

# Can It Be That Simple?

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
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- 2 Kings 5:1-14 <sup>13</sup>His servants went up to him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Now why can't you just wash yourself, as he said, and be cured?" <sup>14</sup>So Naaman went down to the Jordan, dipped himself in it seven times, as Elisha had instructed, and he was completely cured. His flesh became firm and healthy like that of a child.
- Luke 22:14, 19-20 <sup>14</sup>When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.... <sup>19</sup>Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup>And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: It can be reassuring to remember that our calling to be Christian is really quite simple: love God, love others, love always.

Here's the story of Naaman in a nutshell: He was a successful leader of the armies of the king of Syria. Naaman had been victorious against the armies of Israel to the south. On one such raid a young Israelite girl was taken prisoner and ended up back in Syria as the personal maid to Naaman's wife. One day the girl told her mistress that there's a man of wisdom, power, and prophecy back home in the Samaritan region of central Israel – a prophetic voice for God named Elisha. The girl was certain that Elisha could cure Naaman.

You see, for all his military prowess and his great connections with the king of Syria, Naaman bore the burden of a disease. His "Achilles' heel" was that he suffered from a leprous skin disease. In the Bible we often hear about leprosy (now called "Hansen's disease"). Leprosy is a bacterial disease creating pale or reddish patches on the skin that cause loss of sensation. It may or may not be painful. Today it is 100% treatable, but not back then. In pre-scientific times leprosy was often viewed as a consequence because you or your parents had done something bad or wrong or sinful; ancient cultures assumed that most disease was a sign of God's judgment. Some cultures shunned and isolated leprous persons; apparently that was not the case in Syria.

When Naaman heard what the little Israelite girl had told his wife, Naaman went to the king, told him that apparently there was someone in Israel who could cure him, and asked for leave in order to travel there. The king so valued Naaman that he said, "Wait – take these with you," and gave him a letter of introduction for the king of Israel. The Syrian king also sent along a bunch of gold, silver, and clothing as gesture of goodwill toward the neighboring king whose forces he had defeated in battle recently.

When Naaman arrived in the Samaritan region of Israel and presented the letter of introduction to the king of Israel, the king freaked out. "What's he trying to pull?" the Israelite king shouted. "Does your king think I'm a god with the powers of life and death, that I can cure sickness? Obviously he's trying to provoke me into fighting again!"

But Elisha the prophet of God heard about the king of Israel getting all worked up. He sent word to the king: "Just send him to me."

Naaman and his entourage went to the address they were given, expecting the royal welcome from this man of power and healing. Instead, Elisha sent a servant to the gate to tell Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan River... seven times! That would cure him.

Naaman was indignant. He was incensed. He was offended. This healer didn't even have the decency to greet his arrival? To welcome him into his home? He sent a message? Through a

servant, no less?? Naaman felt he was being mocked, toyed with, dismissed. His inflated ego was bruised. Naaman said to his servants,

“I thought that he would at least come out to me, pray to the Lord his God, wave his hand over the diseased spot, and cure me! <sup>12</sup> Besides, aren't the rivers Abana and Pharpar, back in Damascus, better than any river in Israel? I could have washed in them and been cured!”

Once Naaman had cooled off enough to be able to hear anything, his servants said to him, “If you'd been instructed to do something difficult, complicated, you'd have done it in order to be healed. So why not just do what he said and see you are cured?”

So he did. And he was.

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Can it be that easy? Can our faith really be as simple as believing that what God promises is to be trusted? We often talk about the challenges and demands of being a follower of Jesus. And that's true. Christians aspire to choose God over self. Christians try to emulate Jesus – his ability to love unconditionally, his humility, his obedience. Living like that is not only counter-cultural, but it's against our human nature which would have us focus on our wants and needs first. Yes, living a Christ-like life is challenging.

And yet, in another way, becoming a follower of Jesus is really pretty simple.

The book of Acts tells us in Chapter 10

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. <sup>45</sup> The Jewish believers... were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also.... Peter spoke up: <sup>47</sup> “These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as we also did. Can anyone, then, stop them from being baptized...?”<sup>1</sup>

That was it – they listened, they heard, they believed, they began to follow.

Or, when Paul & Silas had been imprisoned in Philippi for protesting human trafficking, the power of God provided for their escape, and in those days a prison break meant death to the jailer responsible. Acts Chapter 16 says,

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for a light, rushed in, and fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas [who were then sitting unshackled in an open cell]. <sup>30</sup> Then [the jailer] led them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” <sup>31</sup> They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your family.”<sup>2</sup>

That was it – they listened, they heard, they believed, they began to follow.

Jesus himself didn't complicate matters. After three years with his disciples – three years of talking and walking, teaching and preaching, healing and revealing – at the end of their time together Jesus gave his disciples a way to be able to recall all that they had learned from him: Jesus said, “When you eat, remember me. When you drink, remember me.”<sup>3</sup>

That was it – they listened, they heard, they believed, they remembered.

I'm not pooh-poohing intense religious study and discussion, or time-consuming effort invested in mission work. Thought-provoking theological discussions can be stimulating, invigorating, helpful. Delving deeply into biblical history and study of scripture can be educational, enlightening, inspiring. Complex, demanding engagement in matters of the spirit all have their place.

But this morning we heard that Elisha the prophet showed Naaman the military commander that doing the right thing could be pretty simple and clear. Naaman's discovery of simple obedience can serve as a reminder that our calling to be Christian is pretty simple: love God, love others, love always. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:44-47 (excerpts) (GNT)

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:16-34, esp. 29-31 (GNT)

<sup>3</sup> Luke 22:14-23, esp. 19-20 (GNT)