



Sermon Growth Guide

March 23, 2025

Washed



Sermon Growth Guide

March 23, 2025

“Washed”

2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-15b

Key Verse: 2 Kings 5:14

“So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.”

Big Idea: The prophet Elisha’s instructions plus the faith of unnamed servants equals a great miracle: the healing and conversion of Naaman.

Foundations

At this time in history, the Divided Kingdom of Israel was ruled by Baal-worshipping Kings. But the greed, injustice, and idolatry were trickling down into the lives of God’s fallen people. Because of this, God didn’t seem to be intent on blessing Israel; He was actually blessing Aram (Syria)! The chapter begins by telling us the Lord had handed over victory to Aram (Syria).

And yet, God’s prophets continued speaking truth and performing miracles in a very lost nation. The prophet Elisha steps onto the scene following his mentor, Elijah. His job: to confront the kings for their disobedience and to instill some glimpse of hope in Yahweh.

When Naaman, a highly regarded commander in Aram, is diagnosed with a debilitating and painful skin disease, God intercedes. Naaman was willing to do anything to be healed, including using his political connections, wealth and expertise. But it is the voice of an Israelite girl whom he had captured—as well as the encouragement of his faithful servants—that lead him to do what the prophet Elisha prescribes: go wash yourself in the Jordan river seven times. Naaman’s pride and entitlement had to be laid down in order for him to receive the miracle. Once again, the God of Israel chooses to communicate His love to the entire world—a love without boundaries or borders; a love that cleanses, heals, and restores.

Understanding God’s Word

Read together 2 Kings 5:1-3, 13. Naaman’s money and status weren’t helping his problem; the gods and prophets of Aram didn’t have a solution, either. But an unnamed slave girl was watching his struggle first-hand. She decides to boldly share her faith in Yahweh and his miracle-working prophet, Elisha. Later in the passage, we hear Naaman’s servants speak up as well, encouraging him to reconsider his choice because the God of Israel could heal him. What do you think this girl had to risk in telling her mistress about Elisha? What role did the servants play in his conversion?

Applying God’s Word

We often focus on Naaman’s pride and self-reliance in this story. Yes, both held him back until he was willing to surrender and humbly follow Elisha’s instructions. Pride, pain, and even bitterness could have stopped the slave girl or the servants from helping Naaman, too. What stops us from sharing our faith with those who may have hurt us; or with those who are of a different status or belief?

Witnessing God’s Word

Think of someone you know whose conversion would “take a miracle.” What is stopping you from telling them about Christ’s healing power today? How can you encourage them to surrender to Him?

We continue moving through the season of Lent with our sermon series, Turn Again. We have heard the cries of Job and we have celebrated the prophetic words of Jeremiah. Last week, we looked at the Holy purpose God handed over to Moses, a man who stepped into his new calling with the assurance that Yahweh would go with him.

When Moses made that turn, albeit with reluctance, I'll bet he never expected God to proceed by performing miracles. And these miracles had a purpose, too: the miracles communicated to the Israelites that God had heard their cries; that He loved them, and that He was willing to do whatever it took to set them free.

The Lord was not only concerned for His people, though. He wanted all nations to know and worship Him. And so, we read about Naaman's miraculous conversion in 2nd Kings which stands as one more example of how God chose to show His love and concern to the entire world.

In today's passage, we see that the prophet Elisha was in Samaria, continuing his mission of holding Israel's kings accountable while also trying to restore Israel's faith in Yahweh. Elisha stepped into this leadership role after asking his mentor, Elijah, for a double portion of the spirit to be on him. On record, Elisha performed literally two times as many miracles as Elijah. Today's story: the healing of Naaman, is one of Elisha's most well-known and remarkable miracles. And it was for a prominent Gentile.

Let's look at the situation: The chapter begins, "Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy." (2 Kings 5:1)

Naaman is described here as a great, valiant, highly regarded man. Because of his position as commander, he had many things: power, money, political connections, expertise, a high social status. But he also had leprosy. Naaman had finally reached a point where he was questioning if something outside of his

own country's borders-, his country's gods, and even his own strength-could heal him.

Maybe someone comes to mind or maybe you are someone who believes: my education, my social connections, my financial investments, my grit has always been enough to solve my problems. Perhaps it has been enough so far. But this is a facade, a trap called self-reliance. When you live this way, you are living focused on you and what you can do...not on God and what God can do.

This is also a life that can quickly turn us into people who are in a constant mode of anger and despair. In Tim Keller's sermon "How We Become Believers," he explains, "No matter how well you have done at creating a designer life, or no matter how much you think you can create a designer life, there will always be something that will come in and ruin it. There is always a '...but he had.'" (Tim Keller)

"...but he had leprosy." In today's world, that could be...Christie. Christie was a successful CEO, but she had an abusive spouse. Jeff owned multiple luxurious homes, but he had a gambling problem. The 'but he had's' of today include things from paralyzing anxiety to a drained savings account to a tragic diagnosis. And resilience, intelligence or good deeds cannot stop the "but he had's" of life from happening.

Self-reliance eventually runs out as you try to outrun grief. Determination, at some point, just won't deliver a solution for pain. People can only dig their heels into the illusion of self-reliance for so long. Eventually they, like Naaman, will have to stop and admit that they cannot do this alone. It's at this point in time when many people are finally open to the possibility of seeking help - even if that means seeking the God of the universe.

And we, we who proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior, we must be ready for those pivotal moments. Look at verses 2 and 3: "Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, 'If only



TURN AGAIN • 2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-15b • Ellen Dawson • March 23, 2025

my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:2-3)

This is when we can boldly proclaim “our God heals,” just like the young girl. She had every reason to keep the promises of God to herself. Why would she want to help this man who had raided her town and taken her away from her family? Because she knew God would bless him. She had faith that he could be healed and that her God could do it. She believed in the power and the life-transforming truth of her God and of Elisha the prophet who worked in His name.

The scripture reads, “Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ‘By all means, go,’ the king of Aram replied. ‘I will send a letter to the king of Israel.’ So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.” (2 Kings 5:4-5) Just picture Naaman here: hitching the modern-day equivalent of 2-3 million dollars to his chariot, speeding out of town with his entourage. They pull up to Elisha’s house in a cloud of dust -- not with faith in a miracle-working Lord, but with the necessary elements of a transaction.

Let’s pick up at verse 9: “So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, ‘Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.’ But Naaman went away angry and said, ‘I thought that 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. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?’ So he turned and went off in a rage.” Naaman turned, but he turned away from God’s blessing.

Now, this is where we could really drive home the problem of Naaman’s pride and entitlement. But I want to be sure we don’t overlook the actions of a few others: first, of Elisha the prophet.

Elisha doesn’t even get off the couch to come greet the great foreign leader. Why? Because Elisha didn’t want to take the credit or get in the way. He knew that even showing himself publicly would take away from what the Lord wanted to do. Elisha knew that God saw the illness of Naaman’s soul, and the only cure was humility and faith.

Naaman’s servants also knew. “Naaman’s servants 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!”’ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.” (2 Kings 5:13-14)

The servants say to Naaman, look, this actually isn’t hard...this isn’t anything spectacular. What seems impossible is possibly possible. They remind him it didn’t require strength or knowledge; he didn’t have to perform or pay anything. He just needed to stop overthinking, pouting, and analyzing the prophet’s instructions. He just had to for it! After all, as William Sloane Coffin writes: “There is nothing anti-intellectual about the leap of faith, for faith is not believing without proof but trusting without reservation.” (William Sloane Coffin, Credo)

In scripture, there are many stories of people stepping into a new life because they believed without proof and trusted without reservation. These stories all carry the theme of conversion. But you know what else they have in common? The people who were in the right place at the right time to share the good news!

For Naaman, it was the slave girl and the servants; For the Ethiopian eunuch it was Philip the evangelist; For Saul, it was Ananias; and for a Philippian jailer, it was the prisoners named Paul and Silas who baptized his entire household the same night they were miraculously freed from their prison cell.

For actor Stephen Baldwin and his wife Kennya, it was a housekeeper. A few decades ago, Baldwin was most



known for his family, his acting, and his addiction to cocaine. Today, Stephen is more well-known for his faith in Jesus... And that his daughter is married to Justin Bieber. Baldwin once shared that his life before Christ was focused on fame and making money. But then, he and his wife hired a new cleaning woman named Augusta. They noticed her singing hymns and worship songs all day as she worked. Kenya finally said to her, "I was just curious why is every song about Jesus?" Baldwin recalls, Augusta burst out laughing, and said, "I hope you understand why I'm laughing...you think the only reason that I'm here is to clean your house." Later, Augusta explained to Kenya that God had told her that she was going to lead the Baldwins to Christ and that they would start a ministry. And they did!

If God can place a housekeeper into Stephen Baldwin's home in Arizona, and a young slave girl in Naaman's home in Aram; perhaps God has placed you somewhere specific with the purpose of sharing His truth?

In verse 15, we read: "Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.'" (2 Kings 5:15a). The turn had happened. The conversion had taken place. Naaman met Jesus in the river Jordan; he met the Savior whose blood would wash the sins of the whole world clean.

God had surrounded Naaman with people who had hope – hope that conquered his "but he had." Their words were the spiritual nudge he needed to listen, open up his heart, and surrender to God's cleansing forgiveness. What a blessing it must have been for the slave girl to see his healed skin and hear him praise God.

We all know people whose conversion, we think, would "take a miracle." Is there someone you'd love to see washed clean of their sins? Joyfully stepping into baptismal waters? I invite you to ask God this week how you can be brave like the slave girl – or encouraging like the servants. How you may be placed

in a certain situation at this particular moment in time not for you...but for another person.

Or maybe you need to say a prayer today. If self-reliance is your M.O., it's time to lay that down. It's time to listen to those around you who have been praying for you and even saying to you: Jesus heals.

Right after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where Satan tempted him to rely on himself to satisfy his hunger, display his power, and claim worldly fame and fortune. But Jesus didn't take the bait. 40 days earlier was his turn. When Jesus came up out of the waters, His public vocation as Messiah began. His mission started as he stepped, dripping wet, onto the shore of the Jordan river. A mission that would be fulfilled on the cross only a few years later.

Last week, we celebrated St. Patrick's life and ministry. As a teenager, Patrick was kidnapped and forced into slavery by Irish raiders. Years later he escaped, fleeing home to Great Britain, only to return to Ireland after God gave him a vision to share the Gospel to the people who had enslaved him. He brought them the Good News of Christ, baptizing thousands and planting over 300 churches on the Emerald Isle.

When people obey, speak up and encourage others to trust a God who can heal them – lives change. You can have a role in someone's story of conversion. Could it be your singing as you work, your message of truth in their darkest moment, your peace in the midst of trial? After all, without the courage, honesty, or conviction of others, millions of people might never have taken the plunge into this new life.

God may be calling you to lead someone one step closer to the shore of their own conversion. Do you believe miracles can happen? They do happen, every day! And miracles have always communicated to God's people that He hears our cries; He loves us, and that He was willing to do whatever it took to set us free.

