

2Kings 5

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

The Lord performs what He does what He decrees 预旨. Where is your God they say? Our God is in the heavens and He does what pleases Him. This morning we are lead again to see the grace and the judgment of God. We see God as the supernaturally powerful one who changes the course of what humanly seems inevitable. Naaman has leprosy 麻风病 and Naaman will die. It is sad and tragic for those who love him. But, “It is what it is” as they say. But in this case the LORD had other plans.

In light of the narrative 叙事 of Kings that spans some 600 or so years the length of this narrative and the detail is telling. The Holy Spirit draws us to that older word: Behold! We need to pay attention. For as Jesus would later comment on this passage, it is at once grace to Naaman, whose name means, “gracious” and judgment upon Israel (and in particular Gehazi).

I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

God Saves Naaman From His Leprosy: 1. The Word Revealed to a Foreigner;

2. The Foreigner Confesses the Word; 3. The Israelite Provokes the Word.

Word Revealed In Aram, or Syria a young girl was serving at Naaman’s house. Naaman was an officer in the army, a ranking official and it seems the King’s confidant¹. He was a man to be reckoned with. Sadly, he also had the incurable terminal disease we call leprosy. We notice that whereas in Israel, leprosy would have meant isolation for Naaman according to the cleanliness laws of Leviticus 13, for the most part he was living a normal life at home and at work. Still it grieved the family and those who loved him that this terrible disease was terminal. It would, as a disease, for many, many years, remain incurable. It was a slow painful and for a man of stature and activity, a humiliating death. Nerves would be attacked and then the fingers and toes would fall off, later limbs and soon dementia 痴呆 would follow. It was however his unalterable reality.

We get the feeling from the narrative that Naaman did not rule his house by fear. Throughout the narrative we get the sense that his servants feel free to talk to him at a fairly equal level. Thus, it seems, he was as his name means, “gracious”.

Now there was this girl, a slave, and exile and a spoil of war that lived in that house. She was there because of the sins of the nation of Israel. Aram was mightier than the Northern Kingdom of Israel and as we have noticed earlier in this series, this was a sign of God’s wrath upon a disobedient Israel. If God was for Israel, Aram would have no hope. But as it was, God allowed Syria to attack and dictate the rules of peace. A young Jewish girl was the casualty and she paid the price and now a covenant child was a slave. We think of the prophetic Word of Moses,

However, if you do not obey the Lord and do not carefully follow all His decrees: Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. (Deuteronomy 28:31-33)

The Lord is in His heavens and He does as He sees fit. Still there is something amazing here. A young girl, a slave, a nothing in the eyes of the world has the courage to speak to the situation. She is sent by God to Naaman’s house to bring the Word of the truth, to be the ambassador 大使 of the good news! It is the way of God! He uses the little, the socially unimportant, the foolish things of the world to bring a message that is

foolishness to the world.² Yet one courageous and faithful slave girl announces the good news of salvation from a deadly malady: “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

She is a slave girl and a foreigner. What can she possibly know about the things of healing and prophets? Yet she knew. Yes she was one more of the 7,000 who had not bent the knee to Baal as God had promised Elijah a decade earlier. She calls to mind the faithfulness of Joseph and Daniel who in their youth and low position were used to hallow the name of the Lord. In faith they made the most of their opportunities. This is the way of God!

It ought also to be inspiration 激励 to us. So often we feel the need to be erudite 博学, intelligent, and theologically astute 机敏 before we will enter into the conversation or speak to others about God. Theology is wonderful and important, God is marvelous and complex, yet the Gospel is simple: God saves sinners through the death of the great Prophet, Jesus Christ. Believe, repent and act and you will be saved. We must call others to call on the name of the Lord. It may seem outrageous and too much for others to believe, yet it is by that Word spoken by the faithful that the Lord draws others into His grace.

The Word was heard and acted upon. Naaman's wife told Naaman who asked the King if he could go to Samaria and a happy and excited King granted letters and permission and in the typical pagan 异教 way gifts were gathered to be given in payment. The word heard was acted upon!

The Word Confessed Naaman was not all that convinced when he finally made it to Elisha's house. Neither was Joram when he heard about it. Joram, paranoid 患妄想狂者 and hopeless fellow that he was, had just signed off on a treaty as loser and now he thought Aram was coming to crush him. Interesting that a little girl in slavery because of the utter failure of this king knows and confesses God and Elisha and the anointed king does not know the anointed prophet at all. He figures this is all some sort of ruse to bring a new defeat.

Interesting as well, that Elisha the man of God as juxtaposed 并列 to the King of Israel hears about and we think the Lord reveals this in terms of the speed of it all. He sends to the King's court for Naaman because God is sending for Naaman. The LORD had sent the girl to send the word. God moved that the second in command in Aram would find hope in the Lord and the king of Israel sits in his hopelessness exposed for the ignorant coward that he is. We see also the power of that Word of hope on Naaman that he unlike Joram acts in hope and seeks out the man of God. The Gentile 外邦人 has come to Israel to be redeemed from his terminal disease. This too is the power of the Almighty.

Finally Naaman had come to the place where healing would happen. The anticipation must have been overwhelming. Now he could get rid of this horrible disease and take up a normal life! As he comes to the house of Elisha, it is Gehazi that he meets. Elisha does not even come out. That is of course because it is not Elisha who will perform the miracle. We have seen throughout the narratives that Elisha often commands and is not necessarily part of the miraculous process. So Naaman is somewhat taken back when he is asked to wash in the Jordan seven times. Rather he turns away in a huff complaining that the man of God did not even come to greet him.

Do you see the Lord who works and deals with the ones that He loves? His ways are not our ways. The servants of Naaman tell him so. Yes, Elisha did not come up and conjure 召唤 up some hocus pocus 哄骗 and some magical rite. There was nothing mysterious or religious about it. Go wash in the Jordan? The Jordan was brown and murky. The Abana and Pharpar rivers in Aram were mountain fed streams, pure clear and beautiful, if for at least symbolic reasons would make more sense. The man who had thus far heeded the words of a little girl and his wife was too proud not to do a simple thing.

But the Lord worked through those servants who apply some logic to the situation. If Elisha had asked him to do some great and marvelous thing he would have done it. If he had to give all of his wealth, or perform some religious ceremony he would have done it. Why not now this simple thing?

This is the way of our God. The simply things He asks are often the hardest for any of us to do. It is our pride and our sense of self that so often gets in the way. For God when deals with us and calls us to He asks only that we believe in the Son. He asks only that believe in the name of Jesus and live a life pleasing to God. Salvation is by grace alone. It is freely given to the faithful. And yet how many have found this so foolish and find many other ways or more elaborate religions or even change Christianity itself. Our pride 骄傲 must be broken down and we must do the simply thing.

Naaman once more shows us that he is a special and kind man. He allows his servants to address him and it is clear that they love him and concerned for him and are willing to speak up. What's more he takes their advice! He washes seven times in the brown and murky water, and behold!!!! Naaman is whiter than snow- he is clean, he skin like a young man. He is healed and he is released from that cursed disease. Faith and activity 信心和行动. Faith and repentance! Faith and redemption. Our God is an awesome God. Our God sits in the heavens and he does as he pleases. A Gentile experiences the goodness and the graciousness of god! That too for us the new truth in Christ. Many if not most here are Gentiles and yet peace has been made between man and God. The leprosy that was our sins has been cleansed, washed in the blood of Jesus! This salvation is by grace alone. It is the truth of new life in Christ! Once lost now we are found, once blind now we see.

It is grace marvelous and expensive from God's part. That washing demanding the blood shedding and the crucifixion of our dear Lord and savior Jesus Christ. But the washing of Naaman points us to that cross. Repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is at hand!

In Luke 4:14-30 we read that Jesus went to his home town in Nazareth and read the Scriptures on the Sabbath in the synagogue. He read from Isaiah 61 about the anointing of the Holy Spirit to preach and bring healing. When Jesus applied it to himself the Jews wondered for Jesus was one of them, Joseph's son. Jesus reminded them that though there were likely many lepers in the days of Elisha it was Naaman the Syria who was healed. Their reaction was to take Jesus to the brow of the hill and throw him over. Jesus simply walked through them and went on his way.

See this story is very much like that of Jonah. Israel like Jonah does not want to hear about the salvation of Jews. In that day the Syrians were enemies. A little Hebrew girl is a slave because this Naaman and his armies pillaged 掠夺 the place. Israel does not want to acknowledge that it is because of their sin that caused this. Nor do they wasn't grace for any but themselves! Jonah could hardly bring the good news of blessings from repentance and was moribund 垂死挣扎 when it was granted.

Israel must be confronted with the coming of the Pentecost era. The Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth and now Naaman will be saved, a people will be saved from every tribe and nation under heaven. Yes that grace is amazing- and it does sound sweet to wretches like us who have been saved by that grace!

We can only imagine Naaman's joy and thanksgiving. He wants to do something and so he heads back to Elisha's house to show him. He needs for Elisha to see it! He wants to give him something. I think we all understand that. But Naaman is a pagan and he needs to be disciplined in the ways of the Lord. Elisha cannot take a gift now because God is revealing that grace is grace! How do you repay God for what He has done for us? How do we repay God for the blessings and the wonder of Christ? We cannot. What we can do is worship though. Naaman understands this and asks that he might take some soil along with him as to provide a sanctuary, a place to pray. Hear Naaman's confession of the Word!

Now I know that in all the world there is no God except in Israel!

Now what are we to make of this? Shouldn't Naaman be sent to Jerusalem and present himself to the priest (Leviticus 13)? But he is a Gentile and an enemy at that. No, Elijah says go in peace and the sense is that there will be forgiveness for Naaman when he bows in the temple of Rimmon. He will not be serving Rimmon, nor will he be sacrificing to the idol gods 偶像神明. God is His God alone. Elisha says, go in peace! There is grace in this as well. God meets Naaman where he is. The LORD will be worshipped in Syria! The Lord will be worshipped in spirit and truth in Syria, whereas in Israel they hardly worship him and when they do they do falsely and in reckless obedience. The Gentile saved by grace goes home in the knowledge of the grace of God. He must have looked forward with joy to telling his wife and the king the good news. Back at home a little girl would be strengthened in her faith.

An Israelite Provokes the Word But the story does not end there sadly. See this grace is too much for Gehazi. Note that he does not understand God's grace as the issue but Elisha's softness. He figures he has chance for a

little treasure and to make something good from the situation. But God has said no! Gehazi does not care and decides to get his anyways. He lies straight faced to Naaman who is vulnerable and so very happy to give some gifts. Gehazi has not only rejected grace but he has now misrepresented God. Like Achan before he took what he was not allowed too and refused to live by grace. Where is Gehazi's joy? Where is his act of worship? Neither through the narrative we see that whenever Gehazi is involved there is weakness and failure for he did not live grace nor by faith in God. He angers God and Elisha brings Gehazi the bad news. Gehazi hides the stuff and again lies. Now he reminds us of Ananias and Sapphira! You have not lied to man but to God. Now Gehazi and all of his descendents will live with the dreaded disease. In fact Gehazi because he lives in Israel will be an outcast- God has excommunicated 逐出教会 him. Grace rejected brings terrible results just as grace embraced brings blessing. The Word believes brings salvation but the Word rejected brings death.

But perhaps worse is that Gehazi has misrepresented God. He has now made it seem that God needed something in return. His selfish act stood in the way of the Word and Israel and we too must see that such demanded punishment. Like Achan who rejected the Word, Gehazi and his generations were condemned. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This is our God. The God of mercy who uses little slave girls to bring the good news of His power to the powers that be in Syria. Yes a little girl, a simple person like any of us is used at any time. We need not be eloquent 雄辩; we simply must walk our talk, make the best of our situation and tell the wonderful story of salvation to those God puts in our lives. This is our God who breaks down stubborn pride and by the Word of Grace brings healing to all who confess the name of His Son. But listen up, take heed and be warned. Gehazi rejected the Word and in time Israel would too and be exiled forever. The Jews of Jesus rejected the Word made flesh and in time Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed.

The Word of Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise then when we first began.

Amen.