

Life Lesson 86
Elisha and Naaman
Text: II Kings 5

Introduction

Naaman was proud – and for a good reason. He was an important man and a great leader of the Syrian army. He led his men in many successful battles against the Israelites. Some historians wrote that Naaman was the Syrian soldier who killed King Ahab. The Bible doesn't say, though, so we don't know that for sure.

The king was grateful because Naaman had been such a brave warrior and had led the Syrians to so many victories. He gave Naaman wealth and honor. All in all, Naaman was pretty pleased with himself. He didn't know that, because he was God's enemy, he really had nothing at all.

But God loved Naaman and had a plan for humbling him and bringing him to God. That plan involved leprosy.

The Story

Naaman must have been horrified to discover he had that terrible disease. He knew his skin would become more and more disfigured until it was covered with spongy, tumor-like swellings. His fingers, nose, ears and toes would probably be eaten away by this horrible disease. There was no cure at that time, so he was sure to die.

During one of his raids into Israel he had taken a little girl captive. This girl was his slave now and served his wife.

"I wish Captain Naaman could go and see the prophet Elisha in my country," the little girl told her mistress. "I'm sure Elisha could heal him of his leprosy."

A spark of hope began to grow in Naaman when he heard what the little girl had said. If there was a cure for him in Israel, he would go to Israel.

Remember, though, that Naaman had been fighting against the Israelites for years. He had killed many of them and carried many away as captives. There was no reason for any of the Israelites to be glad to see him. It would be dangerous for him to go into the country looking for Elisha.

The king of Syria knew that Israel's King Jehoram feared the Syrians. He wrote Jehoram a letter that said, "Here is my servant Naaman. I'm sending him to you so you can cure him of leprosy."

Jehoram, the king of Israel, was upset. He tore his clothes and ranted and raved.

"Who am I to cure this man of leprosy? Am I God? This Syrian king is just looking for an excuse to fight against us," he said.

If he had trusted God, as he should have done, he would have known what to do. He would have known that God could cure Naaman of his disease. He could have immediately sent him to the prophet Elisha.

When Elisha heard about it, he sent a message saying, "Why are you so upset? Send him to me and he shall find out that there is a prophet in Israel."

How hopeful Naaman must have been as he came to Elisha's house! He was so anxious to get rid of his disgusting disease. It would be so wonderful to whole and well again. It would be exciting, too, to see how God would heal him. Maybe the prophet would call upon God in a mysterious ceremony and lightning would fall from heaven and burn away his leprosy.

Maybe Elisha would offer a great number of sacrifices or put some strange potion on Naaman's skin, or say some magic words. Naaman was sure it would be spectacular. He brought plenty of money and gifts so that the prophet would be do his best for him.

The last thing Naaman expected was the very thing that happened. He thought Elisha would be honored and impressed by his visit. After all, Naaman was a very important man. But Elisha didn't even come out of his house to meet him. He just sent a message with a servant.

When Naaman heard the message, he was even more surprised – unpleasantly so! Elisha wasn't going to have a mysterious ceremony or offer a lot of sacrifices or even say any magic words. He just told Naaman to go down to the river and wash in it seven times. That was it.

Naaman was furious!

“If I wanted to take a bath in a river,” he shouted, “I would have taken one in a river back home in Damascus. They are better and cleaner than the river Jordan.”

He started back home in a rage.

The servants tried to calm him down.

“If the prophet had told you to do some hard thing, you would have done it,” they said. “Why not do this simple thing? It can't hurt.”

Naaman finally agreed and went down to the river Jordan. He dipped in the river seven times and came out with his skin as well and new as a baby's. Can you imagine how happy he must have felt to see those horrible sores gone? He was well at last!

He went back to Elisha's house with a different attitude.

“I know now that there is no other God but the God of Israel,” he told Elisha. “I'm going to worship only Him from now on. I'm so grateful that I'd like to give you a present. Please take these gifts from me.”

“No,” Elisha replied. “God healed you. I don't want any payment.”

Naaman went home a happy man. He was healed both in his body and in his soul. God loved him enough to send him troubles and humble him so that Naaman would eventually be truly happy.

The Life Lesson

Why do you think God put this story in the Bible? I think he wanted us to learn a lesson from Naaman. Sometimes we get to thinking we are pretty important people. Instead of worshipping the true God, we become so proud and wrapped up in ourselves that we become our own little god – just like Naaman did.

Because God loves his children, He sometimes will send chastisement on us like He did on Naaman. That doesn't mean that we all will get leprosy, but that there will be sad and worrisome things that will show we can't get along by ourselves.

Naaman had a choice. He could either obey God and humble himself, or he could go on trying to cure himself. How glad he must have been that he gave up and humbled himself before the Lord. When he dipped in that river, it was as if he was saying, "I give up. I'll do things your way, even if I don't like it or understand it."

When we surrender to God, He sends deliverance. Sometimes it is by taking away our problem or worrisome situation. Sometimes it is by giving us the grace to be happy in it.

One thing for sure – if we insist on our own way, we'll go away sad and sorry. If we humble ourselves and surrender to God as Naaman did, we'll have true peace.

Review Questions

What was Captain Naaman's problem?

He had leprosy

Who told him that the God of Israel could help him?

The servant girl.

The Syrian king sent a letter to Jehoram. What did the letter ask Jehoram to do?

To heal Naaman of his leprosy.

Who said, "Send him to me and I'll help him."

Elisha

What did Elisha tell Naaman to do?

Wash in the Jordan River seven times.

What did Naaman think about Elisha's method of curing him?

He was angry.

Who persuaded him to go and wash in the river?

His servants.

What happened when Naaman did wash in the river?

He was cured.

Would Elisha take any reward?

No, because God had healed Naaman.

What change happened to Naaman?

He not only was cured of leprosy, but he decided to follow the God of Israel -- the true God.