

The great miracles in the life of the Syrian General Naaman are the high point of the beginning of 2 Kings. This great man was cleansed from leprosy – something only God can do. But even more profound is the confession of faith which Naaman makes in 2 Kings 5:15.

Monday: Read 2 Kings 5:15-19 and Luke 4:25-30

No God but the LORD

From his comment in Luke 4:25-30 shows, the Lord Jesus must have often reflected these great miracles – Naaman’s healing from leprosy as well as his heartfelt confession of faith in the God of Israel: “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel ...” Compare this statement to Jethro’s, in Exodus 18:11, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them. Notice that Jethro merely attributes to the Lord superiority over other gods.

Naaman confesses the God of Israel’s absolutely unchallenged Lordship and uniqueness as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Naaman, there is simply no other God in all the earth! Jethro, we are sure, would agree with what Naaman says, but rarely in the Old Testament do we have such a clear profession of faith on the part of a pagan as we have here with Naaman.

Meditate and Pray: As we continue to ask God to send revival into our unbelieving families’ and neighbors’ lives, let us ask Him to reveal Himself as the only option for sinners in great distress and need. It is not enough in our witness to invite unbelievers to consider our God as one option among many. He is and must be Lord of all of life. Sing about His absolute claim to such Lordship in hymn # 38:

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might; thy
justice like mountains high soaring above thy
clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

3 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render; O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee!

Tuesday: Read 2 Kings 5:15-19 and Luke 4:25-30

Sovereign Mercy

Jesus’ own neighbors from his hometown of Nazareth became enraged enough to try and kill Him for his commentary on the work of God in Elijah and Elisha’s day. It was not because God healed a pagan in Elisha’s day named Naaman, nor was it simply that this Naaman was a part of the hated Syrian army. Rather, it is because our Lord declared that *lepers in Israel were passed by even at the very time that Naaman was healed* – this is what made them so angry.

Israelite lepers stayed lepers; God cleansed a pagan one. God *turned away* from Israel when He extended grace to Naaman. That captures Jesus’ argument in Luke 4 and explains Nazareth’s anger.

Professor Dale Davis, Commentary on 2 Kings

Meditate and Pray: Oh, how we should tremble under the great weight of blessings which the Lord has poured on His church, while many, hostile to God as we once were, are passed by. In Exodus 33:19 the Lord says, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.” Do we sufficiently treasure God’s sovereign grace to us? How our hearts should melt with gratitude to Him as our Savior!

How could we sing anything other than hymn #469 in our Red Trinity hymnals, *How Sweet and Awesome Is The Place*, noting especially verses 3-4:

1 How sweet and awesome is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.

2 While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

3 "Why was I made to hear your voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice,
and rather starve than come?"

4 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.

5 Pity the nations, O our God,
constrain the earth to come;
send your victorious Word abroad,
and bring the strangers home.

6 We long to see your churches full,
that all the chosen race
may, with one voice and heart and soul,
sing your redeeming grace.

Weds/Thu: Read 2 Kings 5:17, Genesis 22:1-8 and Hebrews 9:18-2

Worship through Sacrifice

Naaman’s profession does not stop at simply confessing Jehovah’s Lordship as the only true God. He also takes practical steps to show that from now on he will rely upon bloody, burnt sacrifices offered only to the God of Israel.

Though there is no doubt some superstition in Naaman’s request for two donkey-loads of soil from Israel on which to build his altar back home, he is nevertheless showing us the insight of all true faith, faith based on sacrifice. All such saving faith recognizes that “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.”

Our father in the faith, Abraham is our example in Genesis 22. His faith believes that God would raise his son Isaac from the dead, after his being offered as a burnt offering (see Hebrews 11:19). But this was not the full extent of the faith which God worked mightily into Abraham’s heart and mind. He also possessed by grace a quiet certainty that a sacrifice would be found to die in Isaac’s place. This is why he says, “God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8).

In other words, Abraham realized that it would absolutely in vain for him to have a living Isaac with whom to walk down the mountain if his (and his son’s sin) was not covered by atoning blood. This is why Abraham, even while he raised the knife to slay his son, believed that God would provide another’s shed blood for

forgiveness. And sure enough, at just the right moment, God commanded Abraham to let his knife drop. Lifting his eyes, Abraham saw a ram caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:13) which he then offered to God as a burnt offering.

Thus we learn that blood offerings were at the heart of the true, biblical religion both of Abraham and Naaman.

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks that we are justified only because our Savior was willing, in our nature, to be placed under the knife of His Father, to be the burnt offering in our place. He took the punishment which our lives deserved at the hands of the justice of God. Instead of our being consumed for our own sins, Christ was consumed on the Cross!

Do we associate our highest joy as believers with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross? Galatians 6:14 says, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world." There would be no comfort to live like an unforgiven Isaac if there was found no lamb to die in our place. May God help us to desire only to live with the blood covering of Christ's Death over us, forgiving us our sins and imputing to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ as our robe and glory! Sing about this robe of Christ's righteousness which covers all who are saved by grace, using hymn # 520:

1 Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
my beauty are, my glorious dress;
'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
with joy shall I lift up my head.

2 Bold shall I stand in thy great day;
for who aught to my charge shall lay?
fully absolved through these I am
from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

3 When from the dust of death I rise
to claim my mansion in the skies,
ev'n then this shall be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.

4 Jesus, be endless praise to thee,
whose boundless mercy hath for me -
for me a full atonement made,
an everlasting ransom paid.

5 O let the dead now hear thy voice;
now bid thy banished ones rejoice;
their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, thy blood and righteousness.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read 2 Kings 5:17 and Revelation 1:1-6

Back at the Altar

We have been marveling this week at the *burnt offering* focus of Naaman the Syrian's faith as telling evidence that his faith was real and Christ-centered because it focused on the need of a sacrificial victim to die in his place. The reason for seeing his faith as real, in other words, is that this Syrian general's commitment to *only offer burnt offerings to the God of Israel* (2 Ki 5:17) is proof his faith was concentrated on the right place: on his need for forgiveness and on God as the only one who could provide the blood cleansing needed for that forgiveness to take place.

Revelation 1:5-6 is another place that focuses on blood forgiveness as the heart of biblical religion. Listen to these words of opening greeting from the pen of the Apostle John:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Notice especially what lies at the heart of John's outburst of praise in the middle of his greeting:

Unto him that loved us and washed in his own blood ... to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

This prayer is really a "doxology to the Son of God in His mediatorial character and office." (A.W. Pink)

Why such praise? Two over-arching reasons: because He has loved us and has made us to be "kings and priests unto God the Father" (v 5-6). What a privilege! As A.W. Pink goes on to say:

We who are children of the most High are made partakers of the honors of Him who is both the King of kings and our great High Priest. As we realize that the Lord Jesus shares His own honors with His redeemed, conferring upon them both the regal dignity and priestly nearness to God, we cannot but exultantly exclaim, "*To Him* be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

The *means* by which all these dignities flow as kings and priests is His cleansing us by His blood (Rev. 1:5). Thus we are back with Naaman and Abraham at the altars for burnt offering which they built as a testimony before a pagan world. Our God is not (and has *never been*) worshipped by our good works and religiously pious feelings or external worship. He has always been known as the God who is pleased when the savor of burnt offering ascends to His throne.

It is only because *we have One* who has poured out His life-blood in our place – not a ram, lamb or fellow sinner – but God Himself in the person of His Son, that we can praise God with John in the opening words of his Apocalypse.

Meditate and Pray: How striking are John's words. On the one hand, as A.W. Pink points out, this doxology to Christ Jesus proves that He is God, for doxological praise in Scripture is *never* offered to men. Yet at the same time, how awesome that here in Revelation 1:5-6 we are praising the Son of God *precisely because He poured out His blood and cleansed us with it!* God's blood! What a cleansing!

May the Lord guard us in this new year as His precious, blood-bought children. May He also enable your elders to be overseers of the flock of God, which He "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).