

“A Proud Man and a Suffering Girl” // 2 Kings 5:1–18 // *The Whole Story* #20

(see 2 Kings 5 file for a version of this sermon with the outline expanded, more robust)

Summer announcement:

Good morning Summit Church, I have a couple of things I want to **discuss with you before we dive in** this weekend.

First, I have an **incredible opportunity** I’m going to embark on here in a few weeks I want to tell you about, because it affects you indirectly.

Most of you know that **God called me to be a pastor by calling me first to the mission field**, and I spent the first two years of my ministry as a church planter among Muslims overseas.

I’ve told you that **God never relinquished that call to missions**; he showed me that my role in it is to be a **part of church** that **sends and supplies** the mission field in extravagant ways.

Well, the **elders of this church have extended an opportunity** for me to go with my family and **live with some of our church planters** for a few weeks this summer. So, toward the end of June, my **family and I and one other family** will be **going to live with some of our Summit teams** on the mission field, in South Africa and Central Asia.

Works Consulted:

Andy Stanley, “No Explanation Required”

Tim Keller, “Receiving the Spirit: The Lepers Are Cleansed”

James MacDonald, “Grace When I Am Terminal”

Sally Lloyd-Jones, “The Little Servant Girl & the Proud General”

Tim Keller, “Revelation”

This is a **special opportunity for us to spend time** on the “**front lines**,” being less “J.D. the guy on stage” and more “J.D. the guy just sharing Christ with people.” This will allow me **not only to encourage** our teams there, but also to renew my own passion for missions to spend some focused time with my kids sharing this passion with them.

Now, I know what you are thinking: “Who is going to take care of us while you are gone?” Over the weeks I’m on this mission trip, we’re bringing **some of your favorite guest speakers** from around the country, and you’ll also be **hearing from some of our own very gifted pastor-teachers**. Suffice it to say, **you are in excellent hands while I’m away**, and I’m confident that these will be **some of your favorite weeks** of preaching for the entire year. (In fact, I’m a **little nervous** you may enjoy them *too much!*—“Just stay!”)

I would ask that you **pray for my family** and me as we prepare for this trip: that God would **refresh and renew** my vision and passion for missions; that he would use us to **lift up the arms of our missionaries**; and that he would use this **trip as a catalyst** to reaching our goal of planting 1,000 churches in our generation! And that my **kids would not drive me crazy** on the plane rides over there. Will you do that?

And, just as a **heads up**, at the very end of the service today, we’re going to do that thing where we **extend an invitation** for you to be baptized if you never have. **Right now, today.**

- You say, “**But I didn’t come prepared!**” “We’re prepared *for you!* We have everything you’ll need—towels, change of clothes to get baptized in... whatever.”

Intro: [2 Kings 5](#)

In this story today, you're going to hear about **two people who are suffering**—one a follower of God, and the other not—and neither of them can figure out **why they are suffering**.

- The non-believer discovers he has a **terminal disease**;
- The believer is a 14-year-old girl whose **parents are murdered**, after which she gets **kidnapped and put into human trafficking**.

And God **weaves their two stories together**, giving us a quick snapshot of what he is doing in the world.

I know that a lot of **you have situations where you look at something** in your life and wonder what God could possibly be up to, or **if there even is a God**, based on how things are going in your life.

I remember as a kid there was this **painting show that would come on** after all the good cartoons on Saturday morning were over...

- (The **kind of thing you'd watch when you've totally given up on your day**, and you're **not really even watching TV** for entertainment anymore, just distraction.)
- Otherwise known now as the **HGTV channel**.)

But this guy, **Bob Ross**, would paint these pictures and explain as he went along what he was doing. Anybody remember this?

- He'd start by **slapping these amorphous blobs of color** onto the canvas and you'd think, "What is he doing?" but then he'd add a couple of strokes and dots and you'd see, "Oh, it's a **cloud—happy little cloud**." Or "It's a **bunch of happy little trees**," or "it's the **face of Nicolas Cage**."

Well, in a way, that's **what you are going to see God do** in this story. You've got these things that **feel like accidental, chaotic blobs** of color that God adds a **couple of strokes to**, and suddenly they transform into works of art.

[2 Kings 5:1–18: The Story of Naaman](#)

Y'all, this story is **probably my favorite** in the whole Old Testament. I'm serious. I love it more than the story of **David and Goliath**; more than **Daniel and the Lion's Den**; more than **left-handed Ehud** sticking a knife in the fat man's belly.

- **And if you didn't grow up in church**, you've probably never heard it!
- But it **contains the answer to that question** of what God might be doing when you can't see any evidence of him at all.

[5:1] Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great (mighty) man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. (Now, Syria was Israel's enemy. So whom had the Lord given them victory over? Israel. God has punishing Israel, if you remember, for their persistent sin and idolatry. Eventually they'd be **driven off into captivity** because of it. This is a story **from that era**). **He was a mighty man of valor... but he was a leper.**

- Now, that's a **huge but**.
- Leprosy was the **most feared disease** in the world.
 - It began as this **small, white, powdery patch** of skin, like a **rash**, that would soon spread all over your body.
 - And wherever it spread, the **nerve endings in your skin would die**, and **boils** would break out all over your body, leaving these **gaping wounds of raw flesh**; eventually **body parts fell off**; your **facial features** lost shape and became grotesque.
 - Essentially, you turned into a **character on the walking dead**.
- And in those days, there was **no cure**. Leprosy had a **100% death rate**.
- And it was regarded to be **highly contagious**. So, **the moment one of these spots** was discovered on you, you were immediately

banished, where you'd spend the next **10–20 years in isolation**, until you died.

Mighty Naaman, on top of the world, discovers one of these “spots of death” on him. [2] Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. [3] She said to her mistress, “Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! (She’s talking about Elisha specifically, one of the mightiest prophets from the pre-exile era) He would cure him of his leprosy.” [4] So Naaman went in and told his lord (the king), “Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.” [5] And the king of Syria said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.”

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. This would have been an *enormous* sum of money!

- **750lbs.** of silver and **150lbs.** of gold...
 - **Clothing may seem an odd addition:** “Here’s \$5 million dollars, and some *shirts*.”
- But in those days **clothing was handmade** and very expensive, and this would have been **party clothing**. Most people would **never own even a single set of clothes** like this. Having 10 would be like having a garage full of Rolls Royce’s.
- Put it this way: ***The man of God gonna be blingin’.***

[6] And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, and the letter said, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.”

[7] And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “*Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.*” (He thinks the **king of Syria is looking for**

an excuse for war: “I asked you to heal him and you didn’t. So now I am going to destroy you.”)

[8] But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, *that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.*” **Elisha perceives a bigger purpose in this leprosy—** God is wanting to do something in Naaman’s life, and to show something to all of Syria.

[9] So Naaman came with his horses and chariots (**Imagine what this would have looked like!** This mighty cavalcade of horses and chariots... like an army of Suburbans and helicopters coming up here to the front of the church) **and stood at the door of Elisha’s house.**

[10] And Elisha sent *a messenger* to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”

- Elisha *doesn’t even go out to see* him. He sends a messenger kid. **An intern.**
- BTW, how would you like to have been this kid who had to deliver this message? “I’m sorry, Mr. Naaman. *Dr. Elisha* has a busy afternoon and won’t be able to see you today.”)Meanwhile, Elisha’s house can’t have been that big, so Naaman could look in there and see Elisha with his feet up on the table **watching the Bob Ross painting show**
 - I read this week that **Steve Jobs got really upset** when, after Apple’s release of the 1st iPad, Rahm Emanuel, the President’s chief of staff, called to congratulate him instead of the President himself!
- Here, you’ve got **the most powerful man in the world** coming to the home of a relatively unknown prophet and the prophet won’t even come to the door, he sends *a messenger*.
- ***What do you think God’s doing here?***

[11] But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

- “I thought there would **like, be a ceremony; Elisha would run out of a smoke filled tunnel, jets would fly over; Beyonce would sing, then he’d walk on hot coals and do a dance** and charm some snakes and then I’d be healed.

Furthermore, [12] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”

- The **Jordan was** nasty little river, more like a creek than a river. I’ve seen it. It doesn’t even look like a river. Pretty **unimpressive**.
- And it was another **15 miles** out of the way.

So he turned and went away in a rage. **Rage in Hebrew for “super ticked off.”** He’s already plotting his revenge. [13] But **his servants** (more servants) came near and said to him, “My father, if it was a **great word the prophet had spoken to you; would you not have done it? Has he only said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’!**”

- **In other words**, “If he’d told you to get the **berries off a plant** at the top of Mt. Everest or **clip the toenails** off a dragon, wouldn’t you have done that?
 - **All he told you is**, “Go and wash!”
- **What have you got to lose, Naaman?** Try it. We’ll **swing by the Jordan** on the way home and if it doesn’t work, then you can come back and open up a can of **whoop-trash** on these people.

[14] So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, (**Summarize:** He dipped the first time, nothing happened. 4th time, getting madder and madder) and on the 7th dip **according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.** He looks... *and it is gone. Like a baby’s skin.*

[15] Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said... (*Now, stop, stop!*)

- Naaman is **meeting Elisha** for the first time. (Remember, up until now he’s only talked to assistants.)
- **What would you say** to the man who has healed you from a **terminal disease**, when you met him for the first time? **“You saved my life! Thank you.”**

No: “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.”

- He makes not **the first mention** of leprosy!
- Naaman wasn’t looking for God; he was looking for a cure for leprosy.
- **But God used his search for a cure to lead him to something even greater than the cure itself—a relationship with God himself.**
- *And the knowledge of God was so valuable that when he finally met Elisha he forgot even to mention the healing. All he talked about was God.*

1. God uses your pain to bring you to himself

- **Here’s the question: What if God had a much bigger purpose in your pain?**
- You see, **up until the moment that Naaman discovered this spot on him**, he had felt on top of the world.
 - The story says he was **“on the king’s arm,”** which means he was the king’s right hand man.
 - It says he was **“highly regarded,”** which meant he was “a celebrity” with a lot of Twitter followers and everybody loved him.
- *All that was taken away in a moment. By one small spot. **One small spot made Naaman realize how fragile and fleeting everything was!***

What if God was saying that to you in your pain?

- What if the problem had been put there by God to wake you up?

- I know a lot of athletes that point to an injury as the thing that work them up to the important things in life. I once was introduced to a professional athlete. Had just signed a multi-million-dollar contract to play in the pro's, but then **got into an accident doing something dumb** that totally destroyed his future career.
- This guy **didn't know God**; his career was his god.
- He **told me with tears in his eyes**, "I lay there on the ground, my legs broken, saying to myself, 'I can't believe I threw away my entire career for a few foolish seconds of fun.'"
 - I said, "Respectfully, I think God may have been up to something bigger in your life. I think I might have been trying to say to you, "You are throwing away your entire eternity for a few seconds of glory in an athletic arena."
 - To make a long story short, **God ended up using this** to bring him to Christ.
- **What if God, in your pain**, had something for you beyond—better than—even the cure for that pain?
 - And what if this thing he had for you was **so valuable** that *after you found it, like Naaman, you forgot to even mention the healing you had just received?*
 - **Request for Friday off.** / Raise your salary by \$100,000

Let me ask you: Where has a spot been revealed in your life that tells you that *you're not as together as you have thought?*

- Maybe there's a problem in your **marriage—it is falling apart** and you can't do anything about it; or **a problem with your kids** and you feel helpless.
- A **habit you can't break** (alcoholism, pornography, or a temper)
- Maybe it's a **fear that paralyzes** you
- A personal **failure**
- A **health scare** you've had that makes you realize your own mortality.

- **A guilt you can't get rid of.** I read this thing about Naaman's spot and I think of the scene in Macbeth... Lady Macbeth is washing her hands saying, "Out (cursed) damned spot!"
- Maybe it is a **dull, aching unhappiness** you just can't get rid of. The sense that you've never **found that love and acceptance** you've always been looking for.

These **spots point us to a bigger problem**—You see, **leprosy, throughout the Bible, you see, symbolizes sin.**

- Like leprosy, **sin deadens**. It **grows in you** and corrupts you more and more over time.
- You **lose feeling** in parts of your life—parts of you die.
 - **Your innocence**; your **joy**; your **compassion** for others.
- **Your soul has a disease, and it is terminal.**
 - Scripture says "For **all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God...**" and "**the wages of sin is death.**"
 - These lesser spots can wake up us up to the **ultimate spot** on our souls!
 - Ivan (the spot) – And the Holy Spirit totally left me. *If he dies, he dies.* Do you think God is going to judge me for how I live? Later that afternoon there was an accident right beside where we were working... he picked the car up. He's **screaming at you!**

The point of this story is not that every leper who heads out to the Jordan River will find healing for his skin disease. The point is to show us that God uses these things to bring you to himself.

This story is about **how God pursues sinners**. *In fact, before I move on to our second point, let me show you this story ends.* Naaman says, **15 "Accept now a present from your servant."** [16] But he (Elisha) said, **"As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none."** Naaman urged him to take it, but he refused. Now, a **fabulously rich guy wants** to give a gift to a pastor, but he refuses? I don't know of any other situation in which that has ever happened.

- **But see, Elisha knows that to receive this gift might confuse everyone watching.** Naaman had started this process thinking he could purchase this miracle with his riches, and **if he ended up giving this gift, even in gratefulness**, people might assume he *had* been able to purchase it...
- **...and the one thing that must be understood about the gospel is that it is a free gift of grace.** It can't be purchased; it can't be won. It has to be received by grace.

[17] Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.

- (That's quite a jump, isn't it? "If you won't take my **million dollar offering**, can I at least have a couple of **wagonloads of dirt?**")
- **His plan is to spread it out** underneath him whenever he sacrifices to God so it is as if he's doing it from Israel.
- That's never commanded, btw, he's just making that up.

Oh, but it gets better. [18] In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter."

- What? **He seems to be asking Elisha** for permission to be a coward and bow down before a false god!
 - Now, I would **expect Elisha to go all prophet on him** and be like, "Listen, if you're not ready to pick up the cross you're not ready for Jesus."
 - **But he doesn't.** [19] He said to him, "Go in peace."
- Naaman's **obedience is imperfect**, but it's a **start**. And he's coming in faith. So God receives it.
 - **I think a lot of Christians forget this.** They talk like you come to Jesus and then "bam!"—you automatically become a **Spirit-filled, mature Christian**; you **wake up in the morning** humming God songs; all the **Beyonce and**

Eminem songs on your iPod transform into Kaimy and Hank singing gospel tunes...

- **Not true: you start out** as a **BABY**. And babies **crawl** and **drool** and **run into** stuff and **break** things.
 - And **that's ok**. Because you are coming the **right direction**.
 - If you're serious about repentance, he's serious about having you, regardless of what shape you are in.
 - He'll patiently guide you if you start coming his direction.

The only things you need are **humility** and **faith**.

- Humility: That's **the one thing God keeps going after** with Naaman.
- Naaman in this story **keeps trying to go to the top**. God keeps **sending him to the bottom**.
 - God only speaks to him through servants.
 - He makes him bathe in a nasty creek.

The path to God is the path of humility. You can't get there any other way. The one thing you absolutely need is need.

- Naaman wants to find salvation through power and strength. But it won't be found that way; it can't be found that way:
- **Eph 2:8–9**
 - **Faith not in what you have done**, but what Jesus has done
 - It has **nothing to do with Naaman's might or strength**. It is the gift of God.
- You see, the cross absolutely **destroys our pride**. It tells you that **God's verdict** on our lives was death. *The verdict over your life was death.*

For most people what keeps them from the gospel is they don't have the humility it requires to admit that the verdict on their lives is death, that they are powerless to do anything about it, and their only hope is grace!

We often like to talk about grace, but most of us don't ever want to be in a position where we really need it. We hate it because it is so insulting.

- Miles: He was on a hiking trip with a bunch of college students where everyone was supposed to read a book before the trip. He made the kids raise their hands if they read it. The kids who hadn't done the reading thought they were going to have to carry someone else's bag. The guy flipped it: the ones who *had* done the work carried the bags for everyone who *hadn't*. **And here's the thing: you would think the kids carrying extra weight would be whining.** They weren't. They felt awesome. Even though they had extra weight, they felt like the extra weight was a compliment to their competence and strength. It was the ones who weren't carrying their bags who hated the experience because they felt humiliated. Why? *Because grace and humility aren't natural.* People don't like to feel needy, like they are dependent on the favors of others.

Do you have the humility to come to Jesus?

- **One other thing** on this: Think about **how much humility it took for Naaman to cross** that border into Israel, a place he regarded as an **inferior culture**, to seek salvation; **to admit** that the **healing he sought could not be found** among his own mighty Syrians.
- **I say that because** maybe this is where you are: you never thought you'd be in a place like this, with people like these.
 - A **church of born-again Christians**? We are in the same category as knuckle-dragging Neanderthals for you.
 - **Do you have the humility and courage** to question your convictions, to consider these things with an open mind?

Humility. And faith. You have to just believe what God says and accept it.

- He says, "There is a river that can wash your sins away and heal you." But you have to believe that and plunge yourself in and receive it as your own.

- You say, *'But it can't be this easy.'* If you are saying that, it's only because you're still looking for a way that *you can* save yourself. But salvation is not about what you do to save yourself; it's about what he has done that you simply believe and receive.
- *There is a fountain filled with blood...*
- *Baptism is the symbol of that...*

But before I go there, let me show you one other thing...

2. God uses our pain to bring others to him

- Let's **turn away from the pain of Naaman** and back toward **this little girl** for a moment. She's **the hero** of this story.
- **How would you respond** to the person who had murdered many of your friends and family, and had taken you captive making you a slave in his house?
- I would have said, "*Ha! The **old goon's** got leprosy... **Serves him right.** Now I get to watch his decrepit old body fall apart and die.*"
- Listen to what this sweet little girl says: [3] "**Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.**"
- She seems **genuinely to care** about him. She seems, remarkably, to have forgiven him. **Somehow, a little 14-year-old girl has the faith** to say, "*I'll let God be the judge who makes things right. I'll have compassion on him.*"

I really want to give this girl a hug when we get to heaven. Because this **sweet little 14-year-old girl**, whose name we never know, gives us one of the clearest OT pictures of Jesus. Think about it:

- She was **suffering through no fault** of her own.
 - In fact, her suffering was **caused by Naaman's sin**, but she forgave him.
- And what's more, her **suffering became the means** of his salvation.

- **Right? Think about it:** Had she not been in this situation, Naaman would have never heard about Elisha, and so would have died of his leprosy.
- Her suffering, which he caused, became the means of his salvation.

In the same way, our salvation would come through a ‘Suffering Servant.’

- Like this little girl, Jesus suffered not for **his own sin**, but ours.
- And like her, instead of hating us for causing his suffering, he forgave us and **kept loving us**.
- And his suffering **became the means by which we can wash our sins away**.
 - **We killed him!** *But he was wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his stripes (the stripes we caused) we are healed.*
 - *“Lord, now indeed I find, thy power and thine alone, can change the leper’s¹ spots, and melt the heart of stone. Jesus paid it all! All to him I owe! Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow.”*

And here’s what it means for you, believer. **Like this little girl**, and like Jesus, God uses our suffering to bring others to him.

- You see, **last week we saw that God would send Israel into captivity** because of her sin.
- **Here we see God had another purpose, too.** He would use the suffering of the innocent people caught up in that, like this girl, to point the Naaman’s of the world to salvation.

Suffering is the God-ordained means by which God brings salvation to others.

- **Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, (Colossians 1:24)**
 - (Explain verse) – Paul doesn’t like pain because he is a masochist. He endures it “for your sake.”
 - What could be lacking in Christ’s afflictions? Didn’t Jesus say “It is finished”?
 - Paul understood that it wouldn’t matter if Jesus had died if no one ever heard about it.
 - *The work of salvation is finished; the work of evangelism is not.*
- In the **1950’s** there was the tragic story of **5 young American men speared to death** on a beach in Ecuador as they tried to bring the gospel to a group of tribespeople who had never heard it. **Everyone asked: Why did God let this happen?** Years later, the son of Nate Saint, one of the murdered 5 said in an interview, “(After carefully reviewing things)... *it looks like there is no way this could have happened apart from the direct intervention of God.*” (from *Christianity Today*). In other words, “It looks like that not only did God not protect them; he arranged their deaths. **Here’s why, he said** (Colossians 1:24). For the world to live, in many ways the church must die.

John Piper says, at any moment God is doing around **10,000 things in your life, and you are aware of only about 3 of them**. He’s using your pain, your suffering, the fact that you are not being rewarded properly for your obedience, to point other people to him.

Here’s the question: Are you willing to take on wounds so that other people can come to know Jesus?

- Maybe God is calling you to make a **financial gift** that will really affect your lifestyle! But it becomes the means of salvation to others.

¹ Many records indicate that “leopard’s” was the original word used in the song. □

- Maybe **it's letting your kids have freedom to pursue the mission of God**... go on a mission trip; not live near you; let them go?
- Maybe it is to **forgive someone**
- Maybe it is to **endure the scorn of others** who will talk badly about you because of your convictions and choices (~~E.g. When I got serious about God in high school, I was the first of my friends. And so got made fun of... Years later, I got a letter from a girl... we'd had probably 2 conversations total in high school that lasted a total of 30 seconds. In her letter she said, "I was at a place where I didn't really know what I believed. Seeing how you believed made me realize I wanted to know Jesus. You never knew it but how you endured the mockery of those people gave me the courage to follow him. I realized when I got the letter than I endured that, in part, so that she could believe.~~).

- Not sure if it is right for me: we have counselors!
- As a baby
- A repudiation of what has happened before. "I've never been a Christian; my parent's faith tradition wasn't legitimate." Not true. You and they were doing things as best you understood them. Now you are obeying what you understand now, which is all you should ever do. So you're not rejecting what has happened in the past, you are adding to it.

Are you willing to become a **suffering servant** for others?

Two questions today:

- If you are a Christian, are you willing for your suffering to become a means of salvation? **Will you say, "God, use me?"**
- If you're not a Christian, let me ask: "Do you have the humility to come to Jesus?
 - It takes two things: Humility and faith.
 - Humility to admit he is your only hope;
 - Faith, to believe that he will save you and reach out in faith and receive it!
- Bow your heads:
 - The symbol of it, and what is supposed to happen immediately you're your confession of faith, is baptism.
 - Baptism doesn't save you. Faith in Christ, receiving the gift does. But baptism gives a picture of it.
- Look up: Big objections:
 - Not prepared
 - Rode with somebody
 - Not important

