

I read about a company who introduced an instant cake mix that was a big flop. Apparently, the instructions said all you had to do was add water and bake. The company was perplexed about why it didn't sell – until their research discovered that the buying public felt uneasy about a mix that only required adding water. **Apparently people thought it was too easy.** So the company altered the formula and directions to call for adding an egg to the mix in addition to the water. The idea worked – sales jumped dramatically.

It is amazing how often we balk at something b/c we think it is too easy. Maybe we're embarrassed by it. Maybe we like a challenge. Maybe we're suspicious b/c it just can't be that easy. This idea is at the heart of a story found in **2 Kings 5** about a man named Naaman. He almost missed out on the healing and salvation of God b/c he couldn't get passed the idea that it just can't be that easy.

In case you're just joining us, we're in a series of messages on OT Characters entitled, **IT Matters**. In this series we've been looking at those qualities and characteristics that make a difference in life. **IT** involves those attitudes and actions that shape our character and determine our steps. Today, we're going to learn that **IT Matters – we follow the simple instructions of God for both our earthly and eternal need.**

The story of Naaman has been called by one English prof, *“The most effective short story in human literature.”* W.A. Criswell said, *“It is one of the finest, most effective, and pungent illustrations of God’s revelation of truth of anything you will find in the entire Word of God.”* (Background)

After Rehoboam became king, Israel entered into a sad time as the Hebrew nation was split into two groups. The northern kingdom consisting of ten tribes was called *Israel*, while the southern kingdom consisting of two tribes was called *Judah*. Not surprisingly, they fought each other often. It was a civil war not unlike the War b/w the States in the U.S. It was during this time, God spoke to His people primarily through the prophets who served as his spokesmen. Yet most of the kings disliked and disregarded the likes of Elijah and Elisha.

It was during a lull in the conflict b/w the two kingdoms we find the story of Naaman. Naaman was a respected officer in the Syrian army who was beloved by the people and trusted by the king. He had everything a man could ever desire by worldly standards – fame, fortune, respect, and influence. He was a hero to his people – but he had a major issue – **leprosy**.

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, b/c through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

I IT Matters – We are DESPERATE for God

The sentence in the Hebrew is intriguing b/c it intentionally strings a series of accolades together in rapid succession so there's an intentional punchline. It basically reads, Naaman was respected; he was valiant; he was successful, he was influential..., and, by the way – **HE WAS A LEPER.**

The term *leprosy* was used to describe a number of skin ailments from Athlete's Foot to the flesh rotting form of Hansen's Disease. Its symptoms started in the skin and nervous system and spread to the outer extremities of the hands, feet and face. People w/ leprosy were feared and often banished by the general public for fear of contamination.

I can only imagine what it was like for Naaman the day he discovered the first spot on his skin. I'd imagine it would've been like the person who receives the haunting news they've been diagnosed w/ cancer – it's terrifying. One day you're on top of the world living large and the next you're wondering what your future holds – **funny how a chronic diagnosis can change your perspective on what matters in life.**

I'll never forget the day we received the news of Colin's diagnosis. One day we were hopeful he was just a little behind his peers and that would eventually catch up – and the next we're told that apart from a miracle of God or a miracle of science our son would experience overwhelming

challenges in life – his life would be anything but normal. In an instant our lives changed – we were rocked. I remember holding him in my arms in a rocking chair that evening mourning the loss of every hope and dream I had for him.

Bad news has a unique way of restructuring priorities. It has a way of putting things into perspective.

We don't know what type of leprosy Naaman faced, but we do know he was a man in desperate need of a cure – so desperate he listened to the suggestion of a Hebrew slave girl and asked his king to make an overture to the king of Israel.

Can you imagine how crazy he sounded to the Syrian king? First of all, he wasn't a Hebrew and he had no respect for them or for their God. But in that moment, he was so desperate he was willing to try anything.

Swindoll offered a comparison. Imagine the Secretary of State has been diagnosed w/ ALS. His body is already beginning to twist and contort and people are seeing the effects of the disease in his life. In desperation, he visits the President for a favor. He says, "Mr. President, a housekeeper my wife hired told me about a voodoo medicine man in Honduras who can cure my disease – would you make a call to the President of Honduras to clear the way for me to go?"

Can I let you in on a little secret that can change your life? We've all been contaminated w/ a highly infectious spiritual disease called sin which has infected all of humanity. The prognosis apart from a miracle of God is absolute devastation and condemnation. Like leprosy, sin starts out small but then spreads like gangrene leading to other sins and causing great damage to our relationship w/ God and others. But unlike leprosy, not only can sin damage your spiritual sensitivity; it also destroys your eternity. **Rm. 6:23**

IT Matters we face the reality of our human condition. **IT Matters** we too become so desperate for a cure that we will turn to God for healing.

II **IT Matters** – We DEPEND on God Alone

The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: “W/ this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so you may cure him of his leprosy.” As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel w/ me!” When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know there is a prophet in Israel.” So Naaman went w/ his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go,

wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage. Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant.” The prophet answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

Two engineers w/ identical qualifications applied for same job at a computer firm. To determine which one to hire, the firm gave them a 10 question test. Each did well, except they both missed the same question. The manager called the 1st candidate, explained the results and then said, "I'm afraid we're going to hire the other applicant." "Why? We both got 9 answers correct and have the same qualifications."

The manager replied, "Yes, but our choice isn't based on the correct answers, but on the question you both missed." The man replied, "But if we both missed the same question, why would you choose him over me?" "Well, in answer to question 5, the other guy put down, 'I don't know.' And you wrote, 'Neither do I.'"

The 1st candidate didn't have enough knowledge to answer the questions on the test and so he sought to get by in a different way – in this case, by relying on another man's learning. Truth is sometimes you can get away w/ riding on the coattails of another person, but in Naaman's case, it was all on him. No one else could go and wash himself but him. Only he could swallow his pride and trust in God.

When it comes to faith in God, it is every man for himself. That is, no one else can do it for you.

The simple truth is it is impossible to experience the favor and presence of God apart from trusting in God for yourself. No one has ever been saved or will be saved b/c of the faith of their parents, or friends, or church, or nation, or anyone / anything else. No matter how many times you attend church – you can't become a follower of Christ by osmosis. The person sitting next to you can't make a decision for Christ for you – it is all up to you in response to the moving of the H.S. in your life to draw you to God.

Hebrews 11:6 says – *...w/out faith it is impossible to please God, b/c anyone who comes to him must believe He exists and that he is a rewarder those who earnestly seek Him.*

Let me take a moment to show you Naaman mistakes – which happen to be the mistakes of most people when it comes to placing their faith in God.

- Naaman thought – he could PURCHASE healing

Naaman assumed his healing was something that had to be purchased. He assumed nothing could be obtained for free. So he brought a significant treasure to payoff Elisha; after all, faith healers can't be cheap.

This still happens. Many well-meaning, desperate people think God's grace is for sale and that it can be earned by the abundance of their good deeds or their gifts to the church.

And sadly – people are more willing to PAY their way into heaven than they are to BELIEVE their way into heaven.

- Naaman thought – SHOWING up was enough

Naaman thought by showing up, Elisha was going to heal him. Honestly, I think he thought Elisha was going to run out and do whatever had to be done b/c of who he was. After all, Naaman was no ordinary guy.

I'm amazed at the attitudes people have w/ regard to God. It's like they're saying – "God, do you know who I am?" Let me tell you, I've had more than my fair share of people who have told me how great they are and how fortunate I am to have them in church. I can only imagine what they say to God – **people whose ego is bigger than their faith.**

- Naaman thought – he could be healed by a MAN

Whether it was the King of Israel or Elisha, it didn't dawn on Naaman that it was God, and not man, who heals. Why? B/c They were sinners in need of a Savior just like him.

I'm amazed at how quickly people run (and where they'll run) to find relief from pain/trouble. **We have a placebo mentality.** We want help so we'll turn to anyone or anything so long as it alleviates the pain, solves the problem, or satisfies the person; even if it's not real. **Don't believe me...**

According to a recent survey – who is the most influential spiritual leader in the U.S.? Who thinks it is the Pope? No! Billy Graham? No! Andy Stanley? No! Oprah? Yes!

Listen – there's not one person who's ever walked this planet apart from Jesus who can provide a true solution to the challenge of the human condition. Only Jesus can truly save. Everyone else is a sad, incapable substitute!

- Naaman thought – his way was better than God’s way

Naaman wanted to be healed; he just didn’t want to obey God to get it done. Maybe it was beneath him. Maybe it was too simple. Maybe it didn’t make sense. **But Naaman was allowing his conditions and expectation to prevent him from seeing and experiencing God’s grace.**

Naaman went w/ his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought he would come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

I can imagine the scene. General Naaman in all his regalia stands outside of Elisha’s house – suddenly, Elisha’s lowly side-kick pops out the door and delivers a message, “Go dip yourself in the Jordan seven times and you’ll be okay. Have a nice day and please tip your waiter!”

Naaman was furious –humiliated. Of the six Hebrew words for *anger* – the word Naaman uses is the strongest. It is the word God uses to describe his anger and wrath towards sin.

Oh how we struggle when God doesn't do things the way we think he ought to do them – especially when it comes to us. This reminds me of a devotional from Oswald Chambers:

...God can never make us into wine if we object to the fingers He chooses to use to crush us. We say, "If God would only use His own fingers, and make me broken bread and poured-out wine in a special way, then I wouldn't object!" But when He uses someone we dislike, or some set of circumstances to which we said we would never submit, to crush us, then we object. *Yet we must never try to choose the place of our own martyrdom.* If we're ever going to be made into wine, we will have to be crushed – you can't drink grapes. Grapes become wine only when they've been squeezed. I wonder what finger and thumb God has been using to squeeze you? Have you been as hard as a marble and escaped? If you're not ripe yet, and if God had squeezed you, the wine produced would've been remarkably bitter. To be a holy person means the elements of the natural life experience the very presence of God as they're providentially broken in His service. We have to be placed into God and brought into agreement w/ Him before we can be broken bread in His hands.

Naaman didn't realize it. But God was helping him to understand that God's way is the only way.

The same can be said of God's grace for salvation. Too often, people get mad at God b/c His way requires their surrender to His grace. His way, the cross, is the only way – and it frustrates people b/c they'd rather have a different medium than to trust and obey.

IT Matters we depend on God alone for our salvation. **IT Matters** we trust in His grace and not in our abilities, ingenuity, or understanding.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph. 2:8-9

III IT Matters – We DISTANCE Ourselves from Idols

“If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord. But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also – when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.” “Go in peace,” Elisha said.

I find this portion of the passage quite interesting. Personally, I think Naaman serves as an example to all of us.

Naaman had given his heart to God. **It was not merely skin deep; it was soul deep.** He is a picture of 2 Cr. 5:17 – *If any man be in Christ he is a new creation...* Naaman was transformed from the inside out. His entire worldview was altered b/c of the healing presence and power of God.

Yet he didn't fold up shop, quit his job, and become a spiritual recluse. No, instead, he returned to his duties (his mission field) and remained steadfast in his faith while he honored his lost earthly boss.

Like every believer, Naaman still had much to learn. He was saved by grace and now he needed to grow in grace. Yet knowing he had to return to Aram, Naaman asked for dirt to take w/ him so that he might be able to worship God in Aram. In those days, the people believed that their gods resided in their land – once you left the land, you left your god. So Naaman asked for dirt to ensure God was w/ him. At the same time, this was a very courageous act, b/c it would insure the king of Aram would ask questions.

His second request was equally important – especially for those of us serving in the marketplace today. You can go to your place of employment, honor your boss, yet not give your heart to the god he serves. Like Daniel and Naaman, we can honor the Lord and our bosses by remaining faithful to our commitment to Christ.

IT Matters – we take our faith to where we live, work, and play yet distance ourselves from idols. **IT Matters** – we remain faithful to God in a world that desires to worship other gods.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, b/c the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4:4

I have good news for everyone today. When it comes to God's grace, you don't have to add anything to the mix – you just must believe – it is that simple.

Unlike the cake-mix manufacturer we spoke of at the beginning of this lesson, God hasn't changed His *formula* to make salvation more marketable. The gospel we proclaim is free of man's efforts and works – it is based solely on God's amazing love and grace for everyone. And even though it might sound too easy – it is not too good to be true... it is good and true!