

SERMON 2 KINGS 5 WHAT'S UNDER YOUR ARMOR?

October 10, 2021

Like many pastors I tend to preach mostly from the New Testament; however, the Old Testament has some great stories and we must not overlook the lessons that we can learn from these ancient writings. So, having recently visited the dermatologist and been treated for skin cancer like many of you, I thought why don't we look at a story about a Biblical character who also had a skin disease and see what we can learn. This is the Old Testament story of the prophet Elisha healing the general Naaman as recorded in the fifth chapter of 2 Kings, the first fifteen verses.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-15

Elisha was the former apprentice of the Old Testament's greatest prophet, Elijah. After his teacher was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, Elisha assumed the role as God's chief prophet. Like his teacher, there are many great stories about Elisha. One of my favorites is taken from 2 Kings 2:23-25. One day some kids were making fun of Elisha's baldhead. So, he put a curse on them and two bears came out of the nearby woods and killed forty-two of the youths. Believe it or not this horrible story is actually in the Bible; the moral of this story is don't make fun of bald men, especially religious ones.

Now this morning's story of the healing of Naaman advances through a series of several scenes. After the first verse sets the stage by identifying the main character, the scene shifts to the Israelite slave girl. She had been captured during a raid and was serving the wife of Naaman. Even though she is a slave in a foreign country, she willingly shares a possible cure for her master's skin disease, which our text refers to as leprosy. This is the term that is used for several skin diseases in the Bible.

In the second scene, the king of Aram turns the proposed journey to Israel into a major production with a royal commissioning of the trip, an advance letter to the King of Israel, and enough gifts to buy a small country. Now the kings of Aram and Israel come onto the scene and completely mismanaged the entire situation. The king of Aram incorrectly assumes that the king of Israel has the power to cure his general or to order someone to do it.

In the third scene, the letter is presented to the king of Israel who interprets this as a political threat and proceeds to tear his clothes in anger. It appears the king does not know or trust God, and does not have a positive relationship with God's prophet Elisha. Elisha hears about the king's situation and sends word to have the general come to him stating: "Then he'll know that there's a prophet in Israel."

In the next scene, Elisha is identified as the real representative of power in the story. Expecting his healing to be a showcase extravaganza, the general is treated instead by a visit from a

servant and told to go dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman takes this as an insult to his pride and social standing; how could the prophet send a lowly servant out to address him and by the way, aren't the rivers in his country cleaner; the Jordan River is just a muddy creek compared to them. In the final scene, it is the wisdom of the servants that save the day when they convince their master to listen to the prophet; after all they had already come this far, it wouldn't hurt to do what the prophet said. So, after seven dunks in the Jordan River, Naaman emerges as a new man with skin as soft as a baby. Don't you wish you could do that and not have the dermatologist carve on you?

As you reflect on this story, you soon realize that only Elisha and the servant girl seem to know what they are doing. The king of Aram assumed that the prophet was subject to the authority of the king of Israel, and that his services could be bought with an extremely large gift. He, like many people today, had the misconception that wealth and power are all you need in life; that you can buy health and happiness.

The king of Israel on the other hand is only thinking of himself and his political future. Sounds a lot like our modern-day politicians, doesn't it? He thinks the entire incident is a conspiracy and an attempt by the king of Aram to start a war. So blind was the king to God's saving presence through Elisha that all he could think was himself. In sharp contrast to the Israelite king in Samaria, the young girl held captive in Damascus was very much aware of God's saving presence through His servant Elisha, which she willingly shared it with her masters.

Now poor old Naaman is downright spoiled. He served at the discretion of his king, a powerful man who was apparently well pleased with his mighty warrior. Without question, Naaman would have had the best: best chariots and horses for battle, best servants and soldiers, best clothes and weapons, and best house. Naaman had all that a man of his stature could ever want. And yet, despite all these riches and luxuries, he was plagued with a skin disease.

Can't you visualize the scene as Naaman rides up to the prophet's little hut in his fine chariot decked out in the finest robes and armor with silver and gold everywhere and surrounded by all his soldiers? Naaman was a proud man; proud of his accomplishments, talents, power, position and wealth. He rode up in an arrogant attitude and thought the lowly prophet of Israel would humbly come out to greet him, but instead, he sent a servant out to meet him.

Thus, Naaman was upset with the method of healing prescribed by Elisha, because it was not what he expected or thought he deserved. He wanted honor and respect, and thought that he had been slighted in two ways. First, he thought Elisha had slighted him by sending orders by a lowly servant and not coming out to meet him himself. After all, he is a great and powerful general. He expected Elisha to come to him and perform a miracle by waving his hands, saying a prayer and blessing him. He wanted to be healed by some magical procedure rather than by

the power of God. Naaman wanted magic; Elisha intended a miracle. Naaman wanted to be treated as a great man who happened to be a leper; instead, Elisha treated him as a leper who happened to be a great man. God deals with everybody the same; everybody is equal in the eyes of God. Remember that the ground at the foot of the cross is always level.

Second, Naaman thought Elisha slighted his country by sending him to wash in the muddy Jordan River, when in his opinion the rivers in his homeland were better and cleaner.

Full of pride, Naaman rides away in a rage, saying he would never lower himself to follow the prophet's instruction and wash in that muddy river. He wore his pride like the armor he wore into battle. And this armor of pride almost kept him from receiving the love of God. He had never been treated like this before. But God had a different plan; He not only wanted to heal Naaman of his skin disease; He also wanted to heal him of his pride.

Pride is also a disease; have you ever thought of it that way? It may not affect us physically, but it does affect us spiritually and will impact our relationships with others. It is one of the things God hates; did you know that? Proverbs 6:16-19 states: "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: eyes that are arrogant, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

Pride has been the undoing of many a person; it is a great sin. Proverbs 16:18 says: "Pride goes before destruction and arrogance before a fall;" in other words, the bigger the ego, the harder the fall. Or as the old saying goes: "Pride goeth before a fall." Proverbs 11:2 states: "When pride comes, so does shame." And one last saying from Proverbs 29:23: "Pride lands you flat on your face; humility prepares you for honors." Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everybody sick except the person who has it.

Pride is placing an excessive price on one's self. It is demanding more than you are worth. You could live off the difference of what some people are really worth and what they think they are worth. Remember that it was pride that brought the devil down. It was also pride that got Adam and Eve thrown out of the Garden of Eden when the devil convinced them that they could be like God. It was said of one prideful person that every time he looked into the mirror, he took a bow.

A minister, a Boy Scout, and a computer expert were the only passengers on a small plane. The pilot suddenly came back to the cabin and said that the plane was going down, and unfortunately there were only three parachutes for four people. The pilot added: "I should have one of the parachutes because I have a wife and three small children." So, he took one and jumped out of the plane.

Then the computer whiz said: "I should have one of the parachutes because I am the smartest man in the world and everyone needs me." So, he quickly grabbed one and jumped out of the plane.

The minister turned to the Boy Scout and with a sad smile said: "You're young and I have lived a rich life; so, take the last parachute, and I'll go down with the plane." The Boy Scout replied: "Relax, Reverend, the smartest man in the world just picked up my backpack and jumped out of the plane." As in this case, pride can be the end of you or as they "pride goeth before a fall!"

The story of Naaman is a good example of a man being stripped of his armor of pride, when he is told to go dip in the Jordan River. Don't you wish that you could have been standing on the banks of the Jordan? Every time Naaman went under the water and came up you could see him looking at his skin and grumbling to himself: "This is ridiculous, I'm not getting any cleaner in this muddy water; this is a waste of time!" And then can you imagine the expression on his face as he came up for the seventh time and he was completely healed. Do you think he looked up to heaven and thanked God? When he overcame his pride and submitted to the instructions of Elisha, he was healed and found God!

This story reminds us that our salvation and healing does not reside in material goods, military might, or social status; our salvation comes from the Lord, who has made both the rivers of Israel and Damascus, and it is freely given to all who will accept it. However, it comes from obedience to God, and not based on our own terms or demands. We must let go of our own prideful agendas and desires and submit to the will of God.

A very successful Christian business man wrote an article entitled "The Art of Being a Big Shot." In the article he stated: "It is my pride that makes me independent of God. It's appealing to me to feel that I am the master of my own fate, that I can run my own life, call my own shots, go it alone. But that feeling is my basic dishonesty. I can't go it alone. I have to get help from other people, and I can't ultimately rely on myself. I'm dependent on God for my next breath. It is dishonest of me to pretend that I'm anything but a man – small, weak, and limited. So, living independent of God is a self-delusion. When I am conceited, I am lying to myself about what I am. I am pretending to be God, and not man. My pride is an idol worship of myself. And that is the national religion of Hell!"

To carry out Elisha's instructions, Naaman had to get off his "high horse," take off his armor, and strip and stand naked before all his men, revealing to them the shame of his skin disease. Pause for a moment and think about that. We cannot come to God on our own terms or with our own demands. We have to get off our own "high horse" and realize that we need God. We can try to find happiness and fulfillment in life in all kinds of toys and relationships, but in the end, they will leave us with nothing but an empty feeling. It is only when we humbly fall to our

knees and realize that the true source of life comes through Jesus Christ that we will find what Naaman experienced when he came up out of the muddy Jordan River the seventh time – true healing.

Each of us wears some sort of protective armor to shield us from life and to keep others and God at a distance. In Naaman's case it was pride and arrogance; for others it's greed, deceit, wealth, insecurity, judgmental attitude, stubbornness, bitterness and other diseases of the mind, body and soul that we hide under our personal armor. But like Naaman, if we ever expect to be healed and made whole in body, mind, and spirit, we must take off our armor, leave it on the banks of the Jordan, and dip in the water of life that flows from the throne of God.

What armor do you wear? What do you use to keep God at a distance? What's under your armor that is holding you back from experiencing a closer relationship with the Lord? Naaman finally risked nakedness in the Jordan. What are you willing to risk to encounter God and experience complete healing, to grow closer to Him? Take off your armor, come into the water, and experience God as never before. Amen