

# I Thought but God Wrought

2 Kings 5:1-19

By Randy Wages

5/3/15

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. Introduction: Our text for today is 2 Kings Chapter 5 where we'll look at the story of Naaman and how God healed him of his deadly, incurable disease of leprosy. And we'll see that God also cured him of that which his leprosy typifies – the dreaded disease which inflicts us all – the leprosy of sin, an eternally deadly disease from which we all desperately need to be healed. And I'm convinced that if you make the mistake of merely considering this passage as a story or an account from the annals of history, without any consideration of its spiritual application to us, you will miss out. You'll miss God's gracious and instructional design in having inspired the writing of this story – a story of eternal significance to us all.

To confirm that, consider from the N.T. passage which \_\_\_\_\_ read in Luke 4, that our Lord equated His sovereignty in salvation (in the spiritual, eternal cleansing of a people from their sins) with His sovereignty in having physically cleansed the Syrian Gentile, Naaman, of his leprosy, and that at the exclusion of all the many other Jewish lepers who lived at that time. In light of that we can know that the story of Naaman from 2 Kings 5 is indeed a type of our Lord's cleansing of all He saves from the leprosy or disease common to us all – the leprosy of sin. We see in 2 Kings 5, not only God's sovereignty in salvation (that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy), but also a picture of what takes place as the salvation of a sinner unfolds – a type or picture which any who are saved will be able to personally identify with. So that should get our attention.

- II. 2 Kings 5:1-19: Let's begin by simply reading through the story as found in our text, 2 Kings 5:1-19. Beginning in verse 1, we read:

***“Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. <sup>2</sup>And the Syrians had gone out by companies, <like small raiding parties that would venture into Israel and we see on one such raid it says...>and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup>And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. <sup>4</sup>And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. <It would appear likely from the context that Naaman's wife had shared this with her husband who in turn told his lord, the king. Verse 5...>***

<sup>5</sup>**And the king of Syria said, <apparently to Naaman> Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he <Naaman> departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. <sup>6</sup>And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, <meaning the letter stated...>Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. <sup>7</sup>And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me. <In other words, the King of Israel, knowing he wasn't God, that he couldn't cure this incurable disease, thought perhaps that the letter was a setup – a pretense for Syria to wage war against Israel once the King inevitably would fail to cure Naaman as the letter requested. Verse 8...> <sup>8</sup>And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.**

<sup>9</sup>**So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. <But notice Elisha doesn't come out as we read in verse 10...> <sup>10</sup>And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. <And look at Naaman's response now in verse 11...> <sup>11</sup>But Naaman was wroth, <angry> and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. <sup>12</sup>Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup>And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? <sup>14</sup>Then went he down, <underline that for there was a miraculous, humbling, change of heart between verses 13 and 14> and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: <in other words, as God had prescribed> and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, <as soft and smooth as a baby's skin> and he was clean.**

<sup>15</sup>**And he <Naaman> returned to the man of God, <Elisha> he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. <sup>16</sup>But he <Elisha> said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he <Naaman> urged him to take it; but he refused. <sup>17</sup>And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? <notice he now calls himself Elisha's servant> for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.**

<As I mentioned earlier, we see from these verses that Naaman had not only been physically healed, but had been given spiritual life, God-given faith and repentance from idolatry (spiritual healing). Naaman adds in verse 18...> <sup>18</sup>***In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.*** <sup>19</sup>***And he <Elisha> said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.***

Verse 18 is interesting as some suggest that here the newly converted, cleansed sinner Naaman was already planning to compromise and cave in to his king's false religion upon his return by continuing to worship the idol Rimmon; however, as other commentators point out, that would be inconsistent with the rest of this immediate context in which Naaman had just asserted how He now knew there was no other God, further asserting He would not make an offering to (or worship) any other God. From the context it makes much more sense to understand this as Naaman asking for forgiveness from that which he just came to realize by God-given faith and of which he now was repenting – that he actually had been attending to the worship of an idol – a religious practice that this context suggests he had no intention of continuing in. Let's look into this story in a bit more detail.

- III. **2 Kings 5:1: There is a problem / Something is wrong:** We can see at the very beginning of our passage that Naaman was a great and honorable man; however, there's a problem. Something is wrong. As we read in verse 1, Naaman was highly respected and had many commendable attributes, but the end of the verse sums up who and what he really was as it reads, "***but he was a leper.***" It's undeniable that there are distinctions among us. Some folks are smarter than others, some more gifted athletically or artistically or musically, some are more charitable and kinder or compassionate than others, some are more successful in their careers than others, and even the least among us typically have some commendable attributes that will cause others to esteem us higher than they otherwise would. I look around our congregation, and I recognize commendable traits among you all. I see here men and women who faithfully attend our worship services – folks who give of their time, talents, and money in support of the Gospel of God's grace that is preached here. But no matter how great and honorable and accurate these descriptions are of you, they will not be your eternally lasting legacy. Naaman was the leader of the Syrian army who had earned great respect and honor from his successful victories against Israel, but that would only describe him for the brief span of his lifetime, for deep down he had a serious problem. He was a leper. A deadly, incurable, and dreaded disease coursed throughout his body. He was a dying man. And as his spiritual conversion reveals, he also had been traveling the road toward eternal death and destruction.

Know this: That no matter how highly esteemed you may be in the eyes of others – you too have a problem. Any accurate description of you or me would have to read something like this: “Randy is a man who... <and perhaps if someone looked long enough they could find some flattering description to fill in the blank> but regardless of any commendable trait you could name, the end of that sentence should read> ...but he was a sinner.” Due to the fall of all humanity in Adam, we come into this world as sinners, in desperate need of spiritual healing. We may be something in somebody’s eyes in this world, but when they lay me or you in the ground when this brief life is over, all these distinctions will vanish. They’ll be burying a sinner whose sins must be accounted for before the judgment of our holy and just God. So 1<sup>st</sup>, notice, that like Naaman, we all have a serious problem which we cannot rid ourselves of – we’re sinners. That defines our very nature. And as sinners, we’re dying physically and will die eternally unless God has miraculously cleansed us of the leprosy of sin by having charged our sins to Christ so that He, as our Substitute, might bear the just penalty due unto our sins by dying in our place – a just punishment which otherwise would fall upon us – eternal condemnation and death.

So we see right off from verse 1, that Naaman, though highly esteemed among men, has a serious problem.

- IV. 2 Kings 5:2-5, 13: **The overriding providence of God**: Next, in verses 2-5 (and in some of the verses that follow) we see a picture of the miraculous, mind-boggling providence of God in salvation. And God’s providential hand is at work in the conversion of each and every one He saves. As our Lord Himself said in John 6:44a, “**No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:...**” I marvel at the manifold wisdom and infinite power of God that so orders the lives and all the circumstances of His dear children to put them under the sound of His Gospel of Grace and gives them such a radical change of heart and mind in drawing them unto Himself. Consider this from our story: The Lord caused this young Israeli girl to be taken captive and then assigned to serve Naaman’s wife. Why? – Because the Lord had mercy in store for Naaman. Think about that – if you’re hearing this Gospel message, it may be because the Lord has mercy in store for you. Now not only was this young girl placed in the household of Naaman, but the Lord also brought to her mind to recall and recommend Israel’s prophet to Naaman’s wife. And then in verse 13, the Lord operated through the heathen servants of Naaman to calm their master’s rage and listen to reason. And when we see the miraculous transformation that takes place between verses 13 and 14, we know that only God could have influenced this proud Syrian to go down into the Jordan River in accordance with God’s prescription for healing after all the rage and hatred he had shown upon learning that the cure wasn’t as he thought – but instead would be that which God alone wrought. Incidentally, that’s the title I’ve given to this message, “I Thought, but God Wrought.”

And I suggest to you that all who are saved are brought to a similar realization. I thought, but contrary to what I thought – God wrought – salvation is truly of the Lord. So we’ve seen 1) there’s a serious problem and 2) we see the overriding providence of God unfolding to bring about all that was necessary for God to show His mercy to Naaman.

V. **2 Kings 5:6-8**: **Seeking the Way that Seems Right to us**: Now in verses 6-8, we see a picture of how we all naturally will seek a cure, if and when we discover our disease. And naturally, we will seek a cure that seems right to us. But hear God as we often quote from Proverbs, ***“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*** (Prov. 14:12, 16:25). So, as with Naaman, we may seek a cure that seems right to us, but the way that seems right to us by nature – will leave us perishing in our sins. Regarding that, consider from this story several aspects of our seeking a way that initially seems right to us. First, we see...

A. **In the wrong place**: Naaman sought a cure for his leprosy, but **in the wrong place**. The King of Syria didn’t send him to the Prophet but instead to the King of Israel who was baffled at the suggestion (as he understood it) that he could somehow cure Naaman’s leprosy. But Naaman needed to see the Prophet. He needed to get to Elisha, the man of God that the young servant girl had providentially suggested he see. Likewise, by nature, we will all seek eternal salvation and forgiveness, but in the in the wrong place. Some will seek it on their knees repeating what some call the sinner’s prayer, some will seek it in a confessional booth, some by going to the priest or to the preacher, some by walking an aisle, some by going into the baptismal pool – But there is no salvation to be found in these places. God is a God of means and the Bible tells us He is pleased to save sinners under the preaching of God’s Gospel of grace found in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. From many pulpits across our land this morning, preachers will invoke the name of Christ while at the same time presenting to their hearers a false gospel that directs sinners to do something in order to save themselves rather than directing them to look to the Savior, to Jesus Christ alone for all salvation. There’s no cure to be found there. That’s the wrong place.

I believe here that Elisha is a type of the eternal Prophet, Jesus Christ, the One prophesied of in Deut. 18:15 where we’re told, ***“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; <a God-man Prophet> unto him ye shall hearken;*”** That is a prophecy of Jesus Christ and there is no salvation to be found anywhere else. As Peter said of Christ in Acts 4:12, ***“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*** As Christ said of Himself in John 14:6: ***“...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*** Naaman sought healing in the wrong place and...

B. In the wrong way: ...Naaman sought it in the wrong way. Naaman took the wrong things with him. As we read, he loaded 6,000 pieces of gold and 10 talents of silver and 10 changes of clothing, heading off to buy his healing. That's the way that seems right to us all. We want to barter with God as if we have something worth enough to swap or trade for our eternal salvation. And so if we go to the wrong place (where a false gospel is preached), they will suggest there is something you can do in order to be saved. They may say a lot about what Christ has done but then add that He'll save you if you will just do this or that <fill in the blank>. Contrary to scripture, many erroneously believe that Jesus Christ lived and died for all and if that were true, the real difference maker would be you unless all are saved, which God's Word clearly refutes. And so they logically focus on what they think makes the real difference in salvation, asking, "How will you respond?" They suggest, "Just believe what is prescribed and God in exchange will save you." They may not say the words, "in exchange" but that is precisely what is conveyed. Or as some say, "Just walk this aisle and profess your "faith" before men and in exchange, God will save you." Or "Give of your time and talents, and in particular your money – and God will bless you in exchange."

My friend, God doesn't need anything that you or I have to offer. He already owns it all. Like Naaman we must be stripped down, humbled and come to Christ as the Prophet Isaiah instructed, ***"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price."*** (Isa. 55:1). As we sing in that grand old hymn, "Rock of Ages," "In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

Naaman came with something to offer for his healing. And that typifies the false gospel of salvation by works – as if salvation is conditioned at least in some way (and / or to some degree) on you the sinner – something you offer up. But God tells us in His word that salvation is by grace alone in Jesus Christ (Quote Ephesians 2:8-9) and in Romans 11 we're taught that if there is any element of works added to the mix, it's no longer grace. God won't have it. So Naaman came to the wrong place and he came in the wrong way... And thirdly, we see that he came....

C. With the wrong Attitude: By God providentially bringing things to the attention of Elisha, Naaman finally got to the right place, but as the story reveals, his first reaction was that of a proud sinner, yet to be humbled and brought to repentance. We read where he came with his horses and with his chariot and stood (perhaps proudly) outside of Elisha's house expecting him to come out and stand before him. But Elisha stayed inside and instead sent his messenger to deliver to this proud man God's prescribed means for his physical healing.

Well, as we read, none of this set well with Naaman initially. He wanted healing but needed it in a way that would preserve at least some degree of dignity. It would seem he thought, “Wait a minute. Who do you think you’re dealing with here?” I have a lot to offer! Look at our text again beginning in verse 10 where Elisha’s messenger told Naaman, “...**Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.** <sup>11</sup>**But Naaman was wrath,** <he was angry> **and went away, and said, Behold, I thought,** <We think we can be saved according to what naturally seems right to us but God says that way is the way of eternal death. Naaman said, “I thought...> **He will surely come out to me,** <not send a lowly messenger> **and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place,** <move his hand up and down with great ceremony over the leprous sores> **and recover the leper.** <He goes on saying...> <sup>12</sup>**Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.**

We see here a picture of a sinner recoiling at what the Bible calls the offense of the cross (or the offense of the Gospel of God’s grace to the natural man). Upon first hearing that sinners are truly saved by God’s grace, many ask in anger, “What do you mean there’s nothing I can do to be saved?” Notice how Naaman confused the means of his physical healing (dipping in the River Jordan) with the source or cause of healing. He considers the rivers back in Syria to be superior to the Jordan River. It would seem it was beneath Naaman to strip down out of his fine raiment and go into Israel’s river. He wanted something to do, but surely it would be something more noble than this. He misunderstood. There was no healing power in the Jordan River or in any other river. God does the healing but we must come to God as He prescribes.

Likewise today, multitudes confuse the means of spiritual healing (of eternal salvation) with the cause, source, and ground of salvation. People are prone to naturally think we can be saved because we do this or that – thinking we’re saved because we believe rather than seeing that we only truly believe because we have been saved. Faith is the blood-bought gift of God to those He saves. If salvation were conditioned on me, the sinner, then I would retain some of my presumed dignity – after all I would have to imagine that I am better than others because I am willing to do what it takes to be saved while others won’t.

In I Peter 5:5b-6, we’re told to “...**be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.**” (I Peter 5:b-6).

VI. Humbling Conversion: So let's consider now Naaman's humbling conversion. In verse 13 we read where his servants reasoned with him how that if the prophet had told him to do something great he would have complied, but why wouldn't he do that which was easy, simply "Wash and be clean." Isn't that akin to simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved?" Wash in the blood of the Lamb and be eternally clean. But like Naaman, we are inclined to insist that we contribute something to save ourselves while God tells us in His Word to simply trust in (and rely upon) the doing and dying of another – of the impeccably sinless, incarnate Son of God. Oh, the folly of insisting that salvation is somehow conditioned on the best I could offer (which is tainted with sin) when by God-given faith, I can claim God's way of salvation which is conditioned on the infallible, sinless perfect work of my Substitute, the God-man, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory! As Romans 10:4 tells us, "...**Christ is the end of the law** <the finishing or fulfillment of all that is required> **for righteousness to every one that believeth.**"

Back to our text, we see that a miraculous conversion takes place between verses 13 and 14. As verse 14 begins, "**Then went he down,...**" That's what has to happen. Many believe it likely that Naaman stripped off all his fine garments that would distinguish him as the mighty leader of the Syrian army, exposing the rotten, ugly sores of his leprosy. He went down. This proud sinner was brought low and made clean, as we read, as clean and soft as the skin of a little child. Naaman now came the way that God had prescribed through His Prophet Elisha, and dipped in the River Jordan and was made clean! And as the rest of our passage indicates, Naaman also was cleansed eternally of the leprosy of sin. As we sing, "What can wash away my sin? NOTHING but the blood of Jesus!" Like Naaman, we must come God's appointed way.

VII. Results of Naaman's Cleansing: Well, we can also learn of the identifying characteristics exhibited by those who are saved by looking at the aftermath of Naaman's healing.

A. New motive of grace and gratitude: First we see there's a new motive for his actions. Naaman initially came loaded with gold and silver to buy his healing, but after being healed, we see in verse 15 he still wants to give to Elisha, but not in order to obtain healing. He already had been healed. Rather now he had a new motive – the motive of love, of grace and gratitude.

B. Worshipped God: Next, as a result of God's saving mercy, we see that Naaman intended to worship Him. When Elisha still refused the gifts Naaman offered, Naaman responded in verse 17 saying, "...**Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.** <Jehovah God who saves. Now Elisha's God is Naaman's God. Naaman, who had turned up his nose in outrage over the idea of going into Israel's river Jordan, now wants to take soil back from the land of Israel to build an altar in order to sacrifice to Elisha's God and Him alone, as an altar built from the soil of their land would testify that Elisha's God is now Naaman's God.



- C. One God distinguished from all Idols: Thirdly, we also saw in verses 15 and following, Naaman’s assertion that he now knew that there was no God in all the earth but the One true and living God. In other words, he could now distinguish the true God from all counterfeits. God-given faith is always accompanied by that inseparable grace of God-given repentance – the initial repentance from former idolatry and the dead work (or works) we had thought would save us.
- D. Repentance: So, lastly, we see that all who are saved, like Naaman, will repent of their former idolatry. Naaman now recognized and asked forgiveness for having worshipped with his king the false god, Rimmon. Our idols may not go under a different name like Rimmon or Allah. The erroneous concept that many have of the God of the Bible is just as much of an idol. Idols aren’t always constructed of stone or other materials as were many of the O.T idols; but rather, our idols are often a product of our own, spiritually lost imaginations. And in salvation, God exposes the evil of what we once thought of God (that idol in our own minds) as it is exposed by how we thought we could be saved – by our having imagined that God would save us in a way that would deny His very essence – His holiness and justice – imagining He could save us in any other way than through the justice-satisfying work of Jesus Christ, by imputing (or accounting) unto us the very merit of His redemptive work – His obedience unto death – His righteousness rather than presuming to be saved by that which we could produce – a presumed righteousness of our own making.

VIII. Closing: I quoted Romans 10:4 earlier but look there again as this passage provides an excellent summary of that which is right and that which is wrong as it pertains to God’s way of saving sinners, as is typified in the healing of Naaman the leper. Beginning in Romans 10:1 Paul said of his fellow Jews, ***“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. <They were lost, but why?> <sup>2</sup>For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, <They are religious> but not according to knowledge. <What vital knowledge did they lack?> <sup>3</sup>For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”***

Like all who are saved, I once thought...; but contrary to what I thought, there was no salvation possible based upon anything done by, in, or through me – by trying to establish a righteousness of my own by which I presumed I could be accepted. No – the only salvation to be found is in that which God wrought – the very righteousness of God in Jesus Christ – all that the doing and dying of the God-man merited for me. He’s the fulfillment of all that is required (the perfect righteousness needed) for every true believer. I thought – but God wrought!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.