

THE SKIN OF A BABY

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Scripture: 2 Kings 5:1-14

2 Kings 5: 1-14

5 Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, *but he was* a leper. **2** Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." **4** Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel." **5** Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand *shekels* of gold and ten changes of clothes.

6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." **7** When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending *word* to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me."

8 It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent *word* to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." **9** So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. **10** Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will* be clean." **11** But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' **12** Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. **13** Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you *to do some* great thing, would you not have done *it*? How much more *then*, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" **14** So he went down and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

This is an interesting narrative. You've probably heard this many times, sermons about it too, yet this particular narrative remains very fresh. Each time I read it, there's always something new that seems to grab my attention as is with the whole word of God. We may have read verses and chapters before, yet somehow the Holy Spirit manages to bring a refreshment through the same verses that we may have seen before. And I believe that He is doing the same for us today through the narrative of the healing of Naaman.

I'd like for us to look at it from different perspectives, maybe from Naaman's perspective, and then the servant girl and then Elisha, and see what we can glean and learn from it.

THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

Naaman: valiant warrior, well-respected, doing very well, the captain of the army of the king of Aram. Up there with the elite. And yet, there's a very significant 'but' that stands at the end of that

sentence, because it's a downer. But he was a leper. What a stigma that carried in those days. Highly respected, valiant warrior, and yet a leper.

The servant girl in Naaman's house: one who has the ability to, as it were, speak truth to power. She was able to speak to the mistress and say, "I wish he could go to Samaria, which was the capital of Israel at that time, and meet the prophet because for sure he can heal him. She was able to speak what she believed in, even as she had been brought captive from Israel. She just longed to speak the truth to this man so that he could be healed.

Elisha the prophet: He sends for Naaman. The king of Israel got into a flutter saying, "What is this man doing? Why is he coming to me? Am I a god that I can heal people? Why does he come to me?" and he tears his clothes. And Elisha says, "Tell him to come to me, and he will know that there's a prophet in Israel." And when Naaman comes, Elisha doesn't even meet him. From inside his house, he sends a messenger to say, "Tell him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan."

Naaman: He gets into a huff and says, "What does he think? Don't we have cleaner rivers in Damascus that I can go and wash myself, that I have to come to the Jordan and dip myself seven times in this water?" and he leaves.

Naaman's servants: they remonstrate with him, saying, "Father, if you had been given a big task to do, surely you would have done it. but now all you have to do is this." And they persuade him. And so, he goes to the Jordan and dips himself seven times and comes out with 'skin like a baby', clean without any leprosy.

APPLICATIONS LEARNED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS

As remarkable as this whole narrative is, we would miss the point if we were to marvel at Naaman, or at Elisha, or the servant girl, or his servants, and stay in the pages of history. We've got to leave this narrative in history, and ask the question: What does this mean for me today in my situation, in my circumstances? Are there principles that I can carry from this narrative into my own life? And that must happen for the Bible to be the transformative word of God as we know that it must be. So, may I invite you to look at it a little differently, from the perspectives of the different characters.

NAAMAN

God often reveals His power in our weaknesses. Here was Naaman, all that he had, and yet his Achilles heel was the leprosy. And he had learned to live with it, it seems, until this little girl spoke up.

And sometimes, we carry weaknesses as well, things that take away joy and peace. I look at Naaman and I think: his greatest level of joy was at the level of his leprosy; he couldn't go beyond that. at every point, his joy and his peace, this was his glass ceiling – he was a leper. And sometimes that's what happens to us – we have these things that we hold above us that prevent us from really enjoying God's fullness and His presence. In fact, we take those weaknesses and make them a part of who we are. We claim it as our identity. I have this temper, but I'm a person who has a temper. I get angry quickly, but I'm an angry person. I carry this bitterness around, but I've been hurt so badly. I can't give it up. I have this, I have that, and it becomes a part of who we are. And the joy, this abundant living that was promised to us, never gets fulfilled because it can never rise beyond that point.

Yet, when we look at Naaman, the question for us is: Are we willing to take it to the Lord and say, "Lord, here's this thing. Can You do something about it." God did something about Naaman's leprosy.

I wonder whether there can be a little faith that can arise in your hearts that says, "You know this thing I carry? It doesn't need to be with me. Maybe I can hand it over, ask God to take it from me so that I can really enjoy this fullness of joy that He continues to provide.

THE SERVANT GIRL

This young servant girl was able to speak truth to somebody like Naaman's wife. She was just a servant girl. Sometimes we look at ourselves and we think, "I'm just an ordinary person. I don't have the gifting that other people have. I am of really no use, and God can't use me. I'm just a nobody." Beloved, that's a lie that comes straight from the pit of Hell. There are no nobodies in the kingdom of God. No nobodies! Everybody in God's kingdom is a somebody with intrinsic value because we're all made in the image of God. We are image-bearers. Don't ever look at yourself and say, "I am nothing." You are somebody in God's kingdom. Whatever might happen, situations or circumstances that may come your way.

In this particular case, for this little girl, imagine being taken away from Israel as a captive, made to work in a foreign household, foreign customs. I wonder today, whether you look at yourself like that, that you see yourself as small and lowly and good for nothing. And so you just go about doing what you need to do. God has a use, beloved, for each and every one of us, and God has placed value upon us. He continues to use us wherever we are placed, whether it is in 'lowly places or in king's palaces', God will use us.

I love the song that Don Francisco wrote many, many years ago. And I don't know if any of you remember Don Francisco, but he wrote the song about the talking donkey. Remember Balaam and the donkey that spoke to him. God can use donkeys to get through to us. he ends the song by saying:

So when the Lord starts using you,
Don't you pay it any mind
Because He could have used the dog next door
If He'd been so inclined.

If God can use these little creatures, will He not use you and me? Beloved, if that's how you look at yourself, as one who is of not worth, you really need to turn your gaze, your attention to the Lord, and ask Him to look at you with a kind of love and respect that He has placed upon you. Because that comes from the Almighty God, not from situations, not from circumstances, and not from people who may have placed you in particular places. Never from them! It comes from God.

There are no nobodies in the kingdom of God. We are all somebodies. 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong."

Think of Mary and Joseph. Think of Gideon. "I'm the least of the least." And God says, Yeah, I can use you. And I only have this much, and God says, Let's get rid of that as well, till all he has is a handful of people. And God says: Now we're talking!

ELISHA

We see Elisha sitting in his room and sending out this messenger to tell Naaman: Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan. Remember, a prophet never spoke words from his own thoughts. He spoke on behalf of God. So, the instructions that Elisha gave were instructions that would have come from God.

Put yourself in Elisha's place, and God is saying: That man who is standing outside there, with all his chariots and horsemen. Just send the servant out and tell him to go dip himself seven times in the

Jordan. I think to myself – I'd say, "Lord, let's just talk this thing through a little bit. He's a powerful man, Lord, and maybe I can go out and tell him. That's the least I can do." Yet, Elisha was obedient. Here's the thing: so often in our lives, when God wants to do a powerful work, He requires us to be completely obedient to whatever He's asking us to do. And oftentimes, the things that God requires of us make us uncomfortable. They do. The things that He sometimes asks us to speak are words that we wouldn't speak even in normal conversations. But God wants to do a work through our obedience.

And Elisha was obedient.

Send a messenger.

What do I say, Lord?

Tell him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan.

Really? You want me to tell him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan river? Anything else, Lord? something a little harder – maybe fight somebody? He's a warrior after all.

No, go dip yourself seven times in the Jordan.

You have to be so in sync with the Lord to be able to do exactly what He tells you to do, however strange it may sound. Even today, the things that God sometimes requires of us make us uncomfortable. We don't want to do it. It's not the way we would do it. and yet, God is saying, "That's what I want you to do. That's what I want you to say. I want you to be completely obedient to Me."

NAAMAN

Naaman had a letter from the king of Aram to the king of Israel. He was told to go and meet the prophet in Samaria. He wasn't told to meet the king of Israel. But you see his trajectory. He is moving at his own social class – from the king to the king, as it were. That's where I'm going to operate. But God had other things on His mind. God knew that Naaman carried pride and had a huge ego. And God was going to deal with that before bringing healing to him.

And so, he's told to go and dip himself. You can see the scorn with which he responds to it. Don't we have rivers in Damascus that I could have gone and cleaned myself, that I have to come to the Jordan? And yet, we ought to be very thankful for people around us who speak wisdom into our situations. Always, God will place people around us who are willing to speak truth to us. And sometimes we miss it because it comes from unexpected sources. And we say, "No. it can't be."

And yet, look at Naaman; he agreed to do it, went in and dipped himself. What a spectacle that must have been. We're seeing the captain of the forces of Aram coming down here with his chariots, with his men, going down to the Jordan River and dipping himself seven times. Can you imagine the number of Israelites on the side who were watching all of this, wondering what was going on? And yet, he did it. and through his obedience, cleansing came.

Here's the thing. We look at this whole narrative and we look at Naaman and how God dealt with his ego and his pride. The servant girl didn't even consider that she was a servant girl and was able to speak truth to power. Elisha speaking exactly the words that God had given him to speak. And even, who knows, maybe having doubts about it. and yet, he did it, speaking the word of God.

And each one of those can sit on our hearts today. I wonder where the Holy Spirit has touched you and said, "That's for you. That's the point that I want to relate to you this morning. that's why you're in church today." I think the crux of the matter here is that for God to do things in our lives, humility and obedience must come together. We cannot come to Him in pride and expect God to do what God wants us to do. Humility and complete implicit obedience open the windows of heaven for

God's blessing to come and rest upon us. I wonder today, whether that's something that some of us may need to leave with and say: Lord, I'm sorry. I've carried this for a long time. I've been too proud to even share it with somebody or talk about it or even bring it to You. It's become a part of my persona. But Lord today, I come humbly before You and whatever You want me to do, I will do.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.
