



## **“SOMETHING GREAT”**

**Kevin Presley**

Greetings and welcome. It's good to be with you today to study the bible together for a few moments. I wish to return to the Old Testament story we considered in our last time together: the story of Naaman recorded in 2 Kings, chapter 5. It's about a high-ranking Gentile military hero who contracted leprosy, an automatic death sentence in those days. He was sent to the prophet Elisha to be miraculously cleansed, and he not only found healing, but He found the true God, and a new way of life. We showed how his story is a good illustration of the theme of salvation from sin as revealed in the New Testament. But the story shows that Naaman was suffering with another syndrome besides leprosy, and it is still very present in the world today, and highly contagious.

Let's reread a part of the story and see if we can identify it. I'm reading now from 2 Kings 5:9-14 "Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

When Naaman's servants approached him, they offered him some life-saving wisdom and in the process, gently pointed out Naaman's folly. His way of thinking is still with us today. In fact, it's probably a temptation for all of us in one way or another. The title of the lesson today: SOMETHING GREAT.

Captain Naaman left Syria and went to Israel to find the prophet Elisha with great expectations. Naaman had leprosy and, like all other lepers, was a terminal case except a young Israelite girl who was his wife's servant told him about Elisha and that God had given him the power to heal leprosy. So, Naaman loaded his chariot with expensive clothing and gifts and sped away to locate the prophet. I'm sure all along the way, Naaman imagined what it would be like when he met Elisha. Being a high official of Syria, he was accustomed to being greeted by dignitaries, having people wait on him, and commanding attention where he went. He says in 2 Kings 5:11 that he thought the prophet would come out in great fashion, ceremoniously wave his hand over Naaman's rotting flesh, call on God, and a spectacular miracle would occur for all to see. How disappointed he was when he finally came thundering up to the house of Elisha, only to have a meager servant or messenger step outside and tell him that if he wanted to be clean, he had to go down to the Jordan River and dip seven times in its muddy waters, his leprosy would be gone, and he would be clean. That was not what Naaman expected. First, there was no meeting with the prophet. That was disappointed and even perhaps insulting enough. But then to be told to humiliate himself by going to a dirty stream, wading out, and ducking his head under the water seven times expecting it to cure leprosy. That was more than this prideful man could stand. The record says in verses 11 and 12, "...Naaman became furious, and went away and said, 'Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage."

We might think how foolish Naaman was to react that way because, after all, it is just going down to a river and dipping himself seven times and as strange as it may have sounded, what if the prophet was right. What could it hurt? I'll tell you what it could hurt – and that's Naaman's pride. And that was the heart of the problem. And everyone could see that except for Naaman. Verse 13: "And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" Pretty wise counsel. 'Naaman, you came all this way clinging to the hope that this prophet would heal you. Obviously, you thought enough of him to come to Israel and find him. Obviously, you had confidence in him. Because, if he had told you to do something fitting of a great man and dignitary like yourself, you would have done it. Had he told you to do something sensational and something that involved some great show of pageantry and power, you wouldn't have hesitated. Had he, in other words, told you to do something that made you look good and had he met all these grand expectations you had when you left home, you would be saying this prophet was the greatest man in the world. Well, either he is, or he isn't. Either he's a prophet, or he's not. Either he has the power to heal, or he doesn't. So, what's changed?' What has changed is that Elisha didn't work in the way Naaman expected him to and so Naaman rejected him. They, rather cautiously I think, dared to tell their master Naaman, "if the prophet had told you to do SOMETHING GREAT you would have done it. How much more then when he says to you, "Wash and be clean."" Thankfully, Naaman listened to their advice, humbled himself and went down to the Jordan River, waded in, and put his head under the water seven times and, just as Elisha promised, the sore on his body healed right before his eyes and his skin was like that of a child.

God certainly used an unusual means to cure Naaman's affliction. I mean, why dipping? Likely because of the connection to the idea of cleansing. But then why did it have to be the Jordan River? Why did he have to do it seven times? God certainly could have done it the way Naaman had imagined. So, why did it have to be a seven-fold immersion in a muddy river? Well, of course, all we can do is speculate because God doesn't say why. He just told him to do it. And as we pointed out last week, it was a definitely a test of Naaman's faith. Regardless, Naaman's pride and prejudice nearly kept him from being healed. He almost went home and died a miserable death because of his prideful expectations. But

Naaman is not so much different from us. Naaman thought that something as great as supernaturally healing an incurable disease must involve some grand display. And Naaman, the “great” man that he was, was all about doing “something great”, but God’s plan for him involved something much simpler and something much humbler. And if you stop and think about it, that really required more faith than doing something you would naturally expect. You see, Naaman is not only afflicted with the disease of leprosy, but he’s also suffering from another condition which still afflicts many of us today: The ‘some great thing’ syndrome and it goes back to the root of all of man’s problems, and that is pride. We see this over and over throughout history: God working though the little while man expects the great. And in the end, it’s the little that ends up being the greatest of all.

Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1Corinthians 1:18-21, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND BRING TO NOTHING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRUDENT.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” You see, the world thinks that all the things of God are foolish. God is hidden in plain sight from man because man is blinded by his own pride and ego. Paul goes on in verses 27 thru 29: “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

This is one of the reasons most of His own people rejected Christ when He came into the world. His Messiahship was not what they expected. Had He come in the way they expected, speaking the things they expected their long-awaited King to say, and doing the things they expected their Deliverer to do, they would have most likely gladly received Him. But they rejected Him! What did most of the first-century crowd in Israel expect? What did they long for? A king who could come in great pomp and circumstance, ride in upon his white horse, conquer the Romans, and restore Israel to greatness. They wanted a king who would make them successful, secure, and sovereign. Instead of being born, however, to an elite family in Jerusalem, he was born to a carpenter’s wife in Bethlehem in the humblest circumstances imaginable. He grew up in Nazareth where supposedly no good thing ever came from. When He became a man and began his ministry, He began preaching a radical doctrine that involved meekness, forgiveness, spiritual and not political reform. So, what did they? “This can’t be our King!” In John chapter 6, the multitudes were intrigued by Jesus’ wonder-working power. They stood amazed that He could say a pray and a few fish and a few loaves of bread could turn into a feast for thousands. And they thought, ‘if this man can do this, we’ve got it made.’ Their physical poverty was solved, and surely, he was the one who could finally step on the neck of Rome and free them from Caesar’s rule. But Jesus, knowing their hearts, said this bread you’re so desperately wanting is the not the bread you are needing. You need ME and my TEACHINGS. You need salvation from SIN, not from Caesar. John 6:58, “This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” And verse 66: “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” Something great, you see. And they missed the Lord because of their expectations of greatness.

Friend, God is a God of the little and unexpected things, and His ways don’t always make sense to us. But that’s the beauty of faith. God uses the “foolish things” of this world to confound those who think they are wise. The wise of this world (and that includes the religious world) stumble at the simplicity of

the gospel and of the church. And consequently, they try to make the church something it is not and was never intended to be. They measure greatness by their own standards instead of God's standards. They reject what they can't see and understand or what doesn't meet their expectations. They shun the little in search of the great and in the process, they miss it all. Now, the church is a great institution. It's a heavenly institution, planned by God, purchased and ruled by Christ, revealed by the Spirit. It is the greatest kingdom the world has ever or will ever know. The world doesn't understand, although they will one day. The church of Christ is the greatest institution on earth, period. But you would never know that by looking at the church and measuring it with man's ruler. The simplicity of the gospel and of the church; what it looks like; how it is organized; how it worships; how it spreads its message is incredibly simple. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:3 "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." That is indeed how Satan works to corrupt the gospel and corrupt the church.

Try to set aside the modern concept most have of religion and read the book of Acts and the epistles and see if a much purer and simpler picture doesn't emerge. Churches in the New Testament were not great enterprises, they were simple, local bodies of believers who came together to worship, be instructed and encouraged in the faith, and went out and daily lived simple Christian lives before the world. You don't read of great schemes and organizations to facilitate God's work. You read of each Christian supplying their lowly part in the local congregation they were members of so that who body could function and grow in Christ. (Ephesians 4:16) There were no denomination organizations or hierarchies of power and control. Christ commissioned His apostles to exercise His authority over His kingdom (which those original men do still today through their writings, the New Testament scriptures). His kingdom was visibly manifested in local congregations of believers who were shepherded by their own elders and deacons. Each church did its own work to spread and defend the truth and to edify and build itself up in love. You see no emphasis put upon a physical structure, rather the church met in different kinds of places, most rather humble and unassuming, often in a home large enough to accommodate the congregation. Their meetings were simple. They came together on the first day of the week to break bread or eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). That was simple, in itself, if you simply read what Jesus did when He instituted it. Those gathered shared a loaf of unleavened bread and a cup of fruit of the vine in His memory. (Mark 14:22-25) Their music was simple. They merely blended their voices together in praise to God. (Ephesians 5:19) Mechanical instruments in their assemblies were unknown to the church for over 600 years after its establishment, not to mention bands, orchestras, and the stagecraft and showmanship of the most recent age. They raised funds for their work through a weekly collection of the saints. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) You read of no business type enterprises to fund the church. But you see, all of that is far too simple for man. Man craves and expects "something great".

Even the Christian life is a compilation of simple every-day deeds. The power of the Christian influence is the effect of little seeds we all sow every day if we're doing what Christ wants us to do. But we think everything must be on some grand scale to make a difference and get His work done. We think we must come up with some grand scheme or some amazing enterprise or launch some impressive organization that is going to take the world for Christ. Friends, that kind of thinking has led the church into a maze of unscriptural innovations, an endless stream of one organization and one scheme after another and divided the body of Christ in the process of trying to enlarge the body of Christ. While the answer is so very simple. Just be the church we read about in the scripture. Be the Christian you need to be. Work to build up the church you're a part of and make it what the bible shows it should be. Live a godly, quiet, and peaceable life before all men. And you and the church you're a part of will be a light. I believe it was the preacher of a over a century ago, T.B. Larimore that may have said, "If you wanted to light an entire city, would it be best to try and provide one great shining light, or put a lamppost on every corner." That

latter is God's design. How about we return to the simplicity of early Christianity. It works. How about we be content to simply do what the Lord has revealed in His word instead of thinking of every way to embellish and garnish it? How about we simply do what the prophet said instead of -- 'something great'. Because God's way IS the greatest of all.

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