

# 24-0929a Transcript

## 24-0929a - *There is a Prophet in Israel*

**Bible Readers:** John Nousek and Roger Raines

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## The Story of Naaman's Faith, Part 1

### Scripture Readings

**1<sup>st</sup> Reader:** John Nousek

Good morning. This morning's first scripture reading is 1st Timothy chapter 6, verse 10, which reads, For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. For some have strayed away from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reader:** Roger Raines

Good morning. I'll be reading from the book of Colossians chapter 3, verse 5. Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Let's conclude this reading.

### Sermon

**Preacher:** Jim Lokenbauer

Good morning, everybody. I want to thank the guys for reading those scriptures. This morning, I'm going to be bringing you some history out of Israel's past.

We can always learn from Israel's history. And it's a particular story that is just so rich with information for us that we can apply to our lives, even today. That's why Paul says in Romans 15 that everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of scriptures, we might have hope.

So by going over scripture, first of all, God's word is true. So these aren't just cleverly made-up stories to guide our lives. They're real history written down for us.

And they have a purpose. God has a purpose for each one of the stories in the Bible. And it's up to us to try and figure those things out.

That's how we gain knowledge. That's how we gain faith. That's how we actually receive more grace, because the more knowledge we mine out of the Bible, Peter tells us in chapter 1 of his second letter, God will heap upon us more grace.

And why is that? He gives us more grace because we're going to need grace. Because the more we know, he's going to challenge us with what we know. So we will get tests from God.

We will get temptations from Satan. And our response is what's going to put a smile on God's face or a frown. He wants his children to get it.

He wants his children to pass the test. He's our biggest cheerleader. He wants to be with his children in heaven.

So there's this particular story in 2 Kings, the fifth chapter of the Old Testament. And if you'd like to turn there, I'm going to read the whole chapter. And the story is filled with rich characters.

And they all have a tale to tell of their own. And we're going to look at little bits of each of their characters in this. And if this lesson had a title, it would be, There is a Prophet in Israel, The Story of Naaman's Faith.

It's 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, name not given, Elisha the prophet, and his servant Gehazi. Now, if you notice that the readings that the gentleman read this morning all had to do with idolatry.

Well, that's going to pertain to this evening's lesson. But I just wanted to float that out there. This story is unique because it's actually a story that people outside of Christ need to hear.

And it's also a story people inside Christ need to hear. So a lot can be derived and learned from what is written about these characters that reveal their true nature. So starting at verse 1, 2 Kings chapter 5. I'll be reading from the RSV.

It's the older British version of the ASV, very reliable translation of the Bible. First one, Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and high in favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

Now the Syrians, on one of their raids, had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure him of his leprosy.

So Naaman went in and told his lord. Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel. 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. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy. And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore 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 you seek in quarrel with me.

But when Elisha, 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 to me now that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the door of

Elisha's house. And Elisha sent his messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.

And Naaman was angry and went away, saying, Behold, I thought that surely he would come out to me and stand and call on the name of Yahweh his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leprosy. Are not the Abana and the 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. But his servants came near and said to him, My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you have not done it? How much rather than when he said to you, wash and be clean.

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.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company. Then 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.

But he said, As the Lord lives whom I serve, I will not receive any. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. And Naaman said, If not, I pray, let there be given to your servant two mules burden of earth.

For henceforth your servant will not offer a burnt offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord. In this matter, may the Lord pardon your servant when my master goes into the house of Ramon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Ramon. When I bow myself in the house of Ramon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter.

He said to him, Go in peace. But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian and not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him.

So Gehazi followed Naaman, and when Naaman saw someone running after him, he alighted from the chariot to meet him and said, Is all well? 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 Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Pray, give them a talent of silver and two vestal garments.

And Naaman said, Be pleased to accept two talents. And he urged them and tied up two talents of silver in two bags with two vestal garments and laid them upon his servants, and they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in a house, and he sent the men away, and they departed.

He went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, Where have you been, Gehazi? And he said, Your servant went nowhere. 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, maid servants and men's servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and your descendants forever.

So they went out from his presence. So he went out from his presence, a leper, white as snow. What an amazing chapter of the Bible.

This is so rich. Many lessons can be taught out of this chapter, and we're just going to look at a couple of them. So first let's discuss Naaman.

This is a man of high position. He's the commander of the Syrian army and the king's right-hand man. Syria is one of the world powers of the time.

Some of your Bibles translations may have the name of the country of Aram. Aram is the ancient name for this country, which was established by Aram, son of Shem, son of Noah. So it's an ancient country and a distant relative of Israel.

Perhaps that's why God had a tender spot for them and would send prophets to them, such as Jonah. At that time, being a Syrian made him an enemy of Israel because they were constantly in battles with them. So that also makes him a Gentile and probably worshipped the local foreign gods of this country, namely Rimmon.

And Rimmon is the Syrian name for Baal. Baal is that god that keeps surfacing through the ages of man. And a lot can be said about that, even today.

But we won't go there for right now. But anyhow, by the way, Baal never healed Naaman of his leprosy. Just a point of interest there.

Naaman's name means pleasant, and he was a man of valor itself. He was brave and honorable and was greatly esteemed by the king of Assyria. Naaman had a bacterial disease called leprosy.

At the time, it was incurable. Now, of course, you go on a course of different antibiotics and you're good as gold. As a note, stay away from armadillos.

They carry the leprosy bacteria. Early on in this tale, we read a very curious comment in verse 1. Because through Naaman, the Lord had given victory to Syria. So God was working through Naaman, the leper.

And what was he doing? Well, the very same thing that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon did for God. Though Babylon was an enemy of Israel, God used that enemy to punish his people. He was trying to get them to repent of their Baal worship.

They had backslid to the point where they were worshiping those gods around them. God is a jealous God. The Jewish oral tradition, the Targum, gives credit to Naaman for being the soldier, the Syrian soldier, who let a random arrow fly that happened to strike King Ahab during battle in 1 Kings 22, 17, and 34 that Micaiah, the prophet, predicted.

And during one of their skirmishes, the Syrians took captive a young girl from Israel. And she became a slave or servant to Naaman's wife. All of the events that happened in this story after this point are because this little Israel girl shared her faith with her captors.

And it demonstrates a couple of principles found in the Bible. Paul tells Philemon in Philemon 1.6, it says, So Paul wants us to know that when we share our faith with believers and unbelievers alike, which is letting our light shine among men, sharing our love and the spiritual fruits that come with it to others, it makes us more aware of the blessings God gives us, which makes us more thankful to God, and he receives the proper praise, honor, and glory.

So what I'm saying is when you share your faith, others benefit from it, and you become more aware of what God has done for you, so you are more content and thankful towards God.

So this child plays an important role in her new station in life, and I'm sure she benefited from God's blessings as well, as you'll see. This goes hand-in-hand with what Paul says in Philippians 4.11.

In the same way he expresses this idea in Hebrews 13, 15-16. 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 this such sacrifice God is pleased. So this child exemplifies all these virtues. 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 towards her captors, looking for every opportunity to escape back to her home. But she isn't, she's content there. She was content where God had put her, having compassion on her master's condition of leprosy.

She excitedly told Naaman's wife about the 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 God anymore, much less listen to his prophets, but she does.

So she came from a family of faith, probably considered one of the remnants. In fact, Elisha's predecessor, Elijah, had just purged the land of many of the prophets of Baal who were installed by Israel's wicked king, Jezebel, who had a temple made in Samaria just for worshiping Baal. She was the wife of the king of Israel named Ahab, who was probably the most evil of Israel's kings.

His son, Jehoram, who followed in his footsteps, is the successor to his throne, and he's the one who received the letter from the Syrian king on Naaman's behalf, who tore his clothes. For more about how evil Ahab and Jezebel were, if you want to do some interesting reading, read 1 Kings 16-22. So following the example of their king, many of the people had apostatized, worshiping all the false gods, the demon gods, Baal of the neighboring countries, and had really upset God.

By her sharing this good news with her captors, she showed her faith in God. So it was 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 presented to her to share the good news that there was a prophet in Israel.

She was a good little girl. Naaman had to have hated this leprosy. Could you imagine your flesh becoming white and sloughing off, digits falling off your hand, noses falling off? It's a degenerative disease that eventually kills the person, destroys nerve endings so that you end up injuring yourself.

You can't feel. It's a horrible disease. Naaman was so bothered that as soon as he heard the good news from that little girl, he had hope.

This commander of the Syrian army believed this little girl's story. And after hearing the little girl's announcement about the prophet, his reaction, by his reaction we learn more about Naaman's character. Her words stirred up such hope in him, the hope that he could beat his death sentence that leprosy put on him.

He could be given a new lease on life. Do you think that this story of Naaman and his leprosy was included in Holy Scripture because of its symbolic nature to sin and death and obedience and faith in God that leads to life? We read that Naaman immediately approached his king and recited what the little girl had told him, and he requested to go to Samaria to see this prophet for healing, which his friend the king was glad to do for him and wrote him a letter.

The people in the surrounding countries around Israel were very aware of the awesome God of Israel and all the wonders he had performed for them when they had left Egypt.

And Naaman was genuinely excited to receive a blessing from this God. The young maiden from Israel gave the shortest sermon recorded in the Bible and the witness of her God and his prophet caused Naaman to respond to the invitation. The good news he heard was that he could be healed of a life-threatening illness.

Little did he know that he was going to receive mercy and grace from the God of Israel that leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ. We're going to stop here. We'll conclude the rest of the story.

It really pertains to us this evening. So if you'd like to respond to the invitation, now's the time. Let whatever request you may have be made known.

Come as we stand and sing.