



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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2 Kings 5:1-19

September 27, 2020
English Standard Version

Naaman and the Servants

The 6th Sermon in a topical series entitled,

Misused Stories of the Bible

1. Welcome

- a. Welcome to Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church. I'm Frank Wang. I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new, please hang out for a little bit after the service. I'd love the chance to meet you and get to know a little bit about you. And if you're new, or if you've forgotten, we're working our way through the Bible, looking at a number of misused or misinterpreted stories. We've looked at Cain and Abel, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, and David and Goliath. This week, we've come to the story of Naaman, a Syrian general, in 2 Kings 5. So if you'd turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Kings 5, we'll be reading verses 1-19.

2. Read Scripture

¹Naaman, 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. ²Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." ⁵And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. ⁶And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷And 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 sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.” ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” ¹¹ 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. ¹² Are not Abana 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 But his servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said 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.

¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant.” ¹⁶ But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷ Then Naaman said, “If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. ¹⁸ In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.” ¹⁹ He said to him, “Go in peace.”

3. Pray

4. **Introduction – Pickpocket Preaching**¹

- a. How many of you have a demonstration by a pickpocket? There are a number of TED talks where professional pickpockets select members of the audience and then proceed to do some crazy things. You can go look up Apollo Robbins or Bob Arno. They're amazing. I watched Bob Arno take a necktie off of Steve Harvey without him noticing. A necktie! How do you even do that?
- b. Apollo Robbins would tell you that it's all about controlling someone's attention and perceptions. It's about giving them red herrings to follow while you're doing something completely different some place else, like taking their watch off their wrist or lifting wallets out of their pockets. It's the slight bump to your shoulder to keep your attention on your shoulder while my hand is in the pocket going for the wallet.
- c. What's interesting, is that the way master pickpockets make their tricks seem ordinary, authentic, and genuine. That bump on your shoulder? Played off as a mistake, as common and unremarkable as anything else. But that bump ends up leaving you walletless.
- d. And so it can be with preaching. Preachers tend to be pretty good at weaving together theological threads to make a seemingly convincing argument. We can make things sound good. But sometimes, preachers don't giving you an authentic,

¹ The background and exposition of this text is adapted from the sermons [Sin as Leprosy, pt. 2](#) by Dr. Tim Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on March 10, 1996 and the commentaries [2 Kings](#) by Philip Graham Ryken, pp. 94-107; [1 & 2 Kings](#) by Ian W. Provan, pp. 191-193; [2 Kings](#) by Dale Ralph Davis, pp. 85-96.

genuine, and real Gospel. When we don't give you a Gospel that is grounded in grace and founded upon Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, then we will leave you with nothing of value. We will have picked your pocket so to speak, waving around words that sound good and convicting, but ultimately leaving you with nothing truly valuable. But it is actually worse, because we will have convinced you of something other than the Gospel, and when you try to rely on whatever I gave you, you'll find it fails you. And so it's not just that I've taken the Gospel from you, but I've replaced it with a gross imitation of it.

- e. That's one of the reasons why we're doing this series. We're not only seeking to show you Jesus from these texts, but also as many different ways that we mess things up so that you can spot errors more easily.
5. **Roadmap:** And so this morning, as we look at the story of Naaman being healed of his leprosy, we are going to see how some folks have hopefully unwittingly picked your pockets. And then hopefully, I'm going to show you a different way of looking at this story. We're going to see how this story really isn't about Naaman that much, but about God's faithfulness to His covenant and His grace to us. So let's start with the wrong way to preach Naaman's story.

6. How Our Pockets are Picked

- a. The vast majority of the sermons that I read in the lead up to writing this sermon were on Naaman's pride. It really stands out in the passage. It's also a sin that we see addressed all the time in the Bible. So how do we see Naaman's pride?

- i. He is called a "great man" and held in "high favor" right there in verse 1. He's a man of immense ability, a great tactician and general. He's able to command the respect and obedience of an army of thousands. He has the ear of the King of Syria. He's also fabulously wealthy as evidenced by the vast treasure he brings along with him. To give you a sense of what he's brought along with him, 10 talents of silver is 750 pounds of silver, and 6000 shekels of gold is about 145 pounds of gold. All told, that would have been worth about \$4.28 million today. So he's rich, powerful, and famous. And he did what he had always done when confronted with a problem, he flexed his considerable skills, resources, and connections to procure a cure.

- ii. But how did Elisha deal with him? Elisha didn't even bother to come to the door to greet him. He sent out a servant to tell him to go do some ritual washing in the Jordan. And we can see Naaman's bruised pride in his seething anger in verses 11 and 12.

1. *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. Are not Abana 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.*

- iii. He's angry because he didn't get the treatment that he felt he deserved. He expected to impress. He expected deference and respect. But that's not what

he got. He got what amounted to a cold shoulder from Elisha, who couldn't even be bothered to come to the door. Didn't Elisha know that he was a **GREAT** man? This greatness would be his greatest weakness, his biggest flaw. He was a proud man, so proud that he didn't even want to follow Elisha's prescription to bathe in the Jordan.

- b. Now once the sin is identified, we can address it. What happened to Naaman's pride? Well he humbled himself and obeyed Elisha's commands. That big ole' pride was taken down, and then in humility, he was delivered unto salvation! That sounds like a Bible verse!
 1. Mathew 23:12 – *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*
 2. James 4:6 – *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*
- c. Now up to this point, we're on fairly solid ground. There are some exegetical issues that we'll get to in a second, but for the most part, we can say that pride is an issue that needs to be addressed. But this is where most of the sermons on this text go wrong. Usually, they say something to the effect of, "Look at Naaman and how humbling himself led to his salvation. We too should be humble." Or it comes out as something like, "Look at how hard the Lord takes down the prideful Naaman. It's the slaves that get it, and only when he listens to slaves that he's delivered. We need to be careful not to be prideful." Or it's something like, "We should never be too prideful to follow the Lord's commands, no matter how crazy or out-of-date they may seem."
 - i. But all of that is rooted in what we do. The onus is on us to not be too prideful, to humble ourselves, to obey the Lord's commands regardless of the social backlash. When it's preached like this, preachers aren't giving you the Gospel, they're giving you a burden to carry. Here's a list of things to do, and next week, I'll give you another one. And week after week, that's all that you get, more things to watch out for, more things to do, and ultimately, more things to fail in.
 - ii. That's the problem with moralism. It teaches you to be good and to do good, but it doesn't teach you **how** to do it, just **that you should**.
- d. I like to think of this as play theological hopscotch because we've hopped right over Jesus. We've gone from Naaman in the Old Testament right to us. Did you notice how all of those applications were completely devoid of Jesus and the Gospel? I said that what's missing in moralism is the "how", and that's because the "how" is found in Jesus and the Gospel. How are we humbled when we come to the Gospel? Well God is the one who humbles us. Remember, we were saved while we were yet sinners. We don't come to the Lord in humility, rather, while we were still prideful, the Lord snatches us from judgment. And when our eyes are opened, well, the Gospel is pretty humbling because of when it starts. We're wretched sinners who deserve wrath. We have nothing to be proud of because we are rebels and traitors.

We are desperate, poor, and without hope, save in the grace of God. That's how we are made humble.

- e. So we've got to be careful to root all of our applications in the reality of the Gospel and grace.
7. Transition: But I also said that there were some exegetical issues in establishing Naaman's pride and then applying it to us. As we look at these errors, they will provide a springboard into how we ought to see this passage.

8. **Seeing the whole picture**

- a. One of the reasons why it is fascinating to watch pickpockets do a demonstration is because we get to see the whole picture while the target only sees what the pickpocket wants him to see. We have the context. But have you noticed that we haven't talked about the context of this particular passage? In some ways, when we look at characters within a story, we forget that these books were written for a specific purpose or purposes. These books were sermons written to the people of Israel to teach them and to sanctify them. They were written at a specific time, for a specific people, in a specific place, for a specific purpose. We need to avoid playing theological hopscotch because we actually hopped over 2 steps when we looked at Naaman and then applied to ourselves. We didn't just skip over Jesus, but we also skipped over the step of putting the passage in its proper context. The Old Testament can be kind of tricky to interpret. We need to keep in mind the original meaning of the text to the original audience to understand properly how the text points to Jesus.
- b. So how does Naaman's pride need to be contextualized before we can preach on pride rightly? First, we need to remember that the book of Kings was written for a people in exile. These people were wondering how God had let this happen to His covenantal people. They were questioning His faithfulness! So, 2 Kings 5 is part of a history lesson. And the lesson is that God was justified in sending the people into exile. Across the pages of 1 and 2 Kings, the reader could have easily seen the unbelief and sin of the Israelites. We even see it here in 2 Kings 5. How did the King of Israel react to the King of Syria's request to heal Naaman? He said, "What am I supposed to do about this?" He certainly didn't pray for help. He certainly didn't seek out Elisha for help. He reacted in a worldly way, seeing things only on a political level, thinking that this was merely an excuse for the Syrians to invade. This was about him and his kingdom. God didn't even register. Where was the dependance on God and faith in Him to do great things? Nowhere.
- c. The exiles were asking the wrong question. Instead of questioning the faithfulness of God, they should have been asking if they could be forgiven for their faithlessness and worldliness. The clear unbelief and worldly thinking should have landed like a hammer on the exiles. They were thinking about how they were going to make Israel great again when they should have recognized that being "great" was never the answer. That's thinking in the way of the world. It certainly wasn't the answer for Naaman. The world wouldn't be able to heal Naaman. And so it couldn't be the answer for the exiles. God is saying in no uncertain terms that the covenant was never about dominating the nations, being great, being powerful, or being wealthy. It

was about being faithful to God. Do you see the trust in all the things of this world and ourselves in the pride of Naaman? Do you see how everyone seemingly thinks on the worldly plane instead of looking to God for help? That's the big issue the exiles have.

9. **Transition:** And so we need to be careful to understand the meaning of the text to the original audience and to be sure to anchor ourselves in the Gospel. Otherwise we end up hopscotching all over the place, and we end up saying things we shouldn't be saying. But I don't actually want this sermon to be about pride, even though we could legitimately preach on pride from this passage. Rather, I think that the passage is far richer when we look at it from the perspective of covenant. In some ways, I want to treat the pride as a distraction, as a rabbit trail that is valuable, but still a rabbit trail.

10. God's faithfulness to a slave girl

11. So if it's not about pride, what is it about? Well I did say right at the start of the sermon that this sermon is about the faithful of God to His covenant, and the title of the sermon is "Naaman and the Servants". So let's look at the servants, more specifically, let's look at the little slave girl that we find in verse 2.
12. This little girl has been through it. She had the misfortune of being captured on a raid by the Syrians, the same Syrians that Naaman led. It stands to reason that Naaman was in some way responsible for her capture. He either ordered the raid, or he led the raid himself. Either way, it's also likely that this little girl had seen friends and family slaughtered at the hands of the Syrians. These were people she loved, people she adored, people she couldn't imagine life without. And yet here she is, serving Naaman's wife.
13. If you were the little slave girl, what would you be feeling? Rage? Bitterness? Hatred toward Naaman? Hatred toward the God that let this happen to her? Anger. Resentment. The list goes on and on. And all those expected feelings make verse 3 all the more shocking.
- a. *She said to her mistress [that's Naaman's wife], "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*
 - b. Now that's astounding on a number of levels. First, she's quite confident that the prophet of the Lord would heal the man leading the army of Israel's sworn enemy. Second, she's quite confident that the prophet could heal Naaman of his leprosy. That's no small thing as evidenced by the King of Israel's words in verse 7, "*Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends words to me to cure a man of his leprosy.*" We're talking some pretty crazy power that she's got faith in. And then finally, it's utterly astounding that she even relays this information in the first place.
 - i. Remember all that hate? Why in the world would she want to help Naaman? And furthermore, the way that she reveals this information tells us that she actually cared for him and his family. She loved him and **wanted** him to be healed.
 - c. And how does this happen? How did this little girl find it in herself to love her enemies? Short answer, she didn't. God did. God was all that this little girl had left. She could have thought that God had abandoned her, but He had not. He clung to her and did not let her go. Her faith, which could have headed down the road of bitterness, instead freed her from all of that to enable her to live a life of service and

- love to those around her. She wouldn't have been able to do that herself. God had to have worked in her heart to produce a radical forgiveness and concern for her enemies. And it's not just a one-time thing. Every day and every moment, she would have been reminded of all that she had lost and suffered. The temptation toward bitterness and hatred would have been strong, and yet, she acted with an almost incomprehensible grace.
14. That grace would end up leading Naaman to Elisha and to his salvation. Did you notice the change in Naaman after he had been healed? He's no longer Naaman the general, but a servant when he speaks to Elisha. And also, what an amazing confession of faith that comes out of the mouth of a pagan! Verse 15, "*Then he returned to the man of God, and he and all his company, and he came and stood before. And he said, "Behold, I **know** that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant."* But not only does he know the one, true God now, but he understands the implications of that reality on his life. Look with me at verses 17 and 18.
 - a. *Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. ¹⁸ In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter."*
 - b. Naaman hasn't just had his eyes opened to who the LORD is, but he was committed to serving the Lord and living in righteousness. Everything about Naaman changed. He was saved.
 15. And that grace from the little girl and Naaman's conversion/transformation tell us that the covenant that God made with His people is still intact. On the one hand, God is justified in exiling the Israelites. At that point in their history could any of the Israelites have made the same profession of faith that this former pagan Naaman did? The vast majority could **not** because they were ensnared by idol worship. Naaman's conversion is an indictment against the Israelites. Even a gentile, pagan, Syrian could see what the Israelites could not. Thus, the covenantal blessings written out in the law had to come, and the exiles were experiencing the legal consequences of their idolatry. So, the covenant was definitely still in effect, just not in the way that they wanted it to be in effect.
 16. On the other hand, there's a vast amount of hope for the exiles as well. That no name slave girl **is** their hope. She's the one that most closely resembles their situation. They had been plundered and watched their cities and towns destroyed by the invading Assyrian and Babylonian armies. They would have seen the same kinds of suffering that the little girl did. Loved ones lost, being thrust into the life of a slave, and living in a foreign land, surrounded by those who caused their suffering. They would have had the same temptations to hate their captors as she did. And yet, she represented the fact that **the blessings of the covenant were also still in effect.**
 - a. Think about when God chose for Himself a people, when He made his covenant with Abraham. God promised that He would make Abraham's line, the Israelites, a great nation. But it didn't stop there. He would bless those who blessed Abraham's people

- and curse those who dishonored them. That's hard to see in the exile when the nation has been destroyed and those that dishonored them rule over them. But yet, in Abraham, all the families of the earth, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
- b. And that blessing of the nations is absolutely screaming at us from this passage. How are the Syrians and Naaman blessed? Through the faithfulness of this Israelite slave girl. God who has kept the covenant with her has enabled her to fulfill, in a small way, the grand purpose of God's covenant with Abraham.
 - c. The people of God aren't just to be languishing in exile. Rather, they have the privilege of continuing to carry out the great covenant that they have with the Lord. It is through them that the whole world, all the sinful nations, will be blessed. They get to be the Lord's hands and feet, His ambassadors to a lost world.
17. And so the word to the people in exile is one of both rebuke and grace. Their sins are revealed to them, but God is still faithfully with them in the covenant, even though they have done everything to break that same covenant. The call of this passage isn't so much about undoing their pride as it is to seek the things of God, to love the things the Lord loves in the order that He loves them. And at the top of the list are the lost, the Gentiles, the broken, you and me.
18. **Transition:** And we see that ultimately being fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He was the one that would suffer the ultimate exile, and yet still fulfill the terms of the covenant, blessing all the nations with an amazing grace.
19. **The Ultimate Exile – The Cross**
20. You see the little slave girl points to Jesus. Naaman's transformation points to Jesus. Even the exiles who were reading this story point to Jesus. They point to the fact that Jesus too came as an exile. He came from heaven into this foreign land. He didn't come as a king, but as a servant. A slave to the will of His Father. He was ultimately isolated and alone. Everywhere He went, He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. And then, He came to the Cross, where He experienced the ultimate exile, the ultimate suffering, the ultimate loss. His Father had forsaken Him, and all around Him were His enemies, reminders of all that He had lost. And for what? To gain these wretched sinners who were putting Him through all this suffering? Can you hear the little girl's words as Jesus's own?
- a. It was if Jesus said, "Oh if only my beloved were with me, the prophet of the Lord! I would heal them!".
21. And so He made a way for us to be with Him, to be united with them. It was for me that He stayed there on the Cross. In the midst of the worst pain, the worst grief, the worst suffering, Jesus loved us. In the midst of the full measure of God's wrath against all the sin for all of His people being poured out upon Him on the Cross, Jesus loved us. In the midst of taking on the leprosy of sin, becoming sin for us, Jesus loved us.
22. And not by the water of the Jordan are we healed, but by His blood we are washed white as snow. By being united with the Prophet of the Lord, the ultimate prophet, we are healed.
23. **Application/Conclusion: Sojourners in a Foreign Land**
- a. My friends, in Christ, we too get to be exiles. We too get to be sojourners in a foreign land for our citizenship is in heaven. We too get to show an exceeding and abundant

grace to our enemies, loving them as Christ loved us. And so let us consider the words of 1 Peter 2:9-12

- i. *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own passion that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. **Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.***
- b. As people who have been transformed by the grace of God, we are called to walk in the good works that the Lord has prepared for us to do. We are called to do as Naaman does, seeking to serve the Lord and those around us as best as we can. Did you notice that Naaman didn't quit his job? Did you notice that the pagan-ness of his hometown didn't put him off from serving them? Rather, he stepped into the brokenness of his world so that he might serve the one true God by serving his neighbor. My friends, we live in a world with a lot of brokenness. Racial injustice, division, sickness, and suffering abound. We have the joy to point not only to Jesus with our words, but also to serve with our gifts and resources so that they might encounter Christ in us. As a royal priesthood, we are called to bring people to God, that's what priests do. Let us work hard to bless those around us that they might see Jesus living within us.

24. Pray