

February 7, 2021

An Opportunity to Receive Healing

Naaman and Elisha (Washing in the Jordan)



Special Music: “The River”

Jordan Feliz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maT4phfTXR4>

II Kings 5:1-14

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife.

3 She said to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

5 “By all means, go,” the king of Aram replied. “I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.

6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: “With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.”

7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!”

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house.

10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

11 But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.

12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

The story is told of how, in the early days of the space race, it was realized that normal pens could not be used in space. The rationale behind this problem was that normal pens were gravity fed and there was no gravity in space.

As the story goes, NASA began a huge endeavor to invent a quality pen that could be used in space. After investing millions of dollars and years of work they finally came up with a design for a pen that could be used in a weightless environment.

In the meantime, the Russians simply used a pencil.

It is a great illustration for our message today, but I have to tell you, the story simply isn't true. The Soviets and the NASA had the same problem. In the early days they all used pencils. But the problem with pencils was that it was difficult to keep a regular pencil sharp without a lot of debris in a space capsule. Debris that needed to be contained. And pencils were flammable, which was not a good thing to have in a space capsule. Regular mechanical pencils were a problem because it was difficult to control the pressure on the pencil in space and the lead kept breaking off. That lead would find its way into the electronics or the ventilation system.

Houston's Tycam Engineering Manufacturing firm came up with a working mechanical pencil that was less likely for the lead to break and sold 34 pens to NASA in 1965 for \$128.89 per pencil. This caused an outrage, so an effort was made to solve the problem.

The solution came from the commercial market. The Fisher Pen Company invested \$1 million dollars to create a pen that would write in space. It used an ink cartridge that was pressurized with nitrogen. The pen could write upside-down in both freezing and extreme heat conditions. It could write underwater and in other liquids as well as the non-gravity environment of space. It truly was a universal pen.

Both NASA and the Soviet Space Agency bought the pens for \$2.39 each. Both agencies still use the pens today. For the NASA shuttle program, a new pen was designed by Fisher to signify the program. It was called the “Shuttle Pen” and was used in both the space shuttle program and on the Mir space station. You can buy one yourself for around \$50.

As human beings, we often find ourselves fascinated with the Rube-Goldberg approach to problem solving. A Rube-Goldberg device is a complex series of interacting materials and events used to solve a simple problem. You’ve seen them before even if you might not have known what they were called. Rube Goldberg was a 20th century cartoonist that had a weekly comic strip that featured ridiculous devices used to solve everyday problems. It was this very thought process that led to the creation of the game of Mouse Trap. And to this day, we are always reading about someone trying to create a better mouse trap, which usually means they become more complicated than they need to be and are often prone to failure. But you have to admit, it is extremely fun to process to watch as everyday materials, dominoes, bowling balls, baseball bats, slides, swings, ropes, candles, blocks and miscellaneous what nots, interact with each other to serve eggs and toast in bed. And don’t we find ourselves secretly hoping for the device will work against all odds?

We live in a world that is often more complex than it needs to be. Naaman lived in a world that was overly complicated. But so often, we are like Naaman. If a solution seems too simple or too demeaning, we would rather just suffer with our problem than embarrass ourselves. **“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”**

There is no question that the Jordan was a muddy river and that there were plenty of other rivers. Let’s face it, Naaman already felt offended because Elisha did not come out of his house to speak to him and instead sent his servant. By the time he got the message, he had probably already decided to ignore it and was looking for any excuse not to comply. After all, he was a high-ranking officer in the army of the King of Aram. Surely, he deserved much better treatment than what he had received. He completely ignored the fact that he had an incurable, progressive disease. At that point, his pride meant so much more to him than getting well. And the solution to his problem was a simple one that did not require him to jump through hoops or complete a series of tasks. It didn’t even require a whole lot of faith.

Don’t we just hate it when someone younger than us points out the obvious and makes us feel stupid and we try so hard not to show it, especially if we are in leadership positions and have a reputation to uphold. **“My father, if the prophet**

had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

I'm pretty sure that Naaman was expecting to have a challenge that befitted his stature.

Go rescue the princess from the dragon

Go find and return the magic chalice

Go defeat a large army

Go kill a giant

In his own words, at the very least he expected physical interaction with the prophet: "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."

He felt totally diminished and that all of his fancy resume' was worthless when he was asked to wash in the Jordan. After all, if washing was the solution, then there were plenty of other cleaner rivers to wash in.

Jesus came into an extremely complicated world where the Jews were struggling to live everyday under a duplex set of laws, both Jewish Law and Roman Law. Life was not easy for anyone. They had to walk a very small tightrope and if they failed, it could easily lead to imprisonment or even death. And Jesus' answer to this politically charged, religiously rigor environment was always very simple. The words that came from his mouth must have sounded a lot like **“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan.”**

When He spoke, He said things like:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

“This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:37-40**

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7

But the message that the non-Christian often hears is

“If you want to go to heaven, you need to follow these rules.”

“If you want to have Jesus in your life, you have to get yourself clean first”

“If you want to come to church, you have to wear these clothes.”

“There’s no place at this table for you if you are not one of us.”

“You are not welcome here because of your past.”

We simply put away the simplicity of the message of Christ and replace it with our own complicated version so that we can keep the undesirables, the less than perfect, the unclean wannabes, the low life, the greedy and obstinate, the lustful and the ungracious out of our Jesus club. We build our own Rube Goldberg devices based, not on scripture, but on how we believe things should work. We do that because we forget that the church is not a house for saints, but a hospital for sinners. It’s not a club, it’s a family. It’s not a philanthropic organization so much as it is a community based caring coalition for becoming the hands and feet of Christ in this world. And more often than we care to accept, that template we try to use to define as Christianity, spills over into our moral ideology, political ideology, and our theology of grace.

I cannot tell you the number of churches that I have visited that use theology, dogma and arbitrary rules to beat back the very people that most need to be a part of a caring and loving congregation. They do this by claiming that those

rules that they are implementing come from God and are manifest in their congregation when the result is the complete opposite of what is taught in the Bible when it comes to grace, mercy, forgiveness and love.

When we look a little farther into the scripture (II Kings 5:15-16) we read:

15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

16 The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

Naaman wasn't just cleansed of his leprosy. He found healing for his soul as well. His attitude changed, his mental focus changed, his belief system changed and he became a believer in the One True God. The God that he had discovered, at his utter astonishment, by bathing in the muddy river Jordan in Israel.

For some reason, we have a hard time accepting the fact that Jesus can be found in the most horrific of places, the filthiest of places, the darkest of places on the planet. That is why it is so significant that Jesus was born not in a palace or a temple, but in a stable.

Jesus gives each of us the opportunity to be healed - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. He doesn't hold anything back. And like Elisha, He doesn't ask for any kind of payment but to take up our crosses and follow Him, tie ourselves to His yoke, allow Him to mold us and use us to His glory. He wants us to acknowledge that God is the One True God and Jesus is His son who made restitution for our sins.

We need to ask ourselves what God has asked us to do that we just outwardly dismiss because it is just too impossible, too ridiculous, too humiliating, too disgusting, too unbelievable because of our preconceived notions about how God uses His people. When we ask for healing, we need to be ready to accept that healing in whatever form God chooses to deliver it, not dismissing the miracle because of the message or the messenger or the place where the message is delivered. We have to want the miracle enough to not let our pride and hubris get in the way.

This week, let's look for those moments where healing can take place in our lives and then let God lead us down that path. We simply cannot pray for healing, and then ignore the message, the messenger, or the process and then complain that God didn't provide healing. We must step into the message of Jesus and let him work through us. We must allow him to accomplish the healing that He promises

us. We have the opportunity to be healed of all our afflictions if we will only take Him at His word.

Our opportunity for healing is ever present in our lives if we allow our ears to process God's message and seek to obey. There is no wound, transgression or grief that God cannot and will not heal if we remove the unnecessary elements to our belief system and accept the simple message of God's promise through His son, Jesus Christ. **"Go your way;" He says in Mark 10:52 "your faith has made you well."**

AMEN

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