



2 Kings 5 is the account of one of the great conversions in the Old Testament; the cleansing and conversion of the great Arman (Syrian) general, Naaman. We will look at this passage through the lens of 'humility'. That is not about having a low view of oneself but having an accurate view

of oneself; getting life the right way around. Humility is one of the greatest needs of everyone on this planet. Christian conversion implants in the soul the principle of a humble trust in the mercy of God. The cultivation and maintaining of humility are the great challenges of the Christian church. Absolute havoc ensues when we lose our humility. Jesus tells us, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". (Matt 18:3) The story of Naaman is the Old Testament counterpart of this statement. "...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" (v14). Naaman was changed, humbled, becoming as a child and entering the kingdom of Heaven. Here we see humility's object, its voice, its formation and its enemy.

Apart from the two kings, everyone in this story is a servant of some kind, either great or humble. The question is what kind of servant are they before the Lord? From verse 1 we see humility's object and author. We are told that Naaman is a great general who commands the Syrian army as they bring God's judgement upon the northern kingdom of Israel during the time of king Ahab. (1Kings 19) However Naaman has a skin condition which indicates an uncleanness, a problem, something not right. Even so, "Through him the Lord had given victory to Syria" (v1) Behind Naaman stands the sovereign Lord who gives victory to whom he wills even to Israel's enemies. This sovereign, living, covenantal, gracious Lord God speaks (v15) and stands in the background of everything and before whom Naaman must be humbled. "Wonder leads to wisdom" It is not just "the sheer panoply of life should make us humble" (R. Dawkins) but it is what we think about God: Father, Son, and Spirit, that is the most important thing. Naaman does not recognise the presence of God in all his success and his uncleanness. If you recognise uncleanness in your life, you need to know God. Everything in our lives comes from him.

It's like our friend Matt who can (incredibly) hear the humblest and smallest voice of birdsong and know what bird is singing. We get to hear the humblest and smallest voice in verses 2 and 3. A young Israelite girl has been taken captive and given as a slave to Naaman's wife. Amazingly she is not bitter against her nation's enemy nor does she keep silent but in compassion says, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." (v3) True humility does not make her bitter but gives her hope and makes her care about others so that she points to the Lord's prophet, to the word of the Lord. The humblest, smallest voice makes the difference in many lives. If we are not embittered or angry with the things we go through but are truly humble before the Lord and rest in his grace, God can use us as humility's voice. Naaman listens to her. On the road to faith many of us think we need to hear the complicated arguments from the voice of some bigshot but certainly not 'my granny' who tells me to go to church. Are we listening to the humble people who say, "You need to know Jesus"? As Christians we are just beggars telling other beggars where to find bread. Humility's object is the living sovereign God.

Naaman is a proud man but something is not right in his life. He needs help. As he hears about a prophet in Israel humility is beginning to be formed in his life. If you watch Peppa Pig you'll know about Daddy Pig who thinks he is an expert about everything. He says, "We daddies know all about this!" As church members our instant reaction can be, "I know about this! I know how to get to God" The Syrians think they know all about approaching God because they are coming with a pagan mind-set that says, "If I bring my offerings, money and my greatness. I can put the coin in the slot and get out cleansing. The thinking is that 'power will make me better' so if there is a prophet then the king will be in charge of him. So the King of Syria writes to the King of Israel. The King of Israel thinks, "Am I God that I can do this?" Elisha says, "Send him to me", he needs to know there is a prophet of the living God who speaks through his word in Israel. When Naaman gets to the door of Elisha's house Elisha doesn't come out, he just sends a message, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times" which makes Naaman absolutely livid! Everything is turned on its head because here is a God who does not come to us through our efforts but through his word. God speaks and operates on the basis of grace. It is an

offence to all the daddy pigs who think they know all about this because we want to come on our own terms. “Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 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.” (v11-12) The things we get angry about show our pride. How will humility be formed in this man's heart? There is a hump he has to get over.

The second favourite character in this story is the nameless servant. (v13) He says, “Don't you want to wash and be clean?” Naaman needs to understand that this living God has to be approached by his word. Naaman literally has to go 'down'. He goes down to the Jordan. He goes down into the water so his flesh is restored. The human heart tells us that we have to do something great. But the Bible is about grace; about a God who pardons us apart from works; who comes to us through his word; a God who cleanses us not from skin disease but from the dirt and filth of sin. Humility is formed in us as we trust in Jesus Christ. Have you humbled yourself before God and his grace? “Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r? /Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?/ Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? /Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?” Humility is formed in the human heart when we come to God on the basis of his grace. After he is cleansed this man is truly converted. He knows there is no God in all the world apart from in Israel.

Elisha declines Naaman's gift so that Naaman cannot say that he has done anything that gives glory to himself. All the glory goes to God. Naaman asks for some earth to kneel on so that it is clear that he is worshipping the God of Israel and he asks for forgiveness for when he must go to the pagan shrine and bow with the King. Elisha sends him home in peace. Naaman is going where he will be a remnant, an out post of godliness. When someone comes to the living God there are all kinds of things to work through. The big thing to work through is, “Are we humble before the Lord and wanting to honour him?” Humility comes as we bow ourselves before the word of God and his grace.

You will remember Jesus' story of the prodigal son; the conversion of the first son and the a sting in the tail in the second son and his response to the grace of God. The sting in the tail in 2Kings 5 is another servant Gehazi who despises Naaman and is shocked that God would forgive this enemy of God's people. He wants to use Naaman. He should be humble. There is something that stinks in Gehazi's heart. He lies to get something for himself. Elisha knows he is lying. An outsider with an uncleanness ends up as an insider having been cleansed. An insider who should be clean ends up as an outsider, unclean with leprosy. In secondary school after playing rugby we were sent to the showers to get clean. That was too much trouble, so we washed our faces and wet our hair, put our uniforms over our muddy bodies and went to RE class. We looked clean but we stank. Gehazi looks clean but he stinks because he is full of greed and pride. We can have all the trappings of Christianity and religion, be proud in what you have done, being close but so far away because you have not been humbled before God. This is a real warning. Are we walking daily by the Saviour's side, washed in the blood of the Lamb, cultivating a humble spirit before the Lord? Be warned when we start to despise other people and prefer one group over another, looking down on other people and backing away from evangelism. Two people stand before God's prophet. Naaman is cleansed, Gehazi is judged.

We are truly humble when we see that the God of everything, the God of this story, is the God who has met you in Christ, who humbly served your greatest problem. The Lord Jesus passed through the Jordan River with no sin of his own in order to identify with sinners. The ultimate swap of the gospel is, 'I am on the outside, proud, filthy and unclean. Christ the ultimate insider who takes my place'. When I am blown away by that and live in the light of that, then I am truly humbled. Is that not incredible? Are you humbled before that God?

The French mathematician, Pascale said, “Jesus is the God we can approach without pride and who we can be humbled before without despair.” He cleanses me and keeps me, so I need to walk with him.

When I survey the wondrous cross
where the young Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.