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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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PSALM 30
2 KINGS 5:1-19

“NAAMAN: A STORY OF GRACE”

The aim of this sermon is to explore how Naaman’s story illustrates our relationship with God’s grace given to us in Jesus Christ.

In honor of the Fourth of July, I have a four-point sermon. We’re going to see how Naaman’s story shows us our need for grace, finding grace, receiving grace, and the effects of grace.

(1) The Need for Grace

Naaman is a man of surprises. And here’s what I mean: In the ears of the original Israelite audience, it would have been surprising to hear the commander of Aram’s army described as a “great man and in high favor with his master.” And why is that? Because Aram (or Syria) was Israel’s constant and superior foe. They were the bully in the neighborhood that tormented Israel. And so, it would have been even more surprising to hear that by Naaman “the LORD had given victory to Aram.” And the final surprise is that this great man, esteemed and favored by the king, a military hero, a mighty warrior suffered from *leprosy*.

Naaman’s favored status and victories, all he accomplished in life couldn’t protect Naaman from being in need. All the success, all the connections couldn’t keep Naaman from suffering. Scholars and commentators admit that we can’t know the specifics of Naaman’s leprosy, since leprosy was a term used to cover a broad range of skin diseases, but we do see Naaman was desperate for healing. He couldn’t set his leprosy aside and just go on with life as usual. In a sense, Naaman’s leprosy touched more than just his skin. It affected everything in his life. And unlike a military foe, Naaman was powerless against it. We might say that Naaman couldn’t change his spots.

And if you’re familiar with the Doctrines of Grace or the Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP), Naaman’s condition gives us an illustration of Point #1—Total Depravity. Total depravity does not mean we do as much evil as is possible.¹ Instead, like Naaman, the point is that our inability to save ourselves is total.² There’s nothing within us that can undo or overcome a sinful nature.

Now, we may experience wonderful successes in life. People might view us as great and admirable. God can even use us for His purposes and do amazing things through us. But none of that changes the hard reality that we are *totally* dependent on God’s grace to intervene and overcome what we cannot.

¹ John Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God’s Grace*, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 17.

¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

And so, in Naaman's eyes, the biggest surprise of all was that he needed something he couldn't subdue or master or win. He climbed the ladder of achievement, got to the top and found that his problem was still clinging to him. He was all these great things, but he couldn't escape the suffering brought on by leprosy. But notice that it was from a place of suffering that God began to make Naaman ready for the grace that would do more than change his spots.

(2) Finding Grace

And what's incredible and certainly surprising is how the LORD began to lead Naaman to find His grace. Remember, Naaman was a man with connections. He knew the king. He must have had access to the leading "physicians" of the day. He probably met with Aram's religious leaders. I'm sure Naaman explored every option that promised healing.

Naaman had access to everything that money and connections could bring. And none of it delivered. Instead, it was a nameless, foreign slave girl who shared the good news of where Naaman could be cured. You see, the message of grace didn't come in lofty speech or from a place of power and prestige but from the lips of a prisoner. One commentator says this about the young girl: "She had no home, no freedom, no experience, no power, and no identity. She was the lowest person on the social scale. Compared to Naaman the Valiant, therefore, she counted for nothing. Yet the little girl's life counted for God."³

What's incredible to me is that this young girl probably had every reason to keep silent. She could have secretly rejoiced that her captor suffered miserably. She could have seen it as justice served. But this young girl proved she understood what God's grace was all about. Because in her place of slavery and powerlessness, she sought to bless Naaman her captor by pointing him to the way of healing. And by sharing this news of grace, this young girl shows us that even in slavery she was free. She wasn't bound by hate or consumed by revenge. Instead, her faith in the abundance of God's powerful grace allowed her to love her enemy. She knew that God's grace was equally available to Naaman as it was to her.

If we want our lives to count for God, this girl's example is one to follow. Because we may find ourselves in places we didn't choose. God may lead us into uncomfortable situations with people we rather not be with. And it's in those times we are prone to grumble and complain that life isn't fair. But perhaps, God has set us in those places to lead others to the knowledge of where grace is found. As a pastor I know would say, it wasn't an accident that this girl was in Naaman's household. There was a reason she was there and through her God was bringing about Naaman's salvation.

(3) Receiving Grace

And so, with the young girl's direction and a letter from the king, Naaman set off to be cured. But not fully understanding the nature of grace, he emptied his bank accounts and took his material wealth with him. One commentator estimates that Naaman took the equivalent of three-quarters of a *billion* dollars.⁴ And after a brief, unfruitful stop at king of Israel's home, Naaman ended up at Elisha's door—the prophet in Samaria.

³ Philip Ryken, *2 Kings*, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2019), 96.

⁴ John Walton et. al, *The IVP Bible Background: Old Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 391.

And what we see in verses 8-14 is the conflict between Naaman's way and the way of grace revealed through Elisha. We see that Naaman came prepared, at least in his eyes. He came to Elisha's front door with his horses and chariots and truck loads of wealth. He thought his strength and power and reputation mattered. Maybe he thought the God of Israel healed those who helped themselves. Sadly, even after all his suffering, Naaman still wanted to conceal just how broken and in need he was.

And then, with all Naaman's power surrounding him, came Elisha's simple words, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." Now, the trip to the Jordan River was about 40 miles from Samaria⁵ And for Naaman that seemed like a waste of his precious time. As he put it, why couldn't Elisha, this supposedly great prophet, just take a few steps out his door, wave his hand over Naaman and cure him right there on the spot? And as Naaman pointed out, the Jordan River was inferior to the rivers of Damascus.

But Naaman's money was no good in Israel, and unlike everything else in his life Naaman's orders counted for nothing before Elisha. Naaman was offended by the scandal of God's particular and free grace. Yes, it promised to cure Naaman but would do so by stripping Naaman of the opportunity to boast in himself. And Naaman couldn't tolerate such a hit to his pride.

Philip Ryken in his commentary says this: "Naaman expected his salvation to be costly—very costly—but not so costly that he could not pay for it himself. He wanted to make a contribution to his cleansing, through either his money or his manpower."⁶

But that's never how we receive the gift of God's grace for us in Christ. There's nothing we can offer to God as payment. Nothing we can contribute. Nothing that we can bring that adds to or improves upon the free, unmerited, gracious salvation God provides for us in His Son. Christ offered himself as the spotless, perfect sacrifice that finished the plan for salvation. Jesus announced it was finished at the cross.

And so, we can walk away, clinging to our pride but still carrying our sin. Naaman could have gone back home, boasting about how he'd rather live with leprosy than do such a pathetic thing as washing in the loathsome, pitiable waters of the Jordan River. But notice what happened. In verse 13, Naaman's servants intervened, once again it was Naaman's inferiors who persisted in seeing his life saved. Remember, the kings of Aram and Israel couldn't do a thing for Naaman. So maybe, Naaman began to realize that his life wouldn't be saved by pulling himself up but by lowering himself. Instead of giving orders, Naaman would *obey* the word of God spoken by the prophet.

And then, leaving his chariots and horses on the shore, all that he brought with him, all that he thought mattered most, Naaman went down into the Jordan seven times, and "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean." That's what's so marvelous about grace. There's absolutely *nothing* you need to bring to Jesus. Just obey his word and leave everything else behind.

⁵ Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 391.

⁶ Ryken, *2 Kings*, 103.

(4) The Effects of Grace

Naaman came up a new man. He returned to Elisha with gratitude. He testified to the truth by saying “there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.” He expressed his desire to worship Yahweh. He showed Elisha that his desire was to live a righteous and obedient life in a foreign land full of false gods and idols.

But what grabbed my attention most of all was how Naaman identified himself. In verse 17, we hear him refer to himself as a servant. The great, valiant Naaman is now a *servant*. Grace changed his identity. He was now a humble, willing servant of the true God. You see, God’s grace doesn’t put us in debt. God’s grace is true liberty and freedom, because Christ has set us free from sin and death! But like the young slave girl showed us, real freedom and liberty is expressed when we serve others by freely sharing the good news of God’s sovereign and free, abundant and powerful grace we’ve received in Christ.

And probably for the first time in his life, even as the great, victorious general, Naaman had peace. Think about all he carried into Israel. His life’s riches. But now, as a servant of the God of Israel, he leaves with the most precious thing of all—peace with God. He leaves not just with clean skin but with a cleansed heart that trusts God’s grace is for him and accomplished what he could never do.

And so, maybe this morning your heart is troubled, or maybe you’re searching for something to deliver real and lasting peace. And the answer is the same for all of us: to stand firm in the grace of God by trusting His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our money and successes and connections will never purchase what can only be received in a humble, childlike faith. And know, this grace will never run out for you. In the bleakest of your days, God’s grace is never exhausted. In fact, it is so abundant you can share it with the world, and as God’s servants, let us pray for the love to do so.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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