

This summer we are discovering how God teaches us so many important things about faith and our relationship with Him through water. Three weeks ago, we looked at the rivers that watered the Garden of Eden and the perfect relationship Adam and Eve lost for all of us when they ate the forbidden fruit. God drove them from the garden. But He went with them with His promise to send a Savior who would crush the head of the serpent who had tempted them to eat the forbidden fruit and restore their holiness and creation's perfection.

Two weeks ago, we saw the faith of Moses and the Israelites put to the test when the Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt and led them into the dry, forbidding wilderness on their way to meet Him at Mount Sinai. He tested their faith by letting them go without water in the wilderness. And they failed the test, grumbling and quarreling against Moses and showing their complete lack of trust in God. Then miraculously God provided water for them through a rock in the wilderness.

This morning we come to our next passage about water. This time it involves a man named Naaman. He was a gentile, a foreigner. The first verse from our text from 2 Kings 5, introduces him this way: "Naaman, 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."

So here is a prominent soldier in the kingdom of Syria. His military skill and leadership had advanced Syria's prosperity. Verse 2 continues, "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."

This little girl is truly one of the unsung heroes of this account. I can only imagine the trauma this young girl experienced watching that raiding band come galloping into her town, then the nightmare of being captured and carried off from her home and made a slave to a foreign woman. She could have been filled with hatred for her captors and delighted to see that her master, Naaman, was struck with incurable leprosy. Or she could have turned her bitterness against God, who had let her be captured and dragged from her home. Listen to her amazing faith in what she said to Naaman's wife in verse 3: "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

What amazing faith, what touching concern for Naaman and his wife. It probably reveals something about the way they had treated this little girl - but even more about the faith the Holy Spirit had created and sustained in her. And

it tells us something about the fame of the prophet Elisha. His name and his works were well known among the people of Israel, including this young girl.

As we might expect, when Naaman heard there was a possible cure for his incurable disease, he immediately leaped into action. Verses 4–5 read, “So Naaman went in and told his lord, ‘Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.’ And the king of Syria said, ‘Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.’”

The relationship between the nations of Syria and Israel was not good. We know that from the simple fact that Syria had sent raiding parties into Israel and captured this young girl. But the Syrian king cared so much about Naaman, he humbled himself to send Naaman to the king of Israel with a plea. Verse 5 continues, “So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.”

This shows us just how prominent and important Naaman was. A great reward was included as payment for this miracle. We read in verses 6–7: “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.’ 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.’”

Very quickly, we learn the state of this Israelite king’s faith. For him, healing leprosy is impossible. He can only conclude the Syrian king wants to start a war and is looking for grounds to justify an invasion. “Cure my servant, or else!” And he knows the strength of the Syrian army. Feeling hopeless to defend his kingdom, he expresses his grief and concern by tearing his clothes. Verse 8 reads: “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.’”

Isn’t it remarkable that the king of Israel didn’t think of Elisha the prophet the minute Naaman came before him? He likely heard of the miracles the Lord God had worked through Elisha His prophet, first assistant and then successor to the famous prophet Elijah. When you compare this Israelite king with the little Israelite girl, what a striking contrast. She has complete faith that Elisha can cure the leper; the king doesn’t believe in God at all. But having no other option, the king listens to Elisha and sends Naaman his way.

You can imagine Naaman's excitement in verses 9–12 as he approached the prophet his servant girl had told him about: "So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. 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.' 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."

Things didn't go the way Naaman expected, and he threw a fit. He was commander of the armies of Syria. His orders & commands were obeyed instantly. He was important! He surely deserved something more than the prophet's messenger coming to him. Elisha should've come down and met him face-to-face and did something amazing. But to have a servant come and tell him to wash himself in the dirty Jordan River? Naaman was insulted. He was ready to go back to Syria in a rage.

You know, that's how many people respond to God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. They expect God will give them a great task to accomplish - a long pilgrimage to a holy place, a difficult ritual to perform for forty days, or a great sacrifice of money, or time, or treasures. But no, God rejects all of that. If you're to be healed of your sin & saved, you must do one thing, repent of your sins and be washed in the water of Baptism.

How many people have rejected Christianity and turned to one of the works-based religions like Islam or Mormonism? "Nothing comes for free. I have to do something for God to overlook the wrong things I have done. I have to earn my place in heaven."

In that same frame of mind, Naaman rejected Elisha's instructions and was ready to leave. But once again, some of his servants step forward to save the day. We read in verse 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?'"

They calmly reasoned with him. If the prophet had directed him to go and do something strenuous and difficult, would he not have done whatever the prophet said if it meant he would be cured of his leprosy? How much more when he was asked to do something as easy as this? And one more time, as we hear in verse 14, Naaman listened to his servants. "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.”

God broke through Naaman’s pride. Naaman humbled himself as a mere creature and submitted to his Creator’s expressed will, and his leprosy was completely cured, and his skin restored.

God used water to do something great for a needy sinner. There was nothing special or magical about the water from the Jordan River. It didn’t contain some mysterious healing property. The water - connected to the Word & command of God - & the faith the Holy Spirit worked in Naaman to go into that river & wash himself as God declared was what healed him.

Many years later, Jesus left His hometown of Nazareth and came to this same river, the Jordan River, and presented Himself to the great prophet John the Baptist. Jesus humbled Himself to obey His Father’s will and be baptized in the waters of the Jordan. When He came up out of that water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. Jesus was anointed and set apart from all the other Jews to be God’s Servant, to go to the cross to suffer for our sins and win complete forgiveness and salvation for all.

Today, Jesus Christ calls us to turn from our sins, our pride, our confidence in our own reasoning, and to trust Him. He joins His powerful Word to common, ordinary water and makes us His own brothers and sisters through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. He washes the sin from us just like He once washed the leprosy from Naaman.

You might think that nothing is free, that since everything comes at a cost Baptism *can’t* be free. And if that’s what you think, you’d be right. The forgiveness Baptism offers *isn’t* free. It came at a *staggering* price. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, went into the water of Baptism and came out carrying your sins and my sins and the sins of the entire world. He carried them all the way to the cross and received God’s punishment for all of our sins. The free benefits Baptism gives us cost Jesus Christ dearly - they demanded His life of perfect obedience and His innocent suffering and death in our place. But since Jesus paid the price, the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation are absolutely free for us - just as the healing from leprosy was absolutely free for Naaman.

And even when Naaman returned with treasures and tried to pay Elisha for his healing, he refused. Why? Because Elisha wanted it to be perfectly clear to Naaman and his servants, and to all the people of Israel that forgiveness, peace, and salvation are impossible for us to earn or merit for ourselves no matter how much time, talent, or treasure we may sacrifice for it. God’s gift of

salvation is free - His Son, Jesus, footed the bill completely. He paid the full price in His life, death, and resurrection.

Today, Jesus Christ again offers you that free and full salvation. Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven. Amen.