

Complete Submission

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WE DEVOTED MUCH of our attention in previous chapters to the requirement made upon Naaman, because that demand and his compliance therewith are the hinge on which this miracle turns, as the response made by the sinner to the call of the gospel settles whether or not he is to be cleansed from his sin. This does not denote that the success or failure of the gospel is left contingent upon the will of men, but rather announces that order of things which God has instituted: an order in which He acts as moral governor and in which man is dealt with as a moral agent. In consequence of the fall, man is filled with enmity against God and is blind to his eternal interests. His will is opposed to God's, and the depravity of his heart causes him to forsake his own mercies. Nevertheless he is still a responsible creature, and God treats him as such. As his moral governor, God requires obedience from him; and in the case of His elect He obtains it, not by physical compulsion but by moral persuasion, not by mere force but by inclining him to free concurrence. He does not overwhelm by divine might, but declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos 11:4).

What has just been pointed out above receives striking illustration in the incident before us. When God's requirement was made to Naaman it pleased him not; he was angry at the prophet and rebellious against the instructions given him. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was a definite test of obedience, calling for the surrender of his will to the Lord. Everything was narrowed down to that one thing: would he bow before and submit to the authoritative Word of God? In like manner every person who hears it is tested by the gospel today. The gospel is no mere "invitation" to be heeded or not as men please, and grossly dishonoring to God is it if we consider it only as such. The gospel is a divine proclamation, demanding the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against heaven. God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). And again we are told, "And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 3:23). The gospel is "for obedience to the faith" (Rom 1:5), and Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb 5:9). To those "that obey not the gospel," the Lord Jesus will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance (2 Th 1:7-8). If men will not bow to Christ's scepter, they shall be made His footstool.

It was this very obedience that Naaman was reluctant to render, so much so that he was on the point of returning to Syria unhealed. Yet that could not be. In the divine decree he was marked out to be the recipient of God's sovereign grace. As yet Naaman might be averse to receiving grace in the way of God's appointing, and the devil might put forth a supreme effort to retain his victim; but whatever be the devices of the human heart or the malice of its enemy, the counsel of the Lord must stand. When God has designs of mercy toward a soul, He sets in operation certain agencies which result in the accomplishment of His purpose. The flesh may resist and Satan may oppose, but it stands written, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps 110:3). That "day" had now arrived for Naaman, and speedily was this made manifest. It pleased God to exercise His power by moving the Syrian's servants to remonstrate with him and by making effectual their plea. "My father," they said, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst not thou have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (2 Ki 5:13-14). "Then went he down." That was something which he had to do; and until he did it, there was no cleansing for him. The sinner is not passive in connection with God's blotting out his iniquities. He has to repent (Acts 3:19), and believe in Christ (Acts 10:43) in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins. It was a voluntary act on the part of Naaman. Previously he had been unwilling to comply with the divine demand, but the secret power of God has worked in him — by means of the pleading of his attendants — overcoming his reluctance. It was an act of self-abasement. "He went down and dipped" signifies three things: he descended from his chariot, he waded into the waters, he was submerged beneath them, and thus did he own his vileness before God. No less than "seven times" must he plunge into that dark stream, thereby acknowledging his total uncleanness. A person only slightly soiled may be cleansed by a single washing, but Naaman must dip seven times to make evident how great was his defilement. The seven times also intimated that God required complete submission to His will. Nothing short of full surrender to Him is of any avail.

"Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God." It is of deep importance that we grasp the exact implication of this second clause; otherwise, we shall miss one of the principal lines in this gospel picture. Note well then that it was not according to the pleading of his attendants, the last thing mentioned in the context. Had Naaman acted simply to please them, he might have dipped himself in Jordan seventy times and been no better off for it. "According to the saying of the man of God" signifies according to the declaration of God Himself through His prophet. Naaman heeded the Word of God and rendered faith obedience (Rom 1:5) to it. Repentance is not sufficient to procure cleansing; the sinner must also believe. And this is what Naaman now did. His heart laid hold of the divine promise, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." He believed that "shalt" and acted upon it. Have you done similarly, my reader? Has your faith definitely appropriated the gospel promise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? If not, you will never be saved until it has. Faith is the indispensable requirement, for without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Ki 5:14). Of course it did. It could not be otherwise, for “he is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23). None has ever laid hold of a divine promise and found it to fail, and none ever will. That which has been spoken through the prophets and apostles is the Word of Him “that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). He cannot falsify His Word. He cannot depart from it, alter it, or break it. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps 119:89). Forever, too, is it settled on earth: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips” (Ps 89:34). God has promised to receive, welcome, own, justify, preserve, and bring to heaven, all who will take Him at His simple Word; who will rely upon it unconditionally and without reservation, setting to their seal that He is true. The warrant for us to believe is contained in the promise itself, as it was for Naaman. The promise says, “you may”; the promise says, “You must”; the promise says, “You are shut up to faith” (Gal 3:23). And I, I say, “Lord, I believe.” Faith is taking God at His Word — His undeceiving and infallible Word — and trusting in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. If you have not already done so, delay no longer, but trust Him now, and wash in that “fountain” which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13: 1).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” Let it be duly noted that there was no lengthy interval between the faith-obedience of Naaman and his healing, in fact no interval at all. There was no placing of him upon probation before his disease was removed. His cleansing was instantaneous. Nor was his cleansing partial and effected only by degrees; he was fully and perfectly healed there and then, so that not a single spot of his leprosy remained. And that is exactly what the glorious gospel of God announces and promises: “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). The moment a sinner claims Christ as his own, His perfect righteousness is placed to his account. The moment any sinner really takes God at His Word and appropriates the gospel promise, he is — without having to wait for anything further to be done for him or in him — entitled to and fit for heaven, just as was the dying thief. If he is left here another hundred years, he may indeed enter into a fuller understanding of the riches of divine grace, but he will not become one iota more fit for glory. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet [not ‘is now doing so’] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1: 12).

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (2 Ki 5:15). When a work of grace is wrought upon a person, it is soon made evident by him. Notice the radical and blessed transformation which had been produced in Naaman’s heart as well as in his body. He might have hastened back at once to Syria, but he did not. Previously he had turned his back upon Elisha in a rage, but now he sought his face in gratitude. Formerly he had despised the “waters of Israel” (v. 12); now he acknowledged the God of Israel. All was completely changed. The proud and haughty Syrian was humbled, terming himself the prophet’s “servant.” The bitterness of his legalistic heart which had resented a way of deliverance that placed him on the same level as paupers had received its death wound. The enmity of his carnal mind against God and his hatred of His prophet, together with his leprosy, were all left beneath Jordan’s flood, and he

emerged a new creature — cleansed and lowly in heart. No longer did he expect the prophet to seek him out and pay deference to him. Instead he at once went to Elisha and honored him as God's servant — a lovely figure of a saved sinner desiring fellowship with the people of God.

Sixth, the Sequel of the Miracle

Let us look more closely at the actions of the cleansed Naaman. First, he "returned to the man of God." Nor did he seek him in vain. This time Elisha came forth in person, there being no longer any need to communicate through his servant.

Second, Naaman was the first to speak, and he bore testimony to the true and living God: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." He had listened to no lectures on evidences of the divine existence, nor did he need to; effectively is a soul taught when it is made partaker of saving grace. Naaman was as sure now as Elisha himself that Jehovah alone is God.

Third, this testimony of Naaman was not given in private to the prophet, but openly before "all his company." Have you, my reader, made public profession of your faith? "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom 1:16); does a like witness issue from your lips, or are you attempting to be a "secret disciple" of His?

Fourth, Naaman now wished to bestow a present on Elisha as an expression of his gratitude. Are you ministering to the temporal needs of God's servants?

Yes, my reader, where a work of divine grace has been wrought, its subject soon makes the fact evident to those around him. One who has fully surrendered to God cannot hide the fact from his fellows, nor will he wish to. A new life within cannot help but be made manifest in a new life without. When Zaccheus was made a partaker of God's "so great salvation," he gave half his goods to the poor and made fourfold restitution to those he had robbed (Lk 19:8). When Saul of Tarsus was converted, he at once said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and henceforth a walk of loving obedience to Him marked the grand transformation. No sooner was the Philippian jailor made savingly acquainted with Christ than he who had made fast in the stocks the feet of the sorely-beaten apostles "washed their stripes" and, after being baptized, "brought them into his house" and "set meat before them" (Acts 16). Is it thus with you? Does your everyday conduct testify what Christ has done for you? Or is your profession only like a leafy tree without any fruit on it?

"But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused" (2 Ki 5:16). Naaman was now taught the freeness of God's grace. This freeness is pictured by Joseph, when he gave orders for the sacks of his brethren to be filled with corn and their money to be returned and placed in their sacks (Gen 42:25). When God gives to sinners, He gives freely. It was for a truly noble reason then that Elisha declined the blessing from Naaman's hand: he would not compromise the blessed truth of divine grace. "He would have Naaman return to Syria

with this testimony, that the God of Israel had taken nothing from him but his leprosy! He would have him go back and declare that his gold and silver were useless in dealing with One who gave all for nothing" (*Things New and Old*). God delights in being the giver. If you wish to please Him, continue coming before Him as a receiver. Listen to David, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon his name" (Ps 116:12-13). In other words, he would "render" to Him by receiving more!

By his response Elisha showed Naaman that the servant of God looks upon the wealth of this world with holy contempt.

Gratitude to the Lord will dictate liberality to the instruments of His mercies. But different circumstances will render it necessary for them to adopt different measures. The "man of God" will never allow himself to covet any one's gold or silver, or apparel; but be content with daily bread, and learn to trust for tomorrow. Yet sometimes he will understand that the proffered kindness is the Lord's method of supplying his necessities, that it will be fruit abounding to the benefit of the donor, and that there is a propriety in accepting it as a token of love; but as others, the gift will be looked on as a temptation, and he will perceive that the acceptance of it would degrade his character and office, dishonor God, and tend exceeding to the injury of the giver. In this case he will decidedly refuse it. This is particularly to be adverted to in the case of the great, when they first turn their thoughts to religious subjects. From knowledge of the world, they are apt to suspect all their inferiors of mercenary designs, and naturally suppose that ministers are only carrying on a trade like other men; while the conduct of too many so-called confirms them in the sentiment. There is but one way of counteracting this prejudice, and that is by evidencing a disinterested spirit, and not asking anything, and in some cases refusing to accept favors from them, until they have attained a further establishment in the faith; and by always persevering in an indifference to every personal interest (Scott).

"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD" (2 Ki 5:17). Once the true God is known (v. 15), all false ones are repudiated. Observe carefully his "be given" and "thy servant." He does not offer to purchase this soil, nor does he as "captain of the hosts" of Syria's victorious army demand it as a right. Grace had now taught him to be a recipient and conduct himself as a servant. Beautiful is it to see the purpose for which he wanted this earth; it was not from a superstitious veneration of the soil, but that he might honor God. This exhibits, once more, the great and grand change which had been wrought in Naaman. His chief concern now was to be a worshiper of the God of all grace, the God of Israel, and to this end he requests permission to take home with him sufficient soil of the land of Israel to build an altar. And is not the application of this to ourselves quite apparent? When a soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious, the spirit of worship possesses him, and he will reverently pour out his heart's adoration unto Him.

The order of truth we have been considering is deeply instructive. First, we have a cleansed leper, a sinner saved by grace, (v. 14). Then an assured saint: "I know" (v. 15); and now a voluntary worshiper (v. 17). That is the unchanging order of scripture. No one that ignores the cleansing blood of Christ or "the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:26) can obtain any access to the thrice holy God. And none who doubts his acceptance in the beloved can offer unto the Father that praise and thanksgiving which are His due. Therefore believers are bidden to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22). As we have passed from one detail to another, we have sought to make definite application to ourselves. Let us do so here. Naaman was determined to erect an altar unto the Lord in his own land. Reader, are you the head of a household, and do you claim to be a Christian? Then gather this family around you each day and conduct worship. If you do not, you have good reason to call into question the genuineness of your profession. If God has His due place in your heart, He will have it in your home.

"In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing" (2 Ki 5:18). This presents a real difficulty; for as the verse reads, it quite mars the typical picture and seems utterly foreign to all that precedes. It is true that Naaman was a converted heathen; and he had himself acknowledged that "there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel," so however great his previous ignorance, he was now enlightened. His desire to erect an altar unto Jehovah would appear to preclude the idea that he should in the next breath suggest that he play the part of a compromiser and then presumptuously count on the Lord's forgiveness. One who is fully surrendered to the Lord makes no reservation. He cannot, for His requirement is, "Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;" and again, "Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." And still more difficult is it for us to understand Elisha's, "Go in peace" (v. 19), if he had just been asked to grant a dispensation for what Naaman himself evidently felt to be wrong.

Is there then any legitimate method of removing this difficulty? Though he does not adopt it himself, Scott states that many learned men have sought to establish an alternative translation: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant: that when my master went into the house of Rimmon to bow down himself there, that I bowed down myself there — the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." We do not possess sufficient scholarship to be able to pass judgment on this rendition, but from what little we do know of the Hebrew verb (which has no present tense), it strikes us as likely. In this case, Naaman's words look backward, evidencing a quickened conscience, confessing a past offence, rather than forward and seeking a dispensation for a future sin. But if that translation is a cutting of the knot rather than an untying of it, then we must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right. So, instead of rebuking him, Elisha left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when Naaman's faith and judgment matured, he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.

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