

Welcome and intimations

Call to worship

Psalm 147 verse 1

Hymn: CH4 124 "Praise to the Lord..."

Prayer

Hymn: CH4 194 "This is the day..."

Readings: OT: 2 Kings 5: 1 to 14

NT Gospel of Mark 1: 40 to 45

Hymn: CH4 458 "At the name of Jesus..."

SERMON

Offering and Dedication

Hymn: CH4 202 "Stand up and bless the Lord..."

Prayer of Intercession

Hymn: CH4 557 "O love that will not let me go..."

Blessing

Sermon

Today's reading from the book of Kings is focused around Naaman. In his day and in his country he was a great man. He was held in high esteem by his master the king of Aram and was clearly a man of great importance as a commander in the king's armies.

It is little wonder he was held in such high regard as we can see from the text he was a successful leader of the king's armies; Having many victories over his foes. As we read on in the passage we find that neither Naaman nor his master, who was king in Syria at the time,

served the one true living God, yet we are told the reason for his success as a leader was because God had given him many victories. Whatever his reasons God had seen fit to allow or enable Naaman to be successful over the armies of Israel and no doubt over many others at this time.

Despite all his success however Naaman suffers from an affliction, he suffers from leprosy, a disease we are told in the bible notes and other books dealing with the history of the times that often covered a number of different skin conditions which clearly were not curable by the physicians of the day. Had they been then one in as important a position as Naaman and one held in such high regard by his king would no doubt have been able to avail himself of such a cure. Indeed I'm sure his king would have insisted on him being treated.

But as we read it is something he is living with, a daily blight upon him even if it may not be life threatening.

As was common at the time the armies of Aram when they raided the lands of their enemies took back, as part of their plunder, captives to be servants in their homes and on their lands.

One such captive was taken to the house of Naaman, she was a young Israelite girl and she was given to Naaman's wife to be a servant to her.

I dare say this young girl may have been treated very well by her mistress but whether she was or not we have here someone who has been removed from her family by a raiding party. No doubt some of her close family have been killed or injured in the struggle that led to her capture and I'm sure their crops have been plundered. Yet here we see this young girl offering help to the master of this house

through his wife. She knew of someone who would be able to cure him and she did not withhold the information.

She could easily have ignored the situation or even gloated over the knowledge she had while keeping it to herself, a kind of revenge in her own mind, for what they had done to her and her people. But she did not she told her mistress that she knew there was a prophet in Samaria who could cure her master.

The actions of this young girl are as clear an example of what we would call Christian behaviour as we can see anywhere in scripture and would be no doubt highlighted in the press today if we encountered it as unusual behaviour. You can see the headline young captive enables captor to be cured of debilitating disease.

It is indeed a very challenging example of displaying the attitude Jesus called for from us when he said

[Luke 6:27 "... Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,](#)

And I am sure many of us would agree that is all too often easier said than done.

Naaman seems to have no hesitation in believing the girl. Maybe it is her innocence that convinces him, maybe it is the evidence he has seen in other ways of what the prophets of the God of Israel can do; whatever it is he has no hesitation in going to his king and asking permission to seek his cure.

King Aram is glad to see this opportunity for his respected commander and willingly sends him off together with a letter to the king of Israel asking him to cure Naaman of his leprosy. Maybe asking him is the wrong word for the king of Israel certainly saw it as an attempt to pick a fight basically. He saw it as an excuse by Aram to go to war against him and he was afraid.

Obviously he realised that such miracles were things that only God could command and so he is distraught and tears his robes in anguish. For some reason he is either unaware of or does not think of God's prophet Elisha and what he can do in God's service for he does not as we might have expected seek his counsel and bring this dilemma to his attention.

Though he has not been asked when he becomes aware of what has happened Elisha sends word to the king asking him to send Naaman to him. There he will see the power of God in action. The king cannot display such great power but there is one who can and that is God's faithful servant Elisha. There is someone in Israel who knows and trusts in God.

Naaman then turns up at the door of the prophet with his entire entourage as befitted someone in his position as a great commander of the King of Aram's armies. Not only does he have many men and chariots he has also brought with him a great gift of money and fine material for the one who will cure him of his leprosy.

And so he waits outside Elisha's house for the prophet to come out and attend him as would be the norm. but Elisha does not come out he does not attend this man as though he were one of great importance nor does he come out to glorify and honour himself by any great display of healing power. Instead he sends a servant out to tell the commander what he must do in order to be cured of his leprosy.

For Naaman there are two things going on here first he needs to realise it is not his great status that has brought him to this point he needs to realise that it is the humble actions of a servant of God and

the loving act of an almighty God not a response to status and power. In other words Naaman needs to learn to be humble.

And of course he must realise that it is God who cures him, it is the God of Israel no physician with great skills and no magician performing mystical acts. And so God lets him wait outside.

The servant passes on Elisha's message to Naaman "go wash seven times in the river Jordan and you will be clean".

But Naaman is unhappy with this cure. It is not pleasing to him. At the very least he expected the prophet to come to meet him to stand before him and to perform some mighty ritual that would cleanse a man in his position in a befitting way. He wasn't happy with the way God was going about things and so he storms off in a huff. He is angry and he lets everyone know about it. Not only is this an insulting way to treat him but he is asked to bathe in the river Jordan a river he clearly sees as not worthy of his body and not a patch on the great rivers at home.

How easy it is to be like Naaman, to react with indignation when God asks us to do something in his service, something we see as beneath our status in the church community or God calls on us to be humble in the eyes of others who we regard as beneath us. Forgetting or not recognising, as Naaman does here, what we read in Rom 8:28 that... [in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.](#)

What this passage and this incident teaches Naaman and us is that it is not about status it is not about wealth it is not about might it is not about our own view of self it is not about elaborate ritual or fancy potions. What it is about and what is required is faith and obedience; a trust that what is being offered to us, what is being asked of us by God, is genuine and can be delivered by the one who offers it.

In his case what Naaman should remember or what he should realise and recognise is - the healing is not the gift of the prophet nor the king of Israel the healing is not bought and paid for by his wealth nor his accomplishments. The healing is the gift of almighty God, offered through his faithful servant, a free gift given not under duress nor out of fear but simply available in love from a God whose greatest desire is to have all people turn to him for true and ultimate healing.

A gift to one in need because they were in need and because they sought help where it could be found.

It can be so easy for us to get fixed in our mind an image of how things should go. Of what we expect to happen when we approach God seeking help, seeking guidance seeking healing we expect some kind of dramatic response; It just doesn't seem enough to hear him say your sins are forgiven ... go and sin no more. Or as Rom 10:9 tells us

[if you confess with your mouth , "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.](#)

Somehow we want something more dramatic something we can claim to have done but all God wants is to see a heart that is open to him a life that recognises its need of forgiveness and wishes to find it and accept it in Jesus Christ his only begotten son.

Fortunately for Naaman he had true and faithful servants who could see things more clearly. They could look at what was happening and say, with honest reflection, what's wrong with being asked to do something so simple and straightforward?

Had you been asked to do the spectacular something demanding something dramatic you wouldn't have blinked and eye. You would have carried it out without hesitation. Surely then, since you came to the prophet in expectation, you should be glad the cure is so straight forward; Indeed is it not even more appealing when all he says is go wash and be cleansed.

How great to have such loyal companions who are bold confident and loving enough to say to you effectively don't be such a fool don't let your pride and self-importance get in the way do as you have been asked and feel God's love enfold you and cleanse you.

Naaman relented and he accepted what God asked of him obeyed his command to wash in the Jordan and was cleansed just as he had been told by the prophet. His body was restored to full natural health unblemished and pure as in his youth.

But his reward goes beyond the physical as he recognised the truth and goes back to Elisha confessing his understanding that there is but one true living God in all creation and that is the God of Israel. So grateful is he that he tries to give Elisha a gift but Elisha refuses. It is God who has healed Naaman and he has asked for nothing from him so Elisha accepts no gift. But Naaman reveals the extent of his new faith when he asks to take earth back with him as he no longer wishes to make sacrifices to any other God.

For Naaman this has been a wonderful learning experience and a revelation of the truth that has changed his heart forever an example that shows us quite clearly that the Lord spoke into the hearts of mankind long before the time of Jesus on this earth in a way that revealed his forgiving love to Jews and gentiles alike.

Naaman has learned his lesson and as he humbles himself in God's presence he receives the gift of forgiveness only God can give.

In this story we may see a lesson for us also...

Whether it is in being loving to those whom we might be expected to hate or despise,

Whether it is helping someone else to see what they are being asked to do is God's will

Whether it is recognising our need to be humble in God's service

Or recognising how easy God makes it for us to receive his forgiveness and his cleansing power upon our life through Jesus Christ

Whatever it is? May God help you to understand it as you reflect on his Holy Word...

Amen.