Intro & Prayer

Chapter 5 begins:

1 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.

Here is what we learn about Naaman:

- He worked directly under the king of Syria.
- He is the commander of the king's army.
- He wasn't just a hireling; we can gather from the text later that Naaman was highly important to the Syrian king and the king cared for him very much.
- We're told Namaan was a great man.
- He was an honorable man in the eyes of the Syrian king, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. I find that really interesting, actually. Syria, being an adjacent enemy country of Israel... had victory over God's people – and it was THROUGH Naaman, a general in the army of God's enemy! Nevertheless, we read prior to today's account that the Syrians had taken over the region. We read time and time again, in the Old Testament, that God would bless His people when they were in obedience, and He allowed captivity when they were disobedient and turned their backs on Him. This was one of those times.
- At the end of verse 1, we read, "He was also a mighty man of valor (or bravery; he was of great courage)... and then we get to Naaman's big problem: "but".

He was a prominent commander, he was great, he was an honorable man, the Lord Himself even used Naaman for judgment over Israel, Naaman was a mighty man of valor... BUT.

He was a leper.

Look – I don't know if you know much about leprosy at all. But, obviously, it wasn't good!

Leprosy then was like a modern-day epidemic today. Not even the CDC could help with this issue.

Kids these days like all those zombie movies, and leprosy was the real, live show – let me tell you!

It was a horrible, flesh-eating, dreaded disease. You would go to great lengths to avoid leprosy. At all cost, really.

In fact -Once you got leprosy, there was nothing you could do about it. You were then shunned by everyone you knew. Everyone avoided you and you avoided them. Unless you hated someone. I guess, then, you could make sure you sneeze on them as they passed by.

If you had leprosy, you were cast out and had to live among the other lepers.

You were no longer CLEAN. You were IMPURE.

And you would now die a very, slow horrible death.

I found a great description of leprosy. It's actually from some guy, named David Guzik:

"Ancient leprosy began as small, red spots on the skin. Before too long the spots get bigger, and start to turn white, with sort of a shiny, or scaly appearance. Pretty soon the spots spread over the whole body and hair begins to fall out - first from the head, then even from the eyebrows. As things get worse, fingernails and toenails become loose; they start to rot and eventually fall off. Then the joints of fingers and toes begin to rot and fall off piece by piece. Gums begin to shrink and they can't hold the teeth anymore, so each of them is lost. [2] (sort of reminds you of your cousin in Alabama, doesn't it? ③). Leprosy keeps eating away at your face until literally the nose, the palate, and even the eyes rot - and the victim wastes away until death." - Guzik

You see...

No matter how much we're told Naaman had going FOR him, what he had going AGAINST him was absolutely devastating.

There was nothing - literally nothing - humanly possible that Naaman or anyone else could do to cure him of this disease.

He was destined to die a very horrible death.

Leprosy still exists today, actually. Every year, about 100 people living in the U.S. alone are diagnosed with leprosy – mostly in California for some reason (*which explains a lot ©*).

Leprosy is now curable – thank the Lord! But, not back in Naaman's day.

Even being a mighty man of valor, great and honorable own his own, Naaman is reminded of his great need for a supernatural work of a supernatural Savior.

2 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. 3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."

NOW -

This young Israelite girl was captured by Naaman's army some time ago, and she was being held captive as a servant of Naaman's wife.

But the FAITH we see in this little girl surpasses the faith we see in giant men! The few words she spoke show the faith she had in The Supernatural Savior.

DL Moody says this of the young, Israelite girl:

"A little maid said a few words that made a commotion in two kingdoms. God honored her faith by doing for Naaman, the idolater, what he had not done for any in Israel. How often has the finger of childhood pointed grown-up persons in the right direction. The maid boasted of God that He would do for Naaman what He had not done for any in Israel; and God honored her FAITH."

Jesus spoke of the faith of a child, and here, we see a great example. She pointed an outsider, a stranger with an incurable disease... to the only Source of healing – the Healer, Himself.

And, I LOVE how she presents the solution to Naaman's problem. She doesn't say, "This prophet MAY be able to help. Don't hold me to it, but maybe you should go see what he has to say. I'm not sure if he would WANT to heal you anyway... but, cross your fingers and hope for the best."

This young girl – in NO way – doubts the power that the God of Israel can have through a simple man like Elisha, back in her home town.

She says, "If ONLY my master were with the prophet who is in Samria!"

There is great emphasis here, I believe, as she says this – "if ONLY." I believe she says this with great excitement! This young girl's faith has just kicked in – because she knows of the great love – and the great power – of the God of Israel.

"For he (the prophet) would HEAL him... of his leprosy."

Not, "He might be able to help." Not, "Let's see what he can do."

But, NO. "He – WOULD – HEAL HIM – of his leprosy."

End-of-story. Bottom line. It's done. There is no doubt here. There is no shakiness in her voice. There is no second-guessing. There is – no – fear.

This little girl knows how big her God is.

4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

For the enemy king of Syria to regard Naaman as highly as he does, and then say, "Go now to the king of Israel...", it meant Naaman's situation was desperate.

Naaman was no fool. The king was no fool.

They both knew Naaman's future wasn't looking so good.

But, suddenly... there's a glimpse of hope.

Now, see – what that meant, though – was that it would require Naaman, the general of God's enemy-army, to humble himself BIG time.

Can you IMAGINE Naaman's situation: defeating a group of your "enemies," taking them captive, and making them serve you as you raid and assault their land...

Only to learn they held the only possibility for a cure – to an incurable disease – that would one day take your life??

BUT ... as humbling and embarrassing as this could possibly be, you've got to try it, right?

But, oh – the humility.

Nevertheless, Naaman went.

In verse 1, Naaman was seen as both great and honorable in his master's eyes.

In verse 4, his master pleas with the king of Israel through a letter, and he gives Naaman his blessing to "Go."

And, now in verse 5, we see the monetary value that he was willing to give up in order for Naaman to have a chance for healing.

5b So he [Naaman] departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

Some estimate this to be over one MILLION dollars!

Which shows you the exact nature of the despair! AND it shows the great value Naaman held in the eyes of his master!

With a disease of the magnitude of leprosy, you take no chances! If you had leprosy with no cure at the time, you would do anything!

You sell your car, you sell your house, you sell your kids, you sell your dog (*then you write a country song*, and *then you sell it to make more money*), you cash in on your 401k, you withdraw every ounce of savings and interest you can find until there is – absolutely – nothing left – to give.

You, literally, give everything you have – in desperation; this is your last hope. This is your ONLY hope.

6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. 7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes ...

Tearing of one's clothes in the Bible was a public outpouring of huge grief and sorrow, or mourning.

It's actually still continued today at the funeral service of a loved one, except it's not as spontaneous as it was in the Old Testament.

Today, the Rabbi will cut the garment (but tradition says, must be done over the heart to signify a broken heart) and then recite words that remind them of the sovereignty of God.

The act of tearing your clothes was a very powerful, public expression of your grief in ancient times.

But - in Joel chapter 2, God relayed through Joel: "'Now, therefore, says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend (or TEAR) your HEART, and NOT your garments; RETURN to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm." (v12-13)

God instructed His people: In times of sorrow and grief, turn your broken heart to the Lord – with everything within you.

God doesn't look at the outside – He looks within. He sees the broken heart. He shows compassion on those who turn to Him.

Psalm 34:18 – "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (NIV)

Knowing the Lord is close when we are brokenhearted, may we turn to Him even more in those times.

Naaman needed to get his broken heart right before God.

As for the king of Israel, he assumed the worst and broke down in a pity party:

... 7b and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

The king of Israel assumed this was another war tactic; as if Naaman was the Trojan Horse sent in to wipe out the entire nation with leprosy.

Although, I really can't blame him all that much! #1, they were enemies, but also, as the king pointed out... what was he supposed to do about leprosy!?

How is the king going to heal Naaman?? With what power??

Which brings me to a point:

It's obvious from the text that the king didn't have a relationship with Elisha, God's prophet in the land – nor did he probably have a relationship with God.

Or he would have KNOWN the healing power God has!

Obviously, no human in any of their own efforts could help Naaman.

But, the fact that the king acted in such unbelief tells you of the estranged relationship he must have had with Elisha, the prophet.

8 So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

I imagine Elisha is almost upset about this encounter. He asks the king, "Why have you torn your clothes??" "There is no need for this behavior."

For Elisha, it was a no-brainer! God can heal; God has the power; nothing is out of his grasp!

And, "You, being the king of God's people, don't even see a way out of this right now?"

In other words, "If YOU won't point him to God, I will do it. This man needs a miracle, not a maniac."

Guys – I love this verse. "Let him come. He shall KNOW."

Listen to the world = you will get worldly, logical advice. Trust in the Lord = you will see the supernatural.

God's answers are NO match for our worldly logic.

9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 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."

Try to picture this scene here – it's like a scene in the movies.

Naaman – as great and powerful as he is – comes with over a million dollars in currency, he's surrounded by his horses, his chariot, his servants, his uniform with all his medals and decorations...

The music is building as he sends word that he is here and ready for his cure. Suspense rises. Naaman starts to crack a little smile. Something BIG is about to happen. He feels it in the pit of his stomach.

The door opens.

A man steps outside. But it's not Elisha.

I think, immediately, the smile starts to retract a little. His eyes squint out of curiosity and questioning. He locks eyes with a few of his servants nearby as they shrug their shoulders out of the unknown.

The man approaches.

I like to picture him out of breath a little bit, but who knows.

"Hey. Uh, I just spoke with Elisha – he says to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times; your skin will be normal and you'll be good as new. Good luck!"

Now, I'm painting this picture with a little bit of exaggeration, but for a reason.

I want you to see the let-down, the disappointment that Naaman must have gone through. The unbelief of an answer that was so anticlimactic.

I don't believe this was the answer Naaman was expecting, do you?

To "wash and be clean"? It's too simplistic for his human mind to wrap around it!

For Naaman, the message of his salvation was a stumbling block – why?? Because the METHOD was too easy.

"What must I do to be saved? Wash and be clean?? In the nasty, JORDAN River?? 25 miles away from here??"

"No way! There's got to be something more!"

When God asks us for simple obedience, it really messes up our brains. We stumble. We can't go any further.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says this:

"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 (the sensible).' 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. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom (philosophers = "lovers of wisdom"); but WE - preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Focht: "To the religious person, the simplicity of Jesus is a stumbling stone."

And to the Greek, the outsider, it's a foolish, unconceivable concept.

You can see the frustration boil over in the next verse when Naaman replies:

11 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.' 12 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.

Now, I want you to take note of what Naaman says:

Naaman reacted the way we would expect a CHILD to react when the situation didn't go as expected.

But, sadly - that's not far off from how we, as adults, would act, too!

See – Naaman's problem was that the SOLUTION ... wasn't big enough, when compared to the GREATNESS of his problem.

And, I believe, that's often where we go wrong: Our problems are too BIG, compared to the solution that God provides – or compared to the act of obedience He requires.

We set the bar SO high that only a response of a proportionate (or higher) measure can be given as the solution.

And when a simple act of obedience isn't enough for us, we become infuriated, frustrated, and (quite honestly) bitter towards God.

Did you notice the pride and bitterness that Naaman displayed in verses 11-12?

He was furious – why?? Because things didn't go his way!

He says to himself, "HE – will SURELY come out to ME. And stand and call on the name of the Lord HIS God. And [he will] WAVE HIS HAND OVER THE PLACE. And HEAL [my] leprosy."

Guys – I've got to tell you: If God were to give you a BIG answer to your BIG problem this morning, would you not run out of here and do it?

But, how much more can God do when we obey Him - in the LITTLE things?

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'?"

God wants our humble hearts of obedience.

Obedience – trumps selfishness. Obedience – defeats pride. Obedience – leads to humility.

I've got a child who is becoming quite defiant these days. I have two sons, and one daughter – and, I won't tell you which child it is for anonymity sake, but let's just say, *she* is pretty feisty ©.

And when she gets in trouble, she refuses to look you in the eye, she refuses to apologize, and she tries to carry on as if not affected in any way by her offense.

So, like a good dad, I have to break her. I get on her level, get face-to-face with her, and stare her in the eye until she finally locks eyes with mine. But, I've got to tell you – it's a difficult process. She can hold out for a couple of minutes before her eyes ever lock on mine! She is as stubborn as her daddy, let me tell you!

Her eyes roam about for two minutes, but when they finally lock into mine, I know I've got her. She will then listen to me, realize her wrong, and she will then be in a place where she can apologize for what she's done. What happens is this: She is dealing with a level of pride and selfishness that says, "I'm not doing that! I'm not apologizing! I'm not going to OBEY."

And over the course of my special torture tactics, she begins to slowly break down. Until she's in a position where she can obey my instructions.

God wants to cure Namaan. He LOVES Namaan. But Namaan is about to MISS the powerful work of God because of his unbelief – that God is bigger than his own problem.

If God were to work a powerful miracle with pomp and flash, we would then KNOW it to be a work of God. But when God says, "Obey Me in the little things...", or gives an answer that seems too "simplistic" in our own thinking... Well, that simply "isn't good enough," and therefore, "It MUST not be a work of God."

Don't be so quick to turn your nose up towards Namaan's way of thinking here. Friends, let me ask you - how many times has this happened to you? How many of us would honestly say, "Yes, Lord. This is me. Too many times have I decided Your answer and Your way wasn't good enough for me. The Bible says, 'God's ways are higher than my ways, and God's thoughts are higher than mine,' but I must admit – I believe I am guilty of limiting the work of God's hand – BECAUSE of my unbelief."

Jesus said it best, when he showed Thomas His nail-scarred hands. Jesus tells Thomas in John 20:27, "Do not be UN-believing, but believing," to which Thomas replies in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas believes AFTER seeing the scars in Jesus's hands and side. It's easy to believe AFTER seeing the results! But Jesus tells Thomas in the next verse, "...because you have SEEN Me, you have believed. Blessed are those... who have NOT seen... and yet HAVE believed."

[2] See, Thomas needed proof! He needed to physically SEE the work of God, in order to truly believe it. I know this, because he said in verse 25, "UNLESS I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I - WILL - NOT - BELIEVE."

Thomas had demands! "Unless you PROVE it to me, beyond the shadow of any reasonable doubt, I - will - not - believe."

I think like many of us here today, that's what it takes to truly believe God can bring a breakthrough in our life, or in the life of a nation, or group of believers. In today's world, there is so much "fake," that it truly becomes hard to see what is real!

How do I discern what is true when people today have become so good at the art of manipulation? It's so easy to gain followers this day and to come up with your own crazy doctrine that it's a wonder we can all agree on anything! Even CHRISTIANS cannot agree on solid, Biblical facts. I'm not speaking of the unknown parts of Scripture, where we can "agree to disagree." I'm referring to the twisting of Scripture for our own gain.

2 Peter 3 describes this very well, when Peter speaks of Paul's wisdom and epistles, and says, "... in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but GROW in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:16-18).

Guys - it is your DUTY to grow in both the GRACE and the KNOWLEDGE of Jesus Christ. Why? So we know Scripture. So we can cling to Scripture and remain STEADFAST in the things of the Lord. Because the closer I get to Jesus, the further I get from the world and a worldly way of thinking! The more I get to know about Jesus, the greater my belief then becomes. The greater my belief, the greater my FAITH.

I truly believe that my faith has seen its strongest moments when I have <u>chosen</u> to believe, when there's no logical reason to do so. It's a choice I have to make. Believe in the seen or believe in the unseen? It takes ZERO faith to believe in the seen... WHY? Because the proof is right before your eyes! But, what about the moments where nothing seems possible... yet, I still say, "Lord, I choose to trust You."?

Can you imagine how it must have felt when the people of Israel were walking around the walls of Jericho? Their challenge was to take the land of Canaan, but they immediately met their first obstacle - the fortified city of Jericho. You can read about it in Joshua chapter 6, but this city was - without exaggeration - unconquerable! We're talking about a wall that was probably 11 feet high and 14 feet wide, with more stone on top of that, angling towards other massive, stone walls that towered even higher. So, what's the plan? God said to march silently around the wall for 6 days, and then - finally - after 7 full revolutions on the seventh day, shout and take the city.

I've got to tell you - there's no possible way this would take down those walls. I'm no architect, I'm no mason, nor am I a contractor. But, I'm telling you - there's no way this is happening in man's own strength.

Imagine you being part of this group that circled the wall for seven days!

The first day, you're probably looking up at the wall, feeling the embarrassing glares from the inhabitants inside. By the 2nd and 3rd day, you're growing pretty tired. By the seventh day, you are hoping and praying that God shows up.

I'm not going to lie, on that seventh revolution on the last day, I'd be sweating and fretting. It's in that moment I'd have to pull myself together and decide, *Do I truly believe what I truly*

believe? I KNOW this is what God wants me to do, but do I believe He will show up now? NONE of this makes sense. I'm not trying to discount the belief of the Israelites in any way... I promise.

But when the walls collapsed, one thing was completely evident: It was ONLY by the power of God that this thing happened. And, what I love about this? Is that that's the only possible explanation. An unbeliever would classify it as a coincidental, nature disaster of some type, or a flaw in the design and build of the wall that caused this. But, not me. See – the evidence for ME is overwhelming – for my faith.

But, see — John chapter 20 wraps up with a wonderful challenge and says, "And truly Jesus did many OTHER signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but THESE are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that BELIEVING you may have life in His name."

It makes you wonder how many other things Jesus did in the presence of His disciples that aren't recorded in the Bible. And then knowing that the things that WERE recorded were recorded for the PURPOSE of our BELIEF - that Jesus is the Christ - the Messiah - the Son of God... and that by BELIEVING, we may have life in His name. WOW, WOW, WOW.

In Matthew 13, those that knew Jesus from childhood became offended at Him, to which Jesus replied, "'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' Now He did not do many mighty works there..." Why? "... because of their unbelief."

But, as the father of the young boy with a mute spirit replied to Jesus saying, "Lord, I believe; help my UN-belief."

Even Jesus used the story of Naaman and Elisha as an illustration towards Israel's unbelief. In Luke's version of Jesus's rejection in His own hometown, Jesus tells the people, "No prophet is accepted in his own country (4:24)... And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed - except Naaman the Syrian." (4:27).

Jesus addressed the crowd in the synagogue in Nazareth with the reminder that God's own people overlooked the work of God that was available to them in Naaman's situation, it was overlooked in Jesus's day, and it is overlooked still today.

When the king of Israel rejected God's own prophet and power, God extended His grace to a Syrian – to an outsider. Jesus was rejected by the Jews, and God reached the Gentiles. Be careful not to overlook the work that God wants to do today - we might miss it!

God knew what He was doing with Naaman. God first needed Naaman to wash in the river of obedience – and cleanse himself of his pride and selfishness.

And, I believe He asks us to do the same.

14 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. 15 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...

It's funny: Naaman expected Elisha to come out and meet HIM in the beginning. But, now, he goes to meet Elisha. Don't forget, this was a 25-mile journey BACK to meet him!

He returns from a 50-mile round-trip of obedience, saying, "Indeed - now I KNOW."

This word here in verse 14, <mark>"dipped," or "*tabal*," can be translated as "plunged," or to be "immersed."</mark>

Naaman was FULLY obedient, and God was FULLY faithful.

BECAUSE of Naaman's obedience, God's work became very real to Naaman. He began his journey knowing nothing of God, <u>but now he holds a testimony</u> that God is Who He says He is.

Naaman forsook his idols, he worshiped the God of Israel, and his life was never the same.

When God does something in your life – whether BIG or small – you will have a testimony. Write these things down, lest you forget. Deuteronomy 8 is very clear about that – that when we eat and are full, when we have times of plenty, when God does something evident, DO NOT forget the Lord your God.

I believe our perspective will begin to change with each act of obedience toward God. When we are obedient (in both the big AND the small things).

GOD will shatter our pint-sized expectations, when we bring Him our faith. Ephesians 3:20 says God is able to do EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY ABOVE all that we ask or think, according to the power that works IN us."

I believe God wants to do big things here at Calvary Chapel. Are you willing to spend time praying, seeking, and asking God for big things – and then waiting for God to do His work?

We must never believe what we have to offer is too small for God. What have I to offer?

My faith.

PRAYER
