

There is a story in the Old Testament that I would like us to take a good look at today. Our story is found in 2nd Kings the fifth chapter, please turn there with me. Within this account of history written by Jeremiah the prophet, is a story filled with rich characters who all have a tale of their own.

If this lesson had a title it would be; "There is a prophet in Israel"; the story of Naaman's faith. It is the story of Naaman; the commander of the Syrian army. The main characters I'd like us to focus on are; Naaman, a young slave girl from Israel, Elisha the prophet of God, and his servant Gehazi.

A lot can be derived and learned from what is written about these characters that reveal their true nature. Let's read the story through and then we'll examine each person and some of the lessons surrounding them that can help us in our lives.

2 Kings 5:1-27 (RSV)

¹ Na'aman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

² Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Na'aman's wife.

³ She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Sama'ria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ So Na'aman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel."

⁵ And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments.

⁶ And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Na'aman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

⁷ And when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

⁸ But when Eli'sha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."

⁹ So Na'aman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the door of Eli'sha's house.

¹⁰ And Eli'sha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

¹¹ But Na'aman was angry, and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that 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 place, and cure the leper.

¹² Are not Aba'na and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

¹³ But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant."

¹⁶ But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

¹⁷ Then Na'aman said, "If not, I pray you, let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.

¹⁸ In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter."

¹⁹ He said to him, "Go in peace." But when Na'aman had gone from him a short distance,

²⁰ Geha'zi, the servant of Eli'sha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Na'aman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him, and get something from him."

²¹ So Geha'zi followed Na'aman. And when Na'aman saw some one running after him, he alighted from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?"

²² And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, `There have just now come to me from the hill country of E'phraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; pray, give them a talent of silver and two festal garments.'"

²³ And Na'aman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they carried them before Geha'zi.

²⁴ And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and put them in the house; and he sent the men away, and they departed.

²⁵ He went in, and stood before his master, and Eli'sha said to him, "Where have you been, Geha'zi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere."

²⁶ But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, menservants and maidservants?"

²⁷ Therefore the leprosy of Na'aman shall cleave to you, and to your descendants for ever." So he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

* What a great chapter in the bible. Let's discuss the first character we're introduced to; Naaman.

This is a man of high position; he is a commander in the Syrian army. Some versions have the name of the country Aram, it is one and the same as Syria. Being a Syrian makes him an enemy of Israel, because they were constantly in battles with Israel at the time. That also makes him a gentile who may have worshiped the local foreign gods of his country.

Naaman's name means; pleasant, and his character was he was a man of valor, he was brave and honorable and was greatly esteemed by the King of Syria. Naaman had the skin disease called leprosy, an incurable disease at the time.

Early on in this tale we read of a very curious comment in verse one, "because through him (Naaman) the Lord had given victory to Syria". Why would God do that? It is because Israel had apostatized and he was using Syria to punish them to get them to repent from evil and call out to him for deliverance.

The Jewish oral tradition the Targum, gives credit to Naaman for being the Syrian soldier who at random shot the arrow (guided by God) that fulfilled the prophecy made by Micaiah about evil King of Israel Ahab dying in battle. (1 Ki.22:17, 34)

During one of their skirmishes, the Syrians took captive a young girl from Israel and she became a servant to Naaman's wife. All of the events that happen in this story after this point are because this little girl shared her faith with her captors. And it demonstrates a principle in the bible. Paul tells Philemon,

Philemon 1:6 (NIV)

⁶ "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

So Paul wants us to know that when we share our faith, (to believers and unbelievers alike) which is, letting our light shine among men, which is sharing our love and all the spiritual fruits that comes with it to others, it makes us more aware of all the blessings God gives us, which makes us more thankful to God, and he receives the praise, honor and glory which is due him. So what I'm saying is when you share your faith, others benefit from it and you become more aware of what God does for you, so you are more content and thankful towards God.

In the same way expressed in Hebrews 13:15-16 (NIV) "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Not a lot is written about this child, we're not even told her name, but it does tell us about her and her upbringing. Being a slave she could have been bitter and hateful to her captures, but she is not.

Having compassion for her master's condition, she excitedly tells Naaman's wife about a prophet in Samaria who could heal him of his leprosy. Of course she was talking about Elisha the prophet. During that time of Israel's history, many of the people didn't

believe in the God of Israel anymore, much less his prophets, but she does, so she came from a family of faith.

In fact, Elisha's predecessor Elijah, had just purged the land of many of the false prophets of Baal who were installed by the evil queen Jezebel to run the temple of Baal she had built in Samaria; she was the wife of evil king Ahab. For more about how evil Ahab and Jezebel were, read 1 Kings 16:29-22:40. Following the example of their king, many of the people had apostatized worshiping foreign gods and that is why God permitted, and even helped to punish disbelieving Israel, God used Naaman to do this.

By her sharing this good news with her captors showed her faith in God. So it is obvious that this child was a believer in the Living God of Israel, and was most likely taught the commandments of God by her parents. She was letting her light shine, producing fruit for God, taking the opportunity to introduce her masters to the true God of all peoples. She is a good little girl.

Naaman hates his leprosy, he is bothered with the effect it has on his appearance, his health, his future and the indignity of being in the lowest class of people even though he is the chief commander of the Syrian army.

After the little girl's announcement, by his immediate reaction we learn more of Naaman's character, he believes her and is hopeful. We read that Naaman immediately approached his king and recited the words of the little Israeli girl and makes his request to travel to Samaria to go to the prophet of Israel.

People in the surrounding countries around Israel were aware of the awesome God of Israel and what he has done in the past.

Naaman has most likely heard some of the great deeds and wonders God has performed too. So when he hears about the prophet who can cure leprosy he acts right away taking the

necessary steps to make the trip to Samaria. What we see is a man acting on hope.

The Syrian king esteems Naaman, and so he writes to Joram the king of Israel on his behalf asking him to heal Naaman of his leprosy. So Naaman leaves for Samaria loaded with gifts of silver, gold and clothes for the prophet of God.

When King Joram reads the letter, he tears his robes, an act of great distress, and says, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back life?..." He saw the letter as a red herring, a ruse, a trick to pick a fight. If he were a king who had faith in the God of Israel, his first action would have been to pray to his God and to consult his faithful prophet to intercede on Israel's behalf...but he did not.

Enter Elisha into the story. Elisha was God's personal pick to succeed Elijah (1 Kings 19:16) He hears of the king's distress and sends a message to him saying, "Why have you torn your robes? Send the man to me and he will know there is a prophet in Israel." Elisha basically rebuked the king, "Why the lack of faith? You should've known there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman full of hope and great expectation, along with his entourage, travels to Elisha's house. He stands at the door. A servant of the prophet opens the door and tells him, "Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." The door closes.

Poor Naaman! He makes this great journey from Syria by caravan with his people, he visits with the king of Israel, and travels to the prophet's house only to be told by a servant, what amounts to, 'go take a bath in the river.'

Here we learn a little more about Naaman, he has a short temper. He expected a little more pomp and circumstance, a little

more showmanship a little more bang for his buck. After all, the prophets where he came from put on quite a show.

They would yell and shout to their false gods, dance around, bang on tambourines and even cut themselves to get their god's attention, but they never get an answer, just look at the behavior of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel when Elijah challenged them, their god versus the True Living God of Israel.

Naaman's hope was so high he created a false expectation in his mind and was greatly upset when all he was asked to do was to dip seven times in the Jordan river.

Naaman storms off in a rage still a leper, displaying unbecoming behavior. But here is a redeeming quality about Naaman, despite being so upset, he is still able to listen to reason. Notice how his servant addressed him, 'My father', this was not the normal way to address your master. They knew if he was asked to do some great feat to be cleansed he would, how much more then just to 'wash and be cleansed?'

It shows a unique relationship between he and his attendants, one of family. This tells us that Naaman and his wife must have been very kind to their staff.

Is it any wonder the little Israeli girl was more than happy to share with her mistress the news about the prophet in Samaria? Naaman takes the advice of his attendant and humbles himself and obeys the command of the prophet and dips in the river seven times. He went from rage to humbling himself, he exercised self control, and what joy he must have experienced when he saw that his flesh was restored to that of a young boy!

His flesh did not receive healing until he obeyed God's command, and isn't that a life lesson we can apply in our own lives? We do not receive God's blessings until we humble ourselves and obey his word.

Listen to Jesus' words, **John 14:21-23 (NIV)**

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

So our obedience to his word is how we show our love to God. When we do that we have the Godhead making their home in our hearts; we become a living temple of God; 1Co 3:16 'Don't you know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you?' So our Lord reigns in both heaven, and in the hearts of obedient believers.

So Naaman has received a miracle from God, via the prophet and his hope of being cured is met and hope is replaced with faith. Naaman returns to Elisha and professes his faith in the God of Israel. Saying, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." Sounds a lot like the response the Samaritans gave to the woman who met the Messiah at the well.

John 4:40-42 (NIV) 'So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

No longer did Naaman just believe because of the words of a little Israeli slave girl, but also because he obeyed the words of the man of God and was healed. Do you think Naaman and his wife were grateful to the little girl when he got back? I have no doubt

about it. I'm guessing that she too would call him, "My father" one day.

Naaman is a changed man. He offers Elisha literally a fortune but the man of God refuses the offer. Naaman then has two more requests of the prophet, one; that he permit him to take with him a load of earth on which he can worship the God of Israel on from his home in Syria.

Second; that he be forgiven when he escorts the feeble king of Syria to the temple of Rimmon, and helps him bow down there.

Elisha dismisses Naaman in peace.

That leaves our last character in this narrative, Gehazi.

Gehazi is Elisha's assistant perhaps the same way that Elisha assisted Elijah in his service to God. Gehazi witnessed many miracles performed by Elisha, including raising the Shunnamite woman's son from the dead. So he himself was a believer.

So we see a change in the character of Gehazi. When Gehazi sees all the treasure not accepted by Elisha leaving back for Syria he gives in to temptation. He starts reasoning to himself as to why he should have some of that treasure, he coveted those things. Gehazi's lust for material wealth caused him to not just covet, but to lie in God's name, "As surely as the LORD lives I will run after him and get something from him."

In his lie to Naaman he claimed that Elisha changed his mind and wanted to provide some clothes and money for a couple of visiting prophets who just showed up.

When Naaman hears Gehazi's lie, he believes him and is more than happy to help out the prophet and gives more than is requested, showing a generous spirit.

Gehazi returns back to his masters house and the prophet asks him where he had been. This was Gehazi's chance to admit his sin but denies being anywhere and lied to Elisha.

Gehazi profitted off of God's free gift of grace to Naaman. His actions could have had negative results concerning Naaman's faith. Had Naaman found out about the scam Gehazi just pulled on him could have changed his opinion about Elisha, and God himself. Gehazi's greed was so great it became an idol to him.

God set his face against Gehazi and took Naaman's leprocy and gave it to him, his skin became white as snow with leprocy.

Though Naaman probably never found out about Gehazi's treachery, Gehazi's sin made God look bad. That's what can happen when a child of God is caught up in sin., (Rom. 2:23-24, 2 Pet.2:2)

'For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,"

"Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute."

Our sin hurts God and the church. It smears his good name, it can cause unbelievers to mock God and his church.

Unbelievers will use that as an excuse not to believe in the very one who can save them from their sins.

Colossians 3:5-6 (NIV) 'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.'

Did you catch that? Greed is idolatry! We normally think of idolatry as setting up graven images, like Israel's golden calf, and bowing to them in worship. But idolatry is also covetousness, envy, and greed!

That is putting the desire for things on a level as worship. Greed and the lust of the eye puts those objects above the importance of you trusting in God for the things we need in life, not being content with what you have, which also makes you ungrateful. It shows you have your priorities way out of line.

Gehazi's lies made things worse for him. Lying is the opposite of truth, and God is the God of all truth, and his word is truth. When you are known as a liar, how can what you say ever be trusted again? So in that moment of weakness he became more like Satan, who is said by God to be the father of all lies. It says in Revelation that those who practice lying will be cast into the lake of fire.

Gehazi left the presence of Elisha; ashamed, embarrassed, frightened and stricken with an incurable disease. But he must have come to his senses and repented and asked for forgiveness as the prodigal son did. A couple of chapters later we see Gehazi once again serving Elisha the profit, though still a leper.

This was a story of a little girl sharing her faith, a story of the hope that it made in heart of a man, how it created humility in that once proud heart which led to obedience to God's word, which led to faith and healing, and peace with God. The story also showed the danger of giving in to the temptation of the lust of the eye, which is greed, and the consequences of that sin.

The apostle John warns the church with these final words at the end of his letter, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Invitation