

We Rejoice to Bring Foreigners to Christ
Sermon on 2 Kings 5:1-17
Weekend of July 29, 2007
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther

**Theme: The Experience of a Servant Girl, Naaman, & Elisha
Parallels Our Own Experience**

The Psalms urge us: *Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—who rejoice to bring foreigners to Christ:

God's Word for our special consideration this morning continues our summer sermon series on Elijah and Elisha. It describes the time that an Israelite servant girl, who worked in the household of a foreigner named Naaman, introduced Naaman to the Prophet Elisha, servant of the true God. Now, as a congregation, we can relate to this story. We also have worked together to introduce foreigners to the one true God. And so, we consider together Second Kings, chapter five, verses one through seventeen—which I'll read and explain as we go along:

Part One: Naaman's Disease Is the Same as Ours & That of Others

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, but he had leprosy.

Of course, you remember that this took place about eight hundred years before Christ, some two thousand eight hundred years ago now. We are dealing with the Northern Kingdom of God's people, Israel, because that's where Elisha was working. But we actually start in *Aram*, modern day Syria, the country immediately to the north of Israel. That country was alternately a rival and then again an outright enemy of Israel, back at that time.

This *Naaman* we read about *was commander of the army of the king of Aram*. Naaman was the top general of the enemy army against Israel! It was the *Lord's* plan to *give victory to Aram* over Israel by way of this fellow. So, this Naaman was, rather naturally, one of the guys the Israelites most feared and hated.

Oh, and *he had leprosy*. A classic case of leprosy would have had some of his skin rotting. After that, more of his skin would rot, eventually robbing him of hands and feet and limbs. Finally, this leprosy would result in Naaman's death.

Now, you and I know people like Naaman these days. Foreigners—they speak a different language. They've "invaded" our country—and not just our country, our community. Some people fear and hate them—like Naaman was feared and hated by the people of Israel.

Oh, and these people like Naaman—they have leprosy, too. These foreigners I'm talking about, who've come to our community, they have leprosy—not leprosy physically, but leprosy spiritually. Their leprosy rots their soul. It robs their soul. Finally, it takes their lives.

Oh, and did I mention? You and I have this leprosy, too. It is the sinfulness of our souls. It rots us, robs us, and murders us, too....

Part Two: Naaman's Cure Is the Same as Ours & That of Others

Now bands from Aram – Naaman's foreign country – had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel. This tender young girl from Israel was probably in her early- to mid- teens. She was a POW, literally a prisoner of war! And she served Naaman's wife.

Now, in the course of time: She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." What an amazing statement! First of all, it's obvious that this young gal had lots of confidence in Christ, and in his Prophet Elisha. Secondly, here she is – a slave, kidnapped and forced far away from home, a prisoner of war, in the very household of one of her people's most-feared, most-hated enemies – and her heart is filled with compassion for her master. She wants him cured—of both leprosies: both body and soul.

And it begs the question. Do we have the same compassion? Are we willing to show the same mercy—and speak up to foreigners, even “invading” foreigners, even feared foreigners, about Jesus?

Well, anyway: Naaman went to his master – the king of this foreign country of Aram – and Naaman told him what the girl from Israel had said. "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter of recommendation to the king of Israel."

So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents (seven hundred fifty pounds) of silver, six thousand shekels (a hundred fifty pounds) of gold, and ten sets of clothing. It actually might have approached one point five million dollars' worth—this foreigner would have a significant economic impact.

The letter that Naaman took to the king of Israel from the King of Aram read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." And so, Naaman makes the nearly week long journey, more than a hundred miles to the southeast, from his capital city of Damascus to Israel's capital city of Samaria.

And you can imagine: As soon as the king of Israel read the letter – that he was supposed to cure this Naaman of his leprosy – he tore his robes in distress 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? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" “I can't cure Naaman. His master knows I can't cure leprosy. The king of Aram just wants to blame me for not healing Naaman, so that he has an excuse to attack me!”

And I suppose you'd have to add: We are just as incapable as the king of Israel in curing our spiritual form of leprosy these days. We cannot cure ourselves. Nor are we capable of curing others either.

Nevertheless: When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." “You are not God, so as to cure leprosy. Nor am I,” Elisha is saying. “But the true God does operate through his Word spoken by godly people.”

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha himself didn't come out. Elisha himself didn't have power to cure the leprosy. But the Word of the Lord through Elisha did have that strength! So, Elisha sent a messenger to say to Naaman, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan" – the lazy, muddy Jordan, a sort of a miserable excuse for a river, and about a twenty mile trip downhill from there, another whole day's journey. "And your flesh will be restored," says Elisha to Naaman, "and you will be cleansed."

But Naaman went away angry. And you can sort of understand it. It's like **he said, "I thought that Elisha 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."** "That would have been something to see! That would have been worthy of a guy like me. But sending me to the Jordan?!" **"Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel?"** And they were! Cascading from the slopes of tall Mount Hermon in the north, those rivers rushed past Damascus, and their cool fresh waters practically made the city an oasis. So, Naaman asks: **"Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.**

But fortunately: **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!'"**

And Naaman was persuaded: **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 – not restored only to become the skin of a rough and mature man, but it – became clean like that of a young boy.**

Dramatic, isn't it?—but not quite as dramatic as what happened to you....

I mean: there you were: leprous. No, not physically—your skin was as soft and clean as that of a young boy or a young girl. But your soul was leprous. My brother, my sister, your heart was rotting away inside you! Your leprosy was robbing you of any happiness in your life here. Your leprosy was slowly killing you! And I know it, because mine was doing the same to me.

But then you were dipped, you were washed, in God's river—not seven times like Naaman, but probably three, eh? "In the name of the Father"—and God the Father lifted your soul into his powerful, loving hands. "In the name of the Son"—and God the Son, Jesus Christ, rinsed your soul clean in the cleansing bathing of his blood. "In the name of the Holy Spirit"—and God the Spirit rushed into your soul with his healthy strength to make you alive again.

And my friend, you revisit that river every time you dive into the refreshing, cleansing waters of the Holy Scriptures.

Now, my brother, my sister: How can we keep this cure from others?! Don't we have to invite them—like the little Israelite servant girl?! Don't we have to direct them—like Elisha?! Don't we have to rejoice with them—just as we have rejoiced to leave our leprosy behind?!—even if they do speak a different language, even if they are from a different country, even if they are rivals or even enemies, as Naaman was....

Part Three: Naaman's Reaction Is the Same as Ours & That of Others

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him – Naaman stood there before Elisha, who this time came out to meet face-to-face with him – **and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel."** "The God we've gotten to know from you – not Mary, not a set of superstitious spirits, not a God who demands our best behavior in order to reward us with la vida eterna – but rather Jesus Christ, the loving Savior, whose sacrificial death substituted for our own, and whose resurrection to life guarantees our own: this is the true Lord—en los Estados Unidos, en México, y en todo el mundo."

"Please accept now a gift from your servant," Naaman says to Elisha. But: **The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing."** God's gift to us, in Jesus Christ, is free. And we are happy to spend our money, and our time, and our lives delivering the gift of Jesus Christ to others: for free.

And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. So: "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. And that is the biggest miracle in this account. The disappearance of Naaman's physical leprosy was marvelous. But when he lost the leprosy in his soul – when he obtained the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ – that was much more marvelous.

And you've got to wonder.... I imagine that all of this had to make Naaman, and the king whom he served, much more reluctant to attack Israel any longer. Now, could it be that our proclamation of the gospel message across cultures does some of the same? Could it be that our love and friendship – that Christ's love and friendship – wins people over these days, too? Might that contribute to a community, growing in diversity, with fewer of the cross-cultural problems – even racial tensions – that many other communities experience? I wonder....

Conclusion: We Rejoice to Bring Foreigners to Christ, as the Servant Girl Brought Naaman to Elisha

Regardless, the reason Saint Mark's carries on Spanish Language Outreach today is the same reason we started to do so ten years ago. Sinful folks need their Savior Jesus Christ. Spanish-speaking folks are no less deserving of the gospel, nor any more so, than English-speaking folks are.

To conclude: Thank you for your support as we have reached these people together. Thank you for your tens of thousands of prayers, for your thousands of dollars, and for the hundreds of times you have bravely spoken up in favor of the outreach we carry on together. Thank you for the opportunity – what a privilege! – to reach folks who originated “south of the border”, mis amigos and now also your friends in Christ—forever! Amen.

The Psalms urge us: *Declare God's glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.* Amen.