

Seven Dips in a Holy River
2 Kings 5:1-19
Sermon 1 of 2 from 2 Kings 5

"But how will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" "The HS will come upon you, and the power of the Most-High will overshadow you. No word from God will ever fail. For with God, nothing is impossible."

Impossible. That's a word we use more than we want to. It's an adjective that means "not able to occur," "not able to exist," and/or "not able to be done." Even the most positive people must admit that there are just some things that are not able to occur, exist, or be done. Your preacher will never be faster than a speeding bullet, or be more powerful than a locomotive, or be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound or be willing to drive a Tesla truck. For with him, such things are impossible.

But church, I'm troubled this morning by the increased usage of the word "impossible" among the people of God, both here in this room and in others like it all around us. I hear the word "impossible" in regards to inflation. I hear it in regards to our nation's future. I hear it in regards to personal situations. I even hear it in regards to our search for a future facility more conducive for accomplishing what God has called us to do as a church. And I want to tell you this morning that getting to a point in your spirit where you use the word impossible more than you know you want to or need to, is worse than all of the issues you are worried about combined. For with God, nothing is impossible.

2 Kings 5 is one of the most fascinating chapters in all of the Bible. It features the story of two men, one of which experienced the impossible. His name was Naaman. Elisha healed him of his leprosy after he, in obedience to the prophet's command, took seven dips in a holy river, the river Jordan. The other was Gehazi. He was Elisha's servant. He lived in his house. He watched him perform 16 miracles. But, at the end of the chapter, he is smitten with Naaman's leprosy. Why? Because he refused to apply the truth that with God, all things are possible to his own life. But here's the real kicker: Naaman was a Syrian Gentle. Gehazi was an Israelite.

Their stories teach us two very important and applicable lessons to our situations right now. But they are very different lessons. Naaman's story teaches us that God is about not only about redeeming even the hardest of hearts and doing things thought impossible to accomplish that purpose, he's also about making these most unlikely characters his witnesses to the ends of the earth. On the other hand, Gehazi's story teaches us what happens when we have become so accustomed to hearing the truth that we never apply it to our situation. Getting to that point in his spirit was worse than all the issues Gehazi was worried about combined. We'll see his story next week. But today, let's look at the miraculous story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-19. His life before the 7th dip and after it couldn't be any more different. For Naaman believed with God, all things are possible.

Before the 7th Dip

1. A "My Glory" Problem (1-3)

- *Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. ² Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*
- **The Mirror on the Wall** — "Mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who is the fairest of them all?" In verses 1-3, the mirror doesn't belong to the evil queen. It belongs to Naaman, the Syrian general. It said: "oh, you are Naaman." But it couldn't hide his leprosy.
- **Big Idea:** The picture presented of Naaman in these verses is that (a) he was great in the eyes of himself (commander of the army of the king); (b) he was great in the eyes of others (a great man in the sight of his master; valiant soldier); (c) until something went horribly wrong (but he had leprosy).
- **Significance for Us:** Naaman's condition is a picture of humanity. We project a "my glory" image but have a leprous heart.

2. A "My Way" Solution (4-7)

- *⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents^[b] of silver, six thousand shekels^[c] of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"*
- **My Way, Frank Sinatra** — For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things, he truly feels. And not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows. And did it my way.
- **Big Ideas:** (1) Naaman, is desperate for healing, but on his own terms (10 talents of silver (universal currency); 6,000 shekels (Jewish currency); 10 sets of clothing (royal currency)). (2) Not one person in these verses understands how the grace of God works. (a) The King of Syria — "I'll send a letter." (b) Naaman — "I'll buy it." (c) The King of Israel — "Am I God?" (No but you represent Him).
- **Significance for Us:** We expect pagans not to understand the grace of God or believe that God is able, but not the King of Israel. That's one of the reasons why Israel will be kicked out of the land at the end of the book. When we fail to believe, God shakes the dust off his feet.

3. A “God’s Way” Education (8-10)

- ⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”
- **SS Teacher:** I used to have a SS Teacher down in the bayous of Louisiana say in with a Cajun French accent: “I got my Ph.D. at the School of the Broken and Bended Knee.” Translation = “I have been humbled by God many times and have learned to depend on Him.”
- **Big Ideas:** (1) Naaman was completely humiliated and given the run around by Elisha twice; (a) Elisha just sent a messenger; and (b) told him to dip in the Jordan 7 times (a humiliating experience that would have required him to remove his armor down to his birthday suit publicly) (2) Elisha did this to bring him to a choice.
- **Significance for Us:** Naaman had to experience the humiliating shame of the cross before his resurrection. The same with Jesus. And the same with you. There can be no crown without a cross. It’s available at the School of Broken and Bended Knee if you are willing to enroll.

4. A “Which Way” Choice (11-14)

- ¹¹ But 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’” ¹⁴ So 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.
- **Line-Item Veto:** A form of executive power whereby the chief executive rejects particular provisions of a bill without vetoing the bill entirely.
- **Big Ideas:** Naaman had two choices. A line-item veto isn’t one of them. (1) Veto Elisha’s instructions, walk back to Syria angry at God because He gave you a prescription for healing that wasn’t on your terms and remain a leper. Or (2) Allow obedience to triumph over your way or the highway, trust what God has spoken, and take 7 dips in a muddy pond (Doing this required faith and trust).
- **Significance for Us:** The call to obedience forced Naaman to a choice. Our call to obedience forces us to the same choice Naaman had.

After the 7th Dip

1. A “Thine the Glory” Confession (15a)

- ¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.
- **Experience:** Experience is often the greatest teacher, isn’t it. I can know from observation and temperature that the lasagna dish is hot. But I can know from experience that if I don’t want to get burned and drop it in the floor again, I should wear gloves this time.
- **Big Ideas:** (1) Name makes the greatest confession of a Gentile in the OT (Now I know there is no God in the world except Israel.” (2) This confession of the truth flowed naturally from his regeneration – The call to take 7 dips in the Jordan; doing it; and the cleansing of the leprosy came before the confession. His genuine experience with the Lord brought about the confession.
- **Significance for Us:** No discipleship class helped him draft that confession. No sermon series brought it about. Only the experience of the grace of God made the confession possible. If there is no experience, everything is just a religious exercise to make us feel better about ourselves.

2. A “Thine the Glory” Worshipper (15b-17)

- *So please accept a gift from your servant.”* ¹⁶ The prophet answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. ¹⁷ “If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord.
- **Worship Definition:** Comes from the Old English word woerthscipe, meaning “worth ship.” It answers the question: what is worthy of my worship?
- **Big Ideas:** (1) What is worthy of worship was answered by Naaman in his first action after the healing: He tried to give Elisha something of great worth because of the grace he received. He did this because of the grace he received. (2) And in the second after it: he requests dirt to take back to Syria for a burnt offering.
- **Significance:** Naaman learned two things in this worshipful endeavor: (1) You can’t outgive God. (2) Grace is a free gift of God.

3. A “Thine the Glory” Peace (18-19)

- ¹⁸ But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this.” ¹⁹ “Go in peace,” Elisha said.
- **Peace of the World vs Peace of Jesus:** (1) The world thinks of peace much like John Lennon: “They may say that I’m a dreamer. But I’m not the only one. One day I’ll hope you’ll join us, so the world could live as one.” (2) Jesus, however, says, “peace I leave with you, not as the world gives. So do not be fearful and do not be afraid.”
- **Big Ideas:** (1) Naaman experiences, after his conversion, experiences what it means to be in the world but not of the world. He’s worried, even fearful, about having to bow to idols and god(s) he’s knows are false in the presence of the king. He even asks for forgiveness beforehand. (2) But Elisha responds with only three words: (1) Go (back to Syria; go into all the world) (2) in Peace. As if to say to Naaman, “yes the quandary in your soul is real and you will be faced with that. But the peace of God will be with you as you go and face what you are about to face. And he will give you wisdom on what to say.”
- **Significance:** The peace Naaman received wasn’t the absence of future conflict. It was the peace provided by the abiding presence of God in the midst of the great conflict sure to come. That’s the peace of Jesus has in mind. Naaman needed know it. We do too.