

Sunday Evening Healing Service 17th November 2013, Kenneth Gray. 2Kings 5:1-27 “All the glory”

Simple, quiet faith in action

In this story of the healing of Naaman's leprosy what is first notable is that the process is started by a young Israelite girl who has been taken captive by raiders from Aram. We know little else about her, not even her name. Despite her captivity she is a dutiful servant to Naaman's wife and shows concern and compassion for her master urging that he should see *“the prophet who is in Samaria”*. Her faith that Elisha could heal Naaman has prompted her to speak up. This step was not without risk to this girl with no status. What might the consequences for her have been if Elisha had felt unable or unwilling to help Naaman and had turned him away?

Is this not how things often progress in the church today - how often is it the quiet, ordinary person whose faith makes a difference in someone's life rather than the church leaders and office bearers? How often it is that the Lord chooses some seemingly 'insignificant' individual of faith through whom to do great things!

The girl clearly cared about her master and wanted what was best for him. She is a wonderful example to us of a genuine Godly care for others and we should consider more carefully who and what we pray for. We find it challenging enough to remember to pray for those we love and are close to; how much harder do we find it to pray for those who perhaps have wronged us or whom we may regard as 'unworthy' of our concern?

Naaman acts on the word of his servant

Next, it is notable that Naaman, *“commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded”* acts on the recommendation of this nameless servant girl. How unlike the diplomatic processes we observe today when heads of state seek permissions and favours or when contracts are being negotiated. In this story we learn of the King of Israel's consternation to receive the King of Aram's letter saying *“With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.”* No long, drawn out behind-the-scenes bargaining between the officials of the two courts in advance of Naaman's turning up with his request to be healed.

We cannot but God can

Early in his ministry Jesus healed lepers. In our day, some three thousand years on from Naaman's time, leprosy is almost eradicated and medical advancements have been able successfully to treat and cure the disease for many years. But when the King of Israel receives the letter he does not know what to do - nor does he give Elisha a thought. Do not we in the church react in a similar way when troubles come upon us? Our faith is puny and we forget we have an all powerful God.

But Elisha has confidence in the Lord. When he hears of the King of Israel's reaction he sends a message to him : 'Why have you torn your robes? Make the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.' He does not say 'Send him to me and I will heal him'. When Naaman arrives at Elisha's house the prophet treats him in quite a disrespectful manner and sends his messenger with instructions for Naaman to follow. By this point Naaman may have felt he was being pushed from pillar to post - not unlike the experience of patients in our hospitals today who never get to see the actual specialist consultant until they've repeated their account of their illness to a legion of his assistants and juniors.

When he hears what Elisha has instructed Naaman is angry and let down. He is the second most important man in the land and he clearly expected more of a ritual - a personalised show put on for his benefit alone. He stomps off in a rage. We too can experience a similar sense of anti-climax when we seek God's help. We expect God to act in certain ways and we are annoyed, frustrated and even doubtful when he does not conform to our ideas.

Naaman takes his attendants' advice.

Thankfully, Naaman listens to the good sense expressed by his attendants and follows Elisha's instructions

When we seek God's help as we are struggling with big problems do we not expect his solutions to be complicated and elaborate? Yet have we not been taught that to achieve the biggest life-changing experience all we have to do is to give our hearts to Jesus Christ? So Naaman's big problem is solved in the simplest of ways. He trusts Elisha's word, bathes in the Jordan 7 times and is healed.

Naaman is healed not because of the Jordan river, nor by any powers of Elisha. He is healed by God. He is healed completely, immediately and most beautifully: *"and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy."*

Naaman's gratitude

Naaman's attitude is now transformed and, full of gratitude, he wishes to pay for his healing with money. Convinced of the power of the God of Israel, not only that he is God, but that he **alone** is God and that indeed *"there is no God in all the earth but in Israel"* he vows to make no sacrifices to any other gods. Elisha refuses to accept any payment - being God's servant is payment enough. Some people believe that if they pay more or do more they will be healed - but God gives freely.

Gehazi's greed

It is all too typical of human nature that someone in this story seeks to profit financially from the situation. Gehazi lies to Naaman *"My master sent me to say..."* and accepts some silver and some clothing from him. He then lies to Elisha about what he has done, with dire consequences - *"Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants for ever."* Gehazi clearly did not know God as Elisha knew him.

Our approach to healing

So many diseases are incurable from a human perspective but nothing is 'incurable' for God. Healing is sometimes required for a spiritual or psychological problem rather than a physical one. God can heal the head and the heart as well as the body. God can also heal a broken life and broken relationships. In such cases he sometimes changes us or sometimes he changes them.

Elisha could not heal - no more can we here tonight. There is no 100% guarantee but there is a 100% promise that God hears our prayers and will touch our lives.