

The Cleansing of Naaman and Saul

INTRODUCTION:

1. Recently I talked about why people come to God. That lesson focused on how coming to God is the result of a realization that we are sinners and that God is our only hope of salvation.
2. Two individuals I addressed in that sermon were Naaman and Saul, which got me to thinking about their cleansing and how similar they were and what we could learn from them.
 - A. They are so similar that Naaman's physical cleansing could be called a type of Saul's spiritual cleansing, and therefore ours as well.
 - B. And their comparison presents excellent information on how God cleanses by his grace.
3. So, I want to talk about the cleansing of Naaman and Saul by considering...
 - A. How both were sinners living in opposition to God
 - B. How both were offered cleansing by God's grace
 - C. How we can apply this to our situation today.

BODY:

I. Both were sinners opposing God

- A. Both were enemies of God's people.
 1. Naaman was the **captain** of Aram's/Syria's army (2 Kgs. 5:1 – "Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the **LORD had given victory to Aram**. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper."").
 - a. Syria was Israel's enemy, with their warring and harassment against Israel mentioned three times in the context (2 Kgs. 5:2; 6:8; 6:24ff.).
 - b. At one point they even attempted to kill Elisha (2 Kgs. 6:8-23).
 - c. So, that Naaman became a candidate for God's cleansing says much about God's grace.
 2. Saul was also introduced as an enemy of God's people at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57 – 8:3 – "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and **stoned him**. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named **Saul**.^{8:1} **Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death**. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.² Some devout men buried **Stephen**, and made loud lamentation over him.³ As for **Saul**, he **made havoc of the church**, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, **committing them to prison**."").
- B. Both fought in *ignorance* against God.
 1. As leader of Syria's army Naaman condoned, likely participated in, and benefitted from raids where Israelites were taken captive and made slaves (1 Kgs. 5:2 – "Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and **had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel**; and **she waited on Naaman's wife**."). That he did this in *ignorance* is seen in how...
 - a. He knew nothing of God's power nor his prophet until the slave girl told him.
 - b. Once he learned of God and experienced His power to cleanse, Naaman *believed* and was *changed* (2 Kgs. 5:17 – "Naaman said, "...for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD."").
 2. Saul fought against God, taking His people captive as well.
 - a. He took God's people captive:
 - i. In the Jerusalem area (Acts 8:3 – "But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."").
 - ii. He sought to raid foreign cities (Acts 9:1-2 – "Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,² and asked for

letters from him to the synagogues at **Damascus**, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”).

- b. He, too, did this in **ignorance** because Saul said so (1 Tim. 1:12-15 – “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a **blasphemer** and a **persecutor** and a **violent aggressor**. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted **ignorantly in unbelief**; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”).
- C. It is easy to think that we better than Naaman and Saul, but sin makes us God’s enemy as well.
 1. Eph 2:1-3 – “And you were dead in your **trespasses** and **sins**, ² in which you formerly walked **according to the course of this world**, according to the **prince of the power of the air**, of the **spirit** that is now working in the **sons of disobedience**. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, even as the rest.”
 2. Col. 1:21-22 – “And although you were formerly **alienated** and **hostile** [enemies] in mind, **engaged in evil deeds**, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach”
 3. So, if you have sinned and have not come to Christ, you stand against God and need reconciliation.

II. Both were offered cleansing by grace.

A. Both were blessed to learn of God’s grace:

1. Naaman learned of God’s grace through his Jewish slave girl (2 Kgs. 5:2-3 – “Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.”).
 - a. So, by the kindness of this abducted girl Naaman was exposed to the reality of God’s grace to cleanse him.
 - b. Yet, **this grace to cleanse was not yet his to enjoy** because it was to be found “with the prophet who is in Samaria,” not in Syria where Naaman was.
2. Saul learned of the reality of God’s grace by Jesus himself (Acts 9:3-6 – “As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “**I am Jesus** whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”).
 - a. Though this encounter Saul now knew that in fighting Jesus he was fighting the Messiah of God’s grace. But, God’s **grace to cleanse him was not yet his to enjoy**.
 - b. For, as Jesus instructed, Saul had to *get up* and *enter the city* where it would be *told to him what he must do* (9:5-6).

B. Both could receive God’s grace if they **sought** it.

1. To receive cleansing by grace Naaman had to **go to where it could be found!**
 - a. Though Naaman went to Israel for cleansing, he did not go to where it was found (2 Kgs. 5:4-7 – “Naaman went in and told his master, saying, “Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.” ⁵ Then the king of Aram said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes. ⁶ He brought the letter to the **king of Israel**, saying, “And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my

servant to you, that **you** may **cure him of his leprosy.**”⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me.”).

- i. Many, like Naaman, want God’s grace, but want to go somewhere different than where God’s word says to receive it.
 - ii. Naaman learned that to receive God’s grace, he must seek it where it is to be found.
 - iii. Healing required going to God’s prophet (5:8-9 – “It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Now **let him come to me**, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”⁹ **So Naaman came** with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha.”).
2. To receive God’s cleansing Saul had to **go into Damascus** (Acts 9:5-6 – “And he [Saul] said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,⁶ but get up and enter the city, and **it will be told you what you must do.**”).
- a. This was because there was a disciple of Jesus named Ananias in Damascus who would tell Saul what God wanted him to do (Acts 9:10-16 – “Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is **praying,**¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.”¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”).
 - b. Like Naaman, if Saul **wanted God’s grace to cleanse him, he had to seek it out by going** to where instructions would be given concerning God’s will for him!
 - c. Saul obeyed (Acts 9:8 – “Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”).
- C. Both could receive grace to cleanse by *obedience of faith*.
1. God’s grace to cleanse Naaman required that he **believe** Elisha and **obey** his words (2 Kgs. 5:10 – “Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean.”).
 - a. Despite having faith to come to Elisha, Naaman had not yet been cleansed.
 - b. Cleansing by grace required **washing/dipping...seven times...in the Jordan!**
 - c. And despite all the conditions Naaman had and would meet, he was still a **sinful enemy** of God’s people **deserving nothing!** He was to be **cleansed by grace**. 2. Like Naaman, God’s grace to cleanse Saul of his sins required that he be washed in water.
 - a. For, upon receiving his sight Ananias told Saul to be baptized to be cleansed (Acts 22:14-16 – “And he [Ananias] said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.¹⁵ For you will be a **witness** for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ Now why do you delay? Get up and be **baptized**, and **wash away your sins**, calling on His name.”).
 - b. Despite having the Lord appear to him, having fasted, and prayed for three days (Acts 9:9, 11), and having his sight miraculously returned to him, Saul was not yet cleansed of his sins. That was because:

- i. Jesus appeared to Saul so he could be a **witness** of the risen Christ (Acts 22:14-15).
 - ii. God has never said for those outside of Christ to fast and pray to receive His grace to cleanse them of their sins!
 - c. Like Naaman, if Saul was going to be cleansed by God's grace, it would come when he was willing to obey God's command to be **baptized** in water (Acts 22:16)!
- D. Neither would receive cleansing if their contrary *thoughts* prevailed.
- 1. Naaman originally rejected God's means of cleansing because he *sincerely thought* it should happen differently (2 Kgs. 5:10-12 – "Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and **wash** in the Jordan **seven times**, and your flesh will be restored to you and **you will be clean.**"¹¹ But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I **thought**, '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 cure the leper.'¹² Are not Abanah and 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.**").
 - a. Though Naaman was sincere in his thoughts, those thoughts could not cleanse him.
 - b. Naaman had to accept and do what Elisha, God's prophet, said!
 - 2. Originally, Saul *sincerely thought* he must reject Jesus (Acts 26:9-11 – "So then, I **thought** to myself that **I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.**"¹⁰ And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.¹¹ And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."").
 - a. Though Saul was sincere in what he thought would please God, it would not save him.
 - b. Saul had to accept that Jesus is the Messiah and obey to be cleansed of his sin!
- E. Both received grace after their faith led to obedience.
- 1. Despite his *reasons* for not obeying, Naaman did not receive grace to be *cleansed* until he dipped seven times in the Jordan (2 Kgs. 5:13-14 – "Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'"¹⁴ So he went down and **dipped himself seven times** in the Jordan, **according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored** like the flesh of a little child and he was **clean.**").
 - 2. Like Naaman, Saul did not receive grace to be cleansed of his sin until he was dipped, or baptized, in water.
 - a. That was the command (Acts 22:16 – "Now why do you delay? Get up and be **baptized**, and **wash away your sins**, calling on His name."").
 - b. That is what Saul did (Acts 9:18 – "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he **arose and was baptized.**"").
 - 3. Thus, by obedience of faith, Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy while Saul was cleansed of his sin!

III. Like Naaman and Saul, If you are in sin, then YOU...

- A. Stand as an enemy of God, alienated and hostile to him, living according to the prince of the power of the air, disobedient, and as a child of wrath (Col. 1:21; Eph. 2:1-3).
- B. Have been offered grace through hearing the gospel (Acts 20:24 – "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the **gospel of the grace of God.**"").
- C. Must seek God's grace where it can be found, which is in Christ Jesus.

1. Justification from sin is in Christ (Rom. 3:23-24 – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is **in Christ Jesus**.”).
 2. The gift of eternal life is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.”).
- D. Like Naaman and Saul, you can receive God’s grace by *obedience of faith*.
1. Faith that trusts and seeks God is required (Heb. 11:6 – “And without **faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must **believe that He is** and that He is **a rewarder** of those who **seek Him**.”).
 2. Faith in Jesus requires obedience (Heb. 5:8-9 – “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.⁹ And being made perfect, he became the **source of eternal salvation to all who obey him**”).
- E. Like Naaman and Saul, you cannot let contrary thoughts prevail.
1. You may think you have **time** or that there is **another way to be saved**.
 2. But such thoughts will keep you from salvation. For, only **faith** in Christ and **obedience to the truth** will cleanse you of sin (John 8:31-32 – “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you **continue in My word** [obedience], then you are truly disciples of Mine;³² and you will **know the truth**, and the **truth will make you free**.”).
- F. So, like Naaman and Saul, you must have **faith** enough to **obey** Christ in **baptism** to be cleansed of sin.
1. It brings you into Christ where salvation is (Rom. 6:3 – “Or do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** have been baptized into His death?”).
 2. It saves (Mark 16:16 – “He who has **believed** and **has been baptized** shall be **saved**; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”).
 3. It brings forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36-38 – “Therefore let all the house of Israel **know for certain** that God has made Him both **Lord and Christ**—this **Jesus** whom you crucified.”³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, **what shall we do?**”³⁸ Peter said to them, “**Repent**, and each of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”).
 4. It is a required act of faith (Col. 2:12-13 – “having been buried with Him in **baptism**, in which you were also **raised up with Him through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having **forgiven us all our transgressions**”).

CONCLUSION:

1. So, like Naaman and Saul, you can be cleansed...of your sins...today!
2. God will bestow that same grace and mercy on you if you will receive it by F-R-C-Bp.
3. The offer of God’s grace to cleanse is yours. Will you come to Christ today and be saved?