

Exhortation for Sunday 19 April 2009.

Reading 2Kings 5.

Theme: What kind of servants are we?

Dear Brothers and Sisters.

We have come together today among other things to examine ourselves. We do this when we consider the teaching of the word of our God and find there lessons for our lives today. 2 Kings 5 is a chapter filled with many lessons, both positive and negative. We can learn patterns of behaviour we ought to manifest and what we ought not.

2Kings 5 is a chapter about servants. Its lessons are relevant to us because we are called to be servants of the living God, the Almighty creator of heaven and earth. The one we remember today, is himself a wonderful servant pattern for us to follow. In Isaiah 53:11 he was called by God “My righteous servant”. He is surely our supreme example. As a servant he gave all for the benefit of others. The scripture says that he “learned obedience” (Hebrews 5:8) as we all must in our lives of probation. Let us see what we may learn today.

Now in our reading of 2 Kings 5 we meet three servants. There is the captive Israelitish maid (verses 1-4), there is Naaman the Syrian (verses 5-19) and there is Gehazi (verses 20-27), the servant of the prophet of God, Elisha. The Israelitish maid shows us the spirit of Christ in action. Naaman shows us, Gentiles, what is needful to become a true servant of the God of Israel, while Gehazi shows us the spirit a servant ought not show forth.

In the opening verse of the chapter we are introduced to Naaman. We read of his remarkable credentials in this life, a great man, a mighty man of war, held in honour by the king of Syria **BUT** he was a leper. Despite all his earthly fame, power and prowess, he was a man in great personal need as we all are by nature. Leprosy was a terminal disease, a living death. Leprosy is used in scripture as figurative of mortality.

In verse 2 we find that Naaman’s wife has a servant girl, a captive Israelitish maid. She was a young woman of outstanding faith. She let her faith be known to her mistress. In the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:16 “*she let her light shine before men*”. She said “*If only my master were with the prophet in Samaria his leprosy would be taken away*”.

This was a statement of remarkable confidence. She had no precedent in her experience that this would be the case. The Lord comments on this very incident in Luke 4:27 where he says that there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha but to none of them was he sent except Naaman the Syrian. The maid demonstrated, in a wonderful way, the very spirit the Lord desires of his servants when she showed love for her enemies (Matthew 5:44). In her concern for her master who had it seems so mercilessly torn her from her family, perhaps even slaying her parents, she counted him worthy of all honour (1 Timothy 6:1). Yet in all of this great demonstration of faith we are not even told her name. She is a nobody. Without father and without mother. A nameless inconsequential slave girl. However her faith was noted in heaven witnessed by the divine response seen in this chapter and doubtless she stands among those of Hebrews 11:34 who suffered bonds and imprisonment.

So impressive was the strength of her confidence that her master could be healed, that the matter came to the ears of the king of Syria in verse 4. He too was sufficiently persuaded that the idea ought to be followed up and he provided a supportive letter of introduction for Naaman in the first part of verse 5.

In the last half of verse 5 we see that Naaman took a large gift with him. In this we see the truth of the Lord's words "what will a man give in exchange for his life". People generally will give a great sum in order to save or extend their life. Life is very precious and people will do all kinds of things to maintain it but the real question is will they submit to God's requirements that they might be saved? This was something Naaman was to come to learn.

In verse 6 Naaman brings his letter to the king of Israel. In verse 7 we see that though the king of Syria saw hope in the prophet in Israel, the king of Israel was oblivious as to what should be done. He rent his clothes signaling that he had absolutely no answer. He was powerless to help. Men truly have no answer to the problem of mortality. To God alone we must turn.

So it is in verse 8 that Elisha, the prophet of God, whose name means "the salvation of God," made known to the king that there was a way forward. All was not lost. He strongly chided the king of Israel who ought to have known there was a prophet of God in Israel when he said that Naaman would recognize this. In all of this God worked to bring an outcome in line with the young maid's faith.

The chapter now focuses on Naaman as he comes to Elisha's home with all of his grand entourage. He is affronted when a mere messenger from the prophet advises him to go wash in the Jordan seven times and he would be clean. This instruction may reflect that under the law of Moses, when a leper was cleansed he was to be sprinkled with water seven times (Leviticus 14:7).

In verse 11 Naaman had his own preconceived ideas as to how he should be saved. But God's ways are never man's ways and if Naaman was to become a servant of the one true God and gain the wonderful blessing of being cleansed, he had to learn the important lesson that one must believe that God's way is the only way and it is right! Mankind must needs learn to submit to him and his teaching. The Bible reminds us in many places that it is vital that we take strict heed to God's word.

In Hebrews 12:25 See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!

In 1 Corinthians 1:20-21 Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

The clear lesson for us is to listen carefully to God's way and do all we can to humbly submit to it. This is the way to become a servant of the living God, our Father in heaven.

Back in 2 Kings 5 in verses 11 to 13 we see how Naaman struggled with the word of God. He struggled with his own pride when he suggested there were better rivers in Damascus. At first he was angry and unsubmitive but in the end he came to see the good sense of simply accepting what God said through Elijah.

In our lives in the Truth we go on learning this same lesson. Our natural way of thinking ought not take supremacy over the ways of our God. We must come to be men and women who trust in him and not ourselves.

Naaman eventually followed the directive of the prophet of God. He journeyed the 30 km to the Jordan and after immersing himself seven times in the river he was cleansed. The record says that his flesh became as that of a young child. This was a wonderful healing. Now Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* So it is if we wish, like Naaman, to receive God's blessings and become God's servants then we need to become childlike in our trust towards him.

Like Naaman, we in our baptism have received a wonderful cleansing. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Titus 2:14 *He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good works.*

Following his healing, Naaman returned to Elisha near Samaria and gave praise to the God of Israel. He went on to acknowledge he had become a servant at the end of verse 15, a servant who needed ongoing pardon in verse 18. Becoming a servant of God means accepting we are unable to save ourselves. We are dependant on another. We've come together to remember that today.

It is interesting to reflect on what is a very similar incident in the life of Christ when he healed a number of lepers in Luke 17:12-17. We notice that one of those who were healed returned to Jesus to praise God and that he was a Samaritan, a foreigner, a Gentile. It is really just like that healed leper and like Naaman, that we Gentiles come together today to praise our God in thankfulness for the cleansing from sin we have received in Jesus Christ. This should be our spirit here. We come with deep awareness of and gratitude for the great blessing we have freely received in the forgiveness of sins through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 2 Kings 5:20 we meet the third servant type in this chapter, Gehazi, Elisha's servant. This young male servant (it is the masculine form of the word used of the maid in verse 2) had a view that the Truth should bring some personal material benefits to those who share its message with others. This was not the view of the maid earlier in the chapter nor was it Elisha's way who refused Naaman's gifts in verse 16. Gehazi sought money and clothing from Naaman for his own personal gain. The Lord was clear in instructing his servants in Matthew 10:8 when he said *You have received without payment, give without payment.* The Apostle Paul followed the same principle. In Acts 20:33 he said to the elders of Ephesus *I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.* So today the true servants of God proclaim the gospel without charge and for no material advantage.

In the record of 2Kings 5:25-27 the time finally came for Gehazi to give an account of himself. Like us he faced a day of judgement. The thoughts and plans he had with the wealth obtained from Naaman are revealed in verse 26 *Is this a time to accept clothing, olive orchards, and vineyards, sheep and oxen and male and female slaves?* As with Gehazi whose motives were known to Elisha by God's revelation, so in the day of judgement our motives will be known to our judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing will then be hidden. Like Gehazi, *All of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil 2 Corinthians 5:10.* Gehazi in the record of 2 Kings was smitten with leprosy. It was as if he was condemned at the judgement seat to death. He is set forward in the record as a servant unworthy of the blessings of salvation.

Let us examine ourselves today. Let us ask ourselves what kind of servant are we? Are we in the Truth so as to gain materially in this life or are we rather servants having within us the humble spirit of the

words of the Lord in Luke 17:10 *So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done!"*

We have become God's servants, purchased by the precious blood of Christ. Let us today remember this great work and remind ourselves to be submissive servants always to his word. Let us now focus on the great servant, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember his selfless service for us.

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