

## **READY, WILLING AND ABLE!**

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

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**2 Kings 5:1–14**

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen!

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

There's been a joke being circulating around pastor's conferences for a while. It was about a man who had accomplished everything he wanted in his life. He had amassed a great fortune. He had a wonderful family, he had servants, and he had a beautiful home. He had gained social status and even had secured one the nation's most prestige jobs. He had it all. And he was still young and in great shape.

One day he found himself facing St. Peter at the Pearly Gates being asked the question, "What is your name?" As he told Peter a puzzled look fell upon the Saint's face. "But you're not supposed to be here yet". St. Peter called the man's guardian angel and asked for an explanation.

Well the angel explained: "He was out riding his bicycle on the road that led down mountain from his home. He was flying down the road at great speed because he didn't need to slow down for the turns like cars do. As he passed one of the cars a bus was coming. So rather than having the family deal with weeks of suffering and worry I called him up to heaven right away." St. Peter scolded the angel, "he would have missed the bus by riding straight down the mountainside. Thus saving his life and creating a brand new sport called mountain biking, he would have added yet another fortune to current and benefitted many for he is a pious and generous man"

The man was fuming and demanded a meeting with God. Being the high powered executive that he was, Peter gave in to the request. During the meeting God asked what he desired. The man's request was simple, I want to go back to be with my family. God said, "No problem, what else." Well, I want to never die again. God responded once again with, "No problem, but, you will still die physically. But after that you will live forever." Is there's anything else, God asked. The man said, I've spent my whole life gathering a great fortune and it is said you can't take it with you. I want to take it with me. God smile and said, no that saying is true, you can't take it with you. The man pleaded with God, it wasn't my fault that I am up here. There must be some flexibility in the rules. So finally God said, okay you can bring 1 suitcase of wealth with you when you return.

Years later the man showed up to the Pearly Gates carrying his suitcase. St. Peter seemed quite surprised seeing a man carry baggage to heaven. But the man explained how God had this special concession for him. Peter's curiosity got the better of him and so he had to ask, "What's in the bag?" The man opened up the suitcase and it was filled with gold bars. Peter looked puzzled and asked the man, "Why are you carrying paver stones?"

### **II. NAAMAN'S LIFE**

In our Old Testament lesson for today we see someone who could literally relate to that story. Naaman had it all. He had risen to the highest ranking job in the nation of Syria without being royalty. He was the number 2 man in the nation. Only the king held a higher post than he.

He was the steward of the king in all manners concerning, wealth, politics and military. Naaman had his own wealth, a home, a family and slaves. He was set for life. That's the way it looked on the outside. But Naaman had a problem. And although he was in good physical shape so very few would have guessed it, Naaman had leprosy.

Leprosy was a death sentence. People did not survive leprosy in Naaman's day. If you were an Israelite you would have immediately been cast out of the community to live in the area around the cemetery where all unclean things lived and died. You would be forced to call out TOMAI, TOMAI that is unclean, unclean anytime anyone approached. But Naaman wasn't an Israelite. He was a Syrian. He could continue to live in the city until the signs of his conditions became visible to others. But doing so would put his family at risk. Eventually he would have no choice but to leave city and his family. In the Syrian religions leprosy was considered a curse by their gods. And no one wanted to be near a cursed person.

### III. NAAMAN'S HOPE

It's interesting what people willing to do when facing death and disability. I'm sure Naaman had consulted the best physicians of Persia, Babylon and Egypt. But none of them could help. The disease was taking its course. It was only a matter of time. I think of today. Have you ever noticed how many quacks are on T.V. promoting books they claim will heal? Yesterday alone I clicked past 3 colon cleansing commercials, 2 which promoted Old Testament (Ancient) diets, even people like Hugh Downs do commercials on healing and cures. And I thought he died years ago, huh! Have you ever bought a book from one of these sorts? I'll admit it, I have. It was garbage. When people are facing certain death or a chronic condition they'll do just about anything. They'll begin to listen to just about anyone.

Listen to a portion of our text again. 2 Kings 5:2-4 ***"Now 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. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord, were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel."***

See how bad things had gotten for Naaman? He is now even willing to tell the king about his health. He ran the risk of being thrown out of the community by telling the king of his leprosy. But that's what desperation does to us. We begin to look outside of ourselves for solutions. Sometimes that's a good thing. In this case he finds hope in the words from his wife's slave girl and in the actions of a King who loves him.

2 Kings 5:5-6 says ***"And 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. And 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."***

How do I know that the King loved him? Well, a talent of silver is about 75 pounds. The king sent 750 pounds of silver with him or in today's prices \$403,000. He also sent 6000 shekels of gold. Which weighed about 150 pounds or in today market about \$4,132,000. Ten changes of clothing. That was a sign of permanency. Naaman was going nowhere until he was healed. And all the changes of clothing pointed to that fact. To carry all these supplies a good sized caravan must have escorted Naaman like royalty. If the King of Syria wanted to get the King of Israel attention, he had! If a cure could be found, the king of Syria wanted Naaman to have it.

#### IV. NAAMAN'S RECEPTION

The relationship between Israel and Syria was strained at best. Naaman's servant girl wasn't hired through some sort of temp agency. She was abducted in a raid. Syria was ready to invade at any time and Israel knew it. When Naaman arrived it must have looked like some pre-invasion party. When Naaman approached the king of Israel with the letter from his king it looked like a pretense to invade. No one could cure leprosy. It was a fatal condition. The fact that the king of Israel allowed Naaman into his presence must have pointed to the fear of reprisal. Naaman was unclean; the king was a Jew and shouldn't have allowed Naaman to come close. But he did. Notice what 2 Kings 5:7 says: ***"And 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.'"***

The king of Israel is helpless. There is nothing he could do to help Naaman. You see the king of Israel needed to know God as much as Naaman did. So Elisha sent a message to the king. ***"Send the man down here, so that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel"***. In reality what Elisha was saying without embarrassing the king was send the man down here so that you and he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.

That was fine by the king. Pass the buck! So the king sent Naaman and his caravan packing. They traveled to the home of Elisha. What type of reception do you think he got? ***"Elisha sent a messenger out to him, saying, Go wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored."***

#### V. NAAMAN'S PRIDE

Naaman was furious. After all he had traveled days to be here. He was the right hand man of the king of Syria, to send a common courier to tell him what to do, how rude. Naaman wanted the big show; we wanted all the bells and whistles. Verses 11 through 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 leprosy. 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."***

Naaman wanted the miraculous. If Elisha had told him to go kill a lion and drink its blood. He would have done it. If Elisha had told him to climb the highest mountain and sit cross legged for 3 days. He would have done it. If Elisha had required some extraordinary work for him to be cured that would have just been fine. But it was just too easy.

It's finally the servants who convince him. ***"My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean '?"***

#### VI. CLEANSING

***"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."*** Yes it was that easy. God restored Naaman by the washing in the water. You see that day God opened the eyes of Naaman through the cleansing in the water. Verse 15 says

that ***“Naaman 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...”***

The world is a lot like Naaman. It looks for healing and spiritual restoration through all sorts of extraordinary means. But God still uses the simple things, the ordinary things to accomplish the extraordinary. Through the common water in the font combined with God’s promise He forgives sins and creates faith and salvation in you. Through the common bread and wine of the altar when combined with His Word, comes forgiveness of sins and reception of His grace through His very body and blood of Jesus. Through the words of absolution you receive the forgiveness of sins as if Christ Himself were speaking them directly into your ears.

The world and the devil would love to tell you that it is too easy to be true. Or that it is too easy to be of any value. That’s true, it is easy for you. But it wasn’t easy for Jesus. It came at a very high price. A price paid on His (†) cross. For Jesus was ready, willing and able to do what was necessary for you.

For Jesus took your sins and died for them. Jesus took your spiritual death and paid for it. And He has cleansed you from all your sin. For He has forgiven you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit, yes it’s that easy, in Jesus name, Amen and Amen!

*The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. AMEN!*

