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SERMON TITLE: The Slave Girl, the Warrior, and the Prophet
SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 5:1-16
DATE September 4, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Jude 17-25.

Jude teaches that faith ignites the mercy of God. Our salvation depends on mercy. Jude says there are divisions among us when we are self-focused and driven by our own personal preferences, but Christian living means personal preferences take a back seat. We must build each other up into the faith. This is mercy.

Our salvation—all that we receive depends on mercy.

As a response to God's great gift to us, you and I must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. We are to rescue others by reaching out to them with mercy.

Examples would be the four friends who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus and lowered him through the roof. The Good Samaritan who took care of the man who had been beaten and left for dead. Jesus' arguing against the stoning of the adulterous woman. An act of mercy was Jesus accepting Peter back into the fold after he denied him three times.

Have you ever been encouraged in your faith by an act of mercy?

Today we step back in history to the 9th Century B.C. It was a time of war and unrest. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, whose capital was Samaria and Aram-Damascus, which lay directly to the north, were in continual conflict, with a few minor intervals of peace. At this time, Elisha had replaced Elijah as the nation's prophet. Israel was war torn almost entirely during the fifty years of Elisha's term as prophet.

This is the story of three very different people: a young Israeli girl who had been taken into captivity during one of the Aramean raids; Naaman, the successful and infamous commander of the Aram-Damascus army and a trusted confidant of the king of Aram; and the Prophet Elisha, who lived in Israel's capital city of Samaria and was known for miracles.

Let's hear **The Problem**. READ 2 Kings 5:1

"The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the LORD had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy."

Now this man was highly valuable to the king of Aram. Naaman had succeeded and prospered not only himself, but his nation. He was a mighty man of valor and a valuable leader. But he had this loathsome leprosy, a diagnosis that covered many skin

diseases. It was not Hansen's Disease, the type that required isolation. Nevertheless, it was a huge problem. Let's read on.

The Young Girl. READ 2 Kings 5:2-8

At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy." So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. "Go and visit the prophet," the king of Aram told him. "I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel."

A young girl whose home was raided and she was carried off to a foreign country. No telling what happened to the rest of her family. Perhaps the war resembled recent pictures we have seen of the war-torn villages in Ukraine.

She was not running from her home to escape but had been taken captive. Yet Providence would lead and she was given to Naaman's prominent family to wait on his wife.

She could have been resistant, reserved, and resentful. She could have been filled with fear and anxiety. How would our teens handle such a circumstance? But here we see a young believer with great faith and enthusiasm! She had great expectations for God's prophet.

With excitement she announced out loud, 'Oh if only he could be with the prophet in Samaria. He would cure him!'

First, she really wanted him to be healed. She had mercy! Being a good servant, she wanted good health and welfare for him. She didn't even worry whether Elisha would help an enemy commander! It was the first thing on her mind that he was God's servant and she trusted God so she spoke up wistfully, without hesitation.

Secondly, she risked her own place by speaking up. Yet, she knew of Elisha's power—

After all, he had saved a woman's son after a brain aneurysm. During a famine he had helped a woman and her family survive who were down to their last jar of oil and flour. He had fed 100 people with a mere twenty loaves of barley and some fresh grain.

What answered prayers do you remember, which encourage you to pray for someone's hard circumstance?

Sometimes we need the courage and exuberance of young faith!

We get knocked down by hard circumstances, but this girl knew, regardless of war, regardless of defeat, regardless of loss – GOD IS GOOD! And God answers prayer.

This young girl's faith gave Naaman the hope he needed. So let's read on about . . .

The Warrior. READ 2 Kings 5:5-8

So Naaman started out, carrying as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter to the king of Israel said: "With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me."

Even though these kings were collaborating to help Naaman, peace was tenuous. This misunderstanding could have caused an escalation of the war!

Ah, thank goodness God is always greater than our fallacies:

But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to Israel's king: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel."

Naaman set out to Elisha's. But he had diplomacy on his mind and so he thought there would be a little pomp and circumstance; some exchange of gifts; formal recognition; horse and chariot; flair; and at least some freshly baked challah! But Naaman had much to learn about the world of faith and dealing with God.

The Prophet. READ v. 9-12

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy." But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me! Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

What was this wonderful prophet Elisha trying to teach this accomplished, highly ranked, but heathen, warrior?

→ It was not the river nor the prophet who made the difference. **It was God's mercy that flowed through the prophet** because the prophet took to heart the power of mercy as expressed by Jude so beautifully many years later:

You must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue them, because they follow their natural instincts, not having God's Spirit in them.

→ Naaman could not be healed **without humbling himself and obeying the Lord's instructions**, which Elisha gave him.

Once again, by God's mercy, Naaman was not left alone. His subordinates spoke up and admonished Naaman to obey Elisha.

The Healing. READ v. 13-16

But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!'" So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed! Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant." But Elisha replied, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused.

Who do you most identify with? The Slave Girl and the other servants who helped Naaman? The Warrior who needed God's mercy? The Prophet who offered mercy, even though it would have been easier to be judgmental and refuse him when he stomped away?

We all have very important things to learn from this about our call to be merciful. Who can you be merciful to this week?

AMEN