

Elisha refuses the wealth offered. He does so because he serves the living God. If you read on you will see that his servant does not. We all need some degree of money, but is the ambition of our life in the blessings of personal prosperity or in God's kingdom service?

We can see that this event raises some relevant concerns for us today. This is one more. Do you trust God for healing? Do you trust God's call to you to be the ambassador of healing for others?

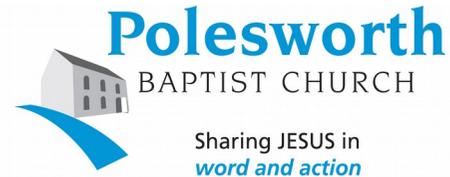
Do we see the girl's certainty in the cure of her master, if he turned to God, as naive? Beautiful, hopeful, but foolishly simplistic. Innocent, but innocent of the realities of life.

Or do we see the girl's trust in God, do we see Elisha's trust in God, do we see the God who can be trusted, as a call to grow into that trust ourselves, to step out in faith like that girl, to come close to the Lord like Elisha, to become His partners in His kingdom healing, a partnership of faith and hope, of disciples willing to be fools for God, who He may enable to be, life changing witnesses and agents of His goodness?

Of course there's a "how?" about this, the desire needs to be made effectual by an equipping. There are steps we can take as disciples, more on that next week, but the first step is to surrender to Jesus our Saviour as our Lord, to live in the authority of His Kingship and in the Pentecost empowering of the Holy Spirit.

After our worship song: *I know a man who can*, I invite you to receive a witness of God's mercy from a daughter of a friend of ours, a neighbour from where we used to live. Her name is Adina, she's currently at university in Wales. She was recently attacked by the dreaded virus. She put her trust in the Lord and He answered her. In God's care for her, is God's care for us. May her good news encourage us, so that when we see suffering, we may speak like the slave girl of the God who can help those who turn to Him and do as He calls.

To God, the one God, the only God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the glory now and forever more. Amen.



Reflections on  
2Kings 5:1-19b:  
Naaman, the girl, the kings,  
God and us.

**We begin with Naaman.** He is the commander of the army of Aram. He is, as verse 18 reveals, the king's right hand man. He is something of a prince in the land. A valiant man of position, and power. And he is a leper. Infections, diseases, viruses are no respectors of human significance. Like the arrow the bowman looses they just do what they do, without knowing what they are doing.

**Then we meet the girl.** She's an Israelite. Stolen from her home as a spoil of war by Naaman. One day living the normal life of home, family and friends, with hopes of her own marriage, children and family. The next cut off from all she knows and loves. No longer able to see them, meet with them, talk with them. She is isolated in a foreign land, in an alien culture, enslaved in service to her master's wife. She could easily have lost her trust in God. She could easily have filled her heart with malice.

Bound in her slavery to serve Naaman's wife, she could privately rejoice in Naaman's leprosy. She could look forward to the day when it would spread from Naaman to his wife, when his body, his position, his family is eaten up by its pernicious grip. So she could have prayed, waiting for that day even as she was forced to wait on Naaman's wife. Malice could have mounted the hurts in her heart, but it did not, she offers mercy. She tells Naaman's wife of her certainty in her knowing of a cure for her husband, if only he would see the prophet who lives in Samaria. A certainty in her heart that fires a spark of hope in Naaman's wife, which she lights in her husband's heart.

How do you and malice live? Are you bosom mates? When Boris Johnson was in hospital with covid-19 some people almost celebrated, and hoped he would die. Perhaps that goes too far for you. But how are you when it comes to forgiving? When it comes to hold the open hand offered to you by one you cannot stand? Do you forgive?

Malice is not always active. Sometimes it burns hottest in the passive – in silence, in not responding, in not connecting with someone you see across the road, in not seeing another’s need, like the priest and the Levite who walked on by the injured man, on the Jericho Rd. And sometimes we justify it in the gossip of a group of friends. Yet do you know that malice consumes those who bear it, while mercy feeds new life?

**And then we come to the kings.** The king of Aram wants to help his right hand man, so he sends him off to Israel, loaded with a wealth of gifts for, presumably, the purchase of the cure, or the purchase of the willingness to heal, of the one who holds the cure. The king of Aram assumes that a prophet who can cure diseases must be a prominent member of the king of Israel’s court. He sees the local god serving the local crown. For a price, of course, for a price. Later, Simon Magus, will try to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who do not know the Lord yet want His benefits, are always tempted to offer money, which sadly the servants of God can be prone to take, to keep the service going, of course, to keep the service going. But true offering flows from our worship, our relationship of covenant love with God, not from our needs. God cannot be bribed.

The king of Israel, king over a state consecrated at its birth in idolatry, and riddled in its history with multi-faith tolerance, seems to have lost all awareness of God. He is more focused on politics than knowing God. He doesn’t call upon the Lord, seeking out Elisha. He just despairs, seeing in his fellow king’s request a potential war.

**He has no eyes for Israel’s true God.** So, as we know, has our society become. In 1940, in the face of great peril, King George VI called for a national day of prayer. A call answered by Parliament and the established church, and all the churches and people in the land. The day was held to bless our sea-going Dunkirk rescue. The next day the channel was calm. The small boats played their part. The army was brought home. Where is the call today? Who has blown the trumpet for the Lord?

The nearest we have come to it, is the weekly applause for the NHS and other front-line workers. I have seen one newspaper article speculating, has the NHS become our new religion? We know that kings and states put their trust in many besides our Lord, but who are we trusting? Trust doesn’t have to be expressed in public applause, but it is to be expressed, like the servant

girl, by humble hearts pointing the needy to God.

**God works through the promise the girl has made.** Where the king is deaf to the knowledge of Elisha, Elisha hears of the king’s shame, and with very little diplomatic tact, he tells the king off and tells him to send the man to him, promising deliverance – he will know that there is a prophet in Israel and by inference, the One True God. So, Naaman will know, but will the king? Dostoevsky, back in the C19<sup>th</sup> wrote “the genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact.” As it was so it is still.

The power of kings and princes has no authority over Elisha. His part in all this is not to be centre stage. All this is for God. So, to make that clear to Naaman, Elisha holds back, he sends a messenger, who tells Naaman what to do to be cured. God’s message challenges Naaman’s pride. He expected Elisha’s personal services. But that is not offered. Naaman wants to be cured but in the proper way, as he sees it, by the prophet giving him appropriate personal attention and due ceremony. Curing a prince is worth a prophet’s time. He is enraged by the instruction to submit himself to the process given. It’s as if he’d rather be a leper in his pride than humble himself before God for his cure. The world is still full of those who prefer personal pride over free submission to God. Is that also sometimes so with God’s people?

Fortunately Naaman has wise servants who talk him out of his pride and into saving sense. He does what God called him to do. And God heals him. Then and only then do the healed prince and the prophet of God talk together. Then and only then does Naaman acknowledge that there is no God in all the world except Israel. Then he accepts Elisha’s refusal to accept his gifts, without any feeling slighted [see by comparison the Corinthian church]. Then he asks for some earth, on which he can build an altar for his worship to the Lord. And also for forgiveness. In his position he will have to go with his king into his king’s temple of idolatry. A forgiveness which is given in Elisha’s call to “Go in peace”. This is not simply a farewell. It’s a statement of covenant relationship. Naaman is now a member of God’s people. Healed, forgiven, redeemed. We shall meet him in the new creation.