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GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HUMBLE THEMSELVES

2 Kings 5:1-14

I want us to go through this story carefully because it has a lot to say to us about power and humility – two things that, unfortunately, seldom seem to go together. Nearly every verse in this story makes some reference to the issue of who has power and authority, and who does not. And almost every initial impression is turned upside down as the seemingly powerful end up dependent on the seemingly powerless.

The passage begins by introducing Naaman as “commander of the army of the king of Aram”. It goes on to call Naaman “a great man and in high favour with his master”, adding that God used him to achieve victory for Aram (5:1). But the end of that first verse adds a sobering twist: “The man who was a mighty warrior, and who had so much power, had a serious problem: he suffered from what was considered to be leprosy. Those who suffered such a disease were often quarantined and forced to live alone. So, Naaman, the powerful commander, actually found himself having outsider status.

What this reminds us of is the fact that there are limits to human power, however great and dominant that power may be. And those limits are not imposed by human hands or plans. Those limits are imposed by forces beyond our control as was the case with Naaman.

In sharp contrast to the powerful Naaman, we encounter the servant of Naaman’s wife. She is a slave girl and a prisoner of war, making her one of the most powerless people imaginable. Yet God’s power was found in her words – she knows who can heal Naaman. This unnamed and utterly powerless slave girl becomes the instrument of healing and restoration of one of the most powerful and prominent men. Incredibly, the captive one has enough love in her heart to be concerned about the one in whose household she is held as a slave. Is that not what Paul says about love in 1Corinthians 13 - that love keeps no record of wrongs?

Hearing from this slave girl that there was a prophet in Israel that could heal him, Naaman got permission from his king to go, not to the prophet that the girl had told him about, but to the king of Israel, and he went bearing extravagant gifts: ten talents of silver (that’s about 750 pounds of silver) and 6,000 shekels of gold, (that’s about 150 pounds of gold). That’s a lot of money - more money than combined yearly wages of hundreds. So a powerful commander from a more powerful kingdom comes to Israel with expensive royal gifts and a request.

There are some people who just don’t get it, some people who believe that the solution to every problem is money – if only you can throw enough money at any problem it will go away. (Some Christians encourage such beliefs). Naaman was soon to discover that was not so. Some things are just not up for sale. Love and grace are included among those things that are not for sale to the highest bidder.

The slave girl freely offered up what she knew about how her master could be healed. She did not negotiate for any reward. She did not bargain for her freedom in exchange. The captive one had enough love in her heart to be concerned about the one in whose household she was held as a

slave. Likewise, the prophet Elisha was not swayed by Naaman's power nor the wealth of his king, he freely pointed him to the grace of God.

Then there is my favourite part of this story.

(Naaman) brought the letter (from the King of Aram) to the king of Israel, which read: 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.' When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.'

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.'

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.' But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, 'I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! (2 Kings 5: 6-11)

What a sense of self-importance! What a lack of humility! But the prophet Elisha is totally unimpressed with Naaman's power or his king's wealth; he treats Naaman like an ordinary person, demanding that Naaman come to him - not the other way around. He sends a messenger to the door to speak to Naaman rather than go himself.

Naaman arrived at Elijah's door with his horses and chariots, but he soon learned that if he wanted to be healed, he had to come off his high horses. His power and wealth, and great achievements did not earn him any special privilege or favour.

Let that message sit with us for a while.

When it comes to God, we have to get off our high horses – we have to humble ourselves. Our great possessions, our significant accomplishments, our outstanding credentials, our vast experience, our superior intellect, our extensive connections, do not earn us any special privilege or favour with God. But humility does! Humility places us in the position to receive the grace of God - which we cannot earn and by which we are saved from that which will defeat and destroy us.

We have to have the humility to accept when the answers to our questions do not lie within our own understanding and intellect, and the solutions to our problems do not lie within our power and ability, however much we think of ourselves, or what others think of us.

We have to have the humility to accept when the ways out of our difficulties are not in the hands of our well-connected and better-off friends and associates.

Repeatedly God directs our attention to God's power at work in the lives and presence of people we may deem to be insignificant, and in ways that we may dismiss because they are not sophisticated.

God doesn't need the powers of this world to accomplish God's purpose; what God needs are people who are willing to humble themselves and surrender to God's power at work in their lives. Then is when hope will spring to life. Then is when real change and transformation will take place. Then is when the impossible will become possible.

God's way may not always appeal to us, but it always leads to blessings. And we can only walk that way with humility.

Whatever we are doing in life, we need God's grace. God sometimes helps those who help themselves, but God always helps those who humble themselves.

So whatever we are doing, whatever is going on, whatever state we may be in, let us allow humility to shape our attitude and direct our choices. When we do so we place ourselves in a position for God to do God's work in and through us.

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