

2 Kings 5 // While we were God's enemies

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[0:00] Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy. Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

By all means go, the king of Aram replied. I will send a letter to the king of Israel. So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of clothing.

The letter that he took to the king of Israel read, With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you, so that you may cure him of his leprosy.

[1:19] As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?

Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me. When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message, Why have you torn your robes?

Make the man come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman went with his horses and chariots, and stopped at the door of Elisha's house.

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored, and you will be cleansed.

But Naaman went away angry and said, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot, and cure me of my leprosy.

[2:40] Are not Abano and Parphar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?

So he turned and went off in a rage. Naaman's servants went to him and said, My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?

How much more then when he tells you, wash and be cleansed? So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored, and became clean like that of a young boy.

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel, so please accept a gift from your servant.

The prophet answered, As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.

[3:58] And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. If you will not, said Naaman, please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other God but the Lord.

But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing. When my master enters the temple of women to bow down, and he's leaning on my arm, and I have to bow down there also, when I bow down in the temple of women, may the Lord forgive your servant for this.

Go in peace, Elisha said. After Naaman had traveled some distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought.

As surely as the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him. So Gehazi hurried after Naaman.

When Naaman saw him running towards him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. Is everything all right? He asked. Everything is all right, Gehazi answered.

[5:34] My master sent me to say, Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim, Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.

By all means, take two talents, said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags.

With two sets of clothing, he gave them to two of his servants and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house.

He sent the men away and they left. When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, Where have you been, Gehazi?

Your servant didn't go anywhere, Gehazi answered. But Elisha said to him, Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?

[6:46] Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes or olive groves and vineyards or flocks and herds or male and female slaves?

Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever. Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous.

It had become as white as snow. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks Michael. If you could keep your Bibles open at 2 Kings chapter 5 that would be really helpful.

It's our principle as a church that we want to, what we teach to just be coming from the Bible. So if you have your Bible open at 2 Kings 5 you can just keep following that and you can find an outline on the back of the notice sheet to follow as well.

Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for this portion of your word and we ask that as we turn to it now your spirit will be our teacher, your word will be our guide and your glory will be our supreme concern.

[7:59] For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, one piece of advice I was given when I was a younger Christian from a minister was him saying what we're interested in is trajectories, direction.

You can have someone who's not been at church for very long. They've just been visiting for a few weeks. They don't speak like a Christian. They don't live like a Christian. Maybe they don't look like a Christian, whatever we mean by that.

But they could be on a rapid journey towards being transformed by God. Their heart might be gripped by the goodness of God. And you can meet someone who's been steeped in the Bible their whole life who can come along to a Bible study and they know the answers and they can talk the talk.

But inside, their heart is really set on things in the world and they're drifting away. And knowing that matters when we're working out how we help a friend, that we're not so bothered about background knowledge but we're thinking about their heart and their direction with the choices they make.

And of course, that's really important in how we examine ourselves. as well to be thinking how is my heart towards God compared to how it was six months ago or five years ago.

[9:14] As we continue in our series in 2 Kings, we meet a man who couldn't be further from the things of God on a trajectory to get rescued and transformed. But then we see a religious insider with all kinds of spiritual privilege walking away.

As we look at their journeys, they call us to watch our step. So our first point, the journey of a rank outsider into the light. Naaman starts almost as far away from God as you could be.

Look at verse 1. Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. Now this is the 9th century BC. God's people are a nation state, Israel, living in the promised land.

Aram is an enemy nation. So to be the commander of the army of the king of Aram is to stand against and fight against the people of God.

Naaman is powerful, he's the commander, he's a great man in the sight of his master, we're told in verse 2, he's a valiant soldier. If we see him, we might think, what could faith in the God of the Bible offer a man like that?

[10:21] He's mighty, he's successful, he's wealthy. But already we're reminded that however far someone might seem from God, God is in charge of their life. He is governing over them, he is interested in them.

So in verse 1, we're told that the Lord gave him victories. It's true of the people around us whose popularity or wealth or success might have made them think they've got no need for God, that when

we stand before God it will be clear that everything that we've ever achieved, it was only by God's grace to us.

And in case we think Naaman was a nice man, the kind of good man God might be looking for, in verse 2 we find out he's a human trafficker. Bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and taken captive a young girl from Israel and she is now the servant of Naaman's wife.

So the image in my mind now is of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria kidnapping schoolgirls. Naaman is a rank outsider to receive God's saving grace.

And five steps transform his life. Similar steps to the ones you or I might take in our lives. The first one is he admits he's got a problem and the problem comes at the end of verse 1.

[11:38] He was a valiant soldier but he had leprosy. Leprosy, a skin disease which means it's a problem he can't ignore, it's a social problem in his community, it's conspicuous, it's obvious, it's also a spiritual problem under the laws of the Old Testament which now no longer apply but under those laws if you had a skin condition like that you were spiritually unclean.

And this helps us think about the crucial step that every person has to take to benefit from God's saving grace in their life. So many people around us they believe in God, they believe in the God of the Bible, they believe that he's there but they never move towards him, why?

Because they think there's no need to do that, I've got no problem with God, God's got no problem with me, I'm just living my life, why would God have a problem with that? When all the while when we open the Bible God reveals to us really clearly that in the sight of his eyes of blazing purity all of us are spiritually unclean, we've fallen short, we've not lived in the glorious way he called us to live for his glory out of thankfulness to him.

He says even our finest efforts they're like filthy rags and Naaman admits he's got that problem.

The next step, step two, a compassionate servant brings a word, look at verse three, about the servant girl we've heard about, she said to her mistress, if only my master would see the prophet who's in Samaria he would cure him of his leprosy.

Now just think about her attitude towards him, if you were in her shoes, you've been wrenched away from your family and your village to go and be the slave of this mistress, this wife of a commander and then you find out the man responsible for those raiding armies has a disease, how would you react?

[13:33] Well she has compassion and she points him to the fact there is a savior in Israel, Elisha, and we thought last week about how in the Bible story, Elisha is foreshadowing Jesus here, he is at that time God's appointed saviour and judge, even his name Elisha means God saves, just as Jesus name means God saves.

That's step two and without step two he can't be made clean, she is the linchpin, the messenger, it's a bit like when we had Rico Tice who developed Christianity Explored, the inquirers course, here last year doing some training and he pointed this out with the importance of a girl like this in the life of Naaman, when you think about your friends who are not yet Christians, who is the most important person they know?

It's you, you are the most important person in their life and Rico told the story of going round his street, round to the neighbours near Christmas time, taking them each a Christmas gift with his daughter and they were knocking on the doors and inviting them to the carol service at their church and as they knocked on the door, they were waiting for someone to come to the door, his daughter looking up at him and saying, Dad, this could be the most important conversation they ever have in their life because it's with a Christian inviting them to hear more about the saviour God has given us.

Step three, his pay system gets demolished, verse five, he left taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.

He's got horses and chariots in verse nine, it's this great commotion, it's this great caravan of a wealthy man, a supremely powerful man and he's got these lavish gifts, seven million pounds worth of gold and a whole wardrobe of Armani suits to offer the person who can heal him of his leprosy.

[15:27] Clearly he thinks if you need something from a God, like the God of the Bible, you must get what you pay for. It will work in the same way the world works, you get what you pay for.

And you can picture the absolute exasperation then of the king of Israel when he receives Naaman and this great caravan and a letter from the king of Aram and in verse seven he tears his robes and he says, am I God?

Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? He's trying to pick a quarrel with me. And it's a reminder that wealth and power, they ultimately, they're absolutely no use to you when it comes to questions of death and life.

And all the while in verse eight, these things are not difficult for God at all. So Elisha, God's prophet, he just sends a message to the king to say, send him to me. And when you come to God with your problem, you don't have the means to pay.

You can't, it can't work in a get what you pay for kind of way or we'd all be bankrupt. And when we share the Lord's Supper later, we'll be reminded as we just receive bread and wine, that it's been paid for by the Lord Jesus.

[16 : 39] Then we get to step four, he humbles himself to follow the way. So he goes to Elisha's house. We heard last week about the kind of place Elisha would stay. One place was an upper room that had been built by a Shunammite woman on top of her house.

A humble place and you can imagine this great commotion as the chariots and horses arrive in the village. And he doesn't even come out as though he just keeps on doing the things prophets do, writing at his table.

And he sends out a messenger to meet Naaman, this powerful man. And in verse 10, Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.

And for Naaman, this is a grave insult. He's angry. And I love how specific he is in verse 11. If you have a look at that, about how it should have been for him.

I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. He even sort of adds this idea of washing a river.

[17 : 46] We've got rivers back home by Damascus. What are we doing? Why have we come? And in verse 12, he goes off in a rage. So the barrier between him and being rescued by God is human pride.

It's the barrier people have all around us, holding them back from coming to the cross. The invitation goes out from Jesus, just come to me and your sins will be washed away.

You'll be clean. Come without cost. Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away, Jesus says in John 6, 37. So who comes? It's the needy who come.

And if you're someone who thinks of yourself as an independent person, a successful person, a self-made person, maybe a good person who looks down on people who don't do the things you do, it's very humbling, isn't it, that the ground around the cross is level ground.

Everyone gets made clean by God in exactly the same way. Whatever you've done, whatever you've become, empty-handed we come. And that is a humbling thing.

[18 : 51] Well, thankfully for Naaman, it's his servants who change his mind. So we get to verse 14. He went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him.

And you can imagine him going down and coming back up and he just still has leprosy. And he goes down and he comes back up. And he does that six times and there's no difference. But he does it the seventh time.

And verse 14, his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. Those are the four steps. And really the fifth step is just how it affects him.

Grace transforms him. And it's good to reflect on this because for most of us here today who are already Christians, this is where we want to grow in step five. In being transformed by God's grace. And if we've been drifting in life from God, we need to reflect on steps one to four in our own lives. how God dealt with our biggest problem.

[19 : 52] The people he ordained would come into our life to tell us about his savior and how we were humbled by coming to the cross. And that is the grace that transforms us.

And it transforms Naaman. So it gives him a new mind. The climax of the chapter is not verse 14 where he's cleansed, but verse 15 where he goes back to the man of God, to Elisha.

And look what he says, verse 15. Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. It's a new confession for his mind. There's one God. It's the God of the Bible.

The God of Israel. And then it changes his heart. So verse 17, he asks for earth from Israel that a pair of mules can carry back.

It's a bit like when you have an embassy for a different country and a different land and it's foreign soil. It's his way of saying in my house we will now worship Yahweh, the God of the Bible.

[20 : 49] I'll never worship a false God again. So he's taking the soil back with him to his home. And the direction of his life has changed. And it also gives him a new purpose for his life.

And to see that we're just going to try something here that we don't normally do. If you're here as a guest, this is not a normal practice for St. Sardis. If you don't like it, you can tell me later. I got this from Andrew Satch.

He came here in May and has done some brilliant work on Kings. We're going to learn some Hebrew together. Okay? So let's go. It's on the sheets there. And it brings us back to verse 2.

And the little girl that we met. Do you remember there was this little servant girl, crucial to the story. And in Hebrew, a girl is Nara. Can we all say that? Nara.

And a little girl is Nara Katana. Nara Katana. Well done. I have no idea if that's right. Michael Rida Harris, where is he?

[21 : 47] He can, I don't know. But, well, it's the correct language. I don't know if we're pronouncing it right. But see how similar it is to boy. So the word for boy isn't Nara. It's Naa.

Should we say that? Naa. And for little boy, it's not Nara Katana. It's Naa Katon. Naa Katon. There we are. Okay.

So in verse 2, we met a little girl. She's a Nara Katana who'd been taken captive. And then when we get to verse 15, verse 14, we don't just hear that his leprosy was healed, do we?

We hear, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a Naa Katon. You see what the writer's doing?

He's telling us that now that Naaman has been healed by God and brought to God, he goes back to where he came from to be like the little girl in the land where he was living.

[22 : 50] That he is a servant called to be faithful, called to be a witness. He can now have compassion on the people around him and point them to the Savior he's come to know.

That's his new purpose and it's the purpose God gives us for our lives. As Elisha says in verse 19, go in peace. Just as God has placed us to be servants in the world who live faithfully, often in lowly positions, surrounded by people who are living for other things.

They've turned them into gods. They're in the dark about the true God. And we have the words of saving truth if we have compassion on them. So that all over the world today, God is doing this kind of saving work, bringing outsiders into his wonderful light.

And our church family is a community of people with a story like Naaman's. If you're here and you've not yet received that kind of salvation from Jesus, you've not been made clean by him, you can do that today.

You just have to say sorry and thank you and please to God. Sorry for the ways that I've lived my life that made me unclean in your sight. Thank you that Jesus has come and died for me to make me clean.

[24 : 09] And then please, please by your Holy Spirit, help me to live in a new direction from now on, living to please you. But the chapter doesn't end there because we meet Gehazi and he's on the opposite trajectory.

So our second point is the journey of a religious insider out to the darkness. The first step away from God is that you resent God's grace to outsiders. Look with me at verse 20.

After Naaman had traveled some distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, my master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean.

By not accepting from him what he brought. So Gehazi is as visibly close to God as you could be. In a land that's turned from God, he is the servant of the one faithful prophet of God.

He's right in the inner band, in the inner ring. But what offends him is that God would be gracious to an enemy, to a man who has been as wrong as Naaman.

[25 : 09] And if we ever think like that, we're forgetting how much we needed God's undeserved grace to us. And this can happen to Christians, especially if we've been serving God sacrificially over time.

We can start having the mentality of the older brother in the parable of the lost son because we start thinking to ourselves, well I know I'm a sinner but I'm not like the other people that I'm thinking of because I've been sacrificial now for God.

I've filled the rotors at my church. I've invested in people. I've given my time and my talents for God's purposes. Don't I deserve more from him?

Another way we might see that mentality is when difficulty or hardship come into our lives, if we start to think, how could God have let this happen to me after all I've done for him?

And we've replaced grace with a transaction and we're on a road to resenting God. The second step away from God is to follow your heart. Verse 20, Gehazi says to himself, as surely as the Lord lives, I will run after Naaman and get something from him.

[26:22] He follows his heart's desire which is to get some of Gehazi's wealth before he goes. And the reason I've put it like that, follow your heart, is because all around us the world tells you that is the good thing to do for your life.

Be true to yourself. Follow your heart. And the Bible tells us without the work of the Spirit to give us a new heart, the default mode of our hearts is that we want to run from God.

And following your heart is actually the worst thing you could ever do. Gehazi acts on his heart's sinful desire. The third step from Gehazi is pursue pursue self-interest with great initiative.

So he runs after Gehazi and look what he says in verse 22. Everything is all right. My master sent me to say two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim.

Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing. Well that's a complete lie, isn't it? And it's clever because right now Naaman thinks quite a lot of prophets.

[27:23] So he asks if he can give double what Gehazi is asking for. Then we get the cover up in verse 24. He comes to the hill near home and he takes the silver and the Armani suits and he puts them away where no one will see.

And he sends the servants away so that no one will know. And then he thinks he can get away with it. Verse 25. When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, where have you been Gehazi?

Your servant didn't go anywhere, Gehazi answered. Shocking. And there are people in our church family who are struggling in the Christian life.

They're struggling because of suffering in their lives. They're struggling because of sin that they're battling with. They're struggling because they're just struggling to keep believing in Jesus. But they are open about it.

They're honest. And they can be helped. We can help each other when we bring things into the light. But Gehazi is putting things away in the dark. And I guess the equivalent today would be if we come along to church and we give the impression that we're living as a keen Christian but we're still covering up that in secret where others don't see, our hearts are in the other direction.

[28:38] And we're just not really that bothered. Well, someone does see. That's the next step towards disaster for Gehazi. It's that he forgets that God is watching.

Verse 26. Elisha said to him, Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Gehazi thinks he's got away with it because he forgets that God sees everything.

God is with us all the time. Everywhere we go. In Romans 2.16, he's the God who judges our secrets. And by the end of the chapter, Gehazi and Naaman have swapped places.

Naaman has gone on his way in peace, a faithful servant. Verse 27. Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous. And Elisha asks a chilling question of Gehazi.

It's our fifth step. It's that you miss God's purpose for our times. Look at verse 26. Elisha asks, Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes or olive groves and vineyards or flocks and herds or male and female slaves?

[29:42] In other words, Gehazi, have you failed to see what's really going on here in our times? What God is really doing right now? Have you missed it?

The world is in the dark. It's without God. It's without hope. And God, in his mercy, is opening eyes to who he is as they encounter his faithful servants who point them to God's Savior.

These are not the times to be acquiring things for personal gain. They're times to live faithfully to God and offer God's saving grace freely, without cost, promiscuously.

Those were the times as well for the first hearers of kings in exile in a foreign land. And they're the times we live in today. Times where, if we're Christians, God calls us to have great compassion on even those who would oppose us in Scotland.

Jesus places us in a world surrounded by people who are living for other things and calls us to be faithful and to have compassion. He says, A city on a hill can't be hidden.

[30:50] You are the light of the world. So the chapter leaves us knowing there are two directions that we can be going in, and only two. Two trajectories. The chapter ends with a great crash as Gehazi goes out into the darkness, far from God, unclean, to warn us.

And it's put strikingly, isn't it, at the very end of the chapter that his skin had become as white as snow. That's where we end up if we're moving away from God's Savior. Is that the direction you're drifting in?

Because if you're drifting in that direction, today you can turn back. God's grace covers every mistake we've made. And when we turn back and move towards Jesus, we find that his grace washes our sins away so that it's our souls that end up as white as snow.

Watch your steps. Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your grace to take the outsider and welcome us home, that while we were your enemies, you showed your love in that Jesus died so that you can look on us and count us clean.

By your Spirit, would you move us to be more and more gripped by that kindness that you've shown to us so that our hearts delight in you and your saving grace.

[32:23] And in our lives, we're glad to be faithful to you. And our posture towards others is compassion, longing that they would know our Savior as well.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.