

When our Lord Jesus Christ was challenged about doing miracles in his own hometown (23, 24; 27) he said to them, *"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."* And he said, *"Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."* *"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."* For Naaman was an outsider, a Syrian, not an Israelite, not chosen, in fact a conquering enemy. We will look at Naaman as the first of three men.

1. The Outsider's Faith

Naaman was an outsider, a Syrian commander, not an Israelite, not one of the chosen people. In fact he was the conquering enemy. But his faith was weak. He was challenged to overcome his pride to dip seven times in the River Jordan, as the prophet said. Faith is taking God at his word. He was told what to do, was promised cleansing, and did what he was told to do. He dipped seven times. It must have been a humiliating, repetitious activity. But when he came up the seventh time, he had the flesh of a little child (v.14). He was not just healed, but his skin was better than new. When God saves he also heals and cleanses. What we see then is,

A Response of Faith

Faith is not just present before the cleansing and it is not just present when dipping seven times in the river, real faith goes on after healing has occurred and it is strengthened, developed and focused by the healing. Real faith is seen in works. This is the point of James 2:18 *"Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* So with Naaman. The outsider's faith is seen as he returns to give thanks. V15. *"Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, 'Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel..."* Naaman says that although he must enter the house of Rimmon with his master, from now on, in his heart, he would worship only Yahweh. He asks for two mule loads of earth from Israel as a sign that he would only worship the God of Israel.

Elisha refused the thank-offering that Naaman offered him. V16 *"As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive none."* But when Gehazi followed Naaman and asked for a gift, Naaman gave it to him immediately, generously and without question. V23 *"And Naaman said, 'be pleased to accept two talents.' And he urged on him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments and laid them on two of his servants."* This brings us to our second man, Gehazi and we see,

2. The Insider's Greed

Gehazi was obviously disappointed in Elisha's refusal to take money from Naaman. Gehazi saw it as gaining from the Syrian. Note verse 20 *"Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God said, 'See my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought.'" Not "Naaman", not "Naaman my brother", not "Naaman the cleansed", not "Naaman the man of faith", but "Naaman the Syrian". Gehazi is saying, never let it be forgotten that he is one of those outsiders, the foreigners, our enemies. He is the man who conquered us and stole our young folk and oppressed our people. We should make him pay. We should gain from his calamity, we should prosper from his pain. Gehazi is not a man of forgiveness or faith or a man of God. So he tricks Naaman into giving him money and garments. But sin always requires a cover up. Satan is the "prince of darkness" and the "father of lies". Gehazi is called to account by Elisha but he declares that he has been "nowhere" (v25). If you cannot do something publicly, then you most likely should not do it at all. If you have to lie about something, it was most likely sinful. We can be so stupid. We think that lying makes it OK and acceptable. We think that we will never be caught out in our lies. We think lying is not changing and corrupting us. We even think lying will deceive God! This is the prophet's servant. He has just seen the prophet's word heal a leper and he thinks*

he can lie to the prophet. So we see the awful judgment of God on the insider Gehazi. The leprosy of Naaman falls on the skin of Gehazi. V27 *“Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.”* You see this was not the time for the tribute of the nations to come to Israel. This action of Gehazi was self-centred greed and unforgiving hostility to an outsider. So the healing became the curse. Which was pronounced by the third man,

3. The Prophet of Israel

Elisha. He understood the mind of God and spoke the word of God. This healing was a one-off demonstration of God’s salvation and judgment. Salvation to outsiders and judgment to Israel. It was not time to take the money from the nations. So he refuses Naaman’s request. He will not accept his money. He did not heal for money. He will not be indebted to the Syrian. He was serving God, the Lord. So he was in the right when he challenged Gehazi saying to him, “you stand before me as a servant but yet you do your own work not mine.” Elisha was God’s servant standing before God and doing God’s work. Gehazi was not such a servant and Elisha rebukes him. But it is more than a challenge and a rebuke, Elisha judges Gehazi with the curse of leprosy.

All sickness comes from the sinfulness of humanity. Not all sin leads to sickness. Not all sickness comes from specific sins not does it incur specific judgment. But sometimes specific sin does lead to specific judgment. God is sovereign over both sickness and healing and on this occasion Gehazi’s leprosy is a miracle just as Naaman’s cleansing is a miracle. So we must learn,

4. Our Lessons.

Firstly, the Sovereign Power of God. We see it here,

(i) in healing, which is what we want to see, why we have come to pray and expectantly look forward to. God can cleanse outsider Naaman of leprosy. He can cure and heal you and me of any, or all, our illnesses. So pray to the Sovereign God who is able. But we must see the other side of the same coin *ie.* The Sovereign Power of God,

(ii) in sickness. God gives rain and sunshine, he is sovereign over all matters and he can even visit us in sickness. We cannot separate sickness from spiritual realities, as if God cannot heal, or as if my sin cannot lead to sickness. Or as if I can secretly sin and expect God to bless and heal. Friends, there is no deceiving God. If we come to him we must come to the Sovereign Lord, the God who pardons. There is no other God in all the world. For this is,

The life of faith. Trusting in the sovereign Lord. It is the faith of the outsider, Naaman who was healed and who came to acknowledge God. Therefore he trusted the prophet’s word and dipped seven time in the Jordan.

It does not matter who you are, where you come from, what you have done. Come to the Saviour, sovereign Lord. For be warned of the failure of the insider. The man who lived in the prophet’s house but did not have faith in the prophet’s God. The last state of that man was worse than the first. Put your faith in God. How? By prayer, and if your faith is real it will lead to a changed life.