

2 KINGS 5:1-19

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^[a] of silver, six thousand shekels^[a] 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.

LUKE 17:11-19

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy^[a] met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

PEOPLE ARE UNIQUE AMONG GOD'S CREATURES FOR MANY REASONS.

AMONG THEM INCLUDE HUMAN NATURE IS BOTH BLESSED AND BURDENED WITH THE ABILITY, AND OFTEN THE DESIRE, TO BE EXTRAVAGANT.

SIMILARLY, WE OFTEN PERCEIVE THINGS, OR ACTUALLY MAKE THINGS, MORE COMPLICATED THAN THEY REALLY ARE OR NEED TO BE.

OF COURSE, BOTH EXTRAVAGANCE AND COMPLEXITY HAVE A LEGITIMATE ROLE IN LIFE.

THE DANGER IS WHEN WE OVERLOOK SIMPLE THINGS OR SOLUTIONS WHEN THEY WOULD BE MORE BENEFICIAL.

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS TODAY OFFER EXAMPLES OF HOW BOTH SIMPLE FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, AS WELL AS SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE PROVIDE GREAT RESULTS.

TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY IS ANOTHER IN A LONG LINE OF HEALING MIRACLES BY JESUS THAT APPEAR IN THE GOSPELS.

IN THIS SENSE IT WAS NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY TO HEAR ABOUT THE PEOPLE CALLING OUT TO JESUS TO HAVE MERCY OR HELP THEM, AND HIS COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE.

THE TEN LEPERS IN THE STORY CAN ALL BE COMMENDED FOR THEIR FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO JESUS.

THEY ASKED FOR HEALING AND HE COMMANDED THEM TO GO SHOW THEMSELVES TO A PRIEST, WHO COULD DECLARE THEM CLEAN.

ALL TEN, EVEN BEFORE THEY WERE HEALED, IMMEDIATELY OBEYED JESUS, AND WERE MADE CLEAN BEFORE THEY HAD GONE VERY FAR.

IN MANY WAYS, THIS IS NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM MANY OF THE OTHER STORIES ABOUT JESUS HEALING SOMEONE MIRACULOUSLY.

BUT WHAT DOES MAKE IT STAND OUT IS THE FACT ONLY ONE MAN RETURNED TO JESUS TO THANK HIM, AS SOON AS HE REALIZED HE HAD BEEN HEALED.

THIS TOO IS NOT IN AND OF ITSELF SO SURPRISING, BUT WHAT IS DIFFERENT IS JESUS HIGHLIGHTING THE FACT ONLY ONE MAN PRAISED GOD AND THANKED HIM.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER THAT THE OTHER NINE, WOULD BE MAKING THE REQUIRED THANK OFFERING AND SACRIFICES TO GOD AFTER A PRIEST VERIFIED THE HEALING.

CONSEQUENTLY, THEY WOULD BE GIVING FORMAL THANKS AND PRAISE TO GOD IN THE WAY PRESCRIBED BY JEWISH LAW.

AND YET, JESUS' STATEMENT ABOUT ONLY ONE MAN, A FOREIGNER. RETURNING TO THANK HIM, SUGGESTS IT BOTHERED THE SAVIOR THAT THE OTHER NINE DID NOT ALSO RETURN TO HIM.

NOTICE, HE ASKED THREE QUESTIONS WHICH SEEM TO EMPHASIZE HIS DISMAY OVER THOSE WHO FAILED TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S POWER HAD WORKED THROUGH HIM.

IT ALMOST SOUNDS AS IF HIS FEELINGS WERE A LITTLE HURT THAT THE OTHERS FAILED TO OFFER SPONTANEOUS PRAISE TO GOD, AND TO THANK HIM.

WHY, WE MIGHT ASK, WAS THAT SIMPLE ACT OF GRATITUDE SO IMPORTANT TO JESUS? AFTER ALL HE DID NOT NEED THEIR THANKS TO KNOW HE HAD DONE HIS FATHER'S WILL.

ONE ANSWER IS FOUND IN THE SAVIOR'S RECOGNITION AND WELCOME OF THE SAMARITAN WHO TOOK THE TIME TO PRAISE GOD, IMMEDIATELY, RATHER THAN WAITING TO DO IT IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE LAW.

THE STORY'S DEEPER MESSAGE IS THAT IT REMINDS US THAT PEOPLE OFTEN TAKE CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND THINGS FOR GRANTED.

THE FAMOUS BRITISH WRITER AND THEOLOGIAN G.K. CHESTERTON MADE A STATEMENT ABOUT THIS IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

HE WROTE THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING HE LEARNED IN LIFE WAS WHETHER ONE TOOK THINGS FOR GRANTED OR WITH GRATITUDE.

THE FACT IS, WE DO OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED THE VERY PEOPLE OR THINGS THAT DESERVE OUR GRATITUDE, AND GOD IS OFTEN AT THE TOP OF THE LIST.

I READ IN A REFLECTION ON GRATITUDE THE VIEW THAT OUR GRATITUDE TO GOD IS NOT MEANT FOR HIS BENEFIT, BUT RATHER FOR OURS.

THIS STORY OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IDEA, AS REVEALED IN THE SAVIOR'S WORDS TO THE MAN WHO RETURNED TO THANK HIM, ALONG WITH PRAISING GOD.

JESUS SAID TO THE MAN: "RISE UP AND GO YOUR WAY; YOUR FAITH HAD MADE YOU WELL."

THIS CAN BE A LITTLE CONFUSING BECAUSE ALL TEN ACTED IN FAITH AND WERE HEALED, INCLUDING THOSE WHO DID NOT THANK JESUS.

BUT THE WORDS "MADE WELL" CAN ALSO BE TRANSLATED AS "SAVED" OR "MADE WHOLE".

THIS POINTS US TO SOMETHING BEYOND PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

THIS SUGGESTS THE SAMARITAN RECEIVED AN ADDITIONAL HEALING THE OTHERS MISSED OUT ON, BECAUSE THEY FAILED TO RETURN TO JESUS.

THE SAMARITAN'S SIMPLE ACT OF RETURNING TO JESUS PROVIDED HIM WITH A SPIRITUAL HEALING TO GO WITH HIS PHYSICAL RETURN TO HEALTH.

TRULY, THANKING JESUS WAS SUCH A SIMPLE THING TO DO, AND YET IT PRODUCED GREAT RESULTS.

WE COME NOW TO A HEALING WHICH HAPPENED CENTURIES BEFORE JESUS WAS BORN.

IT IS ALSO A STORY ABOUT A MAN WITH LEPROSY, WHOSE PHYSICAL HEALING BROUGHT HIM TO KNOW THE LORD GOD.

HE, LIKE THE SAMARITAN JESUS HEALED, WAS ALSO OUTSIDE THE FELLOWSHIP OF GOD'S PEOPLE AS FAR AS JEWISH LAW AND CUSTOM WERE CONCERNED.

IN FACT, NAAMAN WAS EVEN MORE AN OUTSIDER THAN THE SAMARITAN, SINCE HE WAS A PAGAN.

AND YET HE WAS IN MANY WAYS ON TOP OF THE WORLD, AS A COMMANDER IN THE ARMY OF THE KING OF ARAM, WHICH TODAY IS SYRIA.

FURTHERMORE, THE LORD GOD BLESSED HIM BY GIVING HIM MILITARY VICTORIES. NAAMAN ALSO WAS HIGHLY FAVORED BY HIS KING.

HE HAD WEALTH, POWER, AND HONOR, SO MUCH SO LIFE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER FOR HIM, EXCEPT FOR THE FACT HE HAD CONTRACTED LEPROSY.

SADLY, SOMETHING THAT USUALLY BEGAN WITH WHAT SEEMED TO BE A SIMPLE RASH TURNED INTO A DISEASE THAT WOULD ROB HIM OF EVERYTHING HE HAD, INCLUDING HIS LIFE.

BUT THERE WAS HOPE FOUND IN THE WORDS SPOKEN BY A JEWISH SLAVE GIRL WHO SERVED NAAMAN'S WIFE.

HER MESSAGE TOOK NAAMAN ON A JOURNEY TO GREATER WHOLENESS OF BODY AND SOUL THAN HE HAD EVER KNOWN.

BUT FIRST, SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING THE NATIONS OF ISRAEL AND ARAM THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER.

ARAM, HAD BEEN THE VICTOR IN A WAR AGAINST NORTHERN ISRAEL, EVEN KILLING THE KING. BUT THE KING OF ARAM ALLOWED HIS HEIR TO RULE.

HOWEVER, THE ARMY WOULD PERIODICALLY RAID ISRAEL, TAKING WHATEVER RESOURCES THEY COULD, INCLUDING PEOPLE TO BE SLAVES.

THIS WAS HOW THE JEWISH GIRL WAS BROUGHT INTO NAAMAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

AND, WHEN SHE HEARD THE NEWS ABOUT HER MASTER'S CONDITION, SHE TOLD HER MISTRESS ABOUT A PROPHET OF HER GOD WHO COULD HEAL HIM.

NAAMAN WENT TO HIS KING TO TELL HIM ABOUT THE HOPE HER WORDS OFFERED TO HIM.

THE KING WROTE A LETTER TO THE KING OF ISRAEL DEMANDING HE HAVE HIS PROPHET HEAL THE GENERAL.

WHEN THE KING OF ISRAEL READ THE LETTER NAAMAN BROUGHT TO HIM HE DESPAIRED THAT ARAM'S KING WAS LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO ATTACK THE LAND AND DEPOSE HIM.

YOU SEE, THE PAGAN KING DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT GOD'S PROPHETS SERVED THE LORD GOD FIRST, AND THEIR KINGS ONLY AS GOD COMMANDED.

ISRAEL'S KING KNEW HE HAD NO POWER TO PROVIDE THE HEALING; AND SADLY, HE LACKED FAITH GOD WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD NOT.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THE PROPHET ELISHA HEARD ABOUT THE REQUEST AND TOLD THE KING TO SEND NAAMAN TO HIM.

AND SO, THE GENERAL ARRIVED, BEARING GIFTS TO PAY THE PROPHET FOR THE HEALING, WHICH AT THE VERY LEAST SHOWS HE WAS NOT EXPECTING SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.

THIS REVEALS THAT ON THE ONE HAND NAAMAN WAS NOT TAKING ELISHA AND HIS POWER TO HEAL FOR GRANTED.

WE MIGHT IMAGINE NAAMAN AND HIS ESCORT ARRIVING AT THE HOME, AND A SERVANT KNOCKING ON THE DOOR AND TELLING THE ONE WHO ANSWERED WHAT WAS NEEDED.

THE PROPHET ELISHA, HOWEVER, SURPRISED NAAMAN BY NOT GOING OUT TO MEET HIM OR INVITING HIM INSIDE.

SO, ON THE OTHER HAND WE FIND THAT NAAMAN TOOK IT FOR GRANTED THAT THE PROPHET WOULD TREAT HIM WITH THE SPECIAL HONOR HE THOUGHT HE DESERVED.

ELISHA DID NOT DO THAT, BUT INSTEAD, HE SENT A MESSAGE TELLING THE GENERAL TO DUNK HIMSELF SEVEN TIMES IN THE JORDAN RIVER.

WELL, THAT WAS CERTAINLY SEEN AS AN INSULT TO A MAN OF WEALTH AND POWER AND HONOR.

NAAMAN THOUGHT HE DESERVED ELISHA'S PERSONAL ATTENTION AND PUBLIC PRAYERS.

FURTHERMORE, HE FELT THE DEMAND HE WASH HIMSELF SEVEN TIMES IN THE RIVER WAS DEMEANING TO A MAN OF HIS STATURE.

NAAMAN TURNED AWAY IN ANGER, AND HE PROBABLY PLANNED TO GO HOME TO GET PERMISSION TO RETURN WITH AN ARMY.

BUT THEN, HIS SERVANTS, WHO KNEW HIM VERY WELL, REASONED WITH HIM, AND SURPRISINGLY HE LISTENED.

THEY SUGGESTED THAT IF THE PROPHET HAD REQUIRED HIM TO DO SOME GREAT DEED BEFITTING HIS HONOR AS A GENERAL AND FRIEND OF HIS KING, HE WOULD NOT HAVE HESITATED.

SO WHY, THEY ARGUED, WAS HE OPPOSED TO DOING SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS DUNKING HIMSELF IN THE RIVER, AFTER ALL WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE?

NAAMAN THEN DOES WHAT ELISHA DEMANDED AND IS HEALED.

THUS, NAAMAN'S SIMPLE ACT OF BEING WILLING TO TAKE ADVICE FROM THOSE UNDER HIS AUTHORITY PRODUCED GREAT RESULTS.

HE JOYOUSLY RETURNED TO THE PROPHET TO SHOW HIS GRATITUDE WITH MANY GIFTS AND A LOT OF MONEY.

ELISHA, WHO WENT OUT TO MEET HIM THIS TIME, REFUSED PAYMENT FOR WHAT GOD HAD DONE, WHICH IMPRESSED NAAMAN.

BUT HE STILL EARNESTLY DESIRED TO DEMONSTRATE HIS GRATITUDE TO GOD. AND DID SO BY PROMISING THAT FROM NOW ON HE WOULD ONLY WORSHIP THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

THIS SHOW US THAT NAAMAN'S HEALING EXTENDED TO HIS SOUL. IT WAS SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL.

ELISHA RECOGNIZED THIS AND BLESSED NAAMAN WITH GOD'S PEACE AS HE RETURNED TO CONTINUE TO SERVE HIS KING AND COUNTY.

TOGETHER THE STORY FROM 2 KINGS AND LUKE REMIND US TO NOT TAKE FOR GRANTED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

THEY ALSO POINT US TO THE BENEFIT WE RECEIVE BY OFFERING A SIMPLE THANK YOU TO THE LORD.

INDEED, SOMETHING AS SIMPLE A "THANKS GOD" BLESSES US IN WAYS WE WILL NOT ALWAYS BE AWARE OF, AND YET WOULD NOT WANT TO MISS OUT ON IF WE WERE AWARE.

A REMINDER TO GIVE THANKS FOR SIMPLE THINGS IS FOUND IN POEM I READ ONLINE.

"THANK YOU, GOD FOR LITTLE THINGS THAT OFTEN COME OUR WAY. THE THINGS WE TAKE FOR GRANTED BUT DON'T MENTION WHEN WE PRAY.

THE UNEXPECTED COURTESY, THE THOUGHTFUL KINDLY DEED. A HAND REACHED OUT TO HELP US IN THE TIME OF SUDDEN NEED.

OH, MAKE US MORE AWARE, DEAR GOD, OF LITTLE DAILY GRACES, THAT COME TO US WITH SWEET SURPRISE FROM NEVER DREAMED OF PLACES." AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: 2 KINGS 5:1-19 & LUKE 17:11-19

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