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GENERAL NAAMAN HEALED – MERCIES APPRECIATED.

– *AUG. 21. – 2 KINGS 5:1-14.* –

"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved."
– Jer. 17:14.

ELISHA'S fame was evidently very general throughout Israel, and this lesson tells us of its spread to Syria, the adjoining kingdom, through one of its captives – a maidservant in the household of one of Syria's principal generals. For some reason the Lord seems to have had more interest in Syria than in the other nations of the world outside of Israel and Judah. The reason of this probably lies in the fact that King David conquered Syria, and incorporated it as a part of the twelve-tribe kingdom, and it so continued during the period of Solomon's reign. It was thus considerably permeated with Israelitish influence. At the time of the revolt of the ten tribes and the division of Israel into two kingdoms, the kingdom of Syria seems to have regained its independence: nevertheless, because of its intimate relationship with the people of Israel we found (in our lesson of July 24), that Elijah the prophet was sent to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, as indicating a special oversight of that people on the Lord's part, more than of other Gentile nations. No doubt because of this intimacy with Israel, Syria is frequently referred to also in the [R2346 : page 234] prophets, and her captivity to Babylon was foretold.

At all events, affairs so shaped themselves as to bring to the chief general of Syria a better knowledge of the true God, Jehovah, and that through the instrumentality of the little bondmaid. Naaman, with all his prowess in war, and his favor with the king, and the honor done him by the people, had a very serious ailment – leprosy. A man of wealth and position, he would have given almost anything to be free from the loathsome disease. The little maid, so far from feeling envious, revengeful and wickedly toward her captors, was evidently

exercised by a very benevolent, kindly disposition; and perhaps indeed she had been well cared for by her captors, and was appreciative. Seeing the general's trouble she called the matter to the attention of her mistress, assuring her that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him.

She probably knew nothing about the name of the prophet, nor about his resident city, but her account was sufficiently explicit to awaken the interest of her master, the leper, who started out on his journey to the land of Israel, to see the prophet. Naturally, he sought to bring as much influence to bear as possible, and hence took letters from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, as well as valuable presents of money, fine apparel, etc. This would be expected of a wealthy man, dealing with a wealthy man, a king. And the thought in mind of the general, as well as in that of the Syrian king, evidently was that any prophet so notable as the one indicated, and able to cure any kind of a disease, and who had already performed wonderful cures, would be found at the royal court, specially favored of the king, and made a high officer in some sense in the kingdom.

Hence it was that so remarkable a letter was written, which for the time confounded the king of Israel. It read: "I have herewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." [R2347 : page 234] Leprosy was recognized as being an incurable disease; therefore the king of Israel at once surmised that the king of Syria wished to pick a quarrel with him, and to have an excuse for another invasion, to carry off more spoil and more captives. The rending or tearing of the outer garment was, in olden times, a sign of sore distress, perplexity of mind; but it was much less of an operation than it would be with modern clothes. The action of the king was evidently soon noised abroad, and came to the ears of Elisha, who at once sent word that the king need have no perplexity, but should send the leper to him; intimating that he would be healed. All of this experience doubtless seemed very strange to Naaman, as he found that the king knew nothing about such a person at first, and

finally had sent him to a lowly house. He was still more surprised and disappointed when the prophet did not even think it worth while to come out and salute him, or do obeisance, or make particular inquiry or say any words of enchantment, etc., but sent him a commonplace message, that he needed to go and wash several times. He was indignant; he knew that the waters of the river Jordan were muddy, far less likely to wash away any defilement than the waters of his own city, Damascus, which were beautiful, clear mountain streams. Naaman was wroth: had he come a long journey, and with imposing outfit of chariots and servants, to be treated like a dog? Was he not a great man with his master, the king of Syria, and was not the latter an influential king in those parts? "So he turned and went away in a rage."

Leprosy in the Scriptures, because it is incurable, and because it eats as a canker, is used as a symbol of sin, which cannot be eradicated from the blood and the system, except by divine power. Sometimes great sinners, and wealthy sinners, recognize themselves as sinners, and desire to be cleansed; and some of these are inclined to think that there should be some special manner of dealing with their cases, different from the general one: for they are willing to give of their influence or of their means. They forget that our God is not poor; all the gold and silver are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. It is, therefore, difficult for wealthy people to humble themselves, and to come to the Lord in the only attitude of humble obedience, that will gain the desired end; hence it is that the Lord said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" – with what difficulty will they get in, – how few of them will get in. And this applies not only to great riches of money, but also to riches of reputation and to wealth of learning. Hence we see that it is much easier for poor people, and unlearned people, and people without great reputations to come to the Lord and to accept the great gift of his grace, upon his conditions. In coming to the Lord there is no difference between the king and the beggar; both need his bounty, his grace, and it is offered to both upon precisely the same terms.

WISE COUNSEL HEADED.

Naaman had evidently some sensible companions, servants, or possibly under officers, who "came near," approached him in a moderate and wise manner, and offered him some good advice, saying in substance, We know how disappointed you feel; we know that if this prophet had demanded of you some great thing, you would have been pleased to perform it, and not only so but would have been pleased to have rewarded him handsomely, and now because he has ignored your wealth and your presents, and has bidden you do something which seems quite common-place, it is well calculated to make you resentful; but consider the [R2347 : page 235] other side: it is an easy thing to perform, and we advise that you do so forthwith.

How excellent a thing is good counsel; it is needed, not only by the foolish, but needed also by the wise, as in this case. Naaman was undoubtedly a wiser and abler man than his servants, yet in the present case he was so closely interested that his judgment did not act as well as theirs; and they were wise servants, and were surely the more appreciated by Naaman for not simply joining with him and agreeing with his every word and every thought. They might have assented to his proposition, and said, Yes! you are insulted; we are all insulted! Resent the insult, ask the king of Syria to permit you to bring up an army against them, and teach them a lesson of your greatness, etc. But instead, they wisely counselled their general to perform the simple thing which had been directed, and all the more willingly than if it had been a very difficult matter.

So there are everywhere people who are ready to counsel evil, and they are generally more numerous than those who are ready to counsel good – in favor of peace, harmony, obedience, righteousness. Yet this should always be the attitude of the Lord's people: they are always to be peacemakers – on honorable grounds, of course; but nevertheless always striving or making for peace. How often it is that those who are inquiring the way to the Lord, especially if they are

wealthy, are misdirected, by the very ones who have opportunity to help them to take proper views of the matter – to humble themselves to learn the lesson of complete submission to the Lord and his methods of getting rid of sin.

TRUE GREATNESS MANIFESTED.

The true greatness of Naaman is also here incidentally brought forward. Had he been a man of inferior mind, he would have been so haughty and dignified that his servants could not even have offered him a suggestion; or, receiving it of them, he would have resented it, as being from an inferior source; considering that his servants were not qualified to offer him any suggestions. But being a wise man, "a great man," as our lesson expresses it, he was not unapproachable, nor inclined to disrespect sound, reasonable advice, even tho it came from an unexpected and humble quarter. All of the Lord's people should realize that the little child or a person least learned either in religion or science may be able to offer a suggestion which would be valuable to the most profound thinker. It therefore is not only the Scriptural course but the reasonable, wise course, that all of the Lord's people should be so humble minded as to be approachable, and able to hear, weigh, and act upon sensible advice, even from those below them in the social scale.

Naaman dipped himself in the water of the Jordan, as directed, once – no sign of improvement; twice – still no sign; three, four, five, six times – still no sign. The prophet had said seven times; but he might reasonably have expected that the leprosy would begin to go away with the first dip; but no, he was to exercise faith. It required faith to go to the muddy river of Jordan to bathe at all; it required faith to continue the bathing until he had fulfilled the full number of times, according to the promise. With the seventh dip came the blessing, and he was clean. His flesh came again, soft, smooth, clean, not scurfy and dead, as in leprosy.

Thus it is also in reference to sin, – moral leprosy. Every man realizes that he is imperfect, that sin has a hold upon his mental, physical and moral powers; and many are the methods advocated for getting free, getting rid of sin. The natural man suggests that he can get rid of sin for himself, without any advice from any quarter; he can wash and be clean by moral reforms which he will some day begin in earnest; he can cleanse his own flesh and spirit; he needs no prophet to teach him where or how; he has as much knowledge on the subject as anybody. He has no great high Priest and wants nobody to redeem him as his substitute. Besides, to fulfil the conditions required for the forgiveness of sin would be taking a very open and courageous step, and he shrinks from making such an outward demonstration, and considers that it would do no special good anyway: that if the Lord would save him he can save him just as well at one time and place as another. Others make the mistake of being unwilling to do anything for their own recovery out of sin; they will not go to Jordan and wash; because they lack faith. Not a *profession* of faith, but the exercise of an active, living faith brings the blessing.

But the sinner who has come to feel the load of his sin, its grievousness, is prepared to do a good deal if he can only get rid of it. When he comes to this place of being ready to obey the Lord's voice, it not infrequently is the result of good counsel on the part of his friends – Christian friends. He is finally prepared to take the humiliating step of acknowledging that nothing that he can do for himself will relieve his own trouble; of acknowledging that there is only the one power that is able either to prescribe the remedy or to supply it; and that is the Lord. But when finally the sinner plunges into the antitypical Jordan, "the fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins," and when he dips therein seven times (that is, perfectly, – seven being a symbol of perfection) then he has indeed a cleansing. He is justified by faith, justified from all which the law would not justify; he is made every whit whole, reckonedly, and has then a standing with God. We can imagine the rejoicing of **[R2347 : page 236]** Naaman and of his companions, and we know the still

greater rejoicing of the one who, coming to the Lord, has had the moral leprosy of sin all washed away. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our Lord refers to this miracle (Luke 4:27) saying: "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet, but none of them were cleansed, save Naaman, a Syrian." Our Lord points out that there was a difference in the condition of heart as between some of these lepers of Israel and this particular [R2348 : page 236] Syrian leper, just as there was a difference in that particular widow of Zarephath with whom the prophet Elijah dwelt during the famine, and whose cruse of oil and crock of meal on this account did not exhaust. There was *faith* found in the widow. There was *faith* also found in Naaman. The "many lepers" of Israel had heard of this prophet, no doubt, as well as had the little bondmaid. But Naaman had faith in God to come seeking Elisha, and with large presents, while the lepers of Israel had not thought it worth while to seek Elisha, for help, altho in the same country. This illustrates to us the general lesson of the Scriptures, that "without faith it is impossible to please God." God tells us of his benevolence and willingness to forgive sins, yet only those who have faith in him, and who come to have their sins forgiven, only such get the blessing.

How comforting is the Scriptural assurance that the notable, general lack of faith is owing very largely to the influence of Satan, "the prince of this world," who shortly shall be bound for the thousand years of Christ's reign. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." Thank God that soon all these "blind eyes shall be opened." – Isa. 35:5.

GENERAL NAAMAN'S GRATITUDE.

Another matter which shows Naaman in an excellent light, and which assures us that God appreciates character, and made no mistake in sending word to Naaman respecting his prophet, etc., is found in the fact that, after he had been healed in Jordan, he did not thanklessly

go on to his home, saying, Now that king and his prophet, who were so independent that they would not come down and make more ado over me, and perhaps come to Jordan with me, to see whether or not it took effect, have missed getting the present which I brought from Syria for them, and I am the gainer by just that much. No; with a true nobility of soul he desired to make some acknowledgment of the goodness which had been bestowed upon him. He probably knew something about the true God, and probably with his heart and with his lips acknowledged him, and rendered thanks for his recovery from the leprosy, so soon as he was healed: but this was not enough. As God had seen fit to use an agent in bringing the blessing to him, he rightly judged that it was as little as he could do to recognize the same agent that God had recognized – God's own accredited agent in his healing. So he returned to Elisha with the remarkable words, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing [a present] of thy servant." Here true dignity of character is shown. He was not seeking to see how cheaply he could get the favor of heaven; he did not say within himself, If Elisha had bargained with me for a large sum before I went down to Jordan, and got the blessing, then indeed I would have given him much to obtain this great benefit, but now I will put him off with some trifling gift, and no doubt, as a poor man, he will think a great deal of it.

On the contrary, he had brought a gift representing, it is claimed, over seventy-seven thousand dollars, besides much "goodly apparel," and he evidently was desirous that the prophet should receive all of this as a token of his appreciation of the great benefit conferred. Our Lord's reference to Naaman and his cure, and how the Lord's favor reached him, even tho he was a Gentile, reminds us of the fact that when our Lord healed ten lepers by the wayside, only *one of them* returned to give God the glory for his healing. Naaman, the Syrian, was more noble, evidently, than the other nine, if not more noble also than the tenth, who, so far as we know, offered no present – tho perhaps this was because he had nothing to offer.

This illustrates to us the difference in conduct amongst those who receive the blessing of the forgiveness of sins – cleansing from moral leprosy. Some receive it as a matter of course; some are thankful, but especially glad that they got it so cheaply – that salvation is *free*. It is only the occasional one ("not many learned, not many wise," not many altogether), who receives the divine blessing, forgiveness, who returns to give God the glory and to offer him a thank-offering. Not very many present either money or influence or their lives at his feet, in recognition of the boon of their forgiveness.

Addressing these who have been washed from their sins in the precious blood, who have received forgiveness of sins through faith in that blood, and who consequently are reckoned of the Lord as justified freely from all things, the Apostle says to them, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God [manifest toward you in the forgiveness of your sins], that ye present your bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, to God, which is your reasonable service." **[R2348 : page 237]** Naaman had the spirit, the disposition, the mind, which under the favorable conditions of the Gospel age would have made of him a saint – a member of the elect "little flock," the Church. If he appreciated so largely, so heartily, his physical cleansing, who can question that he would have appreciated much more a moral cleansing, and the full reconciliation to God, and the privilege of coming into the family of God as a son and as a joint-heir with Christ? His conduct shows to us that he would have been ready to lay down his life, and all his wealth, all his possessions and his honor with the King of Syria. And this, we see, would be but a "reasonable service" for him as it is for us, and for all who have been made recipients of this great blessing of forgiveness of sins – cleansing.

But if the noble, proper spirit was manifested by Naaman, in desiring to render something in return for the mercies received, there was not less of the noble spirit in Elisha, in refusing to receive those gifts. To have received the presents would have meant the selling of

the divine power which operated through him; and Elisha well knew that God's gifts are not for sale. Fortunate would it be for many who deal with the spiritual things of the Lord, in the cure of the leprosy of sin, if they could take as exalted a view of matters as did Elisha. We fear that too often the Lord's servants are ready to accept earthly *rewards* for their part in the healing of sin-sickness – costly apparel, gold and silver.

And then comes out still another lesson of nobility of character. Naaman requested that he might have as much soil from the land of Israel as two pack mules could carry, intimating that his desire for this earth was that he might place it in some suitable location in his own country, that he might kneel upon the sacred soil, which God had blessed, and might offer prayer to the true God, who had healed him, besides whom there is no God. And the keenness of his conscience is shown by his further remark that he knew that his king, as a worshipper of a false God, would expect him to go with him, as his servant, as usual, that he might lean upon his arm, when bowing himself before the false god; and he inquired whether or not Jehovah would pardon him for thus joining with and assisting his king in the worship which now he no longer would take part in from the heart. Elisha indicated to him that he would be forgiven for joining thus unwillingly in the bowing before the idol, as a servant with his master, the king.

We cannot doubt that Elisha sought direction of the Lord in this matter, and that he had the Lord's mind in respect to it. But why even this much sanction to a false god should be permitted may be a question. We suggest, as an explanation, that God was not then dealing with any Gentile nation, but with Judah and Israel only; "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) The other nations were without any of God's promises, or, as expressed by the Apostle Paul, "without God and having no hope." The redemption sacrifice for the sins of the whole world had not yet been offered, would not be offered for several centuries;

consequently, altho Naaman was of so honest a heart that the Lord delighted to send him to the Prophet, and to heal him of his leprosy, and altho the Lord appreciated his nobility of character, yet *the time had not come* for making any offer of reconciliation to the Gentiles. The only offer thus far made was to the seed of Abraham, according to the flesh.

Consequently, altho Naaman recognized Jehovah, Jehovah had not yet recognized him, – could not do so, under the covenant then in force, the Law Covenant, – and had not prepared to recognize him or any other such noble Gentile characters, until the New Covenant would go into force, later. Hence, it mattered not, except to Naaman himself, how he worshiped. His worship would not be accepted. He had no mediator! It was entirely proper, therefore, that while Naaman, having recognized Jehovah for himself, should worship Jehovah and respect him alone, as the true God, yet nevertheless, as the servant of the king of Syria, he might join in any worship that might please his master, Jehovah not having accepted or even "called" him, to become his servant. We cannot doubt that, when the Millennial age shall have fully dawned, and when those who are in the graves shall come forth, and the turn of Naaman shall come, it will find in him one whose condition of heart and mind toward the Lord will make him very ready for the good tidings of great joy unto all people through the New Covenant, sealed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus at Calvary. We cannot doubt that so noble a character will make rapid progress under the favorable conditions of the Millennial age back to the original perfection, the image and likeness of God, lost by the whole race through father Adam.

The conscientiousness of Naaman, the Gentile, who had never before heard much of Jehovah, is strikingly **[R2349 : page 237]** in contrast with the deficiency of this quality in many who have enjoyed many privileges in Christian lands, and much advantage every way. We wonder much, for instance, when some of the Lord's people are translated out of darkness into his marvelous light, when their minds

are relieved of the cloud of superstition and vail of ignorance which long have hindered them from seeing God's true character, – we wonder why these do not take an equally decided course and inquire of the Lord through his oracle, the Word of [R2349 : page 238] the testimony, whether or not it is longer permitted of them to bow themselves down before creeds of men, which misrepresent the divine character and plan: whether or not it is permitted of them to continue worshiping after the old manner, which they have found to be an erroneous manner: whether or not it is proper for them to lend their influence and presence at meetings whose tendencies and influences are chiefly against *the truth*, tho outwardly they are "religious" and have "a *form* of godliness." Such inquiries now, at the oracle of God, get the response, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

THE COVETOUS SERVANT.

There is still another feature of this narrative which contains a valuable lesson. Elisha had a servant named Gehazi, who had been with the prophet for a considerable time, and had witnessed many of his wonderful works; the same servant, probably, who carried his staff and laid it upon the Shunammite woman's son, and who very well knew that the Lord's power had operated through the Prophet for the recovery of the child to life. But all of this contact with divine power and goodness and mercy, and all of the illustrations of the Prophet's nobility of character and generosity – all of this counted for practically nothing, to Gehazi. He saw the rich presents that had been brought by Naaman, and allowed *covetousness* to enter into his heart, instead of allowing the spirit of righteousness and generosity to prevent it. He said to himself, What a pity to see this wealth thus rejected by the Prophet. I will contrive a plan by which I may get some of it for myself; then I can have olive groves and vineyards, and be a very wealthy man, and some of these costly garments will make me the envy of all my neighbors. So he ran after the departing chariot, to accomplish his purpose.

As a matter of fact, covetousness, with almost everyone, leads to various other sins – generally to lying, sometimes to murder. Nearly every crime is more or less traceable to covetousness. In this case Gehazi did not hesitate to lie, and not only so, but to misrepresent his master, and thus indirectly to misrepresent God. His falsehood was, "My master hath sent me, saying, Behold even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver [\$1944] and two changes of garments." Nothing doubting, the generous Naaman urged him to take two talents of silver, and bound them in two bags, with the changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him, and when he came to a secret place Gehazi took them from their hands and hid them in the house.

But Elisha called him and said, "Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from the chariot to meet thee? Is it a time [a suitable occasion] for the receiving of money, garments, olive yards, vineyards, sheep, oxen, menservants and maidservants?" – intimating that all of these things had been the moving covetous cause before the mind of Gehazi: and no doubt at that period such an amount of money, nearly \$4000, would have purchased a great deal and have made Gehazi a wealthy man. But the penalty of his misconduct was severe, for the leprosy of Naaman was given him.

The lesson here would seem to be that while some who have been ignorant of the gospel of grace of God are mightily and properly actuated by it (like Naaman), others who are in daily contact with divine grace, fail to have the right attitude of heart to appreciate it, and know of it chiefly as so much merchandise (like Gehazi). This covetousness becomes to some, even if they had already been cleansed, a renewal of the leprosy or sin. The same influence which operates favorably upon one heart, operates unfavorably upon another. This reminds us of the Apostle's statement, which is applicable throughout this Gospel age, that the gospel of Christ is either a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. It will either

have the effect of bringing us near to the Lord, in appreciation and imitation of his goodness and love, or it will have the reverse effect of repelling us from the Lord, and bringing us under a spirit of evil and selfishness. Let all who have come in contact with the grace of God take heed, lest they receive the grace of God in vain; lest instead of being benefited by it they are hardened by it, and finally should be esteemed wilful sinners on their own account.
