

Naaman: Cured by Faith or Cured by Works?

John Buttrey II

Many students of Scripture are familiar with the account of Naaman. The Old Testament record of his healing gives us an insightful picture of our spiritual healing in Christ. The writer of Second Kings introduces us to Naaman, with this impressive description:

Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper (2 Kings 5:1).

As powerful and mighty as Naaman was as a soldier, as respected as he was as a person, he suffered from leprosy. No doubt Naaman, and those around him, wondered how this great man could ever be healed from this devastating disease. Little did he know, a cure was available. All he needed was someone to tell him about it.

Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." (2 Kings 5:2-3).

We are not told the name of this little servant girl. Sadly, she is often forgotten in this familiar account of Naaman's healing. What compassion she demonstrated to Naaman, the man who had taken her from her home, and had made her a household servant in Aram. What an example of loving your enemy!

Based upon her suggestion, Naaman makes a journey to Israel to meet with the prophet Elisha. When he arrives, the powerful Naaman is disappointed at the lack of pomp and circumstance to celebrate his arrival.

So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean." But Naaman was furious 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 wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. ' (2 Kings 5:9-11).

How interesting that Elisha does not even come out to speak with Naaman. The prophet sends out a servant to give the instructions. Naaman needed to learn the importance of humility. The mighty man from Aram was furious at the simple instructions he was given. He was told the cure could be obtained by washing seven times in the river Jordan. Naaman was so angry he was ready to go home and remain a leper. Once again, some unnamed servants, helped Naaman gain some perspective.

Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, " My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean '?" (2 Kings 5:13).

Their wise approach to Naaman finds him heading to the Jordan to follow the prophet's instructions. Naaman went to the Jordan in faith (trusting) that he would be healed. When he arrives, look what happens:

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean (2 Kings 5:14).

Consider this important question: Was Naaman saved by faith or works? He went to the Jordan in faith, but had he refused to dip seven times, would he have been healed? **No.** All the faith in the world would not have cured Naaman until he obeyed the instructions. Naaman had to dip seven times. So, was he healed by works? **Yes and no.**

No, he was not saved by works in the sense of earning his healing. The healing was a matter of God's amazing grace. It was a gift. Naaman was not so good that God was a debtor to him. God made the offer, but Naaman had to show his faith. **Yes,** he was saved by works in that he was obedient to the instruction from God's prophet. James wrote of this kind of faith.

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (James 2:20).

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24).

All we find in the account of Naaman holds true with one being healed today of the leprosy of sin. Scripture is clear in regards to the need for baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21). Those today who would argue that baptism is not

necessary, because it is perceived as a work, would have told Naaman all he needed was faith. But as James indicates, Naaman's faith alone would not have saved him.

Let me be clear, we are not saved by works, in the sense that we earn anything from God. Like Naaman's healing, it is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). But we are saved by works, as James indicates, in the sense that obedience to the word of God is essential. God says, "He who has believed and has been baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

There are many out there like Naaman. Like servants of Naaman, tell them the truth of what it takes to be saved. All the faith in the world will not save a soul if it is absent of obedience to the word of God.

www.wachurchofchrist.com