for the kind of administration, the kind of memory that he would leave to this nation. He said that America was the almost chosen people – the last, best hope of the earth. Of course, we are not the old Israel, but there is some kind of destiny that many believe exists here in America. Since 1776, millions have looked to the United States for help. In this current world of chaos, we have been, and should be, the constant thread of hope; a hope that we have in the one true God.

Now there’s a subtle point in our story this morning that we must not overlook; it’s the role of the servants in what happened. They are truly the voice of reason in this story. First there is the kindness of the captured servant girl who shares the source of healing with her master’s wife. Then when Naaman leaves Elisha’s house in a hissy, it is the calm and wise counsel of his servants that convince him to swallow his pride and to follow the instructions of the prophet. While we hope and pray that our political leaders are led by God; in reality, it is we the people, the ordinary folks, who have the responsibility to make this one nation under God and to lead our country back to God and healing. As the story points out, God stands ready to heal those who are willing to call out to Him for help; who are willing to be His people.

Also note what the servants said to Naaman: “If the prophet had told you to do something difficult or heroic, wouldn’t you have done it? All he said to you was ‘wash and become clean’?” God does not ask us to do something great or dramatic; He just wants us to live out our faith each and every day.

In Romans 12:1, the Apostle Paul tells us to present ourselves as living sacrifices; in other words, we are to “walk the talk.” We are to be “living Bibles.” I don’t know if you have ever thought of yourself as a living Bible, but you are. Many of the people that we interact with each day will never attend church or read the Bible. But if they know that we are Christians, they will watch us and see how we react to everyday problems and situations. Thus, the question becomes: “are we reflecting the love and teachings of Jesus Christ in our daily lives?” Are we upholding the pledge that our forefathers made? By our service and witness are we bringing our country back to God one life at a time?

I truly believe that the answer to our nation’s problems is not in advancing a particular political agenda or the dominance of one political party. Our root problems are spiritual and only a revival can reverse the moral decline of our country. The term revival refers to a special movement of God in which His church is refocused on His will for our country. One of the best Old Testament references on revival is 2 Chronicles 7:14 which is in your bulletin and states: “If

my people who belong to me will humbly pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.” As Christians, it is our responsibility to bring healing to this land by praying and living out our faith each and every day.

God has unquestionably blessed America. As believers we must ask ourselves: “Is America blessing God?” Back then John Adams could only have imagined what is now a reality. We are truly a great nation, but as we stretch our hands forward to greet the future, let us hold firmly to the hands that built our foundation – our heavenly Father. May the pledge that our forefathers made not be in vain. May we continue to pray each day for our nation and its leaders as we seek God’s will. May we live each day for Jesus. May God continue to bless America and may America continue to bless God. Amen