

Naaman is basically the most popular guy in school. The equivalent to being the smartest and the most athletic and best looking. Naaman is a commander of the army of his country of Aram, and he is very successful at it. He would have been well known throughout the country, so he's like a movie star. The King of his country thinks very highly of him. They're probably buddies and we can imagine Naaman had some influence in the country. He was valiant and through him, Aram had many military victories.

We see some of their victory in verse 2. Some of the soldiers went and raided Israel and part of their plunder was this young Hebrew girl. They stole her. And somehow, maybe they offered her as a present to Naaman, but somehow, she became a slave to Naaman and Naaman's wife.

Naaman was definitely "up there." He knew all the right people, had all the gifts, all the success. He was invited to all the birthday parties. He was the one everyone would say, "he could be prime minister someday" or his picture would be on the front of a magazine in the checkout line. But he had something on his skin. Something awful. He had a skin disease. Of course, being sick is terrible, but leprosy is more than that. When you had leprosy, it was like receiving a certificate with an order that said, "leave the community. You are out."

Even though Naaman had all these things going for him, he was still an outsider. He didn't belong. He didn't fit in. We can imagine he thought things along the lines of "if this could go away, everything would be perfect." We know he had a great desire to be healed. If Naaman lived in Israel, this disease would actually have kept him outside of worship in the temple – showing us that this man was actually the ultimate outsider. He was very far from God.

It was this disease, this leprosy, this outward sign of physical sickness that would compel him to begin his search for God, even though he didn't know it at the time. I'm sure he realized it was not something he could do on his own. He knew he needed help.

God uses this young servant girl to speak to a great commander. She tells his wife about the prophet in Samaria. She must have told Naaman and the first thing Naaman does – is go to his young servant girl and thank her. I'm just kidding. Naaman? Naaman the great thank a servant? He goes to someone who he considers to be much more important. Goes to the king of Aram and tells him what she said. He says, "go!" The king of Aram then writes a letter to the king of Israel. The king of Israel, not the prophet who the girl spoke about, the king of Israel. The letter says, "I'm sending Naaman so you can cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman goes to the king of Israel. King of Israel gets this. Freaks out. "Cure someone of leprosy? I'm not God!" The actual prophet, Elisha, hears about this. He sends a message to the king to send Naaman to him.

Naaman goes to Elisha. With all of his silver, gold, clothing, with his grand horses and chariots, he rides honorably to Elisha's house. He probably thought he was going to impress him with all his riches and show Elisha how important he is. He gets there and Elisha doesn't even come out. Elisha sends a messenger for him to talk to. Message is: Go, wash in the Jordan 7 times, and your flesh will be restored, and you will be cleansed."

Naaman is so mad. "I thought he was going to wave his arm and say Abracadabra or something and then I'd be cured. But I have to go to the Jordan river? That filthy thing? I'm a commander! A valiant soldier. A celebrity! Admired by the king. I'm somebody. If I'm going to bathe, it should be bathing in a much nicer river – like the Damascus one!" He went away in a rage.

It's not a hard request, actually. Go dip in a river and be healed? Sure, it's gross, but it's not super difficult to go to a river, take off your clothes, and get in. Naaman was a commander. He probably had been ordered to do much more difficult things. Big things. And we can imagine it was those big things that made him a household name. So, being told to dip in a river, is not hard in that sense. We could say that it's weird, but not particularly difficult. What makes it difficult though, for Naaman, is that the reason he doesn't want to obey, is because it's *not* grand enough.

Then, who was it, that convinced Naaman to go? It was Naaman's servants. They went to him and persuaded him. How? They knew him. They said, "if the prophet told you to do something great, would you not have done it?" They knew he would have. If he had been told to conquer a city or climb a gigantic mountain or something newsworthy, Naaman wouldn't have hesitated. He might not have even had a problem with a really nice river. It was the idea of doing something small that he couldn't stand. The idea of obeying the simplest request was what was hard.

So, Naaman the great goes, dips in the icky Jordan river. Not one dip. 7 dips. This great and prestigious man, led by a young slave Hebrew girl, an assistant, servants, to get naked and immerse himself in a gross river.

Page 2: TW: We have an inward disease and outward needs/pains

Naaman had a need that could not be met. We could say two huge needs. He was sick. He didn't belong. He had a physical disease that made him an outsider. Congregation, what is your need? We can identify it if we think about it like this, "if only this could go away, everything would be perfect." I invite you to go ahead and fill in the blank. "If only (blank) would just be healed, would go away, would be better, would change, then – my life would be so good."

I'm not sure what came to mind. Maybe it was a big thing, but maybe it was a smaller thing. Maybe something that has been hard for a long time, maybe something that just came up. My guess is many of us answered similarly to Naaman as those needs have not changed over time.

The need to belong. This is one of our greatest needs in life. We want to belong somewhere. This happens at a young age – one of the greatest desires a kid has is to have a best friend. So, when the teacher or adult leader says, “find a partner” we know who we belong to/ who our partner will be. We don't want to be outsiders; we want to fit in. Wanting to find your person. Wanting to find your friend group. Wanting people to think we're funny and good looking... Wanting to look like others in clothes or body image, way of life, have kids that belong and fit in, someone to understand us and relate to us...

Anything where we can hear the message: You are part of the community. You are in.” Wanting to belong is a deep feeling and a real need.

Maybe you said named that. Maybe you need physical healing. I know there are a lot of people listening to this sermon who have bodies that are failing. There are those suffering with cancer, MS, broken bones, back injuries, arthritis, insomnia, the flu or cold, Crohn's disease, then there are problems with our minds like anxiety, bi-polar, dementia, depression. These things can be debilitating.

Whatever our need, I hope that our needs compel us to search for God. To draw near to God regardless of how far or close we are to him. What does that look like for us?

Does it mean seeking out the really important people in our society and community? Like a celebrity or politician? Does it mean coming to God with all of our abundance and saying, “look at all the ways I’ve been faithful to you” or “I have a master’s degree” or “I read the Bible and pray every day” And expecting God to give you a renowned welcome? In other words, do we approach God with a heart full of pride? Only going to people who we deem to be on the same level of importance as us? Giving him council on the things that he needs to do to fix our life?

There is no guarantee that God will do what we want and what we think is best. God did heal Naaman’s disease, but we know in other stories in scripture and in our own life experiences, God does not always heal. We may or may not get healing for our physical ailments. God may or may not mend a situation that brings us pain. When we approach God with our needs, we see in our text that God can use these to point to an even greater need that we have.

We can see in our text that when we approach God, God will reveal to us our pride. It makes sense. The closer we get to our holy God, we become more aware who he is and who we are. We become more aware of our pride and begin to hate it ourselves and also want it gone.

Ultimately though, the disease we have is called sin and it affects our whole being. It affects the whole world. Disease exists because sin exists – just because you are sick it’s not necessarily from a personal sin, we know this from other texts in scripture. But all our needs are a constant reminder that our world is broken and hurting – because sin exists. Our world needs restoration.

And it is our souls that need cleansing. It is not possible for us do this ourselves. We can’t go to other human beings – even the most important ones. God does not save us because of our accomplishments, reputation, money, or even by being good. We are powerless to save ourselves.

We recognize this especially when we hear the message, “Go, wash yourself” and are led to a cross. A cross that symbolizes and reminds us that “The wages of our sin is death” and shows us clearly that **we need a Savior**. We need to be cleansed of our sin. We need to be healed.

A great healing took place when Naaman went in the Jordan River. After 7 dunks in that river, scripture says his flesh was restored and it became clean. But the greatest healing that happened in this story was in Naaman’s soul. This is the main point in the story. In verse 15 he goes back to Elisha, stands before him, and declares: Now I know there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”

We know what compelled him in that direction. Leprosy. A deep need made him desperate and humble enough to seek help – knowing he couldn’t do it on his own. We know as he continued drawing near to God, God continued to humble him and show him his sin; show him his pride. Do you remember who pointed him there? It was a suffering servant. It was the young Hebrew servant girl. I read somewhere that she was likely a pre-teen girl, so, maybe 11 or 12 years old.

This young girl had to be suffering a lot. Most likely, the raiders killed her parents and her family. The ones who loved her the most and raised her are gone. She was stolen – I doubt she was able to take anything with her, like her favorite stuffed animal. Then when they took her back, she was forced into this other country and culture AND she is made a slave. The whole reason why she was suffering in the first place was *because* of Naaman.

When she saw or heard about Naaman’s leprosy, she could have sat back and revelled at her captor’s demise – watched him waste away and think to herself, “thank you, Yahweh, for justice for my kidnapping.” And somehow. Somehow, this young brave girl, forgives them. She does not harbor her anger at her master. She seeks his wellbeing.

She tells his wife, “If only he would see the prophet in Samaria. He could bring healing to him.” It was through her suffering that Naaman found not only healing for his body but also healing for his soul.

Naaman isn't upset about what God put him through. He is overjoyed and praises the Lord. He goes back to Elisha. He really wants to pay him. He says, “please accept this gift” and notably calls himself a servant. Elisha says, “oh no. This healing? It is free.”

I'd like to summarize this story using the main themes in it: We have a prideful man who is very far from God. God uses a difficult circumstance to compel Naaman to search for him. Naaman keeps going to kings, but God keeps sending him people who are “beneath” him. Naaman wants to be healed by doing something grand, but God shows him it's the small acts of obedience that matter. It was in a river where Naaman's outward illness was healed and where his sins were washed away, and he was made clean – body and soul. It didn't cost Naaman anything. All because a servant, who he made suffer, had compassion on him.

When we read the story of Naaman with those themes in mind, I think we will find that his story is not unlike our own. Actually, it should be like our own. Everyone who claims the title “Christian” must have gone through a story like this.

The cross brings us to humility, but the cross itself doesn't save us. We are saved by a suffering servant who was nailed on it. We are saved by Jesus Christ. We were the cause of his suffering and yet, he had compassion on us. And it was through his suffering that we can find healing for our soul. Just as water can wash away dirt on our skin, so does the blood of Jesus wash away ALL of our sins and make us clean. This is how and why our sins can be completely forgiven. The Lord God says that apart from him there is NO Savior. Only God can save us from our sins.

This is the real cleansing we need and afterwards we can stand and declare publicly: “Now I know there is no God in all the world except in Israel!” And this gift from God is free for us. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

I hope all of us here we have a story like Naaman’s. A story we could tell when God drove us to that depth of humility, we have sensed the weight of our sin, and have cried out to God -naked of our pride - and received salvation from the river of Jesus’ blood which washed away all our sins. This needs to be in our story. But it is not the end of our story.

God continues to work in the hearts of those whom he has saved. He continues to save the saved. He continues to produce in his people humble hearts and getting rid of our pride so we may continue to draw near him. One of the ways God does this is by calling us to obey him.

How do we feel about obeying the “small” things God asks of us. For example, maybe are all about becoming the next Martin Luther. We’re happy to serve God if it means people recognize our talents and time. If God wants us to write a best-selling novel for him or change the world – We are there! Maybe we think we want to serve God by doing all these grand things, but really what we mean is to use God to do grand things for ourselves.

What about washing the dishes? Or being generous in kindness and mercy, forgiving people who have wronged you, asking for forgiveness from someone you have wronged, listening to someone else’s story, filling Christmas hampers for our neighbors, making someone a meal, visiting someone in the hospital, buying someone a cup of coffee, loving your wife, respecting your husband, listening to your parents, obeying civil laws, all these things might seem small to us. No one may notice. No one may appreciate. But it is in these small acts of obedience that produces the humility that God desires to see in all of his people.

My friend Antonia likes to say regularly, “obedience comes first. Then comes joy.” When Naaman obeyed this simple command from the Lord, he received immeasurably more than he could have asked or hoped for.

I’ll share a couple more stories:

There was a youth pastor in the city I went to high school in who was a very successful runner and won many awards in track and cross country. Then he broke his leg. He had to be in a chair for a number of weeks and in that time, he began reading the Bible. His life changed as his identity in being an incredible runner was taken away and it was filled with the word of God. He wasn’t upset he missed running, he praised God.

I had a friend in high school who was pretty unpopular in grades 9 and 10, then in grade 11 and 12 it was like everyone liked her and she was super confident. Someone asked her once what the change was. She said something like, “for so long I kept trying to be everyone’s best friend. It wasn’t working. I went to God crying and God worked in my heart and told me that he wanted to be my best friend first. God became my best friend. Then, yea. Here we are.”

Ultimately, Naaman’s story is a picture of the gospel and showing us the way to salvation. We have a God who saves us by grace alone through faith by a Suffering Servant named Jesus Christ. Who gave himself up for us at the cost of his own life so we could have the free gift of eternal life with him. We continue to struggle with sin and all the effects of sin through our whole lives, but sin no longer has dominion over us.

The Christian path is not easy. It is not comfortable. It will bring us to our knees. God actively and always draws us nearer to him and transforms our hearts to be more like him. We will find that when we draw near to God, He is enough. God may not do what we want, but God will do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. And so, we praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Amen.