



**The  
Mission  
and Miracles  
of Elisha**

**Part  
Four**

**A. W. Pink**



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### 11. The Tenth Miracle

The healing of Naaman is the best known one of all the wonders wrought through Elisha, for it has been made the subject of numerous sermons in the past, supplying as it does a very striking typical picture of salvation. Not in all its varied aspects—for salvation is many-sided—but as portraying the condition of him who is made its subject, his dire need because of the terrible malady of which he was the victim, the sovereign grace which met with him, the requirements he had to comply with, his self-will therein, and how his reluctance was overcome. Yet there is not a little in this incident which is offensive to our supercilious age, inclining present-day preachers to leave it alone, so that much that has been said about it in the past will be more or less new unto the present generation. As it has pleased the Holy Spirit to enter into much more detail upon the attendant circumstances of this miracle, this will require us to give it a fuller consideration.

It is their *typical* import which renders the Old Testament Scriptures of such interest to us upon whom the ends of the ages are come: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning” (Rom. 15:4). That which is set before us more abstractly in the epistles is rendered simpler of understanding by means of the concrete and personal illustrations supplied under the previous dispensations, when figures and symbols were employed more freely. Noah and his family in the ark preserved from the flood which swept away the world of the ungodly, the Hebrews finding security under the blood of the Pascal lamb when the angel of death slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, healing being conveyed by faith’s look at the brazen serpent on the pole, the cities of refuge affording asylum to the manslayer who fled thither for refuge from the avenger of blood,

are so many examples of simple yet graphic prefigurations of different aspects of the redemption which is found in Christ Jesus. Another is before us here in 2 Kings 5.

Before taking up the spiritual meaning of what is recorded of Naaman, there is one thing mentioned about him deserves separate notice, and we will look at it now so that our main line of thought may not be broken into later on. In the opening verse of our chapter it is stated that Naaman was “a great man with his master and honourable because by him the Lord had given deliverance [‘victory’] unto Syria.” This teaches us that there can be no success in any sphere of life unless God gives it, for “the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23), still less to insure their outcome. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it [as was made evident when God brought to nought the lofty ambitions of those erecting the tower of Babel!]: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psa. 127:1)—as Belshazzar discovered, when the Medes surprised and overcame his sentinels and captured Babylon.

Not only can there be no success in any human undertaking unless the Lord is pleased to prosper the same, but He exercises His own sovereignty in the instruments or agents employed in the carrying out of His purposes, whether it be in the communicating of blessings or the execution of judgments. It is therefore to be duly observed that it was not because Naaman was a good man that the Lord caused his military efforts to thrive; so far from it, he was an idolator, a worshiper of Rimmon. Moreover, not only was he a stranger to God spiritually but he was a leper, and therefore ceremonially unclean, shut out by the Mosaic law. From which we may learn that when the Most High is pleased to do so, He makes use of the wicked as well as the righteous—a truth which needs pressing on the attention of the world today. Temporal success is far from being an evidence that the blessing of God rests upon either the person or the nation enjoying the same. All men are in God’s hands to employ as and where He pleases—as truly so in the political and military realms as in the churches.

First, *its subject*. Six things (the number of man) are here recorded about Naaman. 1. He was “captain of the host of the king of Syria.” In modern language this would be, Commander-in-chief of the king’s army. Whether or not he had risen from the ranks we cannot be sure, though the reference to his “valour” suggests that he had been promoted from a lower office. Whether that be so or no, he now occupied a position of prominence, being at the summit of his profession. 2. He was “a great man with his master.” It has been by no means always the case that the head of the military forces was greatly esteemed by his master. History records many instances where the reigning monarch has been jealous of the popularity enjoyed by the general, fearful in some cases that he would use his powerful influence against the interests of the throne. But it was quite otherwise in this case, for as the sequel goes on to show, the king of Syria was warmly devoted to the person of his military chieftain. 3. “And honourable.” Far from the king’s slighting Naaman and keeping him in the background, he stood high in the royal favour. Naaman had furthered the interests of his kingdom, securing notable victories for his forces, and his master was not slow to show his appreciation and reward his valorous general. The brilliant exploits of many a brave officer have passed unnoticed by the powers that be: but not so here. 4. His military success is here directly ascribed to God, for our passage goes on to say “by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.” The blessing of Heaven had attended him and crowned his efforts, and therein he was favoured above many. Not that this intimated he personally enjoyed the approbation of God, but that Divine providence made use of him in accomplishing His will. 5. He was naturally endowed with qualities which are highly esteemed among men, being possessed of great bravery and fortitude, for we are told, “he was also a mighty man in valour”—daring and fearless—and thus well equipped for his calling.

It might well be asked, What more could any man desire more? Did he not possess everything which is most highly prized by the children of this world. Was he not what they would designate “the darling of fortune,” having all that the human heart could wish. He

had, as the votaries of mammon express it, “made good in life.” He occupied a most enviable position. He was possessed of those traits which were admired by his fellows. He had served his country well and stood high in the king’s regard and favour. Even so there was a dark cloud on his horizon. There was something which not only thoroughly spoiled the present for him, but took away all hope for the future. For, 6. “he was a *leper*.” Here was the tragic exception. Here was that which cast its awful shadow over every thing else. He was the victim of a loathsome and incurable disease. He was a pitiful and repulsive object, with no prospect whatever of any improvement in his condition.

Yes, my reader, the highly-privileged and honoured Naaman was a leper, and as such he portrayed what *you* are, and what *I* am by nature. God’s Word does not flatter man: it lays him in the dust—which is one reason why it is so unpalatable unto the great majority of people. It is the Word of truth, and therefore instead of painting flattering pictures of human nature, it represents things as they actually are. Instead of lauding man it abases him. Instead of speaking of the dignity and nobility of human nature, it declares it to be *leprous*—sinful, corrupt, depraved, defiled. Instead of eulogising human progress, it insists that “every man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (Psa. 39:5). And when the Holy Scriptures define man’s attitude toward and relationship with God, they insist that “there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:10,11). They declare that we are His enemies by our wicked works (Col. 1:21), and that consequently we are under the condemnation and curse of God’s law, and that His holy wrath abideth on us (John 3:36).

The Word of Truth declares that by nature all of us are spiritual lepers, foul and filthy, unfit for the Divine presence: “being alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). Ah, my reader: you may occupy a good position in this world, even an eminent station in the affairs of this life; you may have “made good” in your avocation and wrought praiseworthy achievements judged by human standards: you may be “honourable” in the sight of your

fellows, but how do you appear in the eyes of *God*—a leper, one whom His law pronounces unclean, one who is utterly unfit for His holy presence. *That* is the first outstanding thing; the dominant lesson taught by our present passage. As it was with Naaman, so it is with you: a vast difference between his circumstances and his condition. There, was the horrible and tragic exception: “a great man—but a *leper!*” There was a worm gnawing at his vitals: a deathbed at his feast, a ghastly thing which cast its baneful shadow over all his fair prospects.

We would not be faithful to our calling were we to glide over that in God’s Word which is distasteful to proud flesh and blood. Nor would we be faithful to our readers if we glossed over their frightful and fatal natural condition. It is in their souls’ interests they should face this humiliating and unpleasant fact: that in God’s sight they are spiritual lepers. But we must individualise it. Hast thou, my reader, realised this fact in thine *own case*? Hast thou seen thyself in God’s light? Art thou aware that thy soul is suffering from a disease that neither you nor any human being can cure? It *is* so, whether you realise it or not. The Scriptures declare that from the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head there is no soundness in thee, yea, that in the sight of the Holy One, thou art a mass of “wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isa. 1:6). Only as you penitently accept that Divine verdict is there any hope for you.

All disease is both the fruit and the evidence of sin, as was plainly intimated unto Israel. Under the Levitical law God might well have required separate purifications for every form of disease. But He did not, and thereby He displayed His tenderness and mercy, for such a multiplicity of ceremonial observances to have been required would have constituted an intolerable burden. He therefore singled out one disease to be a standing object-lesson, and *that* such an one could not fail to be a fit representation and most effective symbol of sin. This disease was white leprosy, described with much minuteness of detail in Leviticus 13 and 14. Leprosy, then, was not only a real but a typical disease, adumbrating in a most solemn and striking manner that fearful



malady sin, with which we are infected from the centre to the circumference of our beings. While it be true that the type is only intelligible in the light of its antitype, the shadow in the presence of its substance, yet the former is often an aid to the understanding of the latter.

That the disease of leprosy *was designed* to convey a representation of the malady of sin appears from these considerations. First, the ceremonial purification whereby the stain of leprosy was cleansed pointed to the Lord Jesus as making atonement for the cleansing of His people. Second, it was not a physician but the high priest who was the person specifically appointed to deal with the leper. Third, there was no prescribed remedy for it: it could only be cured by a direct miracle. Fourth, the leper was cut off from the dwelling place of God and the tabernacle of His congregation, being put “outside the camp.” Thus it will be seen from these circumstances that leprosy was removed from the catalogue of ordinary diseases, and had stamped upon it a peculiar and typical character. It was a visible sign of how God regarded the sinner: as one unsuited to the presence of Himself and His people. How unspeakably blessed then, to discover that, though not the first He performed, yet the first individual miracle of Christ’s recorded in the New Testament is His healing of the leper (Matt. 8:2-4).

For the particular benefit of young preachers and for the general instruction of all we will close this article with an outline. 1. Leprosy has an *insignificant beginning*. To the non-observant eye it is almost imperceptible. It starts as “a rising, a scab, or bright spot” (Lev. 13:2). It is so trivial that usually no attention is paid to it. Little or no warning is given of the fearful havoc it will work. Was it not thus with the entrance of sin into this world? To the natural man the eating of the forbidden fruit by our first parents appears a very small matter, altogether incommensurate with the awful effects it has produced. The unregenerate discern not that sin is deserving of and exposes them to eternal destruction. They regard it as a trifle, unduly magnified by preachers.

2. Leprosy is *inherited*. It is a communicable disease. It poisons

the blood, and so is readily transmitted from parent to child. It is so with sin. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). None has escaped this dreadful entail. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. 51:5) is equally true of every member of Adam’s race. None is born spiritually pure: depravity is communicated in every instance from sire to son, from mother to maid. Human nature was corrupted at its fountain head and therefore all the streams issuing therefrom are polluted.

3. Leprosy *works insidiously* and almost imperceptibly, for it is a disease which is attended by little pain: only in its later stages, when its horrible effects discover themselves, is it unmistakably manifest. And thus it is with that most awful of all maladies. Sin is subtle and sly, so that for the most part its subjects are quite unconscious of its workings. Hence we read of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). It is not until the Spirit convicts, that one is made aware of the awfulness and extent of sin, and begins to feel “the plague of his own heart” (1 Kings 8:38). Yes, it is not until a person is born again that he learns his very nature is depraved. Only as the sinner grows old in sin does he discover what a fearful hold his lusts have upon him.

4. Leprosy *spreads* with deadly rapidity. Though it begins with certain spots in the skin which are small at first, they gradually increase in size: slowly but surely the whole body is affected. The corruption extends inwardly while it spreads outwardly, vitiating even the bones and marrow. Like a locust on the twig of a tree, it continues eating its way through the flesh, till nothing but the skeleton is left. This is what sin has done in man—it has corrupted every part of his being, so that he is totally depraved. No faculty, no member of his complex constitution has escaped defilement. Heart, mind, will, conscience—spirit and soul and body—are equally poisoned. “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

5. Leprosy is *highly infectious*. Inherited inwardly, contagious outwardly. The leper communicates his horrible disease to others



wherever he goes. That is why he was quarantined under the Mosaic Law, and when he saw anyone approaching he was required to give warning by crying, “Unclean, unclean.” The analogy continues to hold good. Sin is a malady which is not only inherited by nature, but it is developed by association with the wicked. “Evil communications *corrupt* good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33). That is why the righteous are bidden, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it [as a plague], pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Prov. 4:14-15)—such repetition bespeaks our danger and intimates how slow we are to be warned against it. “Shun profane and vain babblings...their word will *eat* as doth *a canker*” (2 Tim. 2:16, 17).

6. Leprosy is *peculiarly loathsome*. There is nothing more repellent to the eye than to look upon one on whom this awful disease has obtained firm hold. Except with the most callous, despite one’s pity, he or she is obliged to turn away from such a nauseating sight with a shudder. Under Judaism there was no physician who ministered to the leper, and hence it is said of his putrefying sores that “they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. 1:6). The leper may well appropriate to himself the language of Job, “All my inward [or ‘intimate’] friends abhorred me, and they whom I love are turned against me” (19:19). All of which is a figure of how infinitely more repellent is the sinner in the sight of Him who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13).

7. Leprosy is a *state of living death*. First the joints become relaxed, then dislocated, and then an eye falls out, or the fingers and toes are shed, and even limbs fall off, until the whole body becomes a horrible mess of dissolution and decay. It is a state of daily and progressive death. As one has said, “The leper is a walking sepulchre.” And this is precisely what sin is: a state of spiritual death—a living on the natural side of existence, but dead to all things spiritual. Thus we find an apostle declaring “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1 Tim. 5:6). The natural man is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1): alive

sinward and worldward but dead Godward.

8. Leprosy was *dealt with by banishment*. No leper was allowed to remain in the congregation of Israel. The terms of the Mosaic law were most explicit: “he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be” (Lev. 13:46). In the centre of the camp was Jehovah’s abode and around His tabernacle were grouped His covenant people. From them the leper was excluded. How rigidly that was enforced may be seen from the fact that even Miriam the sister of Moses (Num. 12:10-15), and Uzziah the king (2 Kings 15:5) were not treated as exceptions. The leper was deprived of all political and ecclesiastical privileges, dealt with as one dead, excluded from fellowship. It is a visible sign of how God regarded the sinner, for sin shuts out from His presence: see Isaiah 59:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

9. Leprosy makes its victim *an object of shame*. It could not be otherwise. Robbing its subject of the bloom of health, replacing it with that which is hideous. Excluding him from God and His people, placing him outside the pale of decency. Consequently the leper was required to carry about with him every mark of humiliation and distress. The law specified that “his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13:45). What a spectacle! What a picture of abject misery! What a solemn portrayal of the natural man! Sin has marred the features of God’s image, in whose likeness man was originally made, and stamped upon him the marks of the devil.

10. Leprosy is *incurable* so far as man is concerned. One really stricken with this disease was beyond all human aid. The outcome was inevitably fatal. Medical science was helpless before its advance. In like manner sin is beyond human cure; it can neither be eradicated nor ameliorated. No power of will or effort of mind can cope with it. Neither legislation nor reformation is of any avail. Education and culture are equally impotent. Sooner can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots than those do good who are accustomed to do evil (Jer. 13:23).

But what is beyond the power of man is possible with God.

Where the science of the ages stands helpless the Saviour manifests His sufficiency. “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Heb. 7:25). To the leper He said, “I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Matt. 8:3). Blessed, thrice blessed is that! In view of the ten points above, how profoundly thankful every Christian should be that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son *cleanseth* us from *all* sin” (1 John 1:7).

In the preceding article our attention was confined to the *subject* of this miracle, namely Naaman the Syrian, who was stricken with the horrible disease of leprosy—a striking type of the natural man, corrupted by sin, unfit for the presence of a holy God. The most fearful thing of all was, that leprosy was incurable by the hand of man. Naaman was quite incapable of ridding himself of his terrible burden. No matter what plan he followed, what attempts he made, no help or relief was to be obtained from self-efforts. Have you realised the truth of this, in its typical imports, my reader: that there is no deliverance from sin, no salvation for your soul by anything that *you* can do? Nor was there any physician in Syria who could effect a cure: no matter what fee he offered, what quack he applied to, none was of any avail. And such is the case of each of us by nature. Our spiritual malady lies deeper than any human hand can reach unto: our condition is too desperate for any religious practitioner to cure. Man can no more deliver himself, or his fellows, from the guilt and defilement of sin than he can create a world.

Most solemnly was the fact shadowed forth under the system of Judaism. No remedy was provided for this fearful disease under the Mosaic Law: no directions were given to Israel’s priesthood to make use of any application, either outward or inward. The leper was shut up entirely to God. All the high priest of the Hebrews could do was to examine closely the various symptoms of the complaint, have the leper excluded from his fellows, and leave him to the disposal of the Lord. Whether the sufferer was healed or not, whether he lived or died, was wholly to be decided by the Almighty. So it is in grace. There is no possible salvation for any

sinner except at the hands of *God*. There is no other possible alternative, no other prospect before the sinner than to die a wretched death and enter a hopeless eternity unless distinguishing mercy intervenes, unless a sovereign God is pleased to work a miracle of grace within him. It is entirely a matter of *His* will and power. Again we ask, do you realise that fact my reader? God is your Maker, and He is the Determiner of your destiny. You are clay in His hands to do with as He pleases.

Second, *its contributor*. “And the Syrians had gone out by companies and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid, and she waited on Naaman’s wife” (2 Kings 5:2). In one of the many seasons in which the name of Jehovah was blasphemed among the heathen, through the unfaithfulness of His ancient people, a little Jewish maid was taken captive by the Syrians. In the dividing of the spoils she fell into the hands of Naaman the commander of the Syrian forces. Observe the series of contrasts between them. He was a Gentile, she a hated Jewess. He was a “great man,” she but “a little maid.” He was “Naaman,” she was left unnamed. He was “captain of the host of Syria,” while she was captive in the enemy’s territory. But he was a leper; while strange to say, she was made a contributing instrument unto his healing. It has ever been God’s way to make use of the despised and feeble, and often in circumstances which seemed passing strange to human wisdom. Let us take note how this verse teaches us a most important lesson in connection with the mysteries of Divine providence.

“And had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid.” Visualize the scene. One fair morning the peace of Samaria was rudely broken. The tramp of a hostile army was heard in the land. A cruel foe was at hand. The Syrians had invaded the country, and Heaven was silent. No scourge from God smote the enemy: instead, he was suffered to carry away some of the covenant people. Among the captives was “a little maid.” Ah, that may mean little to us to-day, but it meant much to certain people at that day. A home was rendered desolate! Seek to enter into the feelings of her parents as their young daughter was ruthlessly

snatched from them. Think of the anguish of her poor mother, wondering what would become of her. Think of her grief-stricken father in his helplessness, unable to rescue her. Endeavour to contemplate what would be the state of mind of the little girl herself as she was carried away by heathen to a strange country. Bring before your mind's eye the whole painful incident until it lives before you.

Do you not suppose, dear friend, that both the maid and her parents were greatly perplexed? Must they not have been sorely tried by this mysterious providence? Why, O why? must have been asked by them a hundred times. Why had God allowed the joy of their home to be shattered? If the maiden reflected at all, must she have thought her lot strange. Why was she, a favoured daughter of Abraham, now a servant in Naaman's household? Why this enforced separation from her parents? Why this cruel captivity? Such questions she might have asked at first, and asked in vain. Ah, does the reader perceive the point we are leading up to? It is this: God had a good reason for this trial. He was shaping things in His own unfathomable way for the outworking of His good and wise purpose. There is nothing happens in this world by mere chance. A predestinating God has planned every detail in our lives. Our "times are in *His* hand" (Psa. 31:15). He "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). What a resting place for our poor hearts does that grand truth supply!

It was God who directed that this "little maid" of Israel should become a member of Naaman's household. And why? That she might be a link in the chain which ended not only in the healing of his leprosy, but also most probably in the salvation of his soul. Here then is the important lesson for us to take to heart from this incident. Here is the light which it casts upon the mysterious ways of God in providence: He has a wise and good reason behind each of the perplexing and heart-exercising trials which enter our lives. The particular reason for each trial is frequently concealed from us at the time it comes upon us—if it were not, there would be no room for the exercise of faith and patience in it. But just as surely

as God had a good reason for allowing the happiness of this Hebrew household to be darkened, so He has in ordering whatever sorrow has entered your life. It was *the sequel* which made manifest God's gracious design; and it is for the sequel you must quietly and trustfully wait. This incident is among the things recorded in the Old Testament "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy" (verse 3). This is surely most striking and blessed. It had been natural for this young girl to have yielded to a spirit of enmity against the man who had snatched her away from her own home, to have entertained hatred for him, and to have been maliciously pleased that he was so afflicted in his body. The Fall not only alienated man from God but it radically changed his attitude toward his fellows—evidenced at a very early date by Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Human depravity has poisoned every relationship: in their unregenerate state God's own people are described as "hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). But instead of cherishing ill feelings against her captor this little maid was concerned about his condition and solicitous about his welfare. Apparently she had been brought up in the nurture of the Lord, and the seeds planted by godly parents now sprang up and bore fruit in her young life. Beautiful, is it to here behold grace triumphing over the flesh.

How this little maid puts us to shame! How sinfully have we conducted ourselves when the providence of God crossed our wills and brought us into situations for which we had no liking! What risings of rebellion within us, what complaining at our circumstances. So far from being a blessing to those we came into contact, we were a stumbling block unto them. Has not both writer and reader much cause to bow the head in shame at the recollection of such grievous failures! Was not this child placed in uncongenial circumstances and a most trying situation? Yet there was neither murmuring against God nor bitterness toward her captor. Instead,

she bore faithful testimony to the God of Israel and was moved with compassion toward her leprous master. What a beautiful exemplification of the sufficiency of Divine grace! She remembered the Lord in the house of her bondage and spoke of His servant the prophet. How we need to turn this into earnest prayer, that we too may “glorify the Lord in the fires” (Isa. 24:15).

No position would seem more desolate than this defenceless maiden in the house of her proud captors, and no situation could promise fewer openings for usefulness. But though her opportunities were limited she made the most of them. She despised not the day of small things, but sought to turn it to advantage. She did not conclude it was useless for her to open her mouth, nor argue that an audience of only one person was not worth addressing. No, in a simple but earnest manner she proclaimed the good news that there was salvation for even the leper, for the very name “Elisha” meant “the salvation of God.” These lines will be read by more than one who is now serving as a kitchen maid. Is there not here a word for them? Not that we suggest for a moment they should assume the office of preachers or speak frequently about spiritual things to their mistress. Nevertheless, if you have a compassionate regard for her good and look to the Lord for guidance, He may well be pleased to give you a “word in season” for her, and make the same fruitful.

“And one went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel” (verse 4). A very incidental and apparently trivial statement is this, yet being a part of God’s eternal Truth it is not to be passed over lightly and hurriedly. We are ever the losers by such irreverent treatment of the Word. There is nothing meaningless in that Holy Volume: each single verse in it sparkles with beauty if we view it in the right light and attentively survey it. It is so here. First, this verse informs us that the little maid’s words to her mistress did not pass unheeded. Well they might have done, humanly speaking, for it would be quite natural for those about her—a mere child, a foreigner in their midst—to have paid no attention unto her remarks. Even had they done so, surely such a statement as she had made must have sounded like



foolish boasting. If the best physicians in Syria were helpless in the presence of leprosy, who would credit that a man of another religion, in despised Samaria, should be able to heal him! But strange as it may seem, her words *were* heeded.

Second, in this we must see the hand of *God*. “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made both of them” (Prov. 20:12)—true alike both physically and spiritually. Yet how little is this realised today, when the self-sufficiency of man is proclaimed on every side and the operations of the Most High are so much ignored. The professing Christian is asked “who maketh thee to differ?” (1 Cor. 4:7). All around us are those who pay no heed to the declarations of Holy Writ and who perceive no beauty in Christ that they should desire Him. Who then has given to thee an ear that responds to the Truth and an eye that perceives its Divine origin? And every real Christian will answer, the God of all grace. As it was the Lord who opened the heart of Lydia that she “took unto her [Greek] the things which were spoken” (Acts 16:14), so He caused those about her to listen unto the words of this little maid. Ah, my reader, make no mistake upon this point: the most faithful sermon from the pulpit falls upon deaf ears unless the Holy Spirit operates, whereas the simplest utterance of a child becomes effectual when God is pleased to so apply the same.

Third, this made manifest the effect of the maid’s words upon her mistress. She communicated it to another, and this other went in and acquainted the king of the same. Thus verse 4 reveals to us one of the links in the chain that eventually drew Naaman to Elisha and resulted in his healing. It also shows how that our words are heard and often reported to others, thereby both warning and encouraging us of the power of the tongue. This will be made fully manifest in the Day to come. Nothing which has been done for God’s glory will be lost. When the history of this world is completed God will make known before an assembled universe what was spoken for Him (Mal. 3:16; Luke 12:3).

Finally, we are shown here how God is pleased to make use of “little” and despised things. A maid in captivity—who had supposed *her* to do service for the Lord? Who would be inclined to

listen to her voice? Her age, her nationality, her position were all against her. Yet because she improved her opportunity and bore witness to her mistress, her simple message reached the ears of the king of Syria. The Lord grant us to be faithful wherever He has placed us.

“And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel” (verse 5). Here also we must see the hand of the Lord. Had He not wrought upon him too the message had produced no effect on his majesty. Why should that monarch pay any attention to the utterance of a kitchen maid? Ah, my reader, when God has a design of mercy He works at both ends of the line: He not only gives the message to the messenger, but He opens the heart of its recipient to heed it. He who bade Philip take a journey into the desert, also prepared the Ethiopian eunuch for his approach (Acts 8:26-31). He who overcame Peter’s scruples to go unto the Gentiles, also inclined Cornelius and his household to be “present before God, to hear all things that were commanded him of God” (Acts 10:33). “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1): strikingly did that receive illustration here. Yet though God wrought, in the instance now before us it did not please Him to remove the king’s infirmities.

Third, *its misapprehension*. “Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel.” As will appear in the sequel, the Lord had a reason for suffering the king to act thus. Poor Naaman was now *misdirected* by the carnal wisdom of his master. The little maid had said nothing about “the king of Israel,” but had specified “the prophet that is in Samaria.” It had been much better for the leper to have heeded more closely her directions, then had he been spared needless trouble. Yet how true to life is the typical picture here presented. How often is the sinner, who has been awakened to his desperate condition, wrongly counselled and turned aside to cisterns which hold no water! Rarely does an exercised soul find relief at once. More frequently his experience is like that of the old woman in Mark 5:26 who tried “many physicians” in vain, before she came to Christ; or like the prodigal son when he “began to be

in want” and went and joined himself to a citizen of the far country and got nothing better than “the husks that the swine did eat” (Luke 15:14, 15), ere he sought unto the Father.

“And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment” (verse 5). It has been computed that the value of these things would be at least seventy thousand dollars or fifteen thousand pounds. The Hebrew maid had said nothing of the need for silver and gold, but knowing nought of the *grace* of God Naaman was prepared to pay handsomely for his healing. Again we exclaim, how true to life is this typical picture. How many there are who think the “gift of God” may be purchased (Acts 8:20), if not literally with money, yet by works of righteousness and religious performances. And even where that delusion has been removed, another equally erroneous often takes its place: the idea that a heavily-burdened conscience, a deep sense of personal unworthiness, accompanied by sighs and tears and groans, is the required qualification for applying to Christ and the ground of peace before God. Fatal mistake: “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1) excludes all frames, feelings and experiences, as truly as it does the paying of a papish priest to absolve me.

Fourth, *its foil*. “And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel read the letter that he rent his clothes and said, am I God to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me” (verses 6, 7). How this made manifest the apostate condition of Israel at that time and shows why God had moved the Syrians to oppress them! There was some excuse for the king of Syria acting as he did, for he was a heathen; but there was none for the king of Israel. Instead of getting down on his knees and spreading this letter before the Lord, as a later king of Israel did (Isa. 37:14), he acted like an infidel; instead of seeing in this appeal an opportunity for Jehovah to display His

grace and glory, he thought only of himself.

What a contrast was there here between the witness of the little maid and the conduct of the king of Israel. Yet his meanness served as a foil to set off her noble qualities. She was in lowly and distressing circumstances, whereas he was a monarch upon the throne. Yet she was concerned about the welfare of her master, while he thought only of himself and kingdom. She had implicit confidence in God and spoke of His prophet, whereas neither God nor His servant had any place in the king's mind. Some may think from a first reading of verse 7 that the king's language sounds both humble and pious, but a pondering of it indicates it was but the utterance of pride and unbelief. Knowing not the Lord, he saw in this appeal of Benhadad's nothing but a veiled threat to humiliate him and he was filled with fear. Had he sought unto God, his terror had soon been quieted and a way of relief shown him; but he was a stranger to Him, and evidenced no faith even in the idols he worshiped. Yet this made the more illustrious the marvel of the miracle which followed.

Perhaps the Christian reader is tempted to congratulate himself that there is nothing searching for him in verse 7. If so, such complacency may be premature. Are you quite sure, friend, that there has been *no* parallel in your past conduct to that of Israel's king? Were you never guilty of the thing wherein he failed? When some heavy demand was made upon you, some real test or trial confronted you, did you never respond by saying, I am not sufficient for this: it is quite beyond my feeble powers? Possibly you imagined that was a pious acknowledgment of your weakness, when in reality it was a voicing of your unbelief. True, the Christian is impotent in himself; so too is the non-Christian. Is then the saint no better off than the ungodly? If the Christian continues impotent, the fault is his. God's grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Feeble knees and hands which hang down bring no glory to God. He has bidden us "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Then cease imitating this defeatist attitude of Israel's king, and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1).

In the previous chapter we emphasized the secret operations of God in inclining one and another to pay attention to the message of the little Hebrew maid: He it was who gave the hearing ear to both Naaman's wife and the king of Syria. Perhaps some have remarked, But such was not the case with the king of Israel! No, it was not, for so far from sharing her confidence and cooperating with her effort, he was sceptical and antagonistic. Therein we may perceive God's sovereignty. He does not work in all alike, being absolutely free to do as He pleases. He opens the eyes of some, but leaves others in their blindness. This is God's high and awful prerogative: "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). This is what supplies the key to God's dealings with men and which explains the course of evangelical history. Clearly is that solemn principle exemplified in the chapter before us, and we should be unfaithful as an expositor if we—as so many now do—deliberately ignored it.

"And it came to pass when the king of Israel had read the letter that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God to kill and to make alive; that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2 Kings 5:7). So utterly sceptical was Jehoram that he deemed it not worth while to send for Elisha and confer with him. The prophet meant nothing to Israel's unbelieving king, and therefore he slighted him. Perhaps this strikes the reader as strange, for the previous miracles Elisha had wrought must have been well known. One had thought his restoring of a dead child to life had thoroughly authenticated him as an extraordinary man of God. But did not the Lord Jesus publicly raise a dead man to life, and yet within a few days both the leaders of the nation and the common people clamoured for His crucifixion! And is it any different in our day? Have we not witnessed providential marvels, Divine interpositions both of mercy and judgment, and what effect have they had on our evil generation? Jehoram's conduct is easily accounted for: "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), and that enmity evidenced itself by slighting His accredited servant.

“And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there *is* a prophet in Israel” (verse 8). The slighted Elisha pocketed his pride and communicated with the king, rightly concluding that his own feelings were not worth considering where the glory of God was concerned. “Naaman came into the land of Israel, expecting relief from a prophet of the God of Israel, and Elisha would by no means have him go back disappointed, lest he should conclude that Jehovah was like the gods of the nations, and as unable to do good or evil as they were. On the contrary he would have it known that God had ‘a prophet in Israel’ by whom He performed such cures as none of the heathen prophets, priests, or physicians could effect; and which were far beyond all the power of the mightiest monarchs” (Thomas Scott). The “counsel of the Lord it shall stand” whatever devices were in Jehoram’s heart to the contrary (Prov. 19:21).

“The righteous are bold as a lion.” Elisha not only rebuked the king for his unbelieving fears but summarily gave him instructions concerning Naaman. However unwelcome might be his interference, that deterred him not. The real servant of God does not seek to please men, but rather to execute the commission he has received from on high. It is true that the prophets, like the apostles, were endowed with extraordinary powers, and therefore they are not in all things models for us to-day; nevertheless the Gospel minister is not to cringe before any one, still less is he to take orders from human authorities. It is his duty to denounce unbelief and to proclaim that the living God is ever ready to honour Him and work wonders in response to genuine faith. As God overruled the king of Syria’s misdirecting of Naaman, so He now overcame the scepticism of the king of Israel by moving him to respond to Elisha’s demand—thereby demonstrating that the words of the little maid were no idle boast and her confidence in God no misplaced one.

“So Naaman came with his forces and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha” (verse 9). Naaman before the

prophet's abode may be regarded as a picture of the natural man in his sins, not yet stripped of his self-righteousness, nor aware that he is entirely dependent on Divine mercy, having no title or claim to receive any favour at God's hand. The fact that he was seated in a chariot mitigated his terrible condition not one iota. No matter how rich the apparel that covered his body, though it might hide from human view his loathsome disease, it availed nothing for the removal of it. And as the valuables he had brought with him could not procure his healing, neither can the cultivation of the most noble character nor the performance of the most praiseworthy conduct in human esteem merit the approbation of God. Salvation is wholly of Divine grace and cannot be earned by the creature: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5, 6).

However much it might be in accord with the principles and sentiments which regulate fallen human nature, there was surely something most incongruous in the scene now before us. Here was a poor creature stricken with a most horrible disease, and yet we behold him seated in a chariot. Here was one smitten by a malady no physician could heal, surrounded by official pomp. Here was one entirely dependent upon the Divine bounty, yet whose horses were laden with silver and gold. Do we not behold in him, then, a representative not only of the natural man in his sins, but as filled with a sense of his own importance and bloated with pride! Such is precisely the case with each of us by nature. Totally depraved though we be, alienated from God, criminals condemned by His holy Law, our minds at enmity against Him, dead in trespasses and sins, yet until a miracle of grace is wrought within and the tumour of our pride is lanced, we are puffed up with self-righteousness, refuse to acknowledge we deserve naught but eternal punishment, and imagine we are entitled to God's favourable regard.

Not only does Naaman here fitly portray the self-importance of the natural man while unregenerate, but as hinted above he also adumbrates the fact that the sinner imagines he can gain God's



approbation and purchase his salvation. The costly things which the Syrian had brought with him were obviously designed to ingratiate himself in the eyes of the prophet and pay for his cure. The following of such a policy was of course quite natural, and therefore it types out what is the native thought of every man. He supposes that a dutiful regard of religious performances will obtain for him the favourable notice of God, that his fastings and prayers, church-attendance and contributing to its upkeep, will more than counterbalance his demerits. Such an insane idea is by no means confined to Buddhists and Romanists but is common to the whole human family. It is for this reason we have to be assured, “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9). Spiritually speaking, every man is bankrupt, a pauper, and salvation is entirely gratis, a matter of charity.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). This is true alike of the most cultured and the thoroughly illiterate. No amount of education or erudition fits one for the apprehension of spiritual things. Man is blind, and his eyes must be opened, before he can perceive either the glory of God and His righteous claims or his own wretchedness and deep needs. Not until a miracle of grace humbles his heart will he betake himself unto the Throne of Grace in his true character, not until the Holy Spirit works effectually within him will he come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar. It is recorded that a famous artist met with a poor tramp and was so impressed with his woe-begone appearance and condition that he felt he would make an apt subject for a drawing. He gave the tramp a little money and his card and promised him a sovereign if he would call at his house on the following day and sit while he drew his picture. The next morning the tramp arrived, but the artist’s intention was defeated: the tramp had washed and shaved and so spruced himself that he was scarcely recognisable!

Similarly does the natural man act when he first attempts to respond to the Gospel call. Instead of coming to the Lord just as he

is in all his want and woe, as one who is lost and undone, he supposes he must first make himself more presentable by a process of reformation. Thus he busies himself in amending his ways, improving his conduct, and performing pious exercises, unaware that Christ “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”—to take their place in the dust before Him. What we have just been dwelling upon receives striking illustration in the chapter before us. Instead of sending Naaman direct to Elisha, Benhadad gave him a letter of introduction unto the king of Israel; and instead of casting himself on the mercy of the prophet, he sent a costly fee to pay for the healing of his commander-in-chief. We have seen the futility of his letter—the effect it had upon its recipient; now we are to behold how his lavish outlay of wealth produced no more favourable response from Elisha, for Naaman had to learn the humiliating truth that where Divine grace is concerned the millionaire stands on precisely the same level as the pauper.

Fifth, *its requirement*. “And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (verse 10). As the representative of Him who deigned to wash the feet of His disciples, the minister of the Gospel must not decline the meanest service nor despise the poorest person. Elisha has set us an example of both, for he scorned not to minister to the physical needs of Elijah by washing his hands (3:11), and refused not to help the impoverished widow (4:2). On the other hand, the servant of Christ is to be no sycophant, toadying to those of affluence, nor is he to feed the pride of the self important. From the sequel it is evident Naaman considered that he, as a “great man,” was entitled to deference, and probably felt that the prophet ought to consider a favour or honour was now being shown him. But, officially, Elisha was an ambassador of the King of kings, and with becoming dignity he let Naaman know that he was at no man’s beck and call, though he failed not to inform him of the way in which healing was to be obtained.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in

Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” Here we see no servile obeisance nor owning of the mightiness of Naaman. The prophet did not even greet him, nor so much as go out of his house to meet him in person. Instead, he sent him a message by a servant. Ah, my reader, God is no respecter of persons, nor should His ministers be. Incalculable harm has been wrought in churches by pastors pandering to those in high places, for not only are the haughty injured thereby, but the lowly are stumbled, and in consequence the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. God will not tolerate any parading of fleshly distinctions before Him: “that *no* flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29) is the unrepealable decision. The most eminent and gifted of this world are due no more consideration from the Most High than the street-sweeper, for “there is no difference: all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22). All alike have broken the Law, all alike are guilty before the supreme Judge, all alike must be saved by sovereign grace if they be saved at all.

But there is another way in which we may regard the prophet’s conduct on this occasion: not only did he maintain his official dignity, but he evidenced personal humiliation and prudence, having his eye fixed on the glory of God. It is not that he was indifferent to Naaman’s welfare: no, the fact that he sent his servant out to him with the needful directions evidenced the contrary. But Elisha knew full well that the all-important thing was not the messenger, but the message. It mattered nothing who delivered the message—himself or his servant, but it mattered everything that the God-given word should be faithfully communicated. Elisha knew full well that Naaman’s expectation lay *in himself*, so like a true “man of God” he directed attention away from himself. What a needed lesson for us in this creature-exalting day. How much better would preachers serve souls and honour their Master if, thus hidden, they occupied them with the Gospel instead of with themselves. It was in this self-effacing spirit that Paul rebuked the creature-worshipping Corinthians when he said “who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom

ye believed?” (1 Cor. 3:5). So too our Lord’s forerunner who styled himself “the voice [heard but not seen!] of one crying in the wilderness” (John 1:23).

What was the force of “Go wash in Jordan seven times?” Let us give first a general answer in the words of another. “When Naaman stood with his pompous retinue, and with all his silver and gold at the door of Elisha, he appears before us as a marked illustration of a sinner building on his own efforts after righteousness. He seemed furnished with all that the heart could desire, but in reality all his preparations were but a useless encumbrance, and the prophet soon gave him to understand this. ‘Go wash’ swept away all confidence in gold, silver, raiment, retinue, the king’s letter, everything. It stripped Naaman of everything, and reduced him to his true condition as a poor defiled leper needing to be washed. It put no difference between the illustrious commander-in-chief of the hosts of Syria, and the poorest and meanest leper in all the coasts of Israel. The former could do nothing less; the latter needed nothing more. Wealth cannot remedy man’s ruin, and poverty cannot interfere with God’s remedy. Nothing that a man has done need keep him out of heaven; nothing that he can do will ever get him in. ‘Go wash’ is the word in every case.”

But let us consider this “Go wash” more closely and ponder it in the light of its connections. As one stricken with leprosy, Naaman pictures the natural man in his fallen estate. And what is his outstanding and distinguishing characteristic of such? Why, that he is a depraved creature, a sinner, a rebel against God. And what is sin? From the negative side, it is failure to submit to God’s authority and be subject to His Law; positively, it is the exercise of self-will, a determination to please myself; “we have turned every one to *his own way*” (Isa. 53:6). If then a sinner inquires of God’s servant the way of recovery, what is the first and fundamental thing which needs to be told him? Why this: that self-will and self-pleasing must cease, that he must submit himself to the will of God. And that is only another way of saying that he must be *converted*, for “conversion” is a turning round, a right-about-face. And in order to conversion, *repentance* is the essential requisite

(Acts 3:19), and in its final analysis “repentance” is taking sides with God against myself, judging myself, condemning myself, bowing my will to His.

Again, sin is not only a revolt against God, but a deification of self: it is a determination to gratify my own inclinations; it is saying, “I will be lord over myself.” That was the bait which the Serpent dangled before our first parents when he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit: “Ye shall be as *gods*” (Gen. 3:5). Casting off allegiance to God, man assumed an attitude of independency and self-sufficiency. Sin taking possession of his heart, he became proud, haughty, self righteous. If, then, such a creature is to be recovered and restored to God, it must necessarily be by a process of *humbling him*. The first design of the Gospel is to put down human pride, to lay man low before God. It was predicted by Isaiah when speaking of Gospel times “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down” (2:11). And again, “every mountain shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight” (40:4); and therefore did our Lord begin His sermon on the mount by saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). That was the basic truth which the prophet pressed upon Naaman: that he must abase himself before the God of Israel.

“Go wash in Jordan seven times” was but another way of saying to the conceited Syrian, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God...Cleanse your hands ye sinners and purify your hearts ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to bitterness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up” (James 4:6-10). Naaman must come down from off his high horse and take his proper place before the Most High. Naaman must descend from his “chariot” and evidence a lowly spirit. Naaman must “wash” or “bathe” as the word is often translated, in the waters of the Jordan; not once or twice but no less than seven times, and thus completely renounce self. And the requirement which God made of Naaman, my reader, is precisely the same as His demand upon you, upon

me: pride has to be mortified, self-will relinquished, self-righteousness repudiated. Have we complied therewith? Have we renounced self-pleasing and surrendered to the Divine sceptre? Have we given ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5) to be ruled by Him? If not, we have never been savingly converted.

In its ultimate significance, the “Go wash in Jordan seven times” had a typical import, and in the light of the New Testament there is no difficulty whatever in perceiving what that was. There is one provision, and one only, which the amazing grace of God and the wondrous love of His Son has made for the healing of spiritual lepers. It is that blessed “Fountain” which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). That holy “Fountain” had its rise at Calvary, when from the pierced side of Christ “forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34). That wondrous “Fountain” which can cleanse the foulest was provided at the incalculable cost of the crucifixion of Immanuel, and hence the washing in “Jordan” which ever speaks of death. Here, then, dear friend, is the evangelical significance of what has been before us. If you have been made conscious of your depravity, ready to deny self, willing to humble yourself into the dust before God, here is the Divine provision: a bath into which by faith you may plunge, and thereby obtain proof that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). If by grace you have already done so, then join the writer in exclaiming, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood...to Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5, 6).

In our last chapter we dwelt mainly upon *the requirement* which was made upon Naaman when he reached the prophet’s abode: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times,” seeking to supply answers to—why was he so enjoined? what was the implication in his case? what bearing has such a demand upon men generally today? what is its deeper significance? We saw that it was a requirement which revealed the uselessness and worthlessness of Naaman’s attempt to purchase his healing. We showed that it was a requirement which demanded the setting aside of his own will and submitting himself to the will of Israel’s God. We pointed out that it was a

requirement which insisted that he must get down off his high horse (descend from his chariot), humbling and abasing himself. We intimated that it was a requirement which, typically, pointed to that amazing provision of the grace of God for spiritual lepers, namely, the “Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1), and by which alone defilement can be cleansed and iniquities blotted out.

“But Naaman was wroth 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 strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper” (2 Kings 5:11). In his own country he was a person of consequence, a “great man,” commander-in-chief of the army, standing high in the favour of the king. Here in Israel the prophet had treated him as a mere nobody, paying no deference to him, employing a servant to convey his instructions. Naaman was chagrined: his pride was wounded, and because his self-importance had not been ministered to, he turned away in a huff. Elisha’s “Go and wash in Jordan seven times” was not intended to signify the means of cure, but was designed as a *test* of his heart, and strikingly did it serve its purpose. It was a call to humble himself before Jehovah: it required the repudiation of his own wisdom and the renunciation of self-pleasing; and that is at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature, so much so that no one ever truly complied with this just demand of God’s until He performed a miracle of grace in the soul.

Even the most humiliating providences are not sufficient in themselves to humble the proud heart of man and render him submissive to the Divine will. One had thought that a person so desperately afflicted as this poor leper, would have been meekened and ready to comply with the prophet’s injunction. Ah, my reader, the seat of our moral disease lies too deep for external things to reach it. So fearful is the blinding power of sin that it causes its subjects to be puffed up with self-complacency and self-righteousness and to imagine they are entitled to favourable treatment even at the hands of the Most High. Aye, does not that very spirit lurk in the hearts of the regenerate! and not only lurk



there, but at times moves them to act like Naaman! Has not the writer and the Christian reader never come before the Lord with some pressing need and sought relief at His hands, and then been angry because He responded to us in quite a different way from what we expected and desired? Have we not had to bow our heads for very shame as He gently reprov'd us with His “doest thou well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4). Yes, there is much of this Naaman spirit in each of us that needs to be mortified.

“Behold, I *thought*” said Naaman. Herein he supplies a true representation of the natural man. The sinner has his own idea of how salvation is to be obtained. It is true that opinions vary when it comes to the working out of detail, yet in all the world over, fallen man has his own opinion of what is suitable and needful. One man thinks he must perform some meritorious deeds in order to obtain forgiveness. Another thinks the past can be atoned for by turning over a new leaf and living right for the future. Yet another, who has obtained a smattering of the Gospel, thinks that by believing in Christ he secures a passport to Heaven, even though he continues to indulge the flesh and retain his beloved idols. However much they may differ in their self-concocted schemes, this one thing is common to them all: “*I thought*,” and that “I thought” is put over against the Word and way of God. They prefer the way that “seemeth right” to them: they insist on following out their own theorisings: they pit their prejudices and presuppositions against a “thus saith the Lord.” Reader, you perceive here the folly of Naaman, but have you seen the madness of setting *your* thoughts against the authority of the living God!

And what was it that this foolish and haughty Syrian “thought?” Why this: “he will surely come out *to me*, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.” He was willing to be restored to health, but it must be in his own way—a way in which his self-respect might be retained and his importance acknowledged. He desired to be healed provided he should also be duly honoured. He had come all the way from Syria to be rid of his leprosy, but he was not prepared to receive cleansing in the manner of God’s prescribing.

What madness! What a demonstration that the carnal mind is enmity against God! What proof of the fearful hold which Satan has over his victims until a stronger One delivers them from his enthralling power! Naaman had now received what the king of Israel had failed to give him—full directions for his cure. There was no uncertainty about the prescription nor of its efficacy, would he but submit to the same: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times and thou *shalt* be clean.” But he felt slighted: such instructions suited not his inclinations; the Divine requirement accorded not with the conceits of his unhumiliated heart.

What right had Naaman, a leper, to either argue or prescribe? He was a petitioner and not a legislator: he was suing for a favour, and therefore was in no position to advance any demands of his own. If such was the case and situation of Naaman, how infinitely less has any depraved and guilty sinner the right to make any terms with God! He is a criminal, justly pronounced guilty by the Divine Law. Mercy is his only hope, and it is therefore for God to say in what way mercy is to be shown him and how salvation is to be obtained. For this reason the Lord says not only “Let the wicked *forsake his way,*” but also adds “and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*” (Isa. 55:7). Man must repudiate his own ideas, abandon his own prejudices, turn away from his own schemes and reject his own preferences. If we are to enter the kingdom of Heaven we must “become as little children” (Matt. 18:3). Alas, of the vast majority of our fellows it has to be said, that they, “going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). They “*will not* come to Christ that they might have life” (John 5:40).

“In Naaman’s mind all was arranged. He pictured the scene to himself, and made himself the foremost figure in the group—the Gentile idolator waited on by the prophet of God. The incongruity of this he did not then see. We see it. God would visit him in grace, but as one who had no ground of his own to stand on. As a sinner He could meet him. As a leper He could heal him. As the captain of the hosts of the king of Syria He would not receive him. What place has a sinner before God save that of one to whom *mercy* can

be shown? What place is suited to the leper save that *outside* the camp? Naaman has to learn his place. He may be wroth with the prophet, but he cannot move him. Before him he is only a leper, whatever he may appear before others. Learning his place, he has to learn his vileness. He imagined Elisha would have struck his hand over the place. A sign, a scene, he expected—not a mere word. He did not know what a defiling object he was. The priest looked on the leper to judge whether he was leprous or not. He touched him only when he was clean (Lev. 14). Of Naaman's leprosy there was no doubt, for he had come to be healed of it. To touch him ere he was clean would only have defiled the prophet! But further, if he had been able to touch him, and so have healed him, would not man have thought there was virtue in the prophet? By sending him to the Jordan to wash, it would be clearly seen the cure was direct from God. Man has no virtue in himself—he can only be the channel of God's grace to others. *God* must have *all* the glory of the cure, and Naaman must be taught his own condition and vileness" (C. E. Stuart).

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (verse 12). Naaman was incensed not only because he thought that insufficient respect had been shown to his own person, but also because he felt his country had been slighted. If it was merely a matter of bathing in some river, why could not those of his own land have sufficed? This was tantamount to dictating unto Jehovah, for it was the word of His prophet he now challenged. Shall the beggar insist on his right to choose what form the supply of his need must take! Shall the patient inform the physician what remedy will be acceptable to him! Is the guilty culprit to have the effrontery to dictate to the judge what shall be done to him! Yet a worm of the earth deems himself competent to pit his wits against the wisdom of the Ancient of Days. A Hell-deserving sinner is impudent enough to draw up terms on which he considers Heaven is due him. But if we are to be cleansed, it can only be by the way of God's appointing and not by any of our own devising.

“He thinks this too cheap, too plain, too common, a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or, if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider (1) That Jordan belonged to Israel’s God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord’s land, the holy land, and in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel or the beauty of the stream. (2) That Jordan had more than once before this obeyed the commands of Omnipotence: it had of old yielded a passage to Israel, and of late to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers which had only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but above all, Jordan was the river *appointed*, and if he expected a cure from the Divine power he ought to acquiesce in the Divine will, without asking why or wherefore. It is common for those that are wise in their own conceits to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of Divine wisdom, and to prefer their own fancies before them” (Matthew Henry).

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” How true to life: how accurate the picture! The flesh resents the humbling truth of God and hates to be abased. And let us say here for the benefit of young preachers who are likely to read these lines: you must expect some of *your* hearers to turn from you in anger if you faithfully minister the Word of God in its undiluted purity. It has ever been thus. If the prophets of the Lord incensed their hearers, can you expect your message will be palatable to the unregenerate? If the incarnate Son of God had to say, “Because I tell you the Truth, you believe Me not” (John 8:45), can you expect the Truth to meet with a better welcome from your lips? If the chief of the apostles declared “for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10), do you expect to be popular with them? There is but one way to avoid displeasing your hearers, and that is by unfaithfulness to your trust, by carnal compromise, by blunting the sharp edge of the Sword of the Spirit, by keeping back what you

know will prove unacceptable. In such an event, God will require their blood at your hand and you will forfeit the approbation of your Master.

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” In this we may see the final effort of Satan to retain his victim ere Divine grace delivered him. The rage of Naaman was but the reflection of his whom he had hitherto served and who was now furious at the prospect of losing him. It reminds us of the case recorded in Luke 9. A father of a demon-possessed child had sought for help from the apostles, which they had been unable to render. As the Saviour came down from the mount the poor father approached Him and He gave orders “bring thy son to Me,” and we are told “and as he was yet *a coming*, the devil threw him down, and tear him” (verse 42). But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. It is frequently thus: the conflict which is waged in the soul is usually sorest just before peace is found. Lusts rage, unbelief seeks to wax supreme, the truth of sovereign grace when first apprehended is obnoxious, to be told our righteousnesses are as filthy rags stirs up enmity. Satan fills the soul with rage against God, against His truth, against His servant. Often that is a hopeful sign, for it at least shows that the sinner has been aroused from the fatal sleep of indifference.

“And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (verse 13). Let us consider first the surface teaching of this verse. This gentle remonstrance was “a word spoken in season.” Had Naaman remained calm and reasonable he should have perceived that what was required of him was simple and safe, and neither difficult nor dangerous. Had the prophet prescribed some laborious and lengthy task, or ordered a drastic operation or painful remedy, probably Naaman had complied without a murmur, so why not do so when no other sacrifice was demanded of him but the humbling of his pride? “When sinners are under serious impressions, and as yet prejudiced against the Lord’s method of salvation, they should be reasoned

with in meekness and love, and persuaded to make trial of its simplicity” (Thomas Scott). If it is necessary to rebuke their petulance and point out to them the foolishness of their proud reasoning, we should make it evident that our rebuke proceeds from a desire for their eternal welfare.

“It is a great mercy to have those about us that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their inferiors: Job 31:13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly though given by the greatest and most venerable names, so we should have our ears open to good advice, though brought to us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks, if it be well said. The reproof was modest and respectful: they call him ‘father’—for servants must honour and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection” (Matthew Henry). Alas, how far has our socialistic and Bolshevistic generation departed from the sound teaching of our Puritan forebears! How few ministers of the Gospel now proclaim the Divine injunction “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1).

It may be those servants had heard quite a lot from the Hebrew maid of the wondrous miracles that had been wrought by Elisha, and hence they were very desirous that Naaman should try out his directions. Or, perhaps it was because they were deeply devoted to their master, holding him in high esteem, and felt he was forsaking his own mercies by permitting his wounded vanity to now blind his better judgment. At any rate, they saw no sense in coming all the way from Syria and now leaving Samaria without at least making a trial of the prophet’s prescription. Such are the suggestions made by the commentators to explain the ground and spring of this action of Naaman’s attendants. Personally, we prefer to look higher and see the power of the Most High in operation, working in them both to will and to do if His good pleasure, employing them as one more link in the chain which brought about the accomplishment of His purpose; for “of Him and through Him and

to Him, are *all* things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

What has been before us here is in full accord with the other things already contemplated. It seemed quite unlikely that any serious attention should be paid to the simple statement of the captive Hebrew maid, but God saw to it that her words did not fall to the ground. It appeared very much as though Naaman’s mission was blocked when the sceptical king of Israel failed to co-operate therein, but God moved Elisha to intervene and caused his royal master to carry out his order. And now that Naaman himself turned away from the prophet in a rage, it certainly looked as though the quest would prove unsuccessful. But that could not be. The Almighty had decreed that the Syrian *should* be healed of his leprosy and brought to acknowledge that the God of Israel was the true and living God; and all the powers of evil could not prevent the fulfilment of His decree. Yet accordingly as He is generally pleased to work, so here, He used human instruments in the accomplishing of His purpose. It may be concluded that, naturally and normally, those attendants had kept their place and distance, and would not have dared to remonstrate with their master while he was in such a rage. Behold the secret power of God working within them, subduing their fears, and moving them to appeal unto Naaman.

The “little maid” was not present to speak to her august master and plead with him to further his best interests. The prophet of the Lord had issued his instructions, only for them to be despised. What, then, shall Naaman return home unhealed? No, such a thing was not possible. He was to learn there was a God in Israel and that He had thoughts of mercy toward him. But he must first be abased. Mark, then, how God acted. He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—oftentimes unperceived and unappreciated by us. He inclines his own followers to admonish Naaman and show him the folly of his proud reasoning. Remarkable and significant is it to observe the particular instruments the Lord here employed. It was first the *servant* maid whom He used to inform Naaman that there was a prophet in Israel

by whom he could obtain healing. Then it was through his “servant” that Elisha gave the Syrian the needed instructions. And now it was his own *servants* who prevailed upon him to heed those instructions. All of this was intended for the humbling of the mighty Naaman. And, we may add, for *our* instruction: we must take the servant’s place and have the servant spirit if we would hope for God to employ us.

See here too the amazing patience and longsuffering of the Lord. Here was one who was wrathful against His faithful prophet: what wonder then had He struck him down in his tracks. Here was a haughty creature who refused to humble himself and, in effect, impudently dictated to God how he should receive healing. Had he been on his knees supplicating the Divine favour, his attitude had been a becoming one; instead, he turns his back upon God’s servant and moved away in a rage. Yet it was *then* that God acted: not against him, but *for* him, so that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And why? Because sovereign mercy had ordained him a vessel unto honour from all eternity. Let the Christian reader join with the writer in looking back to the past, recalling when we too kicked against the pricks. How infinite was the forbearance of God toward us! Though we had no regard for Him, He had set His heart upon us, and perhaps at the very time when our awful enmity against Him was most high-handedly operative He moved some one of comparative obscurity to reason with us and point out to us the folly of our ways and urge us to submit to God’s holy requirements.

The fourth of seven booklets.



