

2 Kings 5 – “Wash and be healed”

Introduction.

Most of us tend to live by the idea that “there is no such thing as a free lunch in life.” Good things usually have to be worked for or paid for *by us* in some way.

- If you want to land a good job, you usually have to go through the hard work of training or study to get there.
- If you want to drive a reliable car, you usually have to be willing to part with thousands of dollars.

Most of us live our lives with the understanding that there is no such thing as a free lunch. And while this *is* generally helpful view of things, it may mean that on the rare moment when something really good is really being offered for free, it might be easy to miss.

In Christianity explored one of the videos we show speaks about an experiment conducted by a London newspaper. They got a person to stand outside Oxford Circus tube station offering people a leaflet. On the leaflet was the free offer of five pounds. All you had to do was bring the leaflet back to the man and he would hand you the cash right there on the spot.

Masses of people passed him. And in three hours only eleven people came back for the money. Most didn't bother to take it. Or if they did take it, they simply refused to believe it. And so many, missed out on a genuinely free gift.

2 kings 5 is telling us not to make the same mistake with God as we see Him holding out the promise of a free gift. Naaman, though initially reluctant, was not left disappointed by the life-restoring gift he was given by God. And nor will you, if you simply take the time to stop and humbly believe God's promise of life on offer to you now in Jesus. For many of you, God's gift of life is something that you've already received. But that's okay, because this passage serves as a good reminder as to what it looks like to keep living in response to God's free gift of grace. The way I've broken up the text is to look first at God's gracious gift, then the two response to God's gift in Naaman and Gehazi.

1. God's Gracious Gift.

First, God's gracious gift.

God's gift in this story comes to a man named Naaman. So what do we know about him. Well, v.1 gives us a bit of an introductory profile and his CV looks pretty good actually. Read it with me:

5 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier

Naaman is the kind of guy, I think most Aussie men, would want to be. He's got power. He's got status. He's got connections. He's summed up as loved, courageous and successful. But this great man has a great problem doesn't he?

But he had leprosy.

Because of Covid we've all become quite familiar with the idea of contagious disease. We're familiar with the idea of social isolation that has goes with it. Naaman, I suspect, had also become familiar with home isolation. The most common approach in ancient times to this contagious and debilitating skin condition of leprosy was containment. Can't treat, so just contain the infectious. But *unlike* us, Naaman, probably couldn't see a road map out of his incurable situation.

A great man, with a great problem. But, you'll notice early in this story that Naaman's problem gains the sympathy of a no-name servant girl who had been taken captive from Israel and served Naaman's wife.

3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman was from the pagan nation of Aram. In the words of Paul, he was without hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:12). But through this little, faithful member of God's covenant people a word of true hope comes to him.

“Go to our God. He will heal you.”

Naaman listens and does what many of us might do. He travels abroad in a desperate attempt to find someone who is willing and able to cure his disease.

Now notice the lengths Naaman goes to increases his chances of success on this trip. Verse 4 and 6 tell us that he used his connections to have a reference letter written for him by the King of Aram. Verse 5 tells us that he went ready to pay whatever it takes. Verse 5:

So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents^[b] of silver, six thousand shekels^[c] of gold and ten sets of clothing.

One bible scholar notes that Naaman’s loot amounts to around 340 kgs silver and 90 kgs of gold. Now, just for fun I calculated how much that amount of precious metal would be worth in Australia today. The figure came out around 7,340,000.

The idea that he would simply be healed for free at this point would have been crazy to Naaman. His knew the way of religion –“there’s no such thing as a free lunch when it comes to the gods... “The more you give, hopefully the more you get!”

When he arrives in Israel, Naaman goes first to the King of Israel. But he’s no help is he? He just freaks and tears his robes, thinking the whole thing is set up by Aarm to “to pick a quarrel with him” (v.7).

It’s only when Elisha hears about the King’s freak out that Naaman gets directed to the right place. Elisha messages Israel’s king (v.8):

“Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

“Have Naaman come to me” says Elisha. And notice the reason... It’s not to help international relations. Nor is it primarily just to heal a disease. It’s so that Naaman will “know that there is a prophet in Israel.” Elisha wants Naaman to come to a personal knowledge of the God he serves. He wants him to see how much better and different he is all the false gods of Aram. The true God won’t play for pay. The true God shows undeserved favour free of charge.

Look at how this is so dramatically shown to us.

Naaman goes to Elisaha’s house and pulls up at his front door with all “his horses and chariots” – i.e. in tow with all his silver, gold and clothing. It’s an amazing scene to picture... The great man, the good man, the victorious and successful man, stepping down off his chariot with his treasure trove of wealth in the back ground. He’s ready for Elisha to step out, welcome him and (hopefully) exchange service for payment – just like every other prophet he’s known.

But look at how Elisha responds. He doesn’t even come out of his house! Instead, he sends out a messenger boy who simply says:

“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

Naaman comes ready to pay the earth. Elisha’s servant tells him, the Lord is giving it to him free of charge. Just head down to the Jordan wash and be cleansed.

We’ll get to Naaman’s response to this in a moment. But right now I just want us to let the picture of God seen within the first part of this story sink in.

Application

The more I think about this passage, the more I think it challenges some of our common misconceptions about who God is.

When you think about God and how He might relate to you, what do you think?

- Maybe when you think God, you think, “distant and uninterested.” Perhaps concerned with the big events of the world, but not with individuals at a *personal* level. But here we see a God who *is* interested and concerned for an individual who has a deep need.
- Maybe when you think of God, you think “exclusive.” There are some people he is prepared to show favour too and others He isn’t. Maybe you think he would accept people who have come from the LGBTQ community or people from other religions. But here we see a God who goes out of his way to show grace to and welcome in a member of a pagan and enemy people group.
- Maybe when you think God, you think “transactional.” “If I do for God, He will do for me.” If I be a better person, or turn over a new leaf, then he’ll accept me. But here we see a God who turns that view on its head. In the face of all Naaman’s status, achievement, and personal wealth, God says, “not interested... My gift to you comes by grace, it cannot be bought or earned.” In fact, later in verses 15-16, when Naaman insists on giving some kind of gift in return for his healing Elisha emphatically says (v.16): “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing!” It’s the same with our cleansing from sin and the eternal life that God offers to each person today. It comes freely by God’s grace. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:8:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast

Does your view of God line up with the God we see at work in this passage? You know who has the right view of God in all of this? It’s actually the little Israelite servant girl. Do you think she would have risked speaking up if she thought God was uninterested, exclusive and transactional? We need to be like her and see God rightly as the One who is interested in people’s lives, welcoming of the outsider, and gracious in His salvation.

This passage helps us first of all to have the right view of God. But it also helps us to have the right response to God and the gift He offers. Naaman’s gift was getting cleansed from leprosy. God’s gift today is getting cleansed from *sin* and given eternal life in Jesus. So we’re going to look now at the response of both Naaman and Gehazi to help us think through the right way to respond to God’s gift to *us* in Jesus.

2. Naaman’s Responses to God’s gift.

So, let’s turn our attention now to Naaman’s response to God’s gift.

And you’ll notice that there is an initial negative response from Naaman. Not to the promise of healing which v.10 makes clear, but to the way in which that healing was to come about – trekking out into the wilderness and dipping himself 7 times into the Jordan river.

Verse 11:

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

Pride has a way of making us turn our backs on genuine help.

I remember in our first year of marriage, Ruth and I were camping in the bush and on the last day when we attempted to drive out the dirt track we came in on we got stuck. It had rained the whole day and the wheels on our ute simply would not gain any traction. Ruth’s suggestion was to call the local park ranger’s office and ask for help... But, I didn’t want this ranger thinking I was just another city-slicker, who had no clue. Plus I thought I could get us out. So, for the next hour or so, I was placing down branches in front of the ute. I was pushing the rear and getting covered in mud. And we made no movement. Finally, Ruth convinced me to eat humble pie. We called, the ranger came, and without any eye-rolling, he gladly pulled us out. Instead of spending that night in the cabin of our ute in the bush, we spent it in a comfortable hotel. The ranger’s help was always there... The question was whether or not I’d be humble enough to accept it.

Pride can be the worst enemy of genuine help. But humility can be its greatest friend. Naaman, discovered that didn’t he? It was pride that led him to turn away in anger. He thought he was worth more than a mere messenger boy and a dirty river in Israel. But it was his moment of humility that led him to turn back around. For me, it was Ruth who got me over the line. For Naaman it was his servants.

Look at verse 13:

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Naaman acts in humility, he lets go of his sense of entitlement and simply does what God asks. And it pays off! He went into that less than impressive river riddled with leprosy, he comes out silky smooth.

But notice that God's gift doesn't just changed him outwardly, but inwardly! This pagan commander of an enemy army suddenly turns to the living God. Verse 15:

¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.

Naaman is a saved man, and now He is a changed man. You see it there in verses 17-18. He asks if he can take some Israelite dirt back home with him? Why?

... because *your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD.*

In the words of 1 Thessalonians 1:18 – Naaman had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. But, something unsettles him. Verse 18:

¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this."

What's going on here? Isn't Naaman compromising? Does this give us the green light to "get away" with a few compromises of our own that we might enjoy? Well, no this isn't an This isn't a picture of compromise, but of commitment! *It because* He is committed to the Lord that his conscience is so sensitive to this particular part of his job description. That's why Elisha says "go in peace." Naaman, humbled himself before God and received the good gift of healing and the better gift of relationship with the true and living God.

I wonder if you know that good and life-changing gift of relationship with God. I wonder if you could say you know the eternal life that God offers as part of that gift today through faith in Jesus?

If you don't, please don't pass it up. It's true. It's good. But, like Naaman, you cannot claim it unless you humble yourself. He had to accept the means of a less than impressive river, you have to accept the means of a crucified saviour. That's how God's gift comes to you. Through the death of Jesus in your place. The cross requires us to accept God's gift with humility. For it tells us that we not as impressive as we think, but sinners deserving of death. It tells us that the way to be cleansed of sin and saved does not come from us or our good works, but by Jesus who had to die for us. Our Gift of life only comes to us free, because Jesus paid the price.

In Luke 14:11 Jesus tells us that

¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." – i.e. justified in God's sight, saved, gifted eternal life!

I almost missed out on a comfortable hotel because I was unwilling to humble myself and accept the park ranger's help.

Naaman, almost missed out on God's gift because he was initially unwilling to humble himself and accept God's means.

Wouldn't it be such a shame if you actually did miss out on God's gift eternal life simply because you were unwilling to accept what the cross says of you? You might need more time to consider that. Why not come along to our next course of CE that starts this Tuesday night online. We already have a few people signed up who want to learn more about the claims of Christianity. Come and join them.

3. Gehazi's Response

As we head towards the end, let's think about how Gehazi – Elisha's assistant - responds to God's free gift of grace to Naaman.

I think, most of us (even Christians) struggle with idea of grace. So many things in life are transactional. You work, you get paid. You train, you get fit. Many of us believe the motto that "there's no such thing as a free lunch."

But a couple of years ago, I mowed the front lawn of an elderly neighbour. When she saw that I had done it, she was so struck by a sense of indebtedness that she ran over to where I was in our front yard with a 5 dollar note in her hand and said, "here you must take this." I thought you were just going to mow my nature strip...

You've done too much for me. Take this money!

But I told her, "it's fine, I was happy to do it. And you know that I'm a Christian. Which means I'm someone who has received grace from God, so it's no problem for me to show grace to others, and this is a pretty small way." And I'll never forget her words:

"I know that's your religion luv ... But this is my religion." And with that, she held out the 5 dollar note and refused to let me take no for an answer.

I think there's a bit of that kind of religion in all of us? Where we can be tempted to think that God relates to us not on the basis of grace but of works. He gives, but only because we've earned it.

That's Gehazi's religion at the end of this passage. He sees Naaman – "that Aramean" as he calls him – getting something for nothing and he's annoyed. Look at verse 19:

*After Naaman had traveled some distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was **too easy** on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him."*

Gehazi is a little like the older brother in Jesus parable of the lost son (Luke 15). When the prodigal son returns to his father, His father doesn't make him work off the debt, or earn his way back into his good graces... He welcomes him in with open arms... The older brother sees that grace and grumbles to his father (Luke 15:29):

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.'

Like the older brother, Gehazi can't see the immeasurable blessings he has in simply belonging to the household of God.. All he sees, is an undeserving Aramean not paying what he owes. But unlike the older brother, Gehazi takes matters into his own hands.. He chases after Naaman, tracks him down, falsely says that Elisha had sent him to get some goods for the sake of some newly arrived visitors (v.22), takes from him two talents of silver and two sets of clothing (v.23) and hides them away for himself.

Do you see the irony? Gehazi thought Naaman was undeserving of God's free gift. But if anybody is shown to be undeserving of God's grace here is Gehazi. He shows himself to be man who saw no issue in coveting, lying and stealing, just to name a few of his sins.

What does Gehazi teach us? He teaches us that even those of us who have been in God's community for many years, who have listened time and again to His word, are still undeserving sinners who desperately need God's grace and forgiveness. Just as much as the "Aramean" we so despise.

Gehazi had stopped believing that. But we must never stop believing that, lest we fall into the same sin. When you mix a religion of works mindset with a puffed up view of yourself you're headed for trouble. You'll be inclined to say:

"I've done the time, I've been faithful, I've served on rosters, you owe me God! That's why I think you should just overlook my indulgence the occasional sexual sin. You owe me that".

"I'm entitled to take the occasional break from church – I'm sure you'll agree that I've had a pretty good strike rate for most of the year."

"Why would I share the gospel with my neighbour – He doesn't really deserve it. In fact I'd like of him standing before God and answering for all the times he inconsiderately parked on my nature strip."

A humble recognition that we are undeserving sinners keeps us from this mindset. In fact it helps us in two big ways. It makes us thankful for the abundant grace and gift of life we've been shown in Jesus. It moves us to be empathetic to those sinners we might otherwise have shown disdain for!

But Gehazi's sin also shows us the danger of refashioning God's message of grace into a message of works. Elisha had just introduced Naaman to the God of abounding grace. You get healed free of charge! That's the kind of God you've come to know.. Gehazi's actions distort that view. It In asking Naaman for even just a few extra things – Gehazi is now presenting God like a "generous friend" who calls in favours... "Well, I was very kind to you... Surely you could do this little bitty thing for me..." That's not called grace... That's called being in someone's debt. That's why God through his prophet Elisha says to him in verse 26:

26 But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes—or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves?"

It's like God is saying – is this moment - in which I am showing the glories of my free grace – really the moment to be taking anything?! You have tarnished my actions! You have twisted who I am to this man. You have made me to look like all those other so-called gods who get paid off to give good things. You have done a wicked thing! And that's why Gehazi is so severely punished. Verse 27:

27 Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

It's no small thing to take God's free gift of grace and wreck it by adding "conditions apply" in beside the word free. This was true with God's gift of healing to Naaman. It's true of God's free gift of salvation in Christ. Pauls says in Galatians 1:9:

If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Gehazi did this and he came under God's curse – He was made as leprous as the he had looked down on.

I was emailed a link to a youTube clip recently which tried to make the case that taking the Covid vaccine would make you lose your salvation. It was an example of how we try to put conditions on God's free gift of grace to us in Jesus.

It's not simply God's grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's grace plus your vaccine status. But could be other things. It's not simply God's grace by which you are saved, you also need to show us that you can speak in tongues, or be baptised, or demonstrate a life of good works. To add anything to the free grace that comes to us in Christ is to rob God of the total glory that belongs to him and place some of it on ourselves.. That message is wrong, that message does not save, and that message will bring judgment on those who continue to teach it.

Conclusion

Most of us go through life living by the motto “there’s no such thing as a free lunch.” This motto came to mind when I received this text on Thursday, telling me to claim my “free gift.”

Tonight we have heard about the true God who extends to each of us an infinitely good and free gift in His Son Jesus. Don’t dismiss God’s gift like you would this text. Believe it as the truth it is. Receive it with thanks. And, like Naaman, know the joy of being saved and changed by the living God.