

Clean and Healed

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[0 : 00] I want to go back for a little while tonight to the passage we read in 2 Kings chapter 5. There's great story, great story of Naaman being healed from leprosy.

Just by way of introduction, can I say a couple of very important things that we need to remind ourselves of as we go through this story of Naaman. It's reminding ourselves firstly of the importance of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is really important. This is part of the All Scripture that's mentioned in 2 Timothy 3.16. All Scriptures is useful and that includes the Old Testament.

Sometimes we forget that. We forget that it's Jesus Bible and we need to remind ourselves that everything in the Old Testament is driving us, pointing us towards Jesus and is a preparation for Jesus.

Really particularly it's reminding us of this truth that comes through in this story, that there's one God. It's not a multiplicity of gods, there's one God.

[1 : 04] There's one God. There's only one God. And that is, you know, in the context of idolatry, in the context of the commandments, a very important aspect to the Old Testament.

Made even more remarkable when we come to the New Testament and people worship Jesus. It's one God. We call the Holy Spirit a divine person, one God.

But it's one God that's revealed in this complexity of his three persons in the New Testament. And there's a reminder, there's a kind of, there's a direction of the Old Testament which is reminding us that none of what happens in the Old Testament is the answer to our needs.

It's pointing towards a better answer. A political theocracy, which in a sense is what Israel had, is not the answer. Ritualistic religion, the giving of sacrifices was not the answer.

Pointed towards the answer. And there's great, God is patient in the Old Testament and reveals himself in grace as well in the Old Testament.

[2 : 11] But ultimately the answer is not in these things. It's in Christ and in his kingdom and in the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. So the Old Testament though is very important.

And the other thing which I can mention there about the Old Testament and easy again for us to forget I think is that God is never in the Old Testament only a Jewish God.

Okay verse 15 makes that clear when Naaman acknowledges what God has done and he says now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel and that acknowledges that God is the God of all the world.

This was written in fragile political times. Israel is under judgment. And we see here that Naaman is the commander of the king of Aram which is not Israel.

It's another nation that have defeated Israel in different times. But at this point there was a degree of fragile peace in that the two could interact between each other, the two nations.

[3 : 27] But that you see that when the king of Israel receives this letter from the king of Aram about his commander who's got leprosy he says what is he trying to do? I am not God I can't heal him.

Is he just trying to start a fight? So there was kind of a fragile peace between the two. But although there was this kind of tension, this lack of this fragility, God was never just the God of Israel.

It's a recurring and important theme of the Old Testament is that God is the God of the Gentiles too. He's the God beyond the borders of Israel.

He's the God of the whole world. Yes, his purposes were narrowed into the people of the Jewish people of the Old Testament for a season, for a period, for a reason.

But it's like an hourglass, it's broad and then it narrows for a while with the people of the Old Testament and then it broadens again to the world through Pentecost and through Christ coming.

[4 : 34] But even within that narrowing period he was never simply the God of the Jew. There was always the place for the Gentile to come with faith and believe in God and trust in God and rely on His grace.

And we need always to remember that important truth when we are steeped in our own particular cultural backgrounds.

And when we think God is our God and that everyone else doesn't really understand Him because He's a Presbyterian God or He's a Scottish God or He's a Western God or He's a Reformed God, He's none of these things.

We can't contain God in these terms. God is God. He's simply God and we recognize that we all see Him with our own particular perspectives and never truly see Him as He is.

But there's only one God. That's what the whole Testament is about. There's one God today for Muslims and for atheists and for agnostics for West and East.

[5 : 43] We don't have our own particular distinctive God in the Christian faith. He's the only God. That's the exclusive claims of the Gospel. There is no other God.

The God who's revealed Himself in the person of Jesus is the only God there is. And He's a God who all will stand before. And it's impossible for us to limit Him, to label Him, to copyright Him and to exhaust Him with our own tiny knowledge of who He might be.

And so often we judge other people and other Christians carelessly because their concept, their understanding, biblically even of God, their experience of God is different from ours so they must be wrong.

But we must learn and must know and must see that God is much bigger than all of us. And in this chapter he speaks very powerful and very loudly I think and very beautifully about really the Gospel. He speaks about our need and he speaks about the core reality of what Jesus came to do. And we've talked about that before that Alicia does point forward to Jesus Christ.

[7 : 06] He's a kind of type, a figure of Christ and is very clear in this passage in many ways. But there's wider truths here about God and His dealings with people as well.

And one of them is that people don't need religion as much as they need God. Neiman wanted religion, he had leprosy.

He was a leader in the Aramaic army, he had lots of things going for him but the worst thing of all of course was he had leprosy.

And he wanted to go down and he wanted to be healed in a massive magic kind of act, a ritualistic religious act.

I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call in the name of the Lord, his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. He was wanting a kind of ritual cleansing.

[8 : 05] He was wanting everything to be a religious act and something impressive and something dramatic and he wanted God to act on his terms for him.

And what God was doing with Neiman was saying, look, I will deal with you my way. I will cure you but I will do it my way and I will do it in such a way that you will see that I am not living and I am not acting under your authority.

Don't we often want God to act under our authority? God do this for me, do it this way for me, do it now for me and do it my way.

And God is saying, no, I am not going to do any of that. Neiman, you want religion, you want drama, you want God in your own terms, you want it to look good, you want to be able to go back and say, yeah, that was this fantastic fanfare and it was amazingly healed.

And all the people came out to see me and this amazing man of God came to do his work. And it's absolutely not what God was going to do here.

[9 : 16] He was wanting to deal with Neiman's heart as well as his physical condition and Neiman needed to be confronted with God personally in his life.

And that is what we always need. So often we are looking for, even in a religious ritual for God to deal dramatically with us and to give us what we want his way and to jump through our hoops and yet we will find that God is saying, I will deal with you the way I will deal with you.

Maybe from God, Neiman needed to know that his greatest need was healing, different probably from the healing that he expected.

And that's also our greatest need. Neiman came to be cleansed but he didn't realise he needed to be healed as well.

The two are inseparable. He wanted God to make him healthy. God wanted to make him whole. Do you see the difference?

[10:37] We often go to God wanting health for example, physical health is a great thing. Not denying how important, how great that is. But very often God is seeing something deeper that we need than simply healing or being healthy.

He sees that we need to be whole. And so physical healing might be part of that. But spiritual healing is much deeper and much more significant and that is what Neiman needed more than physical healing.

See Neiman had it all in many ways. He possessed everything but really he had nothing of value. He had no health laterally, physically or spiritually.

And God showed him his need of both things in his life. And I think that again is a very significant lesson for us.

If you're not a Christian it's an absolutely crucial message. If you are a Christian and as Christians I don't think we ever graduate beyond that reality also.

[11:42] Is that our ongoing greatest need is to be in an ongoing way spiritually healed. We come to Christ and we get rebirth. We're born again, we're made new.

But we're not perfected in that moment. We spend a lifetime of God dealing with our hearts and healing us. And so it's very important for us that in our lives we recognize in an ongoing way that our greatest need is healing.

This ongoing healing that God deals with us in our lives and needs to work to heal our deepest sins, our deepest idolatries. What it is that keeps us from him.

And he will do that because he's committed to doing that. He's the great physician and he's committed to healing us. If you're not a Christian your greatest need is healing from God.

Is cleansing in the way that Naaman was cleansed and healed. That is your greatest, you might not sense that, you might not feel unclean, you might not be interested in being unclean.

[12:49] But God says from His word your greatest need is cleansing. Being made clean and that's the beginning of the healing process in our lives.

I think as Christians we often don't realize that. I think we stop at the cross and accept Jesus as our saviour and we just stagnate there.

And we think it's all done. Legally in terms of our justification it is all done. The Lord has declared us innocent.

But in terms of our progressive lives there is much to be done in our lives to bring us to that place where we are ready to meet with Him.

Where to be ongoing. There is a sanctification that happens, a holiness that happens when we come to faith. But there's an ongoing sanctification, an ongoing healing that we need to do.

[13:49] And for you and for me there are some very deep seated healing that are needed.

There's deep seated unbelief and there's deep seated rebellion that the deeper His light shines into our heart the more it exposes the darkness.

And that darkness that needs healing. But I think I mentioned this before, it's unravelling. What does it unravel? The knotted broken tense and mixed up heart that we have and motives.

And He begins to cleanse and purify and make them right as we go to Him. And we need to come continually to Him for healing.

Your mercy as He says are new every day. You simply can't get to the stage where you think I don't need to be healed anymore. I don't need to be cleansing.

I'm using these terms interchangeably, healing and cleansing. That we need that in our lives. That is part of the forgiveness processes that we are coming to God and saying, deal with my bitterness, my pride, my lust, my impurity, my selfishness, my greed.

[15:05] And all as we look at ourselves in the light of who Christ is, we find ourselves absolutely needing His cleansing. Because of His beauty and because of His perfection and because of His patience and because of His compassion, we recognise how different we are and how much we need His cleansing.

But God is saying through this, reminding us also that the greatest barrier to our cleansing, to our healing, either for the first time in coming to Christ or in an ongoing way is our pride.

It's just such a great story, isn't it? Simon was a proud leader of men. He was used to having servants. He was used to people doing what he commanded.

And here he is, he's raging in this story in verse 11. He's very, he's really angry because he comes to Elisha and the great thing is that Elisha doesn't even come out to meet him.

This is a great commander of the Iranian army and Elisha doesn't even come out to meet him. He sends his servant out to pass on a message. That in itself was hugely humbling for naming.

[16:27] And then the message is, go and wash seven times in the Jordan. What a leg down. What a disaster he's travelled all that way. He's brought all this money and all his gifts and he's been asked to wash in this grubby little Israeli water.

This river that's rubbish, where the river's back home or far more glorious and clean than he could have washed, why he just has to wash in them. And he's absolutely humbled and his pride is sort of, he's like a spoiled child, isn't he?

He goes off in the half of a while. I'm not going to do that. Don't worry about it. He's got leprosy, but he's not going to do it and he's just going to go away. He's so proud that he can't hear. Because you know, what does Elisha say, through the servant to him, go wash yourself in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored.

He didn't hear that. All he heard was go wash in the Jordan and he was absolutely enraged. He wasn't listening to the promise, you will be cleansed.

Your flesh will be restored. His pride didn't let him. How like that is, how like us is that? In our pride we have selective hearing.

[17:43] We only listen to bits, the bits that make us angry and we forget the promises and we forget what God says to us. He wanted it on his condition.

He wanted to play his part. He didn't want to do what he was being asked to do and he couldn't believe that the man of God wouldn't even come to him. Let alone the king of Israel, he wasn't anywhere to be seen.

That's such a great picture of humanity. Do we change? Are we any different? Is that not our greatest barrier to spiritual life and to spiritual growth?

It's our pride. It's just like a freight train this chapter. Why are you not a Christian tonight if you're not a Christian?

You may have many different reasons for it but the basic fundamental bottom line is that you're proud. That you will not have Jesus Christ reign over you. Either you don't believe him or you don't think it's the right time or there's other things that are more important and you're staying away and it's pride that will do that.

[18:48] You're insulted by the cross. You're insulted to think that you can't please God your own way. You think that there's a better way, surely?

You can't accept God's verdict. I don't feel like that I need him. You balk at the idea of judgment but you fail to hear the gift.

You fail to hear the promise of restoration and cleansing that he says and that he gives. You fail to hear him saying, come to me.

I am the way. The same as Trinaross mentioned when he was talking, that challenge that we all have, if we're honest, we're all of that challenge, the way of independence and self-reliance and going our own way and just being proud, saying that we don't need God.

We don't need Christ, not today. I have no problems today. I don't need Christ today. I can get by my own. Pride and independence is our greatest barrier to God and to His work in our lives.

[19:59] I think until we recognise that, we will not come to Him for cleansing. The great thing, of course, is that the icing on the cake, as it were, in terms of name and being dealt with was that he had to listen to his servants.

The servant, how wise is his servant? Very different from a listening servant. My father said, the Prophet told you to do something great. Would you not have done it? How much more then? When he tells you wash and be cleansed?

So he ends up naming this great leader, ends up listening to his servant. His servant has great wisdom. And that is an amazing turnaround for him.

Who are you going to listen to? And who are you going to respond to? And who are you going to follow? And how will you and how will I deal with our pride? Because we're reminded here very briefly that we can't earn our grace.

I think that's, again, very important. We can't earn God's favour, and naming comes and takes a huge amount of money to try and buy this healing.

[21 : 17] And then in verse 16, as he tries to give this gift, the Prophet says, surely as Lord lives, I will not accept a thing. That might just come across as just a simple act of self-denial.

But there's a clear pointing towards the gift of salvation there, the gift of cleansing and healing. It's not bought with money. That comes across in different stories and acts when people try to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It's not like that. It can't come from privilege. It's not anything that we can earn with God. It is something that absolutely is, we humbly come to with just open arms and accept.

And grace continues to be that in our lives. You can't earn it. We can't earn it before God. The gift he gives reminds us of that reality and that truth.

And we need to recognise and remember that to offer the gospel. And the last thing, I'm sure there's many other things from this passage, but the last thing is really that God will be humbling us in our lives.

[22 : 35] The great thing is that the name in here was humbled. He accepted the gift and he went away recognising that this was a great gift.

And as he learned from his servants and others, he recognised that God was the only God. God was his Lord. He goes on to say, and he asks for forgiveness for when he goes back and he has to bow down in front of a pagan idol because he's holding the hand of his master who will be bowing down and let's just say he's going peace.

Now there's another lesson in there that I'm not going to go into about just understanding how to live in a non-Christian environment, non-Christian world.

But he was humbled and he left with grace and he left with both external and internal healing and cleansing. Now I think there's a lot to be said for healing and believing that God can heal.

But I think sometimes what's missed in people's desire to see God's physical healing is that the best healings will also have a spiritual healing effect.

[23 : 51] So healing's going to come and go because we're all going to die. We're all going to grow old one day. But the healing that we must recognise all the time is miraculous as well and is spiritual heart healing in our lives.

And Naaman recognised that and was humbled under God's hand and came to faith. Gehazi was different.

You know I mentioned Gehazi last week, he's a servant of Elisha and he just simply doesn't really get it. He's seen a lot of miracles, he's been around Elisha, he's heard the teaching of God but he doesn't really get it.

And in this story he doesn't get the idea of a free gift and he doesn't get the idea of what Elisha's done. And he says, man what an idiot, he's lost that chance to have lots of money and he could have taken it.

So he runs after Naaman and tells a lie to say that some of the prophets have come and they need some food and clothes and so of course Naaman gives them it and he takes it and stashes it in his house. There's parallels maybe there as well to Ananias and Saphira in the New Testament which we can't go into at one level.

[25 : 01] But he himself is also humbled. But he's not humbled in adoration and in love and in worship, he's humbled in judgement. Because he lied and because he didn't see and he didn't understand and because he chose not to come under the Lordship of Christ.

There's an interesting parallel I think in verse 13, maybe I can't find it now.

Yeah in verse 16 the prophet answers, as surely as the Lord lives whom I serve. That is Elisha speaking and then in verse 19 and verse 20 Gehazi says as surely as the Lord lives I will run after him and get something.

But he misses out whom I serve. And I think that's quite an interesting omission. There's a kind of cold and intellectual recognition of the Lord but he is not willing to serve him and yet he comes to that place of humble humility under God's judgement and that is a fearful thing.

So it's a great passage and we remember as we conclude God very simply. God uses the faith of a servant girl in a mighty way right at the very beginning.

[26 : 39] It's this little servant girl who says to her mistress if only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria he would cure him of his leprosy. Great story unfolds from just that passing comment of the servant girl as she points to her God and the only God.

And God will use us you know. God will use the faith of a servant girl and he will use our faith. We don't need to be great people in the eyes of the world or even in the eyes of the church.

God will use us as we're faithful and as we point to him. And interestingly too also that's judgement in this passage is for the insider and grace is for the outsider.

Judgment goes to Gehazi who's one of God's people and grace is for Naaman who is not one of God's people. That would have been a very powerful message to the Jewish people who thought God was their own just theirs and no one else's.

And it's a very powerful message for us especially in the church you know. In the way we judge other people and in the way that we dispense grace as it were or who we think grace should be dispensed to.

[27 : 57] Just remember that very often in the New Testament judgement is for the people of God within the church at least outwardly those who are the people of God and grace is for the outsider.

That's the story of the New Testament. That's the story of Jesus all the way through. Jesus deals with those who are humbled and who see their sin, who are regarded as outsiders and yet who will come to him for salvation.

But if we're proud and if we think we're privileged or think that we can earn it from him then we are often left on the outside. So may it be that we don't get a terrible surprise one day when we go to meet with God and may we be humbled by his grace and by his healing and by his restoration and by his power in our lives so that we will follow him.

Amen. Let's pray very briefly together. Together God we pray that we would learn from this story.

It's a wonderful story of healing, cleansing of God, revealing himself in surprising and in remarkable ways both then and also now.

And may each of us not walk away from here thinking that we either are not accountable to you or that we don't need your cleansing and that we don't need your grace.

[29 : 22] And may none of us think that we are fine on our own even with head knowledge or with past experience of the love of Jesus but leaving it out of our lives.

So Lord God we pray that we would be humble and dependent and that we would allow your Holy Spirit to cleanse us, to work within us and to see every situation we're in not so much as a situation that we're looking for you to change or to adapt or to answer our desires about but you would see each situation as one where we can ask Lord God what do you want me to learn from this and how can I change through this experience to become more like you.

Bless us then we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.