

November 5 – “Just Ridiculous”

The Story of Naaman

2nd Kings 5:1-19 (focus on 11-12)

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.

Special Music: “Down to the River to Pray”

Peter & Eynne Hollens | The Hound + The Fox

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwKmE29ByE>



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.

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.

17 "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord.

18 But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this."

19 "Go in peace," Elisha said.

LETTING GO

**“Bless me Father
Take my pain.
Heal my body,
And remove the strain
Caused by my broken body
Chained to my tired mind.”**

**And the Father said,
“Is that you, my child,
Kneeling at my throne
Feeling defiled
By your flesh and bone
Tortured by your tired mind?”**

**“It is me, my Father,
What need I do
To heal my retched skin?
I beg to be renewed.
I want to be whole again,
Please calm my tired mind.”**

**And then the Father said,
“Reach out and help another
Stand on their feet again.
Then grasp the hand of some other
Helping them reach within
To be healed, body, soul and mind.”**

**“Bless me father
But you ask too much.
It is me that prays
For your healing touch.
Not some other restless stray.
I ask of you to clam my mind.”**

**The Father of my soul replied,
“You must let go
And die to self.
You must put ego
On the shelf.
You must be blind within your mind.”**

**I cried out to the Father,
“What you ask
I cannot do.
You beg me drop my mask
And let your love shine through.
You can have my body, but not my mind.”**

**A tear fell from the Father’s eye
“Then I have no way
To fix your pain
You choose to pray
And live in vain.
To heal you mind you must let go.”**

But I could not give up my ego.

The story of Naaman holds so very many lessons. It would be easy to do a whole series of sermons on just this story from 2 Kings. There are so many characters making decisions that change the direction of their lives and the lives around them, some for the good and some for the bad. We find lessons on being gracious in accepting help, lessons on friendship, lessons on accountability, lessons on keeping promises, lessons on grace, lessons on ego, lessons on answered prayer, and lessons on the power of God working through his servants. And, of course, a lesson on healing. Someday, God may lead me to do a series of sermons on this event from 2nd Kings.

But this month, we are focused on the topic of Reluctant Gratitude. What does that even mean? Reluctant Gratitude. It can actually mean a lot of things, mostly things we don't want to think about. It is a discussion about how God can offer us things, events, people in our lives that we have trouble seeing as actual blessings at the time they occur. Maybe we think God is asking too much of us in order to grant the blessing. Maybe we are resentful that the blessing comes with some expectation from God. Maybe sometimes we need to do what God is telling us to do and we don't receive the blessing until way down the road.

So often, our expectations in our prayers are similar to Naaman's. **“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.”** “If God loves me so much, why would he expect me to do something? Can't I just pray and then accept the blessing?”

There is an old story told by many preachers that goes like this:

Father O'Mally ran an orphanage that was struggling financially. Donations were down and there had been several setbacks as of late. The building was old and needed constant maintenance. There were leaks in the roof and the boiler needed to be replaced. He had cut back the staff to bare bones. There never seemed to be enough to eat for everyone and things were looking pretty grim.

So, father O'Mally got down on his knees and prayed, "Heavenly Father, if I could just win the lottery, then everything would be okay. We would have the money we need to feed everyone and still have plenty to fix up the building. We could even bring back the staff. The children would suffer less. So, Heavenly Father, I would so appreciate it if you would let me win the lottery for the sake of your ministry to these children." Having prayed, he went to sleep knowing that God would answer his prayers.

The following morning, father O'Mally rushed to get the paper to see if he had won the lottery like he had prayed for. But, alas, he had not. He told himself that maybe God was waiting until the jackpot was a little higher to better meet the need. So, he waited patiently for the next drawing, praying dutifully, pleading with his Creator.

When the next drawing occurred, he still had not won. Things were getting desperate and father O'Mally doubled up on his prayers. "Heavenly father, we really need this money. You know that we need it to be able continue your work here. What have I done that you would ignore my prayers? Is there some

penance I need to perform? Father, what would you have me do? We are beyond desperate.”

Having said his prayers with as much fervor as he could muster, he went to bed and in the still of the night, Father O’Mally heard God’s whisper. “Father O’Mally, you are a true servant of mine and have done great work. I have heard your prayers and have listened to your pleas. I truly want to help you. But, my dear child, there is something that you need to do for me first. If you really want to win the lottery, I need for you to buy a ticket.”

God is not a vending machine, folks. It is not our privilege to question God’s motives or requests. We may not understand why he is asking it, but how can we expect to receive his blessings if we won’t do what he asks. We are his hands and feet in the world. Do we find it unreasonable that God would ask us to “buy a ticket?” Do we find it ridiculous when God asks us to “bath in the river Jordan seven times?” Do we question God when he asks us to “march around the city of Jericho seven times?” Do we balk when God tells us to “Build a boat?” There is no doubt that we seek the blessings on the other side of these asks. Is it so unreasonable for us to follow through on what he asks of us to receive those blessings?

When Jesus goes to wash Peter’s feet and Peter refuses until Jesus tells him that it is the only way to be completely cleansed, do we find that we remain stubborn refusing to allow such an event in our lives? If God is asking us to support missionaries, doctors, and engineers serving in 3rd world countries, are we balking at that request? When Jesus tells us to “Go into all the world to

preach the Gospel,” do we stop short by just saying to God that we will support those that do, but that is just not who we are? Is it so ridiculous that we question that God would ask us to serve at his pleasure?

It can be so easy for us to validate our responses to God’s requests, just like Naaman:

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.

“Lord, I know you want me to do this, but my way is so much cleaner, neater, more in my comfort zone. If I understand you correctly, the point here is to wash seven times, so I think I will do that in my bathtub, if you don’t mind.” God does mind. He is very precise in what he asks of us. This isn’t a negotiation where we get to propose alternatives. What if Noah has built the ark half the size that God instructed because it was easier, would take less time, wouldn’t have taken such a toll on his body? Why is it so hard for us to give God the benefit of the doubt when it comes to his requests? He has proven over and over that he knows what he is doing.

I want to talk a little about Naaman’s servants. We need these kinds of friends in our lives, people who are not afraid to tell us when we are acting foolishly and leaning into stubbornness.

“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!’”

Being servants, Naaman could have been very hard on them for speaking up. But they were concerned about him. It’s hard to tell someone you care about that they are being foolish. But sometimes, they need to hear it before they make a big mistake. Face it, if Naaman had refused to listen to them, he would have gone on about his way and lived with his leprosy, all because he was being too arrogant to accept what Elisha’s servant had told him. Elisha had not done what Naaman had expected him to do. He really just wanted Elisha to wave his hands over him and heal him. But Elisha didn’t even come out and meet him. He sent his servant instead. How dare the prophet have his servant tell him to do something so trivial, so ridiculous?

But the truth is, Naaman needed to be brought down a notch. He needed to spend some time in the waters of humility. It was so worldly of him to think that he could just pay the prophet to do a little dance and cure him. What he did not understand was that the power of the cure didn’t come from Elisha, it came from God. And God has the righteous power to teach us lessons even in the midst of our blessings. And yes, he often will send his servants to explain what we need to do.

Sometimes, God will use our family and friends to remind us that God is not asking for too much. When we reject what God is asking outright, we prevent ourselves from receiving the very blessing we are looking for. When we reject God’s conditions, we are also rejecting the very thing that we are seeking. It is a

good and proper thing that those who care about us call us on the carpet and remind us about what is important. It is also unwise of us to reject that input. We don't have to follow the advice, but we should at least have the courtesy to hear them out and not take offence, because they do have our best interest at heart and they could be speaking the words that God has laid on their heart.

Suppose our car dies, but we still need to be able to get to work or school. We pray that God will provide us with a new car or the money to repair the old one. But instead, God encourages a friend to loan us their bicycle to get around. It may not be what we were expecting or wanting. But if our hearts are in the right place and we trust in God's wisdom and guidance, we will be grateful for the bike rather than dismiss it out of hand.

Naaman really did not want to bath in the river Jordan. He found it too disgusting. But he did re-examine his values with the help of his servants and followed the instructions of Elisha, albeit reluctantly. I'm pretty sure that he was not expecting to get anything but muddy. He wasn't displaying a lot of confidence. How strange that he would have been more confident if Elisha would have just waved his arms around and shouted some mumbo jumbo. But that really wouldn't have required anything of Naathan. It wasn't like the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment with faith so that she would be healed. But even that required the woman to display an act of faith.

The miracle was waiting for Naaman if he would just reach out and accept it. But the miracle was not going to happen if he did not do as he was asked. I think that in a not-so-subtle way, Elisha wanted to remove himself from the

equation. After all, it was not Elisha that performed the miracle, but God. And Elisha wanted to make sure that Naaman understood that the healing came from God, which was one of the reasons he refused Naaman's gifts. Miracles cannot be bought. Any gift of thanks should have been offered up to God, not God's servants.

Where does that leave us? What is the lesson that we can learn from this story? Sometimes, when we pray, God may ask us to do something. And that something may be totally out of our comfort zone. It may even seem to be ridiculous. But we do not have the eyes of God, nor the blueprints for his plans. How is it the old saying goes? "Ours is not to reason why. Ours is but to do or die." Blind faith. Dying to self. Giving up our selfish natures. Understanding that everything, EVERYTHING we do should be for the glory of God, and not for ourselves.

This week, I want us all to look at our motives and spend time in prayer, not asking for what we want, but for what God wants and how he would like for us to be of service. We should be unquestionably willing to bathe in the dirty river if that is what he wants us to do. We should be willing to give up everything if our Creator asks us to do so. Are there things in our life that we know God wants us to do, things that we need to let go of, work that he needs us to accomplish? Do we find those things to be too menial or against our sensible natures? The only way to know that is to spend time in prayer, acknowledging that God knows what is best for us.

Jeremiah 19:11 says:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Do we trust him when he tells us that?

God bless you all.

AMEN

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