

Guest Preacher - Rev Alasdair Macaulay

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[0 : 0 0] While seeking God's help, can we turn back in our Bibles to the passage that we read together. The book of 2 Kings 5, 2 Kings 5, and we can read again just the opening verse of that chapter.

2 Kings 5, verse 1. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. So this chapter opens with a description of a great man, Naaman. We learn almost immediately that he's valiant, he is victorious, he's valued by the king, he seems to have everything going for him. And then we come to this one word that changes everything, but, but he was a leper. Why is it that there is so often a cloud that spoils our situations, despite all the positives that can often be this one negative? And maybe today you have so many of the things that you thought would make you happy, and yet there's something in your life that leaves you uneasy. Maybe today, like Naaman, it's a health scare that clouds your horizon. And despite all the positives, every precious thing you have, the future is uncertain at best, or terrifying at worst. Naaman was a powerful man. He was a man who simply had to snap his fingers to get things done. But this has beat him. Leprosy in Naaman's day was incurable, and it would lead to a horrible end. And his situation, Naaman's situation is very much a picture of your situation if you're not a Christian today, if you are unsaved. The Bible says you have a terminal condition as well, the condition of sin, leprosy of the soul. And there is no human cure for that. And whether you realize it or not, it is, it is the thing that, the cloud that spoils every horizon. Sin mangles every good thing, and it leaves you uneasy. It leaves you empty. Naaman, despite his power, despite his prowess, he was in many ways a pathetic figure, because he had everything, and he was about to lose it all. This disease would slowly kill him. And there was no cure until this servant girl brings a glimmer of hope. This servant girl is an unexpected avenue of encouragement for Naaman, in a place he would never have thought of going looking for it. And that can often be the case with us. We're looking for satisfaction. We're looking for solutions. We're looking for answers in all the wrong places. Maybe today you have never seriously considered the fact that it is Jesus that you need, that it is Jesus alone who can fix you. He is the great healer. He is the one who alone can cure a soul from sin. And he is the one who will truly satisfy your deepest longings. So I want to look at the story of Naaman today. I want to break this into four sections, four headings. First of all, we'll talk about the commander. That's Naaman himself.

Secondly, the captive. That's the servant girl. Then we'll see the cure. And at the end, there's a section we'll call the curse. The curse. So the commander, the captive, the cure, and the curse. So let's begin with the commander. Looking at verse 1. Again, we already read it, but let me read it one more time. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of other, but he was a leper. So he's commander of the Syrian army. That meant immediately that this is no friend of Israel, no friend of God's people. In fact, the Syrians were arch enemies of the Israelites. You see that as he carried on into verse 2. The Syrians, on one of the raids, had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. They were enemies of Israel. Naaman was an outsider in many ways, an outsider with regard to the things of God. But what this chapter is showing us is that God cares about outsiders. God cares for outsiders. And even in, I don't know all of you today, I know many of you, but I don't know all of you, even in a congregation like this, you might feel like you don't belong. You might feel today like you are an outsider. But I hope that we shall see that it is God who orchestrates all these events because he cares for the outsider.

[5 : 49] In fact, it was God who made Naaman great in the first place. I don't know if you noticed that in verse 1. It's the middle of the verse because it says, because by him, by Naaman, the Lord had given victory to Syria. It was God that enabled this man to become great. He cares for outsiders. So Naaman had, he had, he had position, leader of the Syrian army. He had power. We're told he was a mighty man of valor. This is someone who probably was willing to lay his life on the line for his nation. He had prestige as well. He'd been victorious in battle. He was probably decorated with many medals. The king thought highly of him. That's what verse 1 tells us. He was held in high favor. He had the admiration of the king. So he's got position. He's got power. He's got prestige. But that means nothing.

Nothing when you read the next words. But he had leprosy. That changes everything. It changes everything. None of the aforementioned is going to bring him comfort when he has this condition that cannot be cured.

You know, when you come face to face with death, nothing else, nothing else really matters. Your achievements in life, they don't mean much at that stage. I remember a fellow I used to go and visit, really nice man, really capable man, very educated. He'd achieved much in life. And he loved to talk about that. He loved to talk about that. He would tell you about the places he had been and the things he had done and the firms he had worked for and the positions he had held and the things he had created. But one day I went to visit him. And he didn't mention any of these things. Because he had just been told that he had cancer and that it was terminal. That adds a different dynamic to things. And I wonder today, what are the most important things in your life?

[8 : 12] It's easy to work, right? You just think, what do I think about when I have free time? What do I spend my time? What do I spend my money on? What am I not reluctant to spend money on? These are the things that are important to you.

But would they still be important if you were facing death in the face? Naaman had a lot going for him. But this one negative spoiled it all. His reputation, his resume, the respect he enjoyed, provided little comfort in the face of impending death.

And friends, our condition is terminal too. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. That is the payback for a life lived without Jesus. And just as was the case for Naaman, there is no human cure for our condition.

God alone has the ability to heal us. That's the first thing I want to look at today. The commander. The commander, Naaman. But then I want to look secondly at the captive. So we're moving into verse 2.

We'll go a little bit faster than this as we get through the chapter. But verse 2 talks about the captive. The next character in the story. And I don't know if you noticed this, but she is the polar opposite of the first guy.

[9 : 37] He is powerful. She's a slave. She's powerless. He is a commander. She is a captive. He's the one who gives order. She has to obey orders.

He is a mighty Syrian. She is a meek Israelite. And she's only in this man's house because he conquered her people and took her away as a captive. This girl is far from her homeland, far from her people. She's in a foreign land, in an alien home.

And she could have resented all of that. And when she heard that Naaman was sick, she could have said, serves you right. What goes around comes around or something along these lines. But this girl isn't like that. She actually cares for her captors. She shows compassion for Naaman's condition.

She knows that he could be healed by Elisha, the prophet. And so she shares that news with her mistress. Verse 3. She said to her mistress, would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria.

[10 : 54] He would cure him of his leprosy. She tells about that there's hope for him. And surely there's a lesson for us who have trusted in Jesus that we should be ready to share that.

Even with folk who've made our lives difficult. Even with folk who are our enemies. And she presents this hope that she knows of so simply, so beautifully.

Would that my lord were with a prophet who's in Samaria? He would cure him of his leprosy. It's not he might cure him. He would. Notice her faith. She's so sure of this.

She has no doubt about the lord's ability. And her concern is so genuine and her faith is so evident that they act on it immediately. They don't question it.

They just accept it. They believe what she tells him. Naaman goes off to tell his boss, the king, that there might be hope for him after all. Verse 4. He went in and told his lord thus, and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.

[11:59] And so the king says, go. You know, one of the wonderful things about this story of Naaman is that it is an example of what is taught later in the Bible, in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians chapter 1. It says, God chooses the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the mighty. Here's the weakling. And it's the weakling that God is using. A girl, a captive, a servant. Note that word servant because it crops up a few times.

It's very significant in this whole story how God uses servants. A servant pointing her master in the right direction. A captive desiring to save her captor.

And in that way, is she not a picture of Jesus? A picture of Jesus? The one who on the cross prayed for those who were crucifying him.

[13:08] Prayed for his enemies. Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they're doing. So, Naaman informs his boss and with his full support, the king, he heads for Israel with a letter to the king of Israel.

And he goes off with this huge stash of valuables in verse 5. This gift that he's taking. Ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, ten changes of clothing.

If your Bible has footnotes at the bottom, it'll tell you it'll convert that into kilograms or pounds or ounces or whatever. It's a lot. 340 kilograms of silver, 66 kilos of gold.

Today's rate, this is about six million pounds worth. It's a wee bit different to taking a few cakes from Marks and Spencer's when you're going to visit someone.

Six million pounds worth he takes with him as a gift to the king of Israel. So, he's obviously hopeful. Things are looking promising, all because of this little servant girl, the captive.

[14:16] The captive. So, let's move on to our third point. We've seen the commander, we've seen the captive, thirdly the cure. The cure. So, this great army leader then, he arrives in Israel at the palace.

He goes to see the king. He brings his letter. The letter is asking, verse 6, that the king cure him of his leprosy. Now, you can imagine that the king of Israel would be a little bit uneasy with his deputation arriving on his doorstep because, remember, they've been there before.

They've been there with evil intent. They've been there to conquer and to capture previously. So, he'll be uneasy. And then he reads the letter and he loses the plot. Verse 7, he says, am I God to kill and make alive that this man sends word to me to cure one of his leprosy?

Only consider and see how he's seeking a quarrel with me. He thinks this is stirring. He's looking for an excuse for another battle. So, he goes to the king and the king can't help him.

The king can't help him. You see, people often think that's where the power lies. The power is in palaces. The power is in governments.

[15:28] God's ways are not our ways. That is not the way God works. And we fall into this trap as well of going looking for solutions and looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places.

In all the wrong places. And maybe you've been doing that for years. Maybe you've been doing that for decades. Yet you're still humming away.

I still haven't found what I'm looking for. He goes to the wrong place. That doesn't help him.

However, news of the wobbly that the king has thrown spreads quickly.

The prophet Elisha hears about it and he sends word to the king saying, why did you tear your clothes? Just send the guy to me. I'll fix him. And so Naaman is back in his chariot and he's off away from the palace probably heading to the poor part of town where his entourage pulls up outside the prophet's house.

And by now, put yourself in Naaman's shoes, by now I suspect his hopes are high. I mean, the prophet has sent word to the king saying, send him to me, I'll fix him.

[16:37] His hopes are high. But they're soon dashed because Elisha doesn't appear. Who does he send? He sends a servant. There's that word again.

He sends a servant out. Imagine being the servant who gets the job of telling this great commander of the Syrian army who's got six million pounds worth in his back pocket and a big entourage telling him, go and dip in the Jordan seven times and you'll be healed.

Well, Naaman is furious. He's furious at the lack of respect, the lack of dignity. And the proposed cure seems ludicrous to him.

How many people are like that with the gospel? They say, that doesn't make sense. You're telling me to believe in a guy who lived and died and rose again 2,000 years ago?

That's what I need? That doesn't make sense. Well, the Bible tells us this, the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him.

[17:45] They're foolishness to him. Do you know what really bugged Naaman? Is that he had it all worked out in his head, what was going to happen, and it didn't happen that way.

It didn't happen that way. Look at verses 11 and 12. But Naaman was angry and went away saying, Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

We can have it all worked out in our own heads as well. This is the way my life is going to pan out. And it seldom happens that way.

We can even have it mapped out how we're going to get to heaven. At this point in your life I'm going to change. At this point in my life I'm going to reform.

Or maybe you think that, well, if I do enough good deeds, they'll outweigh the bad. And I'll please God that way.

[18:50] That's not the way it works, friends. That's not the way it works. This week I was down in Glasgow. Our youngest was off to uni. So coming back up the road on Friday and going to catch the ferry then from Ullipool.

I was in a bit of a rush. Of course there's average speed cameras which help to keep you on the right side of the law. But sometimes you might overtake and so you may stray a wee bit over the speed limit.

But you just know then that you need to go a wee bit slower so that your average is okay. Some people think that's the way God works. And as long as your average behavior is okay you'll be fine. That's not what the Bible teaches us friends. It teaches that no amount of good deeds will get you into heaven. You need Jesus to do that. He's the only way.

He's the only way. And that irritates some people because they want to do it themselves. They don't want to have to depend on somebody else.

[19:58] Naaman stormed off in the huff. Verse 12 tells us he turned and went away in a rage. So who does God use to talk sense to this man?

You could guess surely. He uses servants. servants. Verse 13. But his servants came near and said to my father, it's a great word the prophet has spoken to you.

Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean? servants. He said to servants. He him. He said to him. Servants.

God uses. The greatest servant ever said this. Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

That's where our hope lies today. In Christ alone. Come back to Naaman. He swallows his pride. He gets into the Jordan and there he's healed.

[21:09] Read in verse 14 that his flesh was restored like that of a little child. He was clean. He was like a new man. He was like a new man on the outside, but he was like a new man on the inside as well.

Because you see evidence of that. You see evidence of a changed heart. Verse 15. Then he returned to the man of God and all his company and came and stood before him and he said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.

And then the middle of verse 17 or towards the end of verse 17, he says, Your servant will not offer burnt offerings or sacrifice to any God but the Lord.

His heart's been changed as well as his health. Even his nature's been changed because if you read, I'm not going to point them all out, but five times between verses 15 and 18, Naaman refers to him, himself, as Elisha's servant.

What a change in this man from the proud, arrogant guy who stood outside Elisha's house just a short time earlier. Your servant.

[22:21] Your servant. Do you know, Naaman's Naaman's got saved. That's what's happened here. But he still has a lot to learn. He's still got loads to learn. The moment you get saved, you don't know everything.

You will be learning for the rest of your life. And you see various things here that hint at that. Verse 15, he wants to pay Elisha, although not necessarily a wrong thing.

He's showing his appreciation. He's not paying him for healing him. He just wants to give him a gift. Verse 17, I know I'm rushing through this, but verse 17, he wants to take a load of Israel's earth home with him to worship on.

It seems like he believes that Israel's turf is sacred or something like that. So there's a wee bit of a misunderstanding there that needs to be fixed at some point. And then in verse 18, again not good time to dwell on this for long, but he asks forgiveness because in his job he has to go with the king into the king's idol temple, the temple of Rimmon.

And the king who must be frail because he leans on his arm, the king bows down and so Naaman whose arm he's leaning on has to bow down as well in the idol temple.

[23 : 39] And so you see all these things that I'm not quite sure that I wouldn't agree with that. What does Elisha say to him? Verse 19, go in peace.

Go in peace. He doesn't say, that's not right, that's not right, you need to fix that and that needs to change. Elisha leaves God to teach him right from wrong.

And I think if there's anything we could learn from this, it's that not every flaw needs to be castigated immediately. We should be gentle with the new believer and encourage them.

Not every flaw needs castigated immediately. If it goes on, yes, it needs to be dealt with. It doesn't all have to be addressed at the start. So Naaman returns home, a new man, humbled, cured, saved, the cure.

One final thing. We've talked about the commander, the captive, the cure, fourthly, the curse. So at this point in the story, you might expect to read, they all lived happily ever after, but they didn't.

[24 : 53] The Bible's an honest book, frighteningly honest at times. And the sequel to Naaman's healing is frightening. The sequel is that Elisha's servant, the prophet's servant, Gehazi, ends up being cursed.

So Gehazi had overheard Naaman, offered to pay Elisha, at the end of verse 15. And clearly his greed gets the better of him. And so he goes after Naaman, he conjures up a story to persuade Naaman to part with some loot and get himself a new wardrobe in the process.

And then he sneaks home, only to be confronted by Elisha. God has revealed to the prophet what's been going on. Gehazi tells more lies to cover his tracks, verse 25.

Was his deception worth it? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Because we read that it brings judgment on him.

In the last verse, verse 27, the leprosy of Lazarus shall cling to you and your descendants forever. It's a sorry end. It's a really sad end to what is a lovely story in many ways.

[26 : 10] But you know the really sad thing about this? Is that while in this chapter we see God's grace and God's favor being extended to an outsider, in that Naaman gets healed and Naaman gets saved, we see also in this story God's grace and favor being rejected by an insider who should have known better.

Gehazi, the prophet's servant, is controlled by his desire for things, for possessions.

Gehazi was the one who had all the spiritual privilege. Who knows how many miracles he had seen. in the presence of Elisha the prophet.

Yet his heart was governed by greed and he ends up cursed. Naaman by contrast, he had no such privilege growing up. An outsider from a pagan nation and yet when he's confronted by the power of God, he immediately believes and is saved.

miracle of This story has to challenge us today as to what you and I do with our spiritual privilege.

[27 : 33] And we are spiritually privileged. The fact that you're in church today, the fact that you're hearing God's Word today is a privilege. Will you make use of that privilege to trust and follow the Lord Jesus Christ?

Or will you once again reject Him and risk being cursed? Naaman or Gehazi, which one best depicts you today?

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank You that the Bible is so clear to us, clear about our privilege, and clear about the necessity of making use of our privilege.

We might feel sorry for Gehazi. It seems in some ways like a terrible punishment for what might seem a small matter.

But Lord, we realize that this is the culmination of many years, maybe many decades, of rejecting You. Lord, save us from that, we pray.

[28 : 47] We are indeed a privileged people. And the Bible tells us that those to whom much is given, of them much shall be required. Help us to make use of our privilege, we pray. We ask this in Jesus.

Amen. Amen. I'm going to finish singing in Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 130. It's on page 421.

This is a psalm that reminds us that there is forgiveness to be found. I'm just going to read the last verse. We're going to sing the whole of this psalm.

Psalm 130 on page 421. To God's praise. Lord, from the death to Thee I cry, my voice, For do Thou hear?

Unto my supplication's voice Give us the Lord, Lord, who shall stand in love, O Lord, Just mark iniquity, But yet with Thee Forgivenesses That fear Thou mayest be I wait for God

[31 : 07] My soul doth wait My hope is in His word More than they that For morning watch My soul waits for the Lord I say, Lord, I say, Lord, I say, Lord, Lay that to watch The morning light To see Let Israel

Hope in the Lord For with Him And from all His Iniquities The Israel shall redeem Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Thank you.