

Today we're celebrating Independence Day with other parts of the service. But today's sermon will be part 5 of our 5 week series about Elijah and Elisha. In our OT lesson this morning, a man is healed of his skin disease. At first glance, it may seem obscure--it was almost, 3,000 years ago and 7,000 miles away. Yet the story of General Naaman and his healing has profound implications for us as 21st century Americans. Because Naaman is a lot like us. So I want to look at his story this morning. 2Kings ch5 (bulletins).

The story starts in the Kingdom of Aram, which today is called Syria. The capital, then as now, is the beautiful city of Damascus. At this time, Syria was a perennial enemy of Israel. They were constantly at war, and Syria usually won.

But in ch5, Syria and Israel apparently are in the middle of some kind of cease fire. And there, in ch5, v1, we are introduced to Naaman. Naaman is a Syrian General. Not only that, he's the head general. He's the chairman of the Syrian Joint Chiefs of Staff. Notice how he's described. He's a great man. He's in good with the king. He's a successful general. He wins battles. He's a mighty warrior. But after this glowing description of Naaman, the Hebrew OT adds one word. Leprous. This guy is a great and powerful man. But he has leprosy.

Now, ancient leprosy is a bit different from modern leprosy. It was characterized by white scaly patches of skin, with reddening, and perhaps with open running sores. It wasn't fatal. But it was painful and annoying.

But it turns out, v2, that one of his slave girls was a captured Israelite. v3 She tells Naaman's wife that there is prophet in Samaria, which is a part of Israel. And the girl says that this prophet can cure Naaman of his leprosy. Apparently, Naaman takes that message to heart, because in v4 he's passing that information on to his king.

Now think about this for a minute. This foreign slave girl is at the bottom of the pecking order. Yet her information is passed on by the #1 general to the king himself.

Apparently Naaman is desperate for a cure for his leprosy. He's desperate enough to listen to the testimony of a little foreign slave girl.

Think of it in today's terms. Would the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff take medical advice from the girl who cleaned his toilets? What if she had just gotten off of the boat from a third world country? "Hey general, I know this witch doctor back in my homeland. He'll fix you right up." Then he goes to his boss, "Mr. President--send me down there." Doesn't sound very likely. Yet it is through this unlikely connection that God is working.

It's a good lesson for us. We often pigeonhole people. And if someone is in the wrong category, we tend not to listen to them. "They're too young. Or they're too old. Or they're too liberal. Or they're too conservative. They're too poor. They're too different from me. What can they possibly be able to tell me?" The message of this story is, be careful about doing that. God may just be speaking to you through someone that you've written off. Don't assume. Listen.

Naaman does listen to his foreign servant girl. And the king listens to General Naaman. So, v5, the king sends Naaman down to Israel. He even gives him a letter to take to the King of Israel. And notice what that means. The King of Syria is admitting that he has no power over Naaman's disease. It's also an admission that the Syrian gods are powerless. Naaman and the king are powerful men. Yet, at some level, they have to admit to being powerless.

But notice what they do. They do the same thing we often do. They try to throw money at the problem. Middle of v5. Naaman goes to Israel and takes along 10 talents of silver and 6,000 shekels of gold. In our economy that's about \$5,000,000 in silver, and another \$1,000,000 in gold. So Naaman's taking with him about \$6,000,000, plus ten sets of expensive designer garments. This is a big bribe or a big gift or a big fee depending upon how you look at it. Naaman REALLY wants to be cured.

So Naaman's motorcade pulls up in front of the King of Israel's palace. He's in his chauffeur driven chariot with a couple of Syrian flags flying on the fenders. He's got the armored car behind him with \$6,000,000 in cash.

And he walks up to the King of Israel and pulls the letter out of his briefcase. v6: "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

v7 The King of Israel says basically, 'What the heck do they expect me to do about it? How can I cure leprosy? That's ridiculous. The king of Syria is just trying to pick a fight with me. He's just looking for an excuse to invade.'

Notice what the King of Israel is missing. He's missing God. God doesn't even hit his radar screen. The king of Israel is only thinking geopolitically.

Again, there's a good lesson for us. We often go react to the events of life without keeping God on our front burner. We might even have him in our closet or garage. He's there in storage if we need him. But he's not the first thing that comes to mind. We'll try everything else. Then we'll go to God. That's what the King does.

And it's at this point that the prophet Elisha catches wind of it. So he sends word to the king, v8: "Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." It's something of a rebuke to the king. You should have been thinking of God, not thinking about your political situation.

So v9, Naaman gets back in the chariot and the motorcade heads to Elisha's house. But notice what's written between the lines. v9 says that they halted at the entrance to his house. They don't go in. They stop at the door. Looks like Naaman's pride and self importance are getting the way here. It's as if he's saying, "I might walk into a king's palace, but I'm not going into this prophet's house. I'm important. He should come to me."

But Elisha doesn't play that game. v10 Elisha sends one of his flunkies out who says, "Elisha wants you to dip yourself in the Jordan River 7 times. Then you'll be cured."

And what's Naaman's reaction. v11 He's mad. 'That's it? Jump in the river 7 times? He doesn't even come out to see me? He doesn't wave his hands over me and go, "Abracadabra"?'

'Besides, (v12) the Jordan is an ugly muddy river. The rivers in Syria are snow fed from the mountains. They're much cleaner. If he wanted me to jump in the river, the rivers back home are much better.'

So we're told, end of v12, he left in a RAGE. His pride has got the better of him. Remember, he wanted desperately to be cured. He brought \$6,000,000 with him. But his pride gets in the way at a crucial moment.

But one of his servants keeps his cool. v13 'General, if this guy had told you to do something difficult, you would have done it. You would have walked across a tightrope over a pit full of alligators while live ammunition was being shot off all around you. But you won't dip yourself in a muddy river? So v14, Naaman listens to his servant. He goes down and dips himself 7 times in the Jordan. And he is cured.

He also gets a major attitude adjustment emotionally. And Naaman is given a wake-up call spiritually.

Naaman starts out sort of halfway there. He knows that his king and his gods can't cure his leprosy. And yet, he is still very hooked on his own power. Look at how he goes down to Israel. He takes a column of chariots. He takes a lot of money. He takes a letter from the King of Syria. Naaman is doing everything out of a power mode. But Elisha asks him to humble himself and jump in a muddy river. Naaman almost blew it. He almost let his pride get in the way.

But then he let go of his own sense of self importance and he did as Elisha said. And he was healed.

He comes out of the river a different man. Our reading stopped with v14. But right after, he professes faith in God. He says "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel." He offers to pay Elisha. He says "Please accept a present from your servant."

And notice that word. He's calling himself Elisha's servant. Before he had waited imperiously in the chariot. Now he acts out of humility.

Before he had rejected the idea of jumping in a muddy Israeli river. But at the end, he will ask permission to take back two loads of dirt with him, so that he can always worship the God of Israel on Israeli soil. Inferior dirt becomes holy ground.

General Naaman's attitude is turned around 180°. General Naaman is healed. Naaman's wealth doesn't make him happy or whole. Naaman's power doesn't bring a cure. In

the end, it is doing what God asks that brings him healing. Naaman swallows his pride and follows God's simple commands.

Dipping himself in a muddy river seems too simple. But it's what God asks.

This week, I would encourage you to do those simple things that God asks.

Spend time praying. God wants relationship with you. Make the time to be in relationship. Talk to God.

Find a few moments to read your Bible. God has sent you a wonderful love letter. Read it. If you don't know where to start, ask me--I'd be glad to offer some suggestions. Or look online at our website under "Spiritual resources."

Try to be loving to the people God places in your path. You can't change the whole world. But you can have a positive influence on your little part of the world.

Share from your abundance with those who are less fortunate. We've been given so much, and we spend much of it on our own toys and comforts, when others are in desperate need. Share just a little bit.

If God wanted you to do something big, you'd want to do it. Why not do the simple things that God asks? Why not do the simple things that God asks?