

Surprising Faith

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[0 : 00] and turn over to 2 Kings. 2 Kings and chapter 5. I was just noticing this yesterday.

I was reviewing some of these first few chapters of 2 Kings, and it's so interesting to me that in the first few chapters of 2 Kings, there's all kinds of little short paragraphs of things that are happening, and then all of a sudden we get this long extended chapter, this one story that takes up this whole chapter of 2 Kings 5.

And so I do think that it is worth our time to work our way slowly through this text and see what God has for us. Lois is going to serve us today.

She's going to read 2 Kings chapter 5, and because it was Resurrection Sunday last week, we need to get a little context. And so 2 Kings chapter 5, starting at verse 1 and down through verse number 7.

Naaman, commander of the army, for the king of Aram was a man important to his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

[1 : 25] The man was a valiant warrior, but he had a skin disease. Aram had gone on raids and brought back from the land of Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, If only my master were with the prophet who was in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease.

So Naaman went and told his master what the girl from the land of Israel had said. Therefore the king of Aram said, Go, and I will send a letter with you to the king of Israel. So he went and took with him 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 sets of clothing.

He brought the letter to the king of Israel, and it read, When the letter comes to you, note that I have sent you my servant, my servant Naaman, for you to cure him of his skin disease.

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and asked, Am I God, killing and giving life, that this man expects me to cure a man of his skin disease? Recognize that he is only picking a fight with me.

Father, thank you for your word. Please bless to us the reading of your word, and help us as we continue to spend time in it together.

[2 : 41] We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. At this time in history, the Syrians or the Arameans, those two words can be used interchangeably, the Syrians or the Arameans, they are the number one enemy of God's people.

And they make these violent incursions into the land of Israel, and by brute force, they just take whatever they want. Sometimes they take livestock, sometimes they take valuables, sometimes they may take crops, other things that they can sell or use for themselves, and sometimes they even take people.

Those people then become slaves. And during one of these raids, the Arameans kidnap a young girl, and when the spoil of this particular raid was divided, she became a slave in the household of the Syrian five-star general, whose name was Naaman.

Now, Naaman is a mighty warrior, and he reports directly to the king, and the king values Naaman and thinks very highly of him.

Naaman has reached the top, but he has to stop. Why? Well, because the Lord has graciously interrupted Naaman's apparently successful, but godless life.

[4 : 30] See, Naaman has a disfiguring, incurable, highly contagious skin condition called leprosy.

Now, we might expect that Naaman's slave girl would celebrate his terminal diagnosis. He's going to die, and I'm glad about it.

After all, he does have the power to return her to her land and her family, but instead, Naaman uses his power to exploit her weakness.

In a very real way, then, Naaman is her enemy. But this unnamed slave girl points us to Jesus.

Jesus loves sinners in their gross sin. And Jesus died on the cross for his ungodly, undeserving enemies.

[5 : 43] She could have hated Naaman for what he did to her and her family, but she doesn't hate him. In fact, she wants him to get help.

Her heart is full of intentional love and kindness and compassion and grace flow from her mouth.

Look at 2 Kings 5 and verse 3. She said to her mistress, If only, if only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease.

Do you recall playing doctor with children or maybe when you were a child? Do you remember playing doctor using some things like this?

A little toy stethoscope and a toy syringe for giving shots with a very, very blunt end on this particular one.

[6 : 58] One of the things that I remember from playing doctor with kids is how quickly we move from diagnosis to you need a shot.

It always seems like you need a shot, right? Now, I love Kenzie.

But if Kenzie tells me you need a colonoscopy, I am not listening to Kenzie's medical advice.

It doesn't really matter to me that her mom is a doctor. I don't think Kenzie is qualified to give medical advice, although she is unbearably sweet.

But look at what happens in this text. Children don't give actionable medical advice.

[7 : 58] But remarkably, Naaman's wife takes the child's referral seriously.

And doubly remarkably, when Naaman's wife comes to him and says, the slave girl says that you need to go see the prophet in Samaria and that if you go see the prophet in Samaria, he will help you.

Doubly remarkably, Naaman takes the child's referral seriously as well. And without seeking a second opinion other than this child's opinion, Naaman requests a leave of absence from his boss, the king.

Verse number four. So Naaman went and told his master, I love this little detail in the text, what the girl from the land of Israel had said.

I think if it had been me, I would have just found another way to think this up and to mention it to my boss without saying, oh, by the way, it was the slave girl that we kidnapped on our last raid.

[9 : 27] But he doesn't seem to have any shame about it. Naaman went and told his master what the girl from the land of Israel had said. Why did they believe her?

Why did they believe her? Well, though she is a child, it seems that she has earned the respect of the household.

Apparently, she is not a foolish child, but a serious child. And apparently, she is not childish, but really quite credible.

I read that and I ask myself this question, what about me? Do I have that kind of credibility with the people that are in my spheres of influence, where I can say something to them and they would respond and know he's not being foolish, he's not being trivial, he's not being crass, he's credible, his words matter, he's thoughtful, he's careful, he's wise.

Why did they believe her? Because she has the respect of the household. Why did they believe her? I think a second reason, Naaman is desperate. Hmm?

[11 : 02] I think the willingness to believe this child's diagnosis and the referral to the prophet in Samaria helps us understand Naaman's desperation.

Leprosy is incurable. It will rot him from the inside out. Naaman is so, so desperate that he is willing to take a chance.

We might say he's willing to go out on a limb. Why? Because he is out of other options.

But even if she is credible and even if Naaman really is desperate, it still seems unthinkable to me to enter into enemy territory and request a consult with the prophet of God on the recommendation of a child's slave.

This, I think, is the most significant reason why they believe her. The Lord is at work. faith, Paul tells us, comes by hearing.

[12 : 29] Faith is a gift of God, Ephesians chapter 2. This sequence of sovereignly controlled events did not believe with the slave girl's kind, compassionate, gracious words.

No. No. This sequence of sovereignly controlled events began in the mind of God. God, who is drawing to himself an apparently successful but godless man.

Naaman is beginning to believe. When Naaman approaches the king of Syria to request leave, I don't know about you but I have some expectations about how this particular conversation is probably going to go down.

Maybe he will just flat out deny Naaman's request oh, you heard that from your slave girl, did you?

No. The answer is no. Or perhaps he will demote his desperate general since when did you become so spiritual that you wish to go see the prophet in Samaria?

[14 : 07] Perhaps the king will try to talk some sense into him. Have you lost your mind? This is a crazy plan. We are enemy numero uno in Israel and this plan is no bueno.

You cannot go into enemy territory and try to get a consult with the prophet. Those are the ways that I expect the king, Naaman's boss, to respond.

But triply remarkably, Naaman's wife, Naaman himself, triply remarkably, the king of Syria does not do those things.

And he not only accepts the medical advice of Naaman's slave girl, the king of Syria also enthusiastically steps up to help Naaman.

look at verse number five. Therefore, the king of Aram said, go, go, and I will send a letter with you to the king of Israel.

[15 : 17] So he went and took with him 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 sets of clothing, and he brought the letter to the king of Israel, and it read, how kind of the spirit of God, to include for us the contents of this letter.

When this letter comes to you, note that I have sent you my servant Naaman for you to cure him of his skin disease. Now, very mindful of the king of Syria's enthusiasm, he gets two things wrong.

first, he incorrectly assumes that healing from leprosy is going to be expensive. Now, we get high medical costs, right?

Especially if you go out of network, and Naaman is surely going out of network. We get high medical costs. He is going to leave the land of Syria, enter the land of Israel, to try to get healing from the number one enemy, an enemy that you regularly go and raid.

It makes sense that he would expect that this would be expensive. And so Naaman is sent with 750 pounds of silver at yesterday's prices, actually, that would be Friday's prices, about \$27 per troy ounce.

[17:00] This is \$300,000. Not a lot. Not a lot. But gold, 150 pounds at Friday's closing prices, \$2,349 per troy ounce.

Ready? \$5.1 million. And 10 cents of clothing. I have no idea what this means. So just to bring it into our context, I'm going to assume it was like a tuxedo.

A multi-piece set of clothing, and Naaman took 10 of them, and I understand a tuxedo costs around \$1,000 to buy. \$5.4 million in our dollars today.

I was reading one commentary who had done similar math. It's an older one, and he said it was \$70,000. So that tells you a little something about the prices of these precious metals.

So he first, he incorrectly assumes that this healing from leprosy is going to be expensive. But second, he incorrectly assumes that healing requires following a chain of command.

[18:17] Did you notice that? When Naaman petitions the king of Syria, the king of Syria follows some kind of diplomatic protocol, and he sends a letter to his counterpart, the king of Israel, so that the king of Israel can order the prophet in Samaria to do this healing.

There must be some kind of chain of command, some kind of pecking order that we have to follow in order to get this healing to happen.

the king of Syria presumes that any person or prophet who is capable of performing such a healing would be a valuable asset to the land of Israel and therefore under the authority of its king.

Israel. Now, I don't know what Naaman's entourage looks like as they approach Israel, but I have in mind, in my imagination, something like the scene when Prince Ali shows up in Aladdin.

Naaman. I think it's kind of a big deal. Prince Ali had 75 golden camels for 53 purple peacocks and he was strong as 10 regular men, definitely.

[19:56] I don't think Naaman is that strong, but he does have an official delegation, plenty of money to get this deal done, and he has a letter from the king of Syria himself.

So then, I expect that Naaman was surprised by King Joram's response. This is in verse number seven.

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and asked, am I God killing and giving life, that this man expects me to cure a man of his skin disease, his leprosy, recognize, pay attention, notice this, that he is only picking a fight with me.

Now, it is possible possible, that the king of Israel did not know the prophet of God in Samaria. Possible.

But that seems unlikely to me. At this point, Elisha has already performed multiple miracles, beginning with, after Elijah was taken up into heaven, in a chariot of fire, Elisha comes back and crosses the Jordan River, but before he can cross the river, he takes Elijah's cloak, I don't know what you call it, his poncho, his toga, his scarf, something that he would wear around his shoulders, his upper body, he rolls it up and he waxes it like you might take a wet towel and whack at your sibling and he whacks the Jordan River and the Jordan River parts and he crosses on dry land.

[22 : 07] Elisha had already healed Jericho's water supply. He had already, in one of my favorite miracles, not really, one of my favorite miracles in the Old Testament, cursed a bunch of boys who were making fun at him for being bald and bears came and mauled them.

Very dark, not my favorite story. He had also cured a poisonous cauldron of stew and he had made a widow's jar of oil temporarily bottomless.

And he had raised a young boy from the dead. It's, it's possible that the king of Israel did not know the man of God, Elisha, in Samaria.

But I think that is highly unlikely. Elisha is a prolific prophet of God. The king of Israel must have known about his proclivity to perform miracles.

But King Joram reads this letter from the king of Syria and he tears his clothes. This is what you would do if you were trying to show how distraught you were, how emotionally broken you were, how sad and full of grief you were.

[23 : 37] We should ask ourselves, is this genuine emotional distress? stress? Or is this more like an athlete who flops in order to get a sympathy call from the ref?

It's hard to know whether this is genuine emotion or not. But let's ask ourselves this question because I think this is more relevant. Why not just send Naaman to the prophet in Samaria?

Why not just send him? And I think the answer to that is in contrast to Naaman and in contrast to Naaman's wife and in contrast to the king of Syria and certainly in contrast to that dear young slave girl.

The king of Israel. King Joram has no faith. So rather than seeing this moment of distress as an opportunity for God's grace and God's strength and God's glory to be revealed by being a blessing to the nation of Syria and to its five-star general, Naaman, rather than seeing this moment of distress as an opportunity, King Joram throws up his hands in despair.

Woe is me! Whatever are we going to do? Why is everyone always picking on me? In this moment of crisis, the king of Israel fails to turn his attention to the Lord.

[25 : 41] And as a result of that failure to turn his attention to the Lord, his attention goes to himself. And he is self-centered and short-sighted and blind to what God is doing.

He's drug around by his emotions and he is unwilling or unable to testify to the power of God at work in the prophet Elisha.

And you know, I can't help but see myself in his response. Under stress, in crisis, when life is hard, when I sense my own weakness and my own inability, how often do I get drug around by my emotions?

How often am I self-centered, navel-gazing, unhelpfully introspective, paralyzed by fear, and anxious about every possible outcome of this situation, because I'm sure that there are no good outcomes and it is only going to get worse before it ever gets better.

That's not faith. Like me and like King Joram, when you encounter troubles and trials and tests, do you fail to discern or even prayerfully consider what is the Lord doing?

[27 : 36] how is God at work? Where is the Holy Spirit moving? How can I participate in God's plan of redemption right here in this moment that feels stressful and overwhelming and everything inside of me wants to throw up my hands in despair and just say, like King Joram, I quit, woe is me, why is everyone always picking on me?

I suspect that like King Joram, we all need more faith.

And I'm so grateful that we don't need 5.4 million dollars to go and buy faith. Nor do we need to follow a chain of command or work through another human mediator.

because Jesus says in Matthew 11, come to me.

Isn't that good? Come to me. Come to me. me. All of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

[29 : 05] What's this going to cost me? Come to Jesus. Hmm? Who do I have to work through to make this happen?

come to Jesus. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me because I am lowly and humble in heart and you will find rest, rest for your souls.

Are you weary? are you burdened? Jesus says, come to me. Are you sad?

Are you sorrowful? Are you discouraged or maybe even depressed? Come to Jesus. Because Jesus says, come to me and I will give you rest.

rest. Are you overwhelmed? Are you exhausted? Are you anxious about the future? Come. Come to Jesus.

[30 : 23] Are you stuck in a spiral of sin that you can't get yourself out of? Come to Jesus. Are you hopeless?

You feel dissatisfied? perhaps you need forgiveness for your sins for the very first time. Come to Jesus. If you want that gift of faith that comes by hearing, then come to Jesus.

Jesus. And Jesus will give you rest. Rest for your doubt. Rest for your anxiety.

Rest for your being drug around by your emotions. Rest from your self-centered navel gazing. Come to me.

And I will give you rest. rest. I wonder if we need more faith in Jesus. It's there for the having.

[31 : 36] If we will come to him, he will give it to us. I wonder what Naaman thought in this moment.

Standing there in front of the king of Israel, who should have known better than to behave this way? What did Naaman think? Was this whole thing just an elaborate waste of time?

Am I going to be shamed in front of my men and my king and my wife? Am I going to be the laughing stock of all Syria for having made this trip into Israel on the recommendation of a slave girl?

And perhaps worst of all, this leprosy is still eating me from the inside out. but we know this, don't we brothers and sisters?

When God begins a good work, he sees it through to the end, doesn't he? Paul writes that to us in Philipians chapter 1. He who began a good work, he will see it through to the end.

[33 : 12] Naaman's visit with the king of Israel is full of divine purpose. Why? Because Naaman knows whatever is going to happen next is not going to be because you brought 5.4 million dollars in our money to try to purchase this.

Whatever is going to happen next is not going to be because your king followed some diplomatic protocol to get it done. Whatever happens next is not going to be because the king of Israel ordered the prophet to perform this miracle on your behalf.

Now is the opportunity for those things. None of those things have happened. Here stands Naaman before the king of Israel and he knows everything that I have brought to the table is worth worthless here because if it was valuable it would already have gotten the job done.

His visit to the king of Israel is not wasted. It's full of divine purpose. Under normal circumstances children do not give actionable medical advice.

But I wonder if you noticed that the slave girl referred Naaman to the prophet in Samaria not the king of Israel.

[34 : 52] Will Naaman get a consult with that prophet? Lord willing next time. Let's pray. Good father we are grateful for your kindness and grateful for your word.

We are grateful to consider these truths and to reflect on our need for more faith, deeper faith, richer faith, in our savior Jesus.

Father thank you that this faith that we need is a gift that comes by hearing. And thank you that your son our savior the Lord Jesus Christ makes this open invitation for all who will to come to him.

we confess our need for more of Jesus and less of ourselves.

Like John the Baptist we say he must increase and I must decrease.

[36 : 17] would you please help us blessed Holy Spirit as we take a few moments and prepare to receive the Lord's Supper.

Where conviction is necessary please convict us. Where comfort is necessary please give us comfort. comfort. Where healing is required please begin a work of healing.

Holy Spirit we ask that you would do this work in our hearts. Father we celebrate the truth of Romans chapter 6 where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

we are humbly grateful to again be recipients of grace. Thank you for your goodness that is ours because of in and through the work of our Savior the Lord Jesus.

Lord Jesus thank you again for going to the cross. How can we ever thank you enough for what you have done for us in purchasing our salvation for redeeming us out of our sin for reconciling us to the Father.

[37 : 52] Make us grateful freshly today for all that you have done for us. It is in the name of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ that we pray.

Amen. Amen.