

Lessons from the River: God Works Through Our Humility
2 Kings 5:9-15
April 22, 2012

We return to the Jordan River and another story out of the Old Testament book of 2 Kings. This story also involves the prophet Elisha, but there is another key figure to consider this morning. He is a man by the name of Naaman. His name means “pleasantness.” And by what we know of him for the most part he was a good man. The 5th chapter describes him as a commander of the army for the King of Aram. He was a man of responsibilities and accomplishments. However, Naaman, suffered from the skin disease of Leprosy. He must have been some what open minded of a person. Because Naaman had a servant girl whom he had taken captive during a war with Israel. He learned through her that in her home land was a prophet who could cure him. Naaman asked permission from his king to go to her homeland of Israel to meet this prophet. His encounter with the prophet Elisha will contain some lessons for us.

Read Scripture

**There is a little Naaman in all of us because pride is universal.
V.11**

One lesson from Naaman’s story is that all of us have some level of pride that can get in our way. Naaman’s leprosy was a disease of his skin, but pride is a condition of the heart. **According to the Bible, pride is that over-inflated view of our importance and power in our relationship to God and others.** It’s the reason we find scriptures that say such things as
“When pride comes, then comes disgrace..” Proverbs 11:2.
“Pride goes before destruction.” Proverbs 16:18.
“The Lord will lay low his pride...” Isaiah 25:11.

This week I had to dig up a septic pipe at our house in Milan so one of the guys from the church could help me make the repair. The ditch was about 10 to 12 feet long and I had to dig about 2 to 3 feet deep. One thing I noticed from one end of the ditch to the other was there were roots everywhere. Small stringy roots and larger tree roots. I actually thought about Naaman's story while I was digging because on the surface when I looked at that piece of ground I thought once I was past the grass roots on top I would be home free. I wouldn't have expected there were that many roots running through that section of our yard.

Naaman's story reminds us to do a little digging in any person and you'll find some roots of pride somewhere. We may be the person to never say an unkind word, the first to open up our pocketbooks and wallets, the first to lend a helping hand, be there for others in a crisis, but somewhere in all of us there is the root of pride. And just like the roots I saw were in various sizes, so goes our pride.

You may not be as prideful as the rooster, who poet George Elliot once said **“thinks the sun rises just to hear him crow.”** You may not walk around clueless about your flaws like a Ted Turner who said, **“If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect.”** You may not brag about your achievements because as Coach Barry Switzer once said, **“some people are born on third base but go through life thinking they hit a triple.”** But just keep digging and pride will be there some how and some way. It must be because pride is the attitude that sets us up to sin by defying God. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23, **“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”** Your pride may worry rather than trust God and make a rash decision. Your pride may let fear direct you rather than take a risk and pay the cost to handle a situation God's way. Your pride may keep a secret that makes you sick. But all of us have some pride.

Pride stumbles at simplicity; but humility will surrender to it:

v.13

Naaman's pride was revealed when he arrived at the home of the prophet, Elisha. And this was when his roots of pride below the surface would be uncovered. Perhaps you could say they were being covered up by his title as a commander of the king's army. Perhaps his pride was being covered up by having power and privilege, because the king himself sent on behalf of Naaman, expensive gifts and a letter to ask that the King of Israel would see to it Naaman be healed.

The uncovering of Naaman's pride occurred when he arrived at Elisha's home. Elisha didn't come out to greet Naaman like he expected (11).

Elisha didn't offer to heal him in a manner that Naaman expected. Naaman wanted Elisha to pray over him and wave his arms around in the air (11).

Instead Elisha, through Elisha's servant, instructed Naaman to go to the Jordan River and wash himself 7 times.

Verse 12 tells us Naaman responded by leaving in a rage.

Naaman's big deal was Elisha told him to go into the Jordan River and wash himself seven times. That's it, that's all, finished. But Naaman's pride surfaced. He expected one thing; but received another. But what is fair to say, Naaman also stumbled to do the simple request that Elisha gave. You can say it any way you want; but what reveals his pride is pretty much what uncovers ours.

Pride stumbles at the simple request because he didn't get what he wanted when he wanted it and how he wanted.

Naaman wanted to be in control of his own healing that he couldn't provide for himself anyway. He was so locked in on how he thought how he should be healed he almost missed it. He stumbled at the simple.

This is why we shy away from reading scripture. It's not just that

there is scripture we cannot understand. It's that there is much truth that is simple and direct in scripture but will require we surrender to God. We face simple truths and like Naaman we stand before God and ask why can't we do it my way. Do I really have to make that sacrifice? Do I really have to be that patient? Do I really have to be that bold?

If our pride runs the show for our lives it will lead us to pursue an outlook or philosophy of life that leads to emptiness. Missionary Stanley Jones once said, **“Philosophy is the search in a dark room for a black cat which isn't there.”** (The Word Became Flesh, Stanley Jones, p.24)

Maybe your lesson from the Jordan River is you want something from God your way. You expect something from God on your terms. Could you be like Naaman, tripping over some simple truth and direction from God?

Naaman's servants encouraged him by pointing out how badly he was missing the point. They told Naaman that if Elisha had asked him to do something difficult he would have done it. So why not surrender and be willing to try the simple instruction to go wash in the Jordan river seven times.

The simple things God tells us to do to put faith in action are not necessarily cheap; but they are doable. The simple things are doable. Naaman finally listened and obeyed the instructions of Elisha and was healed. There are a couple things here to notice. Naaman didn't know Elisha, but he knew his own servants. He listened to people who knew something about living life as a servant. It took true servants to give him a reality check. He listened to them.

Make sure the people you listen to for spiritual growth are those who are servants themselves.

Make sure they are people who you have seen set their pride aside and do God's will.

Make sure they are people who live it and not just talk it.

Make sure they are servants because when they are wrong; they confess it.

Make sure they are servants who try and remain a student of Jesus; rather than an authority about him or the spiritual perks Jesus offers.

Conquering the pride will convert us it changes us. V.15

Naaman did the simple task that Elisha requested and he was healed. He was so overwhelmed by his healing he returned to Elisha and he said to Elisha, **“Now I know there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.” v.15** He referred to himself as a servant. One final lesson from the Jordan River is to learn that dropping the false sense of power and control leads to changes in us. Naaman's pride that said, I expect you to serve me, serve my agenda, serve my needs was gone. See that spirit and attitude will never foster spiritual growth because that is not who God is and how God has designed it. God acts as a servant toward us and Jesus is the ultimate picture of how God reached down and out to us to serve us. He even kept his teaching simple when some asked what they should do to inherit eternal life, he said love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as your self. Simple.

Naaman was healed of his leprosy because he conquered his pride. This is really a double healing story. He could have never experienced physical healing had he not swallowed his pride.

We put so much emphasis on people being healed physically but we often under value spiritual healing. We give thanks for perhaps a disease being healed, a financial answer to prayers but we don't often hear someone give thanks for healing that has allowed them to admit wrongs, ask for help, or confront their weaknesses.

This is a healing story of the body and the soul.

Maybe currently God is asking you in some way go take a dip in the Jordan River. You know why that simple request is there; but you have delayed being obedient. You have been seeking other ways around that simple answer. The other day one of the members sent me an email with some questions that reflect the stubborn inconsistent ways about us. One question asked,

Why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are getting weak?

Why is it that when someone tells you that there are one billion stars in the universe, you believe them but, if they tell you there is wet paint, you have to touch it to check?

I saved an article from a February issue of The New Your Times (2/19/12). It reported that there is beginning to be so much space junk floating around, the junk is endangering the satellites we use for communication.

What is the junk of pride floating around in our heads and hearts that is getting in the way of our communication with God and doing the simple things he expects so we can follow him?

What is the prideful junk keeping us from experiencing the power of his presence and love?