

**“The Power to be Healed”
II Kings 5:1-10**

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“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Nowhere is this Declaration of Independence in more contention than in the field of American health care.

Come with me one more time this summer to the Old Testament and turn to II Kings Chapter 5. The characters in this story include a five star general in the Syrian army by the name of Naaman, an unnamed slave girl who knew where to find help, a couple of kings, a prophet by the name of Elisha, and a religious business manager by the name of Gehazi. It’s a story about healing and health care. It speaks about the connection between government and religion for the good of people and it warns the powerful about being greedy when attending to the needy. Could this old story have some relevant truth for us today? I sense it does. Let me suggest some ways.

First of all, illness is inclusive. Disease is no respecter of persons. Red and yellow, black and white, all are susceptible to illness in the night. Suffering strikes the good, the bad, and the ugly. No one is immune.

A woman became concerned about her husband’s health. He was a physical wreck – weak, flabby, pale, stressed out, constantly tired, out of shape – so she took him to the doctor for a check-up. After an examination, the doctor approached the wife in the waiting room and said,

“Thelma, I don’t like the way your husband looks.”
Thelma replied, “Neither do I, but he is good to the children so I stay with him anyway.”

Illness comes not just to those who are sickly. It strikes the physically fit as well as the couch potatoes. It knocks on the doors of saints as surely as sinners. It comes to the have and the have-nots. Never a morning wears to evening but some heart breaks--a heart just as sensitive as yours or mine.

The first verse in Chapter 5 of II Kings says, “Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram and was a great man and in high favor with his master because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a mighty soldier but he suffered from leprosy.”

General Naaman--even his name meant pleasantness or charm but this great man in a great place had a great problem. He had leprosy. Nowhere are the powerful more powerless than when they stand face to face with illness. You see, leprosy starts with specks on the eyelids and palms. Then it spreads all over the body. It bleaches the hair white, and covers the skin with scales. Those scales get sore and they bleed. From the skin, the disease eats down to the bones where it rots the body piece-by-piece. Even worse than the physical pain is the social stigma that came with leprosy. In both Old Testament and the New Testament days, leprosy was seen as the punishment of the Lord for sins committed. It was the AIDS epidemic of the ancient world.

Naaman had leprosy. What did he do to deserve it? Nothing, absolutely nothing. What kind of man is he? He’s innocent, he’s outstanding, he’s likable, and he’s a leader. The next time you are tempted to pass a snide remark about somebody’s sickness, remember Naaman.

The next time you're prone to compromise your own healing by some sort of self-condemnation, remember Naaman. It rains on the just and the unjust. Good people and God's people as well as bad people get sick. Illness is inclusive.

The second teaching of this Old Testament story is that government is limited. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't make Naaman better again. When the King of Syria fails to help, he makes a referral to the King of Israel. Verse 7 reads, "And when the King of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, Am I God to give you death or life that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Is he trying to pick a quarrel with me?"

Now it's a great day in any country when politicians give up their grandiosity and admit they are not God. It opens the door for all kinds of new partnerships.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free," says Lady Liberty, "the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these the homeless, tempest tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door." If America fulfills that mission statement that has made her great, she must forge a new partnership with the 325,000 churches and religious institutions across this great land of ours.

There are some things that government can do. Government can tax people while the Church can only ask for offerings. Government can pass laws while the Church can preach about love. Government has demanded justice when the Church has lost its way in prejudice. Government alone will never answer the health needs of America.

For the first time in my lifetime, the doors are open for the Church to regain the respect it deserves. The studies are everywhere. A study from the University of Texas says regular worship attendance causes people to live an average of 7 years longer than those who never attend. You thought coming to church was about to kill you! It has added years to your life!

Larry Dossey's scientific studies on prayer show that heart patients who are prayed for improve more rapidly than those who receive no prayer at all. You can read about it in Healing Words. Churchgoers tend to have lower blood pressure than those who never attend church. The elderly who attend religious services are less depressed and physically healthier than those who are isolated at home. People who attend church are twice as likely to volunteer for charitable causes as those who have no active church participation. The success rates at some religious drug treatment centers are as high as 85% while the secular programs are 28%. My prayer today is, "O Lord, may the Church and state combine to heal the ills of human kind."

The third teaching in this story is that – treatment is humbling. I will never forget the day I sat in the waiting room to receive my first chemotherapy treatment. If there was ever a place on earth that I wanted to be away from, it was that place. Sick people were everywhere - their faces were swollen from steroids, their baldheads were covered with all sorts of paraphernalia. Most were so weak, they could hardly sit up. I immediately felt an urge to run. I turned to Sandy and said, "I gotta get out of here, I don't belong in this place!" In fact, I literally walked across to the x-ray waiting room. Three treatments later, I looked like everybody else. Illness is humbling. Sometimes the treatment is more humbling than the disease.

Naaman finds Elisha. Now with a person like Naaman on

his doorstep, you just know Elisha is going to give him special treatment. This is a VIP person who's traveled to a foreign country to get help from a prophet but listen to what takes place. Look at verse 9: So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, "Go wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored and you will be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away saying "I thought he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure my leprosy." In the next verse Naaman says, the rivers of Damascus are a lot cleaner than the muddy Jordan. "Why do I have to submit to all of this?" he asks. You see, he's willing to do almost anything but admit that he can do nothing to be healed.

What is this submission to the simplistic anyway? Does surrender stimulate the cells of survival? Does obedience excite the hormones of health? Do those who call upon the name of the Lord really find help? Do the waters of baptism really cleanse us? Does the body and the blood of Jesus Christ really restore us? Does a touch of oil release the healing power of the Holy Spirit as done in the traditions of the church? I don't know. I simply know that when Naaman got up the courage to dip 7 times in the Jordan River, it was like dipping in the fountain of youth. I know the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. I know. I personally know!

The fourth teaching of this story suggests that profits are questionable. In 1997, Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, spoke to 1500 people at the annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At the end of Mr. Gates speech, Dr. John Kiles posed this question, "Mr. Gates, if you were blind, would you trade all your billions of dollars to have your gift of

sight restored?" Without hesitation, Bill Gates said, "Yes."

Naaman is a rich man. He is so absolutely grateful for his healing that he is ready to unload his wealth at Elisha's doorstep but look at verse 16. "As surely as the Lord lives whom I serve, I will accept nothing." Naaman urged him to accept but Elisha refused. I wonder if Benny Hinn has read this story of Elisha? I wonder if Brother Bruce Hawthorn of the Christian Brotherhood up in Barbertown, Ohio read about Elisha before he skimmed thousands of dollars out of a self-funded religious health insurance program to buy motorcycles and airplanes.

Just how much profit should a person, a company, or stockholders make off the illness of another? I'm not smart enough to know the answer to that question but I think it ought to be asked. Should the real focus of medical care be the bottom line of profit? Have the lean and mean years of the 90's helped or hurt the medical welfare of America?

I guess you've heard the story about the CEO of an HMO who was delivered DOA by the EMS. Sensing the seriousness of the moment, the CEO sent an SOS to St. Peter seeking admission ASAP. After a lengthy period of time, St. Peter made this personal reply, "Sir, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that your request for admission has been granted. The bad news is you can only stay three days."

*For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray in one accord,
For a just and equal sharing, of the things that earth affords,*

*To a life of love in action, help us rise and pledge our
word,
Let the hope of God's salvation be forever heard.*