

As Christians, we are called to compassion. In the books of Kings, we see God's people struggling with how to apply the many laws of Moses to their current circumstances. We understand that in Deuteronomy, God's chosen people were tied to land and temple, yet now their actions have them firmly exiled to foreign lands.¹ We live in a place where due to work or personal choice, many people are transient. Moving from place to place can do that, even in more comfortable places.

The oil industry moves people from Houston, to Beaumont, New Orleans, to California, all over the world. With each move disconnection and loss are possible, as home can be hard to find for a transient person.

According to the book of Kings to be centered : one looks to who God is by nature, the one who heals someone of a foreign land using humility and grace. Listen to the words 2 Kings again, "She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord be with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."² We learn from this woman who was enslaved that she knows more than the great man of Israel.

She has a special and unique relationship with the One, True, God. This young girl also knows about a prophet who is empowered to heal others.

The relationship between the young girl, and the powerful man seems off-balanced to all those who are looking at the story: yet the one with the most grace is a young girl because her nature is rooted in God's love.

The young girl believes in God, yet must learn how to navigate this relationship since she is far from home, having neither land nor temple. One challenge is to learn faithfulness in a place of brutality. From her actions and care of Naaman, she has shared God's grace to others.³

The setting of this chapter in Kings is important. The story is surrounded by tails of greed, and it stands as an example of how compassion can switch someone from greed to faith in an instant. However, it is not this kind of care and compassion that drives the other relationships.

First, there is the relationship of Namaan to the King of Israel. Naaman was only partially afflicted with leprosy which is why he was not as ostracized. It is important to note this was a partial leprosy,⁴ still the King of Israel was distressed by the state of his advisor. In fact, his closeness to Namaan is evident in the ripping of his clothes. This is how he receives an invitation to go to Elisha.

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."⁵

This sending and receiving is a way in which Naaman's obedience was being tested.⁶ We have all had times when we needed to go on a journey to find healing either physical or spiritual. In this case, Naaman is being given the opportunity for both.

¹ Nelson, R. (2012). *Interpretation: First and Second Kings*. Louisville: Westminster. pp.1-13, 172-178

² 2 Kings 5:3

³ Nelson, R. (2012). *Interpretation: First and Second Kings*. Louisville: Westminster. pp.1-13, 172-178

⁴ Barnes, A. (2016). *The Ultimate Commentary On 2 Kings: A Collective Wisdom On The Bible*.

⁵ 2 Kings 5:8

⁶ Wesley, J. (2016). *The Ultimate Commentary On 2 Kings: A Collective Wisdom On The Bible*.

Naaman believes he can charm, flatter, and buy his way⁷ into healing. So he sets off to see the new prophet. [Though we are not told exactly *who* the prophet is, we would know from reading the story that it is Elisha. Elisha does not come out to greet the “great man,” instead he gives him instructions through a messenger. This is not a good start.]⁸ The contrast between these two characters creates some humor. After all, the man who thought he was didn’t receive an audience, because Naaman was over estimating himself and needed a setdown. Elisha provided the correction and facilitated the healing.⁹ This honesty is a type of compassion in itself.

Naaman is offended at this treatment and thinks the instructions to go take a bath in a river are quite silly. Naaman’s pride is hurt. Here Naaman is ungracious, which is funny given that his name literally means gracious.

He must humble himself to be healed, and then he was made clean and returned to Elisha.

The word return here is related to the way his flesh was restored. Naaman is fully made whole again.¹⁰ He then begins to see a better path forward and vows to worship the one true God, even believing in the connection between the land of Israel and his faith.

In the same way that Naaman gave thanks to Elisha after being healed, this leper has great faith.

And now...it is our turn to listen to where God finds us in difficult moments. We are being led to God, We are being called to be made new even in transient places. We are to put aside our fears and pride and turn to God’s service. We may not want to imitate Naaman on that front, but we do want to hold God’s grace in our heart like Naaman and the Samaritan ex-leper.

My prayer today is that we may find God’s grace and gratitude in our hearts. We can find hope with God. For with God’s peace, which passes understanding, that peace can bring us home.

I invite Br. Allen to give us a message of hope.

⁷ Wren, R. (2022). Working Preacher Commentary on 2 Kings.
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-28-3/commentary-on-2-kings-51-3-7-15c-5>

⁸ This portion of the sermon was only at the 9:00 a.m. worship service.

⁹ Barnes, A. (2016). The Ultimate Commentary On 2 Kings: A Collective Wisdom On The Bible.

¹⁰ Nelson, R. (2012). *Interpretation: First and Second Kings*. Louisville: Westminster. pp.1-13, 172-178