



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1029

2 Kings 5:11 "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."

The Bible tells us that Naaman was a great man. He was the captain of the Syrian army. He had been victorious and was highly respected. He was also very sick. He was a leper. A girl taken captive from Israel was serving as a maid to Naaman's wife. She revealed that a prophet back in Israel could cure him. The word reached Naaman, permission was granted and Naaman travels to meet Elisha the prophet. Instead of a face to face meeting, Elisha, sent a message. Naaman was to dip seven times into the Jordan River. This was not what Naaman expected. He at least thought the prophet would come. He didn't. Once he settled down and his servants convinced him to try, Naaman went to the Jordan, dipped seven times, and was cured.

This passage is a favorite of preachers. It's easy to preach. It's full of powerful lessons.

1. The hero of this story is God. He always is. Here we find God granting the wishes to a foreigner who had captured His own people. Without God, Elisha had no powers. It was God's will that cured Naaman. The praise goes to God.

2. If there is such a thing as "second place," it goes to the unnamed servant girl from Israel. Upon her confidence in Elisha and her faith, the wheels got turning that led to Naaman's healing. This servant girl had every reason not to say anything. She was taken captive. She was in a foreign land. She was serving the wife of the captain that probably captured her. Her thoughts could have been on escaping. Her prayers could have been toward her deliverance. The text calls her a "little girl." She was not too little to know. She was not too little to believe. This little girl spoke the words of faith that got things going.

She is impressive. Her heart is compassionate, even toward foreigners. Her prayers are not just for herself. You may be in a place like this little girl. Health issues may hold you captive. Your work takes you away from home. You may be young. You might be old. You may not be able to answer all the questions someone asks you, but you know someone who can. You tell them. You make the connection. You believe. You act. I've known students who invited their high school teachers to services and they came. I've known young people that invited teammates to come to church and they came. I've known young people who arranged a Bible study with someone much older than they were. This little girl got the wheels turning. That's impressive. She believed, even though a captive in a foreign land. That's impressive. She didn't need sunny days and good times to maintain her faith.

3. Then there is the Naaman complex. "Behold, I thought," he said. He had it all figured out in his mind. He had played this scene out. Elisha would show up with great fan fair. He would pray to God with grand and elaborate words. His arms would wave around. Probably thunder would boom from the heavens. Maybe angels would swoop down. Then in the midst of this grand scene, the leper would be cured. The crowds would erupt with applause. It would be incredible. Naaman could hardly wait. He may even be happy that he had leprosy because of this marvelous way he was going to be cured. He just knew this was going to be something. He was going to be the center of all of this.

The news brought great disappointment. The text tells us that Naaman was furious. Elisha wasn't coming. There were no grand prayers offered. There was no thunder from the heavens. No waving of the arms. No wonder and amazement. He was told to go to a dirty river and dip seven times. That didn't make any sense. That's not the way it was supposed to be. There's nothing special about that. Did Elisha not know who Naaman was? Did he not know of his victories? Did he not know of the position he held? Dipping in a river? Dipping in that river?

The Naaman complex is alive and thriving today. God's message is simple. God's message is internal. It works on the heart. God's message is not with fireworks and smoke. The solution to addictions...the way out of trouble...the answer to broken marriages...the return for prodigals...the escape of worry...the answers to doubt...is not wild waving of arms, it's not fanciful words of the preacher, it's not smoke and thunder from Heaven, it's you and I, sitting down with an open Bible in our laps and reading and trusting God. So many of the solutions are not God doing, but us doing by faith. Leaving friends that are destroying us...controlling our environment to keep Satan at a distance...staying away from filthy movies...praying longer, reading the Bible deeper, engaging in worship, walking by faith. These are all actions that we take. We want God to do it all. That's what Naaman wanted. He didn't want to go to a river. He didn't want to dip seven times. He was ready to walk away. Had he done that, he would have died a leper. Many walk away today. It's not the message that they want to hear. They want the church or God to fix the messes that they have created. They want the church to bail them out financially, with no strings attached. They expect the church to raise their troublesome teenagers. They expect the church to come running when they have a problem. When the church offers to show them how to get to Heaven, that's not the message they want. Away they storm, mad. Away they go, complaining about Christianity. They need to stop and listen to what God says. We all do.

So often we want God to remove the problem. Instead, God wants us to weather the storm and learn valuable lessons during the storm. Get us out of the problem is our prayer. When God doesn't do that, we get angry, discouraged and like Naaman, ready to walk away. Those that do, die lepers. Those that listen, are cured. God's way is not our way. God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

The problem of Naaman, "Behold I thought..." The heart of a disciples says, "Behold, I listen..."

Which are you?

Roger Shouse