



Naaman and Gehazi

*A Sermon preached by George Müller at Bethesda Chapel, Great George Street,
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2 Kings v

A great man was Naaman, a very great man, and not only so, but a very rich man, as we shall presently see by the illustration we have here. "But he was a leper." O, how frequently does the Lord act in this way, that with all the glory and honour in connection with great standing in the world, amid the admiration of the world, there is some trial, some affliction, some special trial, or some special affliction associated. Thus it was here. This man was the chief captain of the mighty host of the King of Syria. God had greatly blessed him in that position, for through his instrumentality victory, great victory, had been gained. Personally, also he was "a mighty man in valour." "But he was a leper."

Now, naturally, the desire under such circumstances was that there might be found a remedy for the disease; but it was not to be had. Yea, notwithstanding all that medical skill has been able to accomplish in these hundreds of years, and thousands of years, there never yet has been found a remedy for leprosy. It has been sought after, continually sought after, but without avail. Now, as I stated, Naaman would say, "O, I wish I could get rid of this leprosy;" and at last he did get rid of it. But this very leprosy was the means of his conversion - he would never have got into contact with the prophet in Samaria had it not been for the leprosy. And thus God in our own case, again and again, allows a trial, a great trial, a very heavy trial, in order to bestow on us great blessing. But for the leprosy, speaking after the manner of men, the salvation of his soul never would have come! God, however, overruled all this to the blessing of his soul, and thus God overrules again and again in our own case, so that the greatest trials turn out the greatest blessings.

Here I set my own case, and refer to my own experience, in a long Christian life. I have never passed through a single trial (and I have had hundreds of them), but invariably it has turned out a blessing to me; and I have found that my greatest trials and my greatest difficulties have become my greatest blessings in the end! I mention this particularly for the comfort and encouragement of young believers; to let God work as He wills. A little maid, a young girl, is here used by the Lord to bring about a great work. God is a wonder-working God! He has ten times ten thousand different ways of working, but He always does His work and always manages things to turn out to the glory of His Name!

Who would have thought that this poor little maid, who was taken captive by the Syrians, would be the instrument in bringing about the restoration of the chief captain of the host of Syria, and, more than this, to bring about the salvation of his soul? The prophet could not do it of himself; but the prophet was to be a further instrument in bringing about the restoration, by the power of God Almighty! "And she (the maid) said unto her mistress, 'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy'". Now this might have been said, and no notice taken of it, or, if there had been one willing to take notice, yet he might not have been in the right quarter to hear; but to bring about real blessing, we read, "One went in, and told his lord," that is, her master, the chief captain of the host, was informed, "Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the King of Syria said, 'Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the King of Israel;' and he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousands pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment."

He considered that as the blessing sought after was so great, he must take an immense present to give to the prophet. It was a matter of such exceeding great importance to be restored to health, to have the leprosy removed. Now here we see, what I stated before, that Naaman was not only a great leader, a great soldier, a might captain, and personally of great valour, but he was, in addition to this, an exceedingly rich man. In the first place, as a fee for restoration, he took ten talents of silver. That means, of our money, £3,422, for the Jewish talent was equal to £342 3s 9d. Then he was not merely content with ten talents of silver, but took also six thousand pieces of gold. In the Hebrew what is called here a piece of gold represents considerably more than a pound sterling; therefore, these six thousand pieces of gold made about £10,000 more. In all about £13,422 was

the amount he took as a fee to the prophet for recovering him from his leprosy. This shows how immensely rich he was! Ten changes of raiment, also, of the value no doubt of not a few pounds, were included in the gift.

“And he brought the letter to the King of Israel, saying, ‘Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.’ And it came to pass, when the King of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes and said, ‘Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.’” The King of Syria, of course, understanding nothing of the miraculous manner in which the prophet might restore the leper of his leprosy, thought it was simply a matter of power that was to be exercised, and all he had to do was to give a letter of commendation to his chief captain Naaman, and that then the matter would be settled by the King of Israel. But when the King of Israel read the letter he was altogether astonished to receive such a communication, and considered that as it was quite out of his power to do the thing asked, the letter had been written to seek an occasion against him to begin a war.

“And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the King of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the King, saying ‘Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.’” It was to Elisha that the little Jewish maid had referred. “So Naaman came with his horses, and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.” He did not go in. It was beyond him, in his pride and high-mindedness, such a great man as he was. He remained quiet in his chariot, and expected that the prophet would come out to him and cure him there. “And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.’ But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, ‘Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.’”

This passage is exceedingly instructive to every one of us. “I thought he would do so and so.” He laid down a rule how the prophet should act. And thus are we continually in danger, when we read statements in the Word of God which do not agree with our preconceived notions, saying, “How can this be?” “How is this possible?” “I think so and so about it.” “I think it ought to have been thus stated.” Just acting like this Naaman, when he said, “Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place” (move his hand up and down over the place, that is the idea), “and recover the leper.” O, let us ask God to keep us from such a spirit as Naaman manifested in this case.

But then he goes further, “Are not Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.” Now, in the next verse, we see how much wiser his servants were than their master. “And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, ‘My father,’”. He was not literally their father, but this was an honourable way of addressing him. “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?” If, for instance, he had said, “Run a thousand miles time after time,” he would not have considered it anything too much. Or if he had said, “Beat thyself a thousand times for five minutes each time, very severely,” he would not have considered it too great a thing. But because it was such a very little thing, he despised it. Here we find the wisdom of the servant above the wisdom of the master. “How much rather then, when he saith to thee, ‘Wash and be clean?’” Such a very little thing.

Well, this speech of the servants had an effect on him. Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” Now, it is a very remarkable thing that in the oldest translation of the Old Testament, called as many of you know already, the Septuagint, which is written in Greek, the passage is, “He baptised himself seven times in Jordan,” bringing before us the meaning of baptising. “And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

Now, see how the man instantaneously is completely altered. “And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him. “Not now remaining seated in his chariot, in his pride and high-mindedness, as the chief captain of the host of the King of Syria; but, as a humble servant, standing before the prophet. “And he said, ‘Behold, now I know that there is no God, in all the earth, but in Israel; now, therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.’” He had now come to the knowledge of the true and living God. He had been an idolator before, nothing but an idolator, and an idolator all his life. But now, through the instrumentality of the miracle which had been wrought on him, in restoring him of his leprosy, curing him completely, he is an altered man altogether.

“Take a blessing of thy servant.” That means, “Now, take all this silver and gold which I have brought to thee, and these ten changes of raiment; take all this.” That is what he meant when he said, “I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant,” for he had brought this enormous sum of money as a reward for curing him of his leprosy. Now, see how the prophet acts. But he said, “As the Lord liveth before Whom I stand” (“As Jehovah liveth, Whose servant I am,” that is the meaning of the words, “Before Whom I stand”), “I will receive none.” This prophet sought the glory of God. If he had taken the vast sum of money offered, it would have been considered that he wrought miracles for the purpose of obtaining money. But that was altogether far from this holy man’s purpose. All was done to the glory of God. “And he urged him to take; but he refused.” He would not take one small silver coin as a recompense. Not one single change of raiment. He took nothing whatever! The glory of God was dearer to his heart than all the immense sum of gold and silver which Naaman brought to give him.

“And Naaman said, ‘Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth? For thy servant will thenceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.’” See how complete the change was! Without a word being said by the prophet to him, he had obtained from God enough light at once to see that he could not remain any longer an idolator. As to his worship, there must be a complete alteration in his whole life. He saw that the worship in which he had been engaged up to that time was altogether contrary to the mind of God, that it was idolatry, and hateful to Him; that he had been worshipping devils, instead of the true and living God.

He desired instantaneously to become altogether different; and without a single word having been spoken to him on the subject, he considered that now he had to alter all this. He must bring his offering to God, and he conceived that there was no better altar to be obtained than one made of the earth of the country of Israel. For this reason, he desired “two mules’ burden of earth.” See in what a brief time God can work real, true conversion in the hearts of persons! And to make this practical we are to look upon our unconverted parents, or unconverted children, or unconverted wives or husbands, however far from God they may be now, and remember how it is in the power of God very, very quickly, in a brief moment, to change their hearts completely. Such a portion as this tells us how readily God can alter things. There is Paul’s conversion before us. The voice from heaven, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” instantly brought about a complete change in the heart of this persecutor of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is Manasseh’s case: a most fearfully wicked one. We have not an instance, in Holy Scripture, of one more abominable and more wicked than this Manasseh was. But the Almighty imposed a terrible judgment on him, with the result that he was brought to the knowledge of the true living God, and became an entirely altered person. This abominable wretch, this most awful sinner of sinners!

See what God can do. The man is completely altered. He who had made Jerusalem almost to swim in blood, on account of the numberless innocent persons whom he had murdered. An exceeding encouragement this is, and it brings before us the exhortation under no circumstances to give up prayer, but continually to look at the power of God, in His love, to listen to our supplications.

“And Naaman said, ‘Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth unto the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.’” A remark that which shows us the enlightenment given to

Naaman. He reasoned, "I am going back to Damascus, and when there, I, as the chief captain of the host of the King of Syria, shall have to accompany my master when he worships in the house of the idol Rimmon. My master will expect that when he bows before Rimmon, I bow too; and what will become of me if I bow not down, as my master the king does?" Therefore, he brings this before the prophet.

Now, naturally, one might have expected that the prophet would say, "O, Naaman, this would be very wicked of you; thou must rather give up thy position as chief captain than bow down before this idol. Thou wilt dishonour God, the true and living God, in doing so!" But what does the prophet say? "And he said unto him, 'Go in peace'". That means, before Naaman could get to his master's, the Lord would enlighten him more and more; for he had shown already how in these few hours after his conversion, he had obtained such an exceeding great amount of knowledge that he could no longer carry on his idol worship as before, and, therefore, wanted another altar altogether, and would on this account take some of the earth away out of the land of Israel, in order to carry on a completely different worship from what he had been engaged in before. Therefore, the prophet considered, "Let him alone; the Holy Spirit will instruct him further and further, for he has given proof already how greatly He has advanced him since he dipped himself and washed himself in Jordan."

It was on this account that the prophet said, "Go in peace." Not that he would countenance idolatry, but that at present he was too weak to be fully enlightened about everything. Just such a case as we find in the Gospels. The Lord Jesus Christ had many things more to say to his disciples, but they could not bear them, and, therefore, He did not speak, further and further to them. For this very reason, the prophet said nothing, but left it to the power of the Spirit of God, not merely to enlighten, but to strengthen him, for what he had to do. And we have the fullest reason to believe that Naaman, on whom the king had leaned in going to the house of Rimmon, no longer proceeded as he had before.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said 'Behold, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought, but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him and take somewhat of him.' So Gehazi followed after Naaman, and when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, 'Is all well?'; and he said, 'All is well; my master hath sent me, saying, 'Behold, even now, there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets, give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.'" A complete falsehood, a fabrication of the whole, in order that he might get money for himself. And he did get the money for himself; but the lies he had uttered brought a most horrible judgment.

"And Naaman said, 'Be content; take two talents.' and he urged him and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him." Naaman was ready at once to do what he was asked by giving two talents – which, of our money, is £684 8s – besides two changes of garments; and it was a heavy load for two servants to carry. "And they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower" – rather to the elevation of the hill, Samaria being built on a hill, which he had come down in order to get to Naaman – "he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house; and he let the men go, and they departed." Having got the money, he put it away in some secret place in the house to hide it. "But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, 'Whence cometh thou, Gehazi?' And he said, 'Thy servant went no whither.'" Ready to utter lie after lie. "And he said unto him, "Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?"

"O, Gehazi, thou has not cared in the least about the honour of Jehovah!" We imagine the prophet saying, "I refused what was offered to me, and would take nothing whatever, in order that God might be glorified by my declining to accept a recompense for restoring him of his leprosy; and thou hast uttered lies, thou hast taken this money contrary to the mind of God. This is no time to receive money under such circumstances; it is no time to receive a profit, to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants, as thou are looking after, and craving to obtain, by the money which thou, through lies, hast now obtained."

“The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman, shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.” The ordinary way in which God acts is that He does not, under like circumstances, bestow such terrible affliction, in the way of chastisement, on those who have been as guilty as this Gehazi was, but this judgment is to bring before us how painful sin is to God, and how in the end He will visit wickedness upon those who offend Him. And this particularly reminds us of the fact, since all of us more or less are sinners, though we may not have been guilty of such sins as Gehazi was, that we need the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to make us clean from our sins.

Therefore, the solemn question occurs in reference to everyone of us, “Have we obtained this atonement for ourselves? Have we individually been really and truly cleansed from our sins, through faith in the Lord Jesus, so that the blood of Christ becomes our atonement, to make us clean from all our numberless transgressions?” How do we stand before God regarding our sins? O, what will become of us if for one single sin of which we have been guilty, we have to suffer! For every one of our numberless transgressions we need the blood of Christ to make us clean; and if we are standing before God on the ground of our own goodness, merits and worthiness, it would be certain to be our ruin for ever. Every one of us, the very best among us, needs a Saviour. And trusting in Him, depending on Him, the greatest sinner need not despair, for there is power in the blood of Christ to make all clean from their sins.

Now, then, let us remember how in Naaman’s case, an exceeding great trial led to an exceeding great blessing, even the salvation of his soul. And though we may be saved already by having come to Christ, and therefore, though in this sense the blessing may not be so great as in the case of Naaman, this is certain: that God intends by every trial with which He visits us to bring a blessing in the end. Thus invariably I have found it.

Then let us remember how much a little maid may accomplish; how even a little maid may witness for God, and be His instrument in bringing about a great blessing. Then let us further remember, in regard to the Holy Scriptures, that we have never to reason as Naaman did, “I thought,” “I thought.” It is not what we think, but what God thinks. God declares the truth, and our business is to accept it as He declares it. We have not to say, “O, I thought He would do so and so!” Let us not reason about the Word of God as if we knew better than God. He knows; and we have to learn. God is infinitely wise, and we are extremely ignorant. We have, therefore, to submit to what He says at all times, and under all circumstances.

Then, lastly, let the example of Gehazi be a warning to us. Though God does not in every case visit sin as He did here in the case of Gehazi; at the last He will have the account settled regarding our sins, and woe, woe, woe, unto us, if we are found standing on the ground of our own merit and worthiness, instead of hiding ourselves in Christ. The work must be His. Depending entirely upon His atoning work, knowing nothing in the matter of salvation but Christ, and from first to last, all, all, will be well throughout eternity.



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