

## 2 Kings 5

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Bible contains many stories about real people who lived in this world in which we are living. About people who experienced God's power and love.

And it's very important to remember about Bible characters, that they did not live in some kind of fairy tale world, or in a world of religious time or mythical time.

They lived in the real world, the same world in which we are living. Otherwise, the things we read about them were true only in religious time or mythical time, not in real time or in the real world.

The Bible characters lived in the real world. And like if it's a parable, if it's a parable and it was a story and Jesus introduced it as such. Otherwise, it's history. It's the real world.

Now here is one of these stories. Children love this story, but it also has much to teach adults as well. First of all, let's do a little bit of geography.

[ 1 : 16 ] Naaman was commander of the army of Aram. Now Aram was an area of what is today known as southern Syria.

This area lay to Israel's northeast. And you'll remember that the people of God often suffered aggression from their neighbors. The Arameans to the north, the Philistines to the southwest, the Midianites to the southeast, and others.

Now that's enough geography. Let's go to the two main characters. Naaman was an important man in a high position. As a great soldier, he was well known and famous.

He had position, popularity, and power. He had a good life, except for one fatal problem. That was, he had leprosy.

This was a disease of the skin, which became knobby or lumpy and tough like leather. In the long term, leprosy could destroy your hands or your feet or other parts of your body.

[ 2 : 25 ] This disease would eventually have killed Naaman. And it was very infectious. You could catch the disease simply by touching a person who had leprosy. So you had to keep a distance from other people if you had leprosy.

Imagine what this was like for Naaman. He could have no physical contact with his wife or his children or other family members or close friends.

They'd be afraid to go near him. So he was a great man. He had great possibilities, great potential. But he had a life-threatening problem.

He had a death sentence hanging over him. Well, there was a young slave girl in their house. We're not told her name.

But she was from Israel. She had been captured in one of the raids which Naaman had led or authorized against Israel. She was now a helper to Naaman's wife.

[ 3 : 28 ] This young girl is old enough to realize what is wrong with the great man, her master. So one day, she remarks to her mistress, we have the words in verse 3, If only my master would see the prophet who was in Samaria.

He would cure him of his leprosy. Now, Samaria was a town in Israel. The prophet was Elisha, the man of God. He was famous in Israel for his amazing acts.

You can read about the widow's oil that did not run out in chapter 4, and the story of the Shunammite's son who was restored to life. Well, something in that little girl must have impressed Naaman and his wife.

Why should they listen to a child? But they did listen to her. At once, Naaman went to the king and asked permission to go to Israel to visit the prophet, the man of God.

Well, it appears that diplomacy or political protocol demanded that they go through certain channels in order to ask for this favor.

[ 4 : 39 ] So that's why, I think, Naaman went first of all to the king of Israel. The king of Aram had sent a letter addressed to the king of Israel. But the king could not cure Naaman of his leprosy.

The king is afraid and panicked by the letter, and he suspects that this is an excuse for another war. However, this misunderstanding is eventually overcome, and Naaman finds his way to the person he should have seen in the first place, the man of God.

And what happens? Elisha does not come personally to meet his important visitor. You can imagine the impressive and colorful procession of horses and chariots stopping outside Elisha's house. But Elisha only sends him a message. He doesn't even come to meet him personally. And the message is taken as an insult. Naaman is angry and disappointed.

And you can read in verses 11 and 12, he went away angry and said, I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot, and cure me of my leprosy.

[ 5 : 52 ] Are not Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed? So, no mighty miracle, not even a prayer.

Just an instruction that seems totally stupid and pointless. And delivered second hand. However, Naaman's servants, leaving with him, they went to him and said, My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?

How much more then, when he tells you, wash and be cleansed? Is that a difficult thing he had told you to do? If he had told you to do a difficult thing, you would have done it.

And they might well have reasoned it in this way too. They might have said, well, it's the prophet who's going to look stupid if nothing happens. Not you. Well, anyway, Naaman decides to give it a try.

He went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh is restored.

[ 7 : 06 ] Then follows the amazing testimony from this man to his newfound faith in the God of Israel. Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.

Now, his faith is a very imperfect faith as yet. You can see that later in the passage. But he has discovered the power of God, and that has changed his life.

Now what I'd like us to do is to consider the practical usefulness of this information for us today. Remember, these were real people living in the real world just like ourselves.

It's not just a story with a model. The first point, I think, is this. God is the same God today.

In all the world, there is only one true and living God. You know, they had their own gods in Aram too. But, these gods had no power.

[ 8 : 20 ] No power to do what Naaman needed. Remember Naaman's testimony in verse 15. Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. The Bible teaches that there is only one true God.

And he is the creator of the universe and the father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible calls on all the nations of the world to worship the same God.

The one God. If you read again, we were singing earlier in Psalm 96. It's very interesting, those words. I'll just read them in the prose version. Verse 4.

There is a clear distinction between the God that are only figments of people's imagination and the God who actually created us, the God who gave us our existence, in whom we live and live and have our being.

That is the biblical testimony. And verse 7 of Psalm 96. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

[ 9 : 39 ] Verse 10. Stay among the nations. The Lord reigns. The world is firmly established. It cannot be moved. He will judge the nations with equity.

And verse 13. They will sing before the Lord because he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness. God is not confined to any one nation.

He is above the nations. Above all the nations. And we are all accountable to him for what we do with the lives he has given us. He is the judge.

And we will stand before him and be judged. So we are accountable to God. Whoever we are, whatever our background, wherever we are from, we are accountable to God for what we do with our lives.

So God is above man. He is above governments. Above all human powers. Above all demonic powers. So what should we do in the light of all this?

[10:44] Well, Psalm 96 says we should worship him. And in fact, it goes on to say in verse 9 that we should tremble before him. Tremble before him.

All the earth. Why tremble? Well, he is our judge. We have failed to do his will.

We have gone our own way instead. And the wages of sin is death. That is why we should tremble.

So how do we begin to worship him?

Well, he has made himself accessible to us. He has made himself accessible through prayer. Here is a prayer that you could use with God.

You could say this. Oh God, help me to have no other God but you. Let me not worship other gods, such as nation, or state, or education, or technology, or economic power, or art and culture.

[11:57] I often think that when people have no God, when they don't believe in a transcendent God who made us, the next best thing to worship is man. The next highest thing you've got is art and culture.

And a lot of people worship that their God. So you could pray to God, let me not worship the gods that we invent for ourselves, or gods like sport personalities, or film stars, or great thinkers, or great inventors, or even great religions, or even the church.

Oh God, let me not worship false gods. You could pray that for yourself. You could say, forgive my sins against you, Lord God, and help me to bow humbly to your power and saving love.

Love that you've made known to me in Jesus Christ. That's how you would begin to worship God.

You would ask for his help. He hath made himself accessible to us through prayer in the name of Jesus.

The true and living God who is there has actually revealed himself and made himself knowable as Savior God. There's a way to God which he himself has opened up.

[13:20] So he's the same God as he was then, the only true and living God, and we need to come to him. That's the first point to remember from the story.

And the second point I want to leave with you is this. To experience God's power, we need the word of God.

It was because of the girl's testimony that her master came to be cured of his leprosy. Because she spoke up, the child knew the Lord and spoke the truth about him.

And God was willing to bless Naaman, although he did not as yet know him or acknowledge him.

How did Naaman find out about God? Through the girl's testimony to the truth.

So Naaman decided to give it a try and see what he discovered. He discovered the power of the true and living God. He discovered that God cared for him.

[14:27] He discovered that he mattered to God, although he didn't even know God. But you see, unless we have a word from the Lord, unless we've got a word from God, we cannot know anything about his love.

We might know something by looking at nature and say, well, there must be a wonderful designer or architect or creator up there. There must be, but I don't have any personal contact with him. It's through his word that we can know him personally and know his love.

We won't know anything about his love and his grace unless we have a word directly from himself.

And all the talk there is today about spirituality and all the interest there is in it, we're really only guessing unless we have a word from God, a definite word from himself.

And that's what the Bible claims to be, the word of God, God's testimony to who he is, who we are, and what's wrong with us, and what we need to do, what he can do.

God's testimony. Now that little girl's Bible would have consisted only of the first five books of Moses. But she knew the Lord. She'd been taught from the word of God.

[15:49] Today, we have the whole Bible. And God is the same. So, come to God yourself in the way he has given as revealed in his word.

Start tonight if you've never done so before. And if you've become a Christian years ago, keep coming to God in the way he has given.

Through his word, through his son, through the way of salvation, confession of sin, and faith in Christ. Keep coming to God in the way he has given, revealed in his word.

You will not be disappointed with God. You will not be disappointed by believing his word. You will not be disappointed by taking his promises to him in your prayers and saying, Lord God, you have

said this in your word.

I ask you to do this for me. Whatever it is, you find the fuel in his word on which to base your prayers.

[16:54] So, that's the second point. To experience God's power, we need the word of God. We need to come to God using his word. And in order to do that, we need to get to know his word better and better. Don't just leave the Bible gathering dust on your shelf between, for the whole week.

Now, the third point I would like to make is how God can overrule all kinds of circumstances, especially mishaps and misunderstandings for the good of people.

The story shows that. How God can overrule things for the good of those who seek him. Here we've got in the story an insignificant young girl making a simple suggestion.

It's amazing that they listened to her. But the wife Naaman's wife told Naaman and Naaman went straight to the king. But, you know, thinking about it humanly, this story could have ended there.

Who is she? Why should you believe her? But God overruled. They did listen. And Naaman went all the way to Samaria and was healed.

[18:04] However, of course, before he was healed things went wrong. For Naaman goes to the king of Israel, the king is given the wrong impression. He gets the wrong impression from the letter.

The letter seems to suggest that the king is expected to perform the miracle cure. The king feels threatened. This could mean war. That could have been the end of the story.

But it wasn't. Somehow, Elisha heard about it. Look at verse 8 where it says that when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message.

Send the man to me. Now, how did Elisha come to hear about it? In God's good providence. You know, the king did not send to the prophet for advice and guidance.

He probably should have. He should have thought, I better get Elisha in on this. What am I going to do? But he didn't even think of that. Elisha somehow heard about it. And he tells the king to send the name to him.

[19:16] Now, still more goes wrong. Even after finding the man of God, the great man's hopes and expectations are disappointed.

He feels humiliated. He is really angry and leaves in disgust. Elisha didn't even come to speak to him. And then, the message he got was insulting.

Why couldn't I bathe in the beautiful rivers of my own country? It could have been the end of the story. He could have gone straight home there and then, vowing never again to be so foolish as to listen to ridiculous claims made by religious fanatics or by naive, credulous people.

But, his servants reasoned with him. God is sovereign. God can use people.

And the great man, and this is probably the greatest miracle of the whole story, the great man humbled himself to obey the word of the prophet and wash in the river he despises.

[20:23] I think that was as great, if not great, as a miracle than the actual healing, the actual cure. The man humbles himself. You know, that's the sort of thing that happens to people when they're converted. They're humbled before God.

They're humbled to realize that their own devices and their own efforts to make themselves good or to improve themselves enough to please God are useless.

And they're humbled. And they're brought to realize, I have to turn to God and I have to do this God's way, not my own way. There's no hope for me unless God rescues me.

So they're humbled, you see. And that's what happened, that sort of thing that happened to Naaman. He was humbled to obey the prophet and go and wash in the Jordan.

He was also cured of the leprosy and the glory is given to God. Naaman said, now I know that there is no God in Israel except the God of Israel. And that story has been repeated down through the generations after having been recorded in Scripture.

[21:27] The glory is given to God. And millions of people have given the glory to God reading this story. Well, then again, the good work done in Naaman's soul was very nearly ruined by the easy attempt to line his own pockets afterwards.

But again, God overruled and most solemnly. Naaman thankfully seized the request in the best possible light and granted that God also saw and punished Gehazi's greed.

But the story illustrates God's sovereignty and God's power to overrule circumstances and mishaps and accidents and things that shouldn't have happened. God has the power to overrule because he's God.

And this is his world. Not man's world or the devil's world or a world in the grip of chaos or chance or bad luck. It's God's world.

God is good and wise. That should give us great hope. Now, the narrative should encourage us in several ways. In the first place, this should encourage us in our prayers.

[ 22 : 44 ] God is sovereign and it's his world. He is also approachable. When we feel our own weakness and insignificance and impotence, when we feel that we're just like that young girl, we should remember that God is sovereign and graciously overrules for his glory and for our good.

Remember that when you feel weak. God doesn't always do what we ask or what we want. But in his sovereign providence, all things work together for good to those that love God.

God will do what is good. You can rest assured of that. Ask him. Ask him what you believe you should ask and know that he will do what is good and what is for you good and you will know his love.

So we should be much in prayer. We should be people of prayer. Asking God for things. Come to the prayer meeting if you don't already do so and intercede for the church and the country and the world and in all its need.

Do you pray for your neighbours? For your work colleagues? If a colleague shares a problem with you, would you consider saying to him, I'll pray for you. That's a witness.

[ 24 : 14 ] Many don't know how to pray for themselves but they often appreciate it when it's offered to them. We should be people of prayer. We should believe in prayer. In personal prayer and in prayer together in the prayer meeting.

Jesus said once, if two of you agree on earth concerning what they shall ask, it will be done by my Father. That's a great encouragement to people who gather together in the prayer meeting.

So, this story encourages us in our prayers because God is sovereign and is approachable. But also, secondly, this story should encourage us in our witnessing.

It should encourage us to be like the girl in the story. To take opportunities to speak for Christ and to share the word of God.

See what good can be done by a simple word. Yes, some people will think you're naive or credulous. But don't let that discourage you.

[ 25 : 18 ] Just seek every day to live a consistent Christian life and to let your life as well as your words speak of God's grace and salvation. You know, often our witness is weak or non-existent.

I'm sure we're all conscious of that. I feel we often look, I often look too much like everyone else around me. They don't see any difference in the way I live, the way I think and act, my attitude.

They don't see any difference between me and themselves. And of course, we feel ourselves. We don't want to preach at people, we don't want to embarrass people. So, we dumb down.

This story encourages us to witness. Is there a story you could tell? Is there an experience of how God helped you that you could relate?

Is there a practical word from the Bible that you could share? Like, for example, where Paul says, you don't let the sun go down in your wrath. Let's say you know a young couple, or an older couple, who are going through a rocky patch.

[ 26 : 25 ] You know you could see the Bible, see the version of the Bible that says, do not let the sun go down in your wrath. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry. Don't go to bed while you're still angry.

Try to talk about it and resolve the matter. Don't go to bed not speaking to each other. The Bible says practical things like that. Is there something like that you could share? It could be a valuable witness to someone.

It might help a person and show them that God is really there. And he's willing to help them. So, here's one last thing. Don't give up on the people that you have already witnessed to.

You may feel that they've seen through you. You feel that they have come to the conclusion that after all has been said and done, they have a more comprehensive way of understanding the world. You're just simple and naive. Remember, their story is not over yet either. God is still dealing with them.

[ 27 : 32 ] You may yet even come into faith in Jesus Christ and come to experience the goodness of God. So, keep witnessing and keep praying. I'll leave these thoughts with you.

Let us pray. Let us pray. you're