Who is Saving My Life? - 2/05/2017

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2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man
and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given
victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from
leprosy. [2]Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl
captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. [3]She said to
her mistress, 'If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He
would cure him of his leprosy.' [4]So Naaman went in and told his lord just
what the girl from the land of Israel had said. [5]And the king of Aram said,
'Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.'
He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold,
and ten sets of garments. [6]He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which
read, 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my
servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.' [7]When the king of
Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to give death
or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just
look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.' 8 But when Elisha
the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a
message to the king, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to
me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.' [9]So Naaman came
with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's
house. [10]Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go, wash in the Jordan
seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.' [11]But
Naaman became angry and went away, saying, 'I thought that for me he
would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his
God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! [12]Are
not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters
of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?' He turned and went
away in a rage. [13]But his servants approached and said to him, 'Father, if
the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not
have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, "Wash, and be
clean"?' [14]So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the
Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored
like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

1. The People We Impact

According to some estimates, each of us will interact with up to 80,000 people in our lifetime. When I heard this statistic, I began to think:

how many of these people do we really impact in a lifetime? Some people, like the president of a country, may have an impact on a large number of people. But how often do we have a life-changing impact on the people around us? For most of us, we likely have an impact on a handful of people.

2. A Hebrew Maid and Naaman

This morning we hear an amazing story from 2 Kings chapter 5. It is a story of Naaman's healing of leprosy that no one ever expected would happen. Naaman was the commander of the Aramean king's army. Aram was a country northeast of Israel in the land that would later be called Syria. Naaman was a valiant warrior. The writer of 2 Kings says that the Lord had given victory to Aram.

Tragedy struck in the midst of victory. Naaman became a leper. Naaman would have fallen into despair and would have longed to be cured of his disease. In his struggle, Naaman hears a potential for a cure from his wife's maid. She is a young Israeli girl. She had been taken captive when raiders from the king of Aram had attacked Israel. She had been wrenched from her home and her family and was now a slave in the home of Naaman. She could have become bitter and resentful but she has compassion for Naaman. And so, one day she says to his wife, "**If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy**" (2 Kings 5:3).

I am not sure I could do as she had done. But I am reminded of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:43-45. "'**You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous**." Jesus gives us an important lesson. We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. When we do this, we become children of God.

3. Naaman's Response

What was Naaman's response to his wife's young maid? He could have dismissed or ignored the slave girl's suggestion. But instead, he acted on her words. In verse 5, after telling the king of Aram, the king tells Naaman, "**Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel"**

(5:5). Despite the danger of Naaman being captured in Israel, the King of Aram writes a letter to the king of Israel to heal Naaman. Naaman left, taking with him the letter from his king, ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of clothing. Naaman was so excited about being healed of leprosy.

When the king of Israel read the letter, he could not believe what he read. The king of Israel knew that only God could cure leprosy, but the king was not God. The request from the king of Israel was not possible at all. He may have thought the king of Aram was trying to provoke a war. The king of Israel tore his clothes in shock and dismay. The prophet Elisha heard about this and asked the King of Israel to let Naaman come to him. In verse 8 and the following, we see that the prophet Elisha gave orders to Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times. At first he was angry but later he did as the prophet Elisha had said. After Naaman dipped himself seven times in the Jordan River, his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. Naaman was both overjoyed and awed at the power of God. In verse 15, Naaman confesses, "**Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel**." Naaman realized that the Lord is the one true God, and that there is no other. Naaman was thankful not only that he was healed of leprosy, but also for experiencing God's power.

4. God Loves the Gentiles

What we hear from this story is quite different from other stories in the Old Testament. In most cases, we read story after story that God is on the side of Israel, helping Israel to defeat the Gentile countries. But in this episode, God saves Naaman and gives victory to a commander who is against the Jews. God uses a Jewish servant girl and the prophet Elisha to cure a Gentile commander. This image would be unthinkable for a Jewish person reading this passage. What then is God telling us through this story? God is reminding us that God's love is not only for the Israelites but also for the Gentiles. God would use this story to remind the Israelites that God is using his people, the Israelites to save the Gentiles.

5. Conclusion

Today's scripture tells us how God used a young Jewish girl to save and transform Naaman for God's kingdom. I am very curious to know who the young Israeli girl was. I want to know what her name was and how old she was when she served in the home of Naaman. I am wondering how she began to serve Naaman's wife. And I would like to know how she was

so nice to Naaman and his wife. I also want to know who helped her to have such wonderful faith. I would like to know who told her about the prophet Elisha. Since she never complained about her circumstances, I am wondering whether she volunteered to serve Naaman's family. Probably God knew her desire to be an instrument of salvation to the foreigners, so God sent her to Naaman. She was an angel of the Lord for him. She was a messenger of hope and God's agent of salvation.

6. Application

What does this story tell us? Last Sunday we had 27 children. It could be the biggest number of children since I came to Swift Memorial Church. I have been asking a question. Why does God keep sending children to us? I am sure that God wants us to teach them how much God loves them and God wants to use them as God used the slave Israeli girl for Naaman. What do we have to do if God keeps sending us more children and youth? I believe that we have to be ready for more children and youth. The other day I read the 2000 Charge Conference report, and learned that we had 50 children and youth. I believe God will send more children and youth if we are ready to welcome them. Do you think we are ready? I believe so. Why?

Last week one of church members sent me an email and asked me to stop by. When Christine and I got there, she showed me what she was doing. She was working on a project to raise some money for the Activity Center. This is what she made with the slate from our church roof. She began to do this because she felt God wanted her to do this. Have you ever prayed to learn what God wants you to do for the church, for this community and for the Activity Center?

I have learned throughout my ministry that if God wants to do something, God inspires someone to begin and invites more people to join to fulfill God's dream. As long as we listen to God and follow God's directions, we will see miracles that we have never dreamed of. Philippians 1:6 says, **"he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** God began to save all human beings through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Jesus, and his followers. God will continue doing God's mission by empowering God's people through the power of the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns. May God bless each one of us and use us to bring salvation to all human beings. Amen.