

Text: 2 Kings 5:1-15

Title: There is a God in Israel

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Our story begins in ancient times. The tensions are high between the two enemies; Aram, we know as Syria today, and Israel. On this particular day the Syrians were raiding in Israel. As I understand raiding, this is an opportunity to steal and take anything you want to take, destroy anything you want to destroy, all under the guise of war.

On this dark day the Syrian soldiers attacked a village in Israel. In that village was a young girl somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12. Just a little girl, at home with her family. She was probably doing chores or helping with her baby brother.

When suddenly a cry of alarm went up through her village. “**Run! Hide!** Soldiers are coming.” Everyone understood what that meant.

Strong and powerful soldiers began to trample through her village on huge war horses bred for battle. They had armor and weapons and adrenaline all mixed together in the evil stew of greed and war.

The little girl was running, trying to get out of the way of those galloping hooves bearing down on her. Abruptly she felt something grab her arm and yank her off the ground. For a moment she felt like she was flying. And then she was slammed face down over the heavy saddle. The wind was knocked out of her and she couldn't even catch her breath to scream.

But she could hear. She could hear her mother screaming her name. She could hear her father shouting at the soldiers to bring her back. And she could smell...smoke! Her village was on fire.

Abruptly the soldier drops her on the ground. As she looks around she realizes that she is with other captives who will be marched back to Syria. And so, she is taken away from her village, away from her home, away from her family. To Syria. She is now a spoil of war.

The Bible sums up this part of our story in one verse: *Now the Syrians on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel (2 Kings 5:2).*

She misses her Abba, she wants her mommy. Although she is very young, she tries to remember what they taught her. But it appears that she is not too young to have faith. And not too young to live in that faith, which is now put to the ultimate test. What is the ultimate test of faith? **To believe God when there is no reason to believe.**

That is not the end of her story. Our little girl ended up in the home of the Commander of the entire Syrian army, a man named Naaman, where she served his wife. Naaman was a great man and a mighty warrior. He had direct access to his king. Naaman is wealthy, powerful, successful and desperate.

Why would this influential man be so desperate? Because he has leprosy. Biblical scholars tell us that the word translated as “leprosy” is not the Hansen’s Disease we are familiar with today. However, we do know that he had some sort of skin disease that was dire enough to drive him to take desperate measures for relief, for a possible cure and deliverance from suffering and shame.

Now Naaman’s wife has a little servant girl; we met her earlier. This little Hebrew child has pity on Naaman and tells her mistress, *“If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy”* (2 Kings 5:3).

This little girl knows several things; there is only one true God, the God of Israel. He has a prophet, Elisha, who speaks for Him and that prophet is able to perform miracles on behalf of the One True God. I doubt the little girl can read but I would bet that she knows one verse of scripture by heart. *“Hear O Israel; The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

I can also imagine that she has some songs memorized. As she serves Naaman’s wife, she might be humming Psalm 91; *“You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust”* (Psalm 91:1-2).

She continues to believe in God when there is no reason to believe and she is faithful to what she knows about God and His prophet. What an amazing and faithful little girl!

Naaman hears about this healing prophet and decides that at this point, he has nothing to lose. He travels to Israel with a letter of introduction from the King of

Syria. He takes lots of gifts, gold and silver. Because that is the way of the world. But it is not God's way. Naaman has an audience with the King of Israel and gives him the letter from the King of Syria. It reads, *"When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy"* (5:6).

The King of Israel is beside himself and believes that the King of Syria is trying to set him up for more war! His response is very telling, *"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!"* (5:7)

These two kings have tried to add bureaucracy to the work of God, which only adds confusion and fear. God does not take applications. Fortunately, Elisha, God's true prophet, hears about this incident and he chastises the King of Israel. *"Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel"* (5:8).

At this time, there was no written Word of God. If you wanted to know what God said about a certain situation, you asked God's prophet. You asked Elisha. You recall that Elisha was mentored by the prophet, Elijah, who called down fire from heaven. Elisha had *bona fides!*

Most of us remember this part of the story from Sunday School. Naaman, in all his glory, visits the prophet of God. Elisha doesn't even come out of his house to meet Naaman, but sends a servant to tell Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman is insulted and outraged. Naaman rails against Elisha, *"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! Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"* (2 Kings 5:11-12).

Can you hear his pride and arrogance? His anger and disgust? "Doesn't this prophet know who I am? He didn't even bother to come outside and see all my wealth and power. Who does he think he is? Better yet, who does this supposed **God of Israel** think he is?"

Naaman's servants talk some sense into him and convince him to "give it a try." Naaman obeys the prophet's instructions and washes himself seven times in the Jordan River and he is cleansed, healed from his disease! His rotting and aging

flesh is now like the flesh of a little baby. Now Naaman gets it! He understands that there is a God in Israel!

He goes back to the home of Elisha in humility and faith. He tries to pay Elisha because it is the way of the world. But once again, it is not God's way. God can't be bought. He is not for sale! Naaman not only is healed from his disease, but he now believes in the one true God of Israel and plans to serve this God when he returns home.

There are lots of characters in this story. Who would you be if you were in the story? Maybe you identify with one of the kings. They are powerful and understand the system and all the politics. They have gone as high as you can go in the government but both are left out of the healing loop. The King of Syria doesn't even know that there is a God in Israel. The King of Israel knows there is a God but has no faith or confidence in Him.

Maybe you identify with Naaman. You are successful at your job, competent and skilled. You have been successful and handled any challenge that has come your way – *until now*. You need God's healing and blessing so you stamp your foot and start making ultimatums. Your prayers might sound something like this: "If there really is a God, He needs to show me right now and answer my prayer!" And you hear only silence.

After your spiritual temper tantrum, you are desperate enough to try God's way; you are at a point where you can stop and hear the Word of God. You're not sure that you really believe but there is no place else to go. Then you hear that in Jesus Christ there is healing and restoration available. That in fact, *There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)*.

You decide to try trusting in Jesus, but it seems kind of silly and even humiliating. You think, "Just pray and ask? Confess my sins? Shouldn't there be a bigger ceremony? Maybe some flashing lights or a big fire?" Your lodge initiation was more impressive than this. Again, that is not God's way. I Peter 5:5-6 reminds us, *"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.*

This step of faith can be scary. We think, "What if this doesn't work? What if I get it wrong or don't have enough faith? Jesus told the man with the sick child, "*All*

*things can be done for the one who believes. The father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 6:24)*

Perhaps today you identify with Elisha, this faithful man of God, who can't be bought or compromised. He is not afraid of either king or of the general, Naaman. Elisha is not moved by politics, power, cash or fear. He doesn't pay attention to the clamoring of the kings or the demands of this powerful military commander, Naaman. He is too busy paying attention to the voice of God.

As a preacher, I would love to be like Elisha, to be able to tune out all of the voices that are demanding my attention. To be able to ignore the distractions in my life that keep me from listening for and hearing the voice of God. I pray that as I continue to serve and preach, I would be more like this prophet of God.

But there is one more person in our story; she's easy to forget. The little servant girl. We don't know her name, her family name, her tribe or where she is from. We do know that she is doomed to a life of servitude in a foreign country and that *if* her family is alive, she will never see them again. This little girl is a slave, she is property, a spoil of war. She can't claim anything as her own, not the clothes on her back or the food in her mouth. The only thing she can control is her faith. And she believes in the one true God!

I doubt that she is happy in her circumstances. But she knows something that the King of Syria does not know, that the King of Israel does not know and that Naaman didn't know. She knows that her life is in the hands of the Lord God, Creator of Heaven and earth, the great *I Am that I Am*. She knows that her heavenly Father holds her in his almighty, infinite and loving arms. She has passed the ultimate test of faith; *she believes in God when there is no reason to believe*.

This is the challenge of our life of faith. We try to build our lives on the institutions around us, like the government or our retirement plan. We try to find security in a job or the company we work for. We want support to come from family and friends. And yet all of these things have the potential to crumble and leave us alone and yes, desperate. What is left when it seems that there is nothing left? There is God! There is hope and salvation in Jesus Christ. The old hymn says it this way:

On Christ the solid rock I stand  
All other ground is sinking sand  
All other ground is sinking sand.

Amen.