

No Big Deal

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15

INTRODUCTION

I like stories with anonymous heroes.

- Those people whose names we will never know, but who nonetheless do something that changes the outcome of the story.
- Those people who quietly makes a difference for somebody else.

This week I had a chance to talk with a man named Eddy. He is from Haiti, now living in Fort Wayne, IN. Eddy told me that when he was a little boy a group of people from the Evansville, IN area paid his tuition and uniform costs so he could go to school and continued to pay those costs all the way through high school. When he graduated, he was determined to come to the United States to thank them personally. But he has no idea who they are and now, after 40 years of looking, realizes that he will never be able to meet them.

The story is never about anonymous people like that, but without them there would be no story. There would be no Eddy to tell the story.

- A text message I received this week talked about people who came to the aid of a family in Ft. Myers, FL in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian.
 - Some of the people were friends of the family. Others were not ... like the two guys with chain saws who took care of the oak tree that was laying on their roof.
 - That story is being repeated over and over again in that region of the country.

There are two such anonymous people in today's Old Testament reading. The first is a slave girl, captured during an earlier raid into Israelite territory. She worked for the wife of a prominent military general named Namaan. It is her statement of faith that sets the rest of the story into motion:

If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy. (2 Kings 5:3)

The other anonymous person is a servant of General Namaan. This unknown man asks a brave question to one of the most powerful men in the land:

If the prophet had asked you to do something hard and heroic, wouldn't you have done it? So why not do something simple like 'wash and be clean'? (2 Kings 5:13, The Message)

That question that caused Namaan to do something he otherwise would not have done. That question that made the difference in General Namaan's life. And that is the question I would like us to consider this morning.

Namaan was asked to do a simple thing – something that was “no big deal.” But he became angry and refused to do it. Why? Why did he resist doing the simple thing that was asked of him – a thing that would result in the healing that he wanted and needed and that God was ready to give? Why didn't he do what God asked him to do?

Let me suggest that there are THREE REASONS that caused Namaan to respond as he did. You might discover these reasons have an application to your own life as well.

REASON #1: HIS IMAGE

Notice how Namaan is described:

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. (2 Kings 5:1)

Namaan was a man whose image was shaped by his accomplishments and the praise others heaped on him because of them. He was a man who:

- Had achieved the rank of commander in his nation's army
- Was a great man in the sight of his king
- Was highly regarded
- Had won a major victories in battle

I can just imagine him as a man who never met an enemy or problem he couldn't conquer on his own. He didn't need help and he never asked for it. And for most of his life that worked very well for him. But, as it turns out, Namaan also had a major problem. In addition to being great and highly regarded, he was a leper. Namaan the leper. That's how we know him. Not Namaan the highly regarded or Namaan the military hero. Namaan the leper. And there wasn't a thing he could do to change that.

I find myself wondering how long Namaan suffered with his leprosy. How long between diagnosis and this story? He isn't identified as a man who was recently diagnosed. No, he apparently had been afflicted for some time. So what treatment steps had he taken in the meantime? This was a man who was used to being able to accomplish whatever he set out to do. He was a conquerer! And conquerers don't ask for help.

A couple of years ago, Alyssa was complaining of some stomach problems that she was trying to cure on her own. Her mother kept saying things, “Honey, you ought to go see your doctor about that.” And Alyssa would respond, “Well, I've read this article online and I'm going to try that remedy first.” A couple of weeks would pass and Karen would ask “How did that remedy work?” “Well, it didn't, but I've read another article.”

So finally I intervened, and here's what I said: “Don't you dare go to the doctor! You are a Brodbeck and Brodbecks never go to the doctor. We handle these things on our own.

There are dozens of dead Brodбеcks populating the cemeteries across central Ohio who refused to get medical treatment and they are counting on you to uphold the family image!" Alyssa laughed, and her mother gave me a dirty look. And no, she didn't go to the doctor. She's a Brodbeck!

Some of us struggle to get the help we need because our image gets in the way.

- Real men never cry.
- Other people need me, so I don't have time to fall apart.
- Christians never get angry.
- What would people think if they saw me like that?

And all the while, God is saying to us "Why are you trying to deal with that on your own? If you would just do this one simple thing it will make a major difference in your life." But we won't do it ... because that's not who we are.

#2: HIS EXPECTATIONS

The prophet Elisha enters our story at this point. Elisha is my favorite Old Testament character, because he himself is indeed a character. If you've never done so, you need to read the Elisha stories, if for no other reason than the pure entertainment value. (2 Kings chapters 1-13)

To be cured of his leprosy, Namaan had to deal with this odd little prophet. Namaan was used to dealing with kings – and he did first try to find his cure from the King of Israel, but it was Elisha that he really needed to see.

Maybe Namaan's expectations stemmed from the way things happened in the pagan religious ceremonies in his home country, or maybe they stemmed from his own sense of identity, but it is clear he didn't get what he expected. Look at verse 11:

I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. (2 Kings 5:11)

Instead, what he got was (verse 10):

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." (2 Kings 5:10)

I picture that Namaan showed up on a fall Saturday afternoon during the Ohio State game. Elisha never got out of his La-Z-Boy, and just sent a servant out. An important man was on the front porch, and Elisha wasn't impressed. Not one little bit.

More importantly, General Namaan wasn't pleased with how he was treated (ignored, actually) or what he was told to do. In his mind, if God is going to do something, it needs to happen in a certain way. And what he was told to do, wasn't that way.

Sometimes while we are looking for a big production number, God is wanting us to look for a simple melody. God is saying "You think your issue requires something majestic. It doesn't. Just do this simple thing."

#3: HIS WILLINGNESS TO OBEY

If Namaan wanted to be healed of his leprosy, he needed to do one simple thing. Immerse himself in the dirty Jordan River seven times. Not once. Not six. Seven. He couldn't opt for the nicer rivers in his home country. It had to be the Jordan and it had to be seven times. A simple act of obedience. One that would result in his receiving what he needed.

I've been thinking these days about all the simple things God asks you and me to do. Things like:

- Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)
- Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)
- Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)
- If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

None of those are hard. But they do require us to admit that we aren't the answer to all our problems. And they do require us to do what God asks us to do. Simple acts of obedience.

APPLICATION

Great Christians aren't made from great things. Great Christians develop as real people do the simple things God asks them to do.

The vast majority of our Christian life will involve doing the simple things. Most of us will never be asked to the hard and heroic. But every one of us will be called to the simple. And we are likely called to that many times every day.

A recent devotional time included this statement:

Faithfulness in little things is a big thing. (John Chrysostom)

What little thing is God asking you to do? What small step is God identifying that will make a big difference in your walk of faith?

Please do it. Remember the question of the servants that prompted Naaman to obey:

If the prophet had asked you to do something hard and heroic, wouldn't you have done it? So why not do something simple like 'wash and be clean'?" (2 Kings 5:13, The Message)

I mean, it's no big deal.

Amen.