

## A Noteworthy Short Story with Multiple Great Lessons

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.

Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. "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 of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 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."

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!"

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." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 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."

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. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

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!'" 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.

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. <sup>2Ki 5:1-15</sup>

This is a good story on several counts – to look at just a few key points:

1. When people are desperate they will do anything for resolution (even if it sounds unlikely and far-fetched): in this case, a high-ranking General believing a slave girl saying someone could heal his leprosy, a slow, incurable and painful death sentence of that day.  
And we can see how serious the General was about a possible healing: he took 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold and 10 sets of clothes as payment for his cure.
2. The king of a pagan country had greater belief that this healing might be possible than the King of Israel – teaching an important lesson that sometimes those who have opportunities very near don't have corresponding faith to act and, therefore, do not benefit from these opportunities.
3. So, after receiving approval from the King of Israel, Naaman traveled on to consult with Elisha for his cure. Yet somewhat surprisingly, after this long trip, Elisha didn't even go out of his house to talk to Naaman – he sent a messenger to give him instructions for his

healing, simply: “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

Elisha did not ask for any money or make any other demands so we would fully well, at this point, think the General should have been overcome with joy and amazement and quickly completed what Elisha told him to do.

Instead, “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. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?’ So he turned and went off in a rage.”

He was probably already peeved because, after his great efforts (he was after all a very important man and had a traveled a long way) Elisha didn’t honor him by coming and speaking to him personally – the indignity of it! Pride can and does kill many opportunities for Grace and its benefits.

Naaman must have also mistakenly believed the commonly-held belief that “No Pain – No Gain” (“Only by facing, dealing with, or subjecting oneself to difficulty or hardship will one truly improve or progress.” *The Free Dictionary by Farley*).

He was able and willing to pay a fortune for a cure and, in addition, he would have done anything else he had been asked. Yet, he was simply told to go wash himself seven times in the Jordan – there were no religious rituals as he expected, he wasn’t asked for any money, it was not credible that this would work! Yet, miracles are not logical nor credible, they just happen!

This is an example of how we can be confused by “simple” actions with great payoffs – by miracles of God – we can refuse to pursue them because of their simplicity.

4. However, to his ultimate credit, after storming off, Naaman humbled himself by listening to his servants, returned (repented), did what he was told and was healed – He then understood the Gospel, the Good News:
  - a. That God’s Grace must, as first importance, be sought and valued to be experienced. If, in looking around and seeing others in the same condition or worse, we are comforted, not alarmed, and as a result do not believe we have a need or that there is a real cure, the hope of Grace is lost unless/until, at some point (by Grace), we really see our need and God’s gracious offers.
  - b. God’s Grace is always free – we don’t have anything God would want or need in repayment.
  - c. God’s Grace comes with simple, yet precise, instructions and conditions so we understand He is the source and giver of all good things.

We are all under a slow painful death sentence apart from God’s salvation. And His salvation is neither offered nor helpful as a supposed one-time gift – unless He becomes our [on-going] salvation we will not be saved from the final death sentence of being eternally lost and separated from Him.

God gives grace to the humble meaning if we choose, in our pride, to expect Him to do what we say we forfeit the grace that could otherwise be ours. Or, if we devise our own religions, in which we demand God operate (“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 . . .”), potential Grace will we lost.

- d. God's Grace of day-to-day earthly gifts are given so we remember and "know that there is no God in all the world except" Him, so we grow in Grace, knowledge and faith throughout our earthly life.
- e. It is never too late (short of death) to receive God's Grace. We may initially and subsequently refuse, ignore or care so little for His offers that we do not read and follow His instructions (the *Bible* and *Bible*-supported prayers) and, as a result, remain in our self-supporting and dying condition. But the offers stand open as was shown by one of the thieves on the cross with Jesus – repenting mere hours before his death – “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” <sup>2Pe 3:9</sup>

In summary, Grace is ours when we humble ourselves by realizing we are under an eternal death sentence and realize we are fully helpless, hopeless and without anything we can offer as a cure and then call out to Grace (Jesus Christ) as evidenced by our true concern and seeking His instructions and conditions to heal us now and forever. This is faith: knowing our condition, realizing we have no hope and help apart from that offered by Christ and desperately, as of first importance and concern, seeking His Grace and Truth.

Jesus said:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.” Jn 14:15

And we will only know what He commands if we read His Word! Read His Word for in it we find His offers of Grace along with His detailed instructions for receiving them.