

NEW BIRTH STORY

2 KINGS 5:1-19 AUGUST 1, 2021

You moms have probably told the birth story of your kids multiple times. The road to delivery can have a many twists and turns. We find the details compelling and often surprising. Maybe your story is like Mary Gorgens who delivered her fifth child in just 120 seconds (the fastest on record).¹ Or maybe for your family it was more like Joanna Krzysztonek, who had to endure 75 days of labor, laying tilted 30 degrees backward 24 hours a day to keep her twins from delivering too early.²

The Bible describes salvation being delivered and born again. Jesus said we *must* be born again if we want to escape death and receive the forgiveness of our sins. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Titus 3:5 - [God our Savior] saved us - not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy - through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

This amazing process of being born again is the most important thing that could possibly happen to you. Now, the Gospel is the same in every age and in every place. God reveals Himself, man is given the choice as to whether they will believe Him and trust Him and, if they will, then He gives them His righteousness. But the road to redemption is particular to each individual. Some are saved very young, some are saved very old. Some were ignorant of spiritual things, others were actively in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people had a single event that made them realize that they were sinners in need of a Savior. Others can identify decades of plain but persistent attempts on the part of God to rescue them.

In 2 Kings, chapter 5 we have a wonderful new birth story. As we examine it we will not only be amazed at the power and grace of God, but we also get a chance to see how He involves those of us who already know Him in the process. And, for those of you who may not yet *be* born again, you will, hopefully, see a reflection of yourself and the state of your heart, your need for forgiveness, and that salvation is being held out to you by a God who knows you and loves you.

Our story opens in a house in the ancient kingdom of Aram - we would call it Syria today - more than 100 miles to the north of the city of Samaria, which was the Israeli capital at the time.³

2 Kings 5:1 - Naaman, commander of the army for the king of Aram, was a man important to his master and highly regarded because through him, the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was a valiant warrior, but he had a skin disease.

Naaman is our main character. He is the one who will be saved at the end of the story. At the start, we learn a lot about him. He was a man of great power, great position, great ability. He was the commander-in-chief of the mighty Aramean army. He hadn't cheated or bribed his way into this spot. He earned it through valor and victory. We find that he was a man respected and revered, both by his king and his own servants. But we learn two other *very* important things.

First, we see that it was by God's grace that he had won the battles he had won. If you're not a Christian, even if you believe there's a God, you may not realize just how involved He is not only in

¹ https://www.parents.com/baby/all-about-babies/whoa-this-mom-gave-birth-in-two-minutes/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

² https://www.madeformums.com/news/75-days-is-this-the-longest-labour/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

³ Warren Wiersbe *Be Distinct*

the world generally, but specifically in *your* life. The Bible explains that God is in charge of this world and the flow of history. He has a will and it *will* be done. On top of that, He is directly involved in your life. It's *His* breath in your lungs. You may think that you are the commander of your life, but God's word says, "through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed."⁴

The most significant thing we learn about Naaman in this verse is the last thing: He had a skin disease. We would call him a leper.

In the Bible, leprosy serves as a picture of our sinful condition before God. Leprosy was a rotting decay that would start small and slowly grow, ultimately killing the victim. You could try to cover it up, but that wouldn't do any good. In fact, it would only pollute whatever touched it. Leprosy isolated a person and deadened their senses. There was no cure anywhere on earth. Nothing could be done to clean yourself or rid yourself of the stain or effects of this terrible affliction.

That's exactly the *spiritual* condition of every single human being. You see, when we're born we inherit a sin nature and then, throughout life we commit individual acts of sin. Some worse, some not so bad in the eyes of other people, but all of them putrid and criminal in comparison to a perfect and holy God. When He sees our imperfection, our rebellion, our refusal to do what is right in every thought, word and deed, here's His assessment: From the sole of your foot to the top of your head, no spot is clear. The whole thing is festering with our sin.⁵ It's a plague in our hearts.⁶

You can rise through the ranks of men, you can become a great champion, secure in your wealth and your position and your legacy. But what will cure you of the wrongs that you've done? If you're not a Christian, you're Naaman. And you're in a world of trouble, living on borrowed time.

But, here's the good news: Naaman was not *only* important to his king or his country. He was also *very* important to God. And God was about to do something incredible for this man.

2 Kings 5:2-3 - ²Aram had gone on raids and brought back from the land of Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease."

This girl is one of the most remarkable people in all the Old Testament. We don't know her name, but look at her heart. She had been living her life when suddenly she was stolen and became a slave in the house of the very man who led the Godless soldiers who had kidnapped her. But, despite the suffering she had endured, despite the fact that the entire trajectory of her life was now completely different, she did not turn her back on God. In fact, her hope in God was alive and well. And she knew that the God of Israel would be kind and compassionate even to the Commander of Aram.

Do we present God that way to the world around us? As if He is willing to receive *anyone* who will come to Him? As if He is both very mindful of our present sufferings but also has plans and purposes that are far greater than our present circumstances? That's Who God is. He is the God Who loves His enemies and does all He can to save them. This girl is a reminder to all of us who *are* born again that we are guaranteed trouble in this world, but at the same time, God works all things together for good in us and through us. We have hope and confidence even in defeat or suffering.

⁴ Lamentations 3:22

⁵ Isaiah 1:5-6, Psalm 38:3

⁶ 1 Kings 8:38

This girl had every right to hate Naaman - to pray that he would die for the evil things he had done. Instead, her heart was full of compassion. *And* it was full of real insight for the lost and dying people around her. She didn't just say, "I wish things weren't so bad for you." She does the much more valuable thing, "I wish Naaman would go to *this* man in *this* place so that he would live and not die."

If you're a Christian, you know the way to salvation. You have the directions which lead to heaven. We are to go through life delivering that saving message, not coddling people or generically consoling them, but giving them the prescription for eternal life. That it is found in One place and One Person: Christ Jesus who is fully God and fully man, who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on a Roman cross, was buried and raised to life the third day and now offers freely the forgiveness of sins. That if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you *will* be saved.

Now, Naaman was mighty, but he was also desperate. He was a dead man walking unless he found some healing, some cure for his incurable disease. No doubt he had gone to many physicians and shamans and potion makers in an effort to escape his fate. All of them had failed miserably, as the legions spread ever-further over his body. But, he had heard that *sometimes* strange things happened in the land of Israel. Whispers of the impossible were shared in the barracks. Now there's this little Hebrew girl saying, "I know how you can be totally saved from your sickness."

2 Kings 5:4 - ⁴So Naaman went and told his master what the girl from the land of Israel had said.

This must've been a hard meeting to schedule. To go in and ask your king for time off to go into the capital of the enemy to have a holy man heal you of a disease everyone knew couldn't be cured based on the testimony of a little slave girl. It shows just how desperate Naaman was.

If you're not a Christian here today, you need to realize your condition. If Naaman had thought, "It's just a rash, it'll go away," then he wouldn't have cared about what the girl said. But he knew this wasn't just a scab. He was doomed.

Friends, if you've never been born again, you're *doomed*. There is a way that seems right to a person but its end is the way to death. The Bible says you are rushing toward an eternity in Hell, not because *God* wants to send you there, but because you haven't accepted His offer to be saved from it. God is not willing that *any* should perish but that all would come to repentance. But you have to realize your need - that you're lost and guilty and hopeless but for God's intervention.

2 Kings 5:5-6 - ⁵Therefore, the king of Aram said, "Go, and I will send a letter with you to the king of Israel." So he went and took with him 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, and it read: When this letter comes to you, note that I have sent you my servant Naaman for you to cure him of his skin disease.

In today's valuation this is more than \$4,000,000! Naaman and the king assumed that this sort of healing would require payment. Naaman was worth every penny to Aram, so he's sent with quite a bounty. But, it was all *worthless*. Money couldn't solve his problem. Money couldn't buy a miracle. You see, they were operating with human intuition and attitudes. They really hadn't listened carefully to the young girl from Samaria. She said nothing about the king of Israel or a price to be paid.

For any non-believer listening: You may have to admit that you have pre-suppositions about God or about Jesus or about Christianity that aren't in the Bible at all. Naaman had a bunch of them, as we'll see. And for us Christians here today, it's so important that we accurately explain the Word of God to people. It makes a very big difference.

2 Kings 5:7 - ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and asked, "Am I God, killing and giving life, that this man expects me to cure a man of his skin disease? Recognize that he is only picking a fight with me."

The king of Israel was, ethnically, one of 'God's people,' but he was no believer. He was a pagan idolator just like Naaman. And we see just how empty he was. He didn't even believe the other gods he worshipped would help him in this situation.

We also see his hardness of heart. He knew who Elisha was and what he was capable of. Elisha had raised the dead! But we're told these kings of Israel "clung to their sin." And, because of it, when this man had an opportunity to see the astonishing work of God, he missed it. It's true, he couldn't give life, but he should've known the God Who can.

If you're one of God's people here today, don't become like the king of Israel - so wrapped up in wealth and pleasure and politics and selfishness that you become just like the unbelieving world around you. We're meant to be in the world, not of it. The *light* of the world, pointing others to life.

2 Kings 5:8-9 - ⁸When 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? Have him come to me, and he will know there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

Elisha took initiative, not for his own glory, but for the glory of God and for the sake of a suffering leper. He welcomed the chance to work in this man's life. The stakes were high, the problem difficult, but Elisha wasn't ruffled. He was full of faith and confidence in the Lord.

2 Kings 5:10-12 - ¹⁰Then Elisha sent him a messenger, who said, "Go wash seven times in the Jordan and your skin will be restored and you will be clean." ¹¹But Naaman got angry and left, saying, "I was telling myself: He will surely come out, stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the skin disease. ¹²Aren't Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and left in a rage.

Why the disrespect? Is Elisha just turning the screws on one of Israel's enemies? No. What we're seeing here is that this isn't really a skin issue as much as it is a *heart* issue. It's Naaman's *heart* that needs healing more than his skin. Of course, to him the most important thing is this terminal illness. But God is showing him that there is more going on - something on a deeper level. God didn't want to simply clear the sores off his skin. God wanted to renew Naaman's heart, transform his life, and rescue him from the kingdom of darkness forever and ever.

That's what God wants to do in our lives. He *is* mindful and *does* care about our physical suffering, sorrows, and difficulties. But He wants to save every part of us, transforming us from the inside out.

Naaman was a great man. A powerful man. He commanded and it was done. Naaman had the resources he needed to buy what he wanted. But salvation is not for sale. It can only be received as a *gift* by someone with a humble, surrendered heart. The Bible says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.⁷ When He reaches out to a person, He says, “Follow Me.” To follow God means that we must believe Him and trust Him. That we turn away from our previous path of life, we turn away from our sin and our wickedness and instead allow God to be the Master of our lives.

Naaman wasn't ready to submit. He had come with his own terms in mind. “He should come out, show me a certain amount of preference. He should do religious things and perform a spectacle worthy of a man as important as me.” Naaman was dying, but wanted to be in charge of the treatment. You see, he was ready to be rid of his leprosy, but he wasn't ready to be rid of his pride. And, as a result, he flew into a rage and *almost* missed his chance to live and not die.

What's holding you back from becoming a Christian? Is it that you won't believe? Is it that you won't surrender? Is it that you're worried what others might think? Consider what would've happened to Naaman if he just went home and the story ended at verse 12. Thankfully, it didn't.

2 Kings 5:13 - ¹³But his servants approached and said to him, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more should you do it when he only tells you, ‘Wash and be clean?’”

Naaman must've been a good man, at least most of the time. His servants really loved him. They thought of him as a father. On the other hand, he was a proud man. A man with a temper. God knew everything about Naaman. He didn't demand that Naaman clean himself or make himself perfect before he could be saved. But, to be healed, to be saved, meant Naaman would have to surrender to God's way. It wasn't complicated, but that doesn't mean it was easy to conquer himself, lay down his arms and bow his knee to the King of Heaven. But that was his only hope.

2 Kings 5:14 - ¹⁴So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the command of the man of God. Then his skin was restored and became like the skin of a small boy, and he was clean.

How can you go into a dirty river 7 times and come out clean? The Jordan was a brown, muddy mess. God accomplishes the impossible. Each time and Naaman went in and dunked under he came out, took a look at himself and saw no change. But he made the choice to trust the God of Elisha. His other gods had never done a thing for him. Now, he believed the word he had been told and he obeyed the command he had been given. Not on his own terms, but on God's terms. It must've been a silly sight if you were there fishing on the river that day. But what may have seemed silly to some spectator was actually the transformation of a life. The saving of a man from death and hell. Naaman came up out of the water and was brand new, inside and out.

2 Kings 5:15-16 - ¹⁵Then Naaman and his whole company went back to the man of God, stood before him, and declared, “I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel. Therefore, please accept a gift from your servant.” ¹⁶But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, in whose presence I stand, I will not accept it.” Naaman urged him to accept it, but he refused.

⁷James 4:6

More than his skin was transformed. We see, *immediately*, the marks of salvation in the heart and words and actions of Naaman. First, he was thankful. He didn't go home, but first took the 25 mile trip *back* to Samaria to thank Elisha for what had happened.

Second, we see his heart was overflowing with worship and testimony about God. He went in the water as a pagan leper, he came out a righteous monotheist. He wanted people to know. He wasn't ashamed of the Gospel.

Third, his heart was full of generosity. He wasn't trying to bribe anyone or pay for anything. He said, "please accept this gift." This wasn't out of obligation or coercion, but out of a thankful heart.

Fourth, his newfound humility remained. When Elisha refused him, he was content to be refused. No flying into a rage this time.

Why *did* Elisha refuse? Isn't a workman worthy of his wage? Yes, that's true. And a heart transformed by God *will* be a heart full of generosity toward the Lord's work. But God, working through Elisha, wants this to be perfectly clear: Salvation is *free*. It is the *gift* of God. You are saved by grace through faith, not of works, not of money, not of worthiness, lest any many should boast.

2 Kings 5:17 - ¹⁷ Naaman responded, "If not, please let your servant be given as much soil as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will no longer offer a burnt offering or a sacrifice to any other god but the Lord.

In these closing verses many commentators criticize Naaman for being "superstitious," but we need not criticize. He knew *nothing* about how to worship the Lord. Not yet anyway. He had no Bible. He'd never been to synagogue. Instead, we see a man who wanted to do whatever he could to worship God faithfully. His life was in Syria and so he wanted to, in a sense, take a temple with him. He made a plan to worship and to honor God. He didn't consider his relationship with Jehovah as over. He knew this was just beginning. Yes, he'd have a lot to learn, but he was ready to worship - ready to acknowledge publicly that there is one true God.

2 Kings 5:18-19 - ¹⁸ However, in a particular matter may the Lord pardon your servant: When my master, the king of Aram, goes into the temple of Rimmon to bow in worship while he is leaning on my arm, and I have to bow in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant in this matter." ¹⁹ So he said to him, "Go in peace."

Naaman thinking about how his life would have to change now that he was a servant of God. He realized it wouldn't always be easy and that people would notice the things he was doing and how that might reflect poorly on his faith.

From our vantage point we might call this compromise. But if we step back for a moment, what do we see? We see a heart enthralled with God. We see a man completely changed, wanting very much to honor God in every thought, word and action. We see Elisha speak graciously to him - he doesn't rebuke him. Naaman knew that it wasn't only his skin that had been cleaned, so was his heart and mind. He wanted to go forward in life just as clean and pardoned as he was in that moment.

Put yourself in this story. If you were going to be cast as one of these characters based on what's going on in your life, who would it be? If you're not born again choose between Naaman and the king of Israel. They both found themselves in trouble. But the king held onto his resentment toward

God. He clung to his sin. He refused to believe. Naaman surrendered and he was changed forever. His life was saved. His heart was saved. He suddenly had a value no battlefield victory could give him. He was *loved* by God and, after years of life and leprosy, took hold of the gift of salvation God extended to him. If you're not a Christian, God wants to redeem you. In Hosea chapter 7 God mourns over those who rebel against Him and flee from Him. He says, "I *want* to redeem you." Are you willing to let Him? God loves you just as much as He loved Naaman or the servant girl or even His own Son. God so loves the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever would believe on Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

For those of us who are Christians here today, choose between the servant girl and Elisha. One is not better than the other. It's more about circumstances. Whether you find yourself in a time of trouble or a time of peace, God can use you to do world-changing, eternal work. You may feel insignificant or pushed aside, but none of that matters when we're talking about what God can do. Commentator Max Anders points out that the girl was everything Naaman wasn't. He was powerful, she was powerless. He was free, she was a slave. He was a conquering Aramean, she was a despised Hebrew. She had nothing, he had everything. But which was the hero?

Or look at Elisha. Presented suddenly with the pressure of a seemingly hopeless situation. And yet, his trust in God's ability did not flag. Both of these servants of God showed grace and compassion as they spoke the truth. They set aside resentment and prejudice and doubt and, as a result, something historic happened. More importantly, because of it, you and I will get to meet Naaman one day and hear him tell the story himself. But it requires a willingness on our part to set our minds on things above, not on our earthly circumstances. To choose to love our enemies. To remember that this is the work God does and His delight is to do it through us. Your conversations, your prayers, your acts of compassion to the people God brings into your path, those things are not wasted and they are not insignificant. They just may be the last phrase that helps bring a person into the Kingdom. You and I are part of God's labor and delivery team.