

Sermon Preached By Phillip Jensen, Dean of Sydney, at The Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-15

Topic: *The Reluctant Hero of Faith*

Last week I spoke of an unnamed Heroine of Faith, a slave girl, whose name is known only to God. This is such a contrast to today's Hero of Faith, Naaman. We know his name and we know of his fame. Verse 1 tells us he was a victorious and successful commander of the king's army. A man held in high esteem by the king and a mighty man of valour. But in his own way he too was a hero of faith. He was a hero of faith in a very different way to the slave girl, yet both were heroes of faith.

We will start by thinking for a few moments on

## 1. FAITH AND ITS OPPOSITES

Faith is a strange thing for many people. They would like it, they want it but yet they are not sure what it is and they are not sure of how to get it. They do not recognise it within themselves and they do not understand its opposites. Opposites are helpful in understanding something. Eg war is not peace; fiction is not fact; black is not white; sin is not holiness. But what are opposites of faith? Most people would answer "doubt", but doubt can be part of faith and doubt can be indecisiveness and a personality characteristic. A better word for doubt that is the opposite of faith is "double-minded" *James 1:5-8* Note in verse 6 "but let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." This is a person who wants God but also wants the world, who wants God's wisdom but also the world's wisdom. There are people who want God's wisdom but still live by their own wisdom, unless God's wisdom agrees with them. That is not faith, because we cannot rely upon God and something or someone else.

The second opposite is related to doubt, namely disobedience. We see it in Hebrews 3:17-18, "And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?" They did not enter the promised land because of their disobedience and their unbelief. If you believe God, then you believe God's word. If God in His word tells you to do something, then you do it. If God in his word tells you **not** to do something, then you do not do it. To disobey God is to show you do not believe God; that you do not trust God; that you do not rely upon God and that you do not have faith.

This brings us to the third opposite to faith. The one that was particularly relevant to Naaman, pride. Naaman was too proud to trust somebody else, too proud to depend upon another person. Pride often gets in the way of faith, for pride is about self. Faith is about somebody else, while pride is about self-reliance. Faith is about humble dependence. A proud four year old would say "I can do it." Faith says, "I cannot do it. Please help me."

## 2. THE PRIDE THAT BLINDS

For while Naaman the commander was a leper he was also blind. Not physically blind but spiritually, personally and morally blind. His pride had three elements,

### a) National Pride:

Syria had conquered Israel and moreover, Syria had good rivers, viz. Abana and Pharpa. People tend to think of "our" nation, people, culture, religion to be of superior importance, (of course they are not). Tribal, racial, national pride blinds us to God, God who is Lord over all nations, who is not a respecter of persons, who gave Syria victory.

b) Personal Pride:

Naaman was a big man. He didn't go to the prophet of Israel. He went to the king of Israel. He came with money, servants and a letter from the king of Syria. How enraged he was to be left outside the prophet's door and then to be told to wash in the Jordan River. His pride had created expectations of how to be healed, v.11. He expected the prophet to come out, call on a name, wave his hand over the spot and cure the leper, not to be told to wash. The third aspect of pride that blinds,

c) Humiliating Pride:

Pride goes before a fall. When we are proud like this we become stupid, obstinate, foolish, so even his servants could see his folly. He had to take his servant's advice, follow the word of the Israelite prophet, climb down off his high horse and wash himself seven times in the Jordan. Pride is so humiliating. He could go home a proud leper or a humbled man, humbled and clean, humbled and healed. So often, the biggest hurdle to our healing is pride. We will not humble ourselves to ask, not accept God's way even when a hopeless leper.

### **3. THE HUMILITY THAT SAVES**

a) He had to acknowledge that there is a prophet in Israel

Not a king, a commander or worthy peer, but a man of God, an Israelite prophet, not a Syrian but an Israelite. Salvation comes from the Jews. You cannot be anti-Semitic and Christian because Jesus was Jewish. Salvation, healing, peace, righteousness comes from Jesus. You cannot be anti-Semitic and Christian because Jesus was Jewish. Salvation, healing, peace, righteousness comes from Jesus. You cannot be a proud Christian because you come on the basis of a crucified Jew, not on the basis of wisdom or power. The humility that saves acknowledges,

b) There is a word in Israel

When we put our faith in God, his word, his prophet and the prophet's word and not in, what Naaman would have liked, waving arms, coming out, praying out loud. What he got was a word, but what a word! V13 "a great word", 'wash and be cleaned.' It is like a great word of the gospel, "Believe on Lord Jesus Christ and be saved." People say, "But I want to do something, I want to have other impressive religious activities." God is saying, "Trust me" and that is a great word, because

c) There is a God in Israel

and Naaman came to see it, v.15, "There is no God in all the earth but in Israel." This is a humble faith, trusting not in self or religion or in national culture, trusting just in God. And that friends is

### **4. THE NATURE OF FAITH**

It is why this man is a hero of faith because he got down off his high horse and did what God said to do, he trusted God's word to him. He humbled himself as God humbled him and came to God on God's terms and not on his own terms. It takes courage to be humble, to have faith, to trust God. Friends, we are going to pray for a clear word of salvation (forgiveness), a clear word to trust in the Lord with all our heart and understanding. We cannot heal ourselves, our hearts, our relationships, bodies or lives. God and only God, can. So we must turn back to him, for his way, in prayer by Jesus.