

Last week my irrational fear of cats got mentioned in the sermon and that has prompted several questions about whether or not the cats were eating broccoli and if that was somehow connected. It's not, but it certainly wouldn't recommend either the broccoli or the cat to me. Today I'd like to talk about something I do actually like – a story from the Old Testament. All the stories are my favorite stories, but I think the reason I've always liked this particular one is because it has a little girl in it. There's not a lot of Bible stories that feature kids and this is about the only one that has a girl. The story is found in 2 Kings 5 and you can follow along there if you'd like.

We aren't specifically told who the king of Israel is at this moment, but presumably it's Ahab and Jezebel's son, Joram. Sometime before this story takes place there had been war between the Arameans and the Israelites. During one raid the Arameans had taken captives back to Syria. One of those captured was a little girl who knew the One, True God of Israel. She was given to the wife of the field marshal of the army whose name was Naaman. He was a great military leader who worked directly with the king of Aram. A valiant soldier, a great man, who was highly regarded by all. But, he also had a skin condition and desired to be healed of it. The Bible calls it leprosy, but it isn't the Hansen's disease that we know as leprosy today. Naaman was still working with the king and in charge of the army, so his condition was not contagious, but it was clearly bothersome. The little girl was clearly aware of his problem, presumably she could see this condition, maybe even overheard him speaking to his wife about the difficulties it caused him. The little girl went to her mistress full of faith and with a lot of guts and boldness said – "I know how the master could be cured. If only he would go and see the prophet in Samaria." That's why I like her – she was brave and unafraid to use her voice to speak up about her God.

Immediately Naaman went to see the king of Aram with the info from the little girl. The King said – you must go at once. I'll send you a letter to give to the king of Israel. Now, note the little girl said nothing about kings or politics or rival kingdoms she only spoke of the prophet of God. But, neither the King of Aram nor Naaman knew the God of Israel, yet. He packed up his horses and chariots with 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 sets of cloth that would make beautiful clothes. You never know how much a healing might cost. To be clear – this is

more money than it cost to purchase the hill of Samaria – so in other words he is willing to spend an absolute fortune on getting well. Naaman and his servants set out for Israel. They arrive at the palace and hand over the letter from the King of Aram to the King of Israel. The king of Israel goes crazy – what? Am I God? “Can I kill and bring back to life?” Is this some sort of trick and Aram is using this to declare war again? Why does he think I can heal skin conditions? So, at this he tears his robes. The prophet of God, Elisha, hears of this and sends a message to the king to find out why he’s grieving and panicking. Why are you tearing your robe? Send the guy to me and then you and him both will know there is still a prophet of the one, true God left in Israel. He said that last part just to anger the king because everyone knew the king’s family had been trying to kill off all God’s prophets for years. Except the false prophets weren’t going to be able to heal Naaman any more than the king could. So off Naaman goes to the house of Elisha.

Now, remember he’s a great man who deals with kings face to face. But, when he gets to Elisha, the prophet sends out a messenger with a strange message. Go wash yourself in the Jordan River 7 times and your skin will be restored and cleansed. Naaman is furious. The prophet didn’t even come out to greet him – does he not know who I am? – or to give the message face to face. Plus, he was expecting a miracle, not a ridiculous request to go dip himself 7 times in a dirty river. Syria had much nicer rivers – if he wanted to swim he would do it in the Abana or Pharpar rivers not in the muddy Jordan. He stomped off in a rage. The great man is acting like a child, and the little girl in the story had acted with maturity and faith beyond her years. I think the writer of the story wants us to see this play on words.

Naaman’s servants speak to him – My father, they say, because clearly flattery was the way to Naaman’s heart, if the prophet had asked something important or difficult of you wouldn’t you have done it? Why are you refusing to do something so simple and small? So, he reluctantly goes to the Jordan. He walks into the water and dips himself in 7 times. I have to wonder what was going on his mind with each dip. Was he progressively getting better with each dip? Was faith rising? Or was he getting angrier and angrier thinking this was the most stupid thing he’d ever let himself get talked into it? We don’t know what he was thinking but we do know that after the 7<sup>th</sup> time into the water his skin was restored and had become clean in a way he hadn’t

looked since he was a boy. The great man released his pride and became like a child. It happened just as the man of God had said it would. Naaman went back to Elisha and full of faith boldly declared, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”

To paraphrase Shakespeare:

**To obey or not to obey? That is THE question.**

Naaman was sure he was going to be asked to do something complex, heroic, or difficult and he knew he was up to the task. This was the fairy tale moment – the slay the dragon to get to the princess, or the kill the wicked witch and bring back her broom sorta moment – and if your brain didn’t go to Sleeping Beauty and Wizard of the Oz then I can’t help you. Perhaps this is the sort of thing Naaman would have been willing to do. Had he been asked he would have killed dragons in order to be healed.

So often we expect those grand, heroic opportunities too, but when the message comes to us from the Lord – the simple request for obedience we’re out.

Lord, I’ll do anything you ask of me. If persecution is coming I will die for you before I would ever renounce my faith. I’ll boldly stand up for Jesus! Then the message comes - tell your co-worker you’ll be praying for them before they take time off for a surgery? Oh, no, I’m out on that. I was prepared to do something much more difficult and much less likely to occur.

I’m ready to do the big thing – the thing that everyone will see and know and applaud me for! I’m ready for my 15 minutes of Christian fame. The message comes - will you do the small thing that will only matter to the 3 people who will actually know and be impacted? Well, no, I’m not really interested in that. I really don’t have the time for that. It sounds really involved.

If I had a million dollars I’d give so much to the work of the Lord. But, I don’t have a million dollars so I’m off the hook for the missions offering today. The message comes - give \$5 in the missions offering this morning – hey I have \$5. Don’t be asking me to do something simply and reasonable that I can actually do!

Often, we’re willing to obey and do the big, future things, but not the small in the present things we’re being asked to do. Naaman’s servants said, **“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?’” 2 Kings 5:13** The request was clear, the next step fairly simple, but would he obey or not obey?

Obedience is not always easy. For me I always want to know why? But, why do I have to do that? Does this serve a purpose? What’s the point of this? Why are we doing this? I’m giving Naaman a hard time but I wouldn’t have gone straight to the river either – I would have had multiple questions first. Why the Jordan? Why 7 times? All the way under water? Can I just stand and dip or do I have to get out each time and then get back in to count as 1? I would have needed to know exactly how this was going to work out and why this was the chosen method. I have always needed to know why. If my mother were here she could attest to this. Because as a child this incessant need to know why nearly drove my mom insane. And, as all good mother’s eventually say – the answer to a child’s, but why? Is because I said so.

Why did Naaman have to dip in the water? Because the man of God, the prophet of God who spoke on His behalf said so. Why do I have to walk this path? Why do I have to pray for that person? Why do I have to serve in this department at church? Why do I have to take that class, go back to school, work this job, decline the promotion, go to church when I don’t feel like it, be nice and kind to those who hurt me? Why? Sometimes the answer is because God said so. Sometimes obedience is just doing the thing God asked us to do. No other reason, no other explanation, no other plan, no other purpose. Just do what God is asking simply because He asked. We can obey or not obey – the choice is ours.

Think through the story again. The little girl, the great man – who did the simple request and who did the harder request? Here was this young girl – a slave, a captive, saying to her owner – I know how the master can be healed. What if she was wrong? What repercussions could have come her way if nothing had happened? What if she sent Naaman on an expensive journey for no reason? But she knew she had the answer. She knew who her God was and what He could do. She had to obey. All she did was speak up. She has two lines in this whole story. If only he’d go to the prophet. He would cure him. He will do it. She just knew He would. Her faith prompted her obedience. Was it a big thing or a small thing that she did?

Naaman arrives in Samaria and is asked to go dip in a river. This is not a difficult request. In fact, it's silly. At first he refuses, but then he sets aside his pride and steps into the water.

Obedience. Was it a big thing or a small thing that he did?

Or, did both of them just simply choose to do the obedient thing? To obey or not to obey is always The question.

### **Obedience makes way for the miracle**

The little girl was obedient to speak the truth which sent Naaman to Samaria looking for a cure. First, he goes to the King of Israel. The ruler of his day could not heal him. We shouldn't be surprised that the government didn't have the power to heal or to save. It didn't then and it doesn't now. Yet how often do we misplace our faith in the wrong things? People have long looked to the government to solve problems only God can fix. So, it makes sense that Naaman would head to the palace upon arrival. But, the King of Israel, who was doing evil in the eyes of the Lord, and was ruling solely on his own wisdom, realized when confronted with an issue of spiritual consequence that he was not God. **"As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, 'Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?'" 2 Kings 5:7** The king couldn't heal him because the king cannot do what God alone can do. You can't govern your way around being obedient to God.

Next, Naaman goes to the man of God, but Elisha doesn't even come out to see him. Elisha knew who could restore and heal and bring Naaman back to life. He also knew it wasn't him. Elisha was just the servant of the One, True God who did in fact have the power to kill and bring back to life. Later on in the story after Naaman is healed he tries to give Elisha all the silver and gold he had brought with him. But, here's the thing – you can't bargain your way out of obedience and you can't buy yourself a miracle. So, side note, if you're gonna need to send in a special offering to receive your healing – turn the channel! The healing wasn't found in the prophet's giftings or abilities or in what the silver and gold could attain, but in the God of Israel whom the prophet served.

Naaman finally heads down to the water in the Jordan River. He's right the Jordan River is dirty. I can't believe my dad isn't here for me to make an Israel reference – but maybe it's just fitting

that even when he's not here you'll still hear someone say – for those of you who have been with us in Israel and have been to the Jordan or been baptized there – you know it's not super nice. Naaman was probably correct – there were nicer rivers. But, the river wasn't bringing healing to him either. The Jordan, the Abana and the Pharpar were just rivers that God created. Creation is subject to God and He can use whatever He wants to bring about a miracle, but rivers themselves can't perform a miracle. Because here's the thing – it wasn't about the water – it was about obedience.

The miracle wasn't in the government, the King, the prophet, or the water. The miracle worker was the God of Israel and Naaman's act of obedience opened the door for the miracle to occur in his life.

Maybe you've been trying to find the answer to the problem in your life in all the wrong places. You've consulted earthly leaders, rulers, authorities. You've tried climbing the ladder of success, following influencers. You've been convinced by prophets, preachers, and teachers to believe crazy things yet you've no more peace or wisdom than you had before. You've tried to bargain and plead your way out of doing what you know God has been saying to you. It doesn't make sense, this isn't the right time, do I have to do it now, maybe when the kids are older, for now I'll just send money instead of myself. You've outright refused to do what you know God has been speaking to your heart to do because it makes as much sense as dipping in a muddy river and coming out clean. But the miracle, the provision, the answer, the direction you're seeking – all of it comes from God alone and our simple step of obedience to the Lord will make way for it.

### **Miracles make way for revelation**

The little girl didn't know that her small step of obedience – I know how he can be cured – would lead to a great man getting healed. Naaman didn't know that his steps of obedience – traveling to Samaria, dipping in the Jordan River 7 times – would lead to a revelation of who God is and desired to be in his life. Neither of them knew the impact their obedience would make on a nation.

Naaman had gone away from Elisha angry – angry because things weren't going the way he had planned. **"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.” 2 Kings 5:11** How many times have we been angry because God wasn't doing what we thought He should do? I thought you were gonna show up and work a miracle in this situation the way I thought you should! I thought my life was gonna look like this... I thought I had a plan... I thought I knew where I was headed... I thought I had it all figured out... I thought surely I would be further in reaching my goals by now... I thought, I thought, I thought.

But, when Naaman stopped thinking of how he thought the miracle should come and actually obeyed what was asked of him he discovered the leprosy was gone.

Naaman also wrongly expected the prophet to work some sort of magic. Wave your hand and heal me. I ask, you perform, you grant me my wish, I carry on with my life. That's not how relationship with God works. Prayer isn't a magic weapon, and the Scripture isn't a magic spell we say over our lives. Prayer is us communicating with our Father God and our Savior Jesus Christ. The Bible is powerful! It's living and active! It contains truth that we apply to our lives and live out. Our obedience is part of us living out God's commands. If we love Jesus we'll follow and obey His commands.

Obedience led to a miracle and the miracle led Naaman to say with certainty, **“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.” 2 Kings 5:15**

Naaman didn't say that God was better than all the other gods, that He was the best of the gods, that He was more powerful than any other god. Naaman declared – There is no god except this God. He's the only one! His small act of obedience revealed something about the nature and power of the One and Only True God. Had he been cured the way he thought it should happen he would have never known who God was. He would have assumed the king had the power or Elisha was a magician. He would have never experienced God in the way that he did – alone, in the Jordan River – no one else beside him – just him and God in a dirty, desperate place with only a simple act of obedience prompting an incredible revelation – You are God and there is no other.

Our next step of simple obedience might just be what stands between us and the greatest revelation of who God is that we've ever seen. Imagine what God longs to reveal to you if you'll obey and do what He's asking you to do.

### **What is God asking you to do?**

This sermon came about because a few weeks ago I was reading a book and came across a statement. It was a throwaway line – the chapter wasn't on 2 Kings or Naaman or obedience. It was just one sentence as an illustration of a completely different point, but it said, **“Naaman almost missed healing from the deadly disease of leprosy because he did not want to deal with simplicity.”** – Melvin V. Wade Sr. The questions that have been in my mind since I read that statement are these:

#### **What simple tasks are we refusing to do while waiting for larger, more important ones?**

We're ready to do big things while refusing to do the small things. Are there calls to daily obedience we're ignoring while declaring that we'll do whatever you ask of me, Lord!

**What small thing are we turning down or not obeying and, in the process, missing the miracle that God has for us?** What if the provision you need, the answer, the direction, the healing, the deliverance is coming at the next step of obedience? What if Naaman hadn't dipped into the water all 7 times?

#### **What revelation of God awaits us if we'll step out in simple obedience?**

Obedience doesn't always make sense, but it's always worth it because obedience always leads to contentment and joy. God might just surprise you with His faithfulness, delight you with His presence, thrill you with His love.

Nearly a thousand years later the Apostle Paul wrote to a young church in the Greek city of Philippi and outlined these exact same things in the life of Jesus – obedience led to a miracle that led to revelation – and instructed us to have the same attitude:

**“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”**

Jesus obeyed the Father – and died for us. This wasn't a simple request or task. This was a big thing. But, His obedient death on the cross made way for the miracle of salvation that is offered



to each of us this morning. His death brings us life. That is the greatest miracle ever known. That miracle made way for revelation.

**“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11**

The greatest step of obedience we can take is to surrender ourselves to Jesus. To acknowledge that He is Lord of our lives. To exalt Him above everything else. To recognize that His death has brought us life and that because He died and rose again I can be forgiven of my sins. If you haven't asked Jesus to save you – you can do that today as we pray.

But, this morning, will we all take just a moment to say yes, in obedience, to whatever the Lord is asking us to do?

Let's pray.