

LEAN BACK

II Kings 5:1-14

Intro

Our opening passage is a long one with a whole bunch of names of both people and countries that make us think, 'what is going on here?'

What happens is rather simple: a foreign military leader named Naaman is afflicted with a skin disorder that causes him to be isolated from his family and his army. He hears about a man in Israel, named Elisha, who would be able to cure him. Naaman goes with the blessing of his king, and a caravan of riches that screams out, 'I will do anything to be made well.' The king of Israel gets this not so subtle message, and is frightened, because what if this important military leader isn't healed? Surely he will come back with his army and level Israel.

Elisha says, 'don't worry: send him on over!' Naaman does, and Elisha tells him, through a messenger, to take a bath in the river. This infuriates Naaman. He's a proud and powerful man. But eventually, he relents, bathes in the river, and is healed. No worldly source was able to cure him of what ailed him.

However, a spiritual resource could. He needed to step out in faith to allow that opportunity to become a reality. The scripture reads this way.

II Kings 5:1-14

5 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. **2** Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." **4** So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. **5** And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. **6** He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." **7** When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." **9** So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. **10** Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." **11** But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! **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?" He turned and went away in a rage. **13** But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do

something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Galatians 6:7-16

Intro

Our second passage takes this sentiment of trusting in the Spirit and calcifies it into a way of life, or, as Paul writes, you reap what you sow.

So the question is simple, as you look at your life, in whom do you trust and how is that trust exhibited in how you live in the world? The scripture reads this way.

Galatians 6:7-16

⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸ If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. ⁹ So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

¹¹ See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶ As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

“Lean Back”

Over the last few days as we have been celebrating the 4th of July, we have heard messages that remind us of the principles that our country was founded upon. We heard the words and concepts like freedom, and liberty. And if we are taking the responsibility of being a citizen seriously, we then take where we are today and compare it to those foundational building blocks.

The question that I have is, if we are willing to do that in regards to our country, shouldn't we be all the more willing to do it in regards to our faith? Shouldn't we be willing to make that honest assessment?

What we read from Galatians is toward the end of the letter. Paul is starting to wrap up his correspondence and he wants his listeners to get it, so he steps into the metaphorical language that the people of his day would absolutely get: he steps out on to the farm: you reap what you sow; you get out what you put in; you receive that which you give. The concept is simple enough: you live a sort of life that is emblematic of the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), and you will not only

be corresponding blessed, but even receive the gift of life eternal. Paul is saying that if you lean upon the Divine in how you live in the world, if you strive to live as God has called us to live, then God will bless you.

The flip side is also true, if you lean upon the things of the world, if you lean upon money, power, vanity, popularity, personal wants as opposed to the needs of your neighbors, then you will equally reap what you sow. The world may look at you and think that you have it all figured out; the world may think that you're in control; some in the world may even desire to have what you have, but in the end, through the eyes of faith, you have planted nothing, at least nothing that lasts in the realm of the eternal. Paul wants his readers to make a real, God-based assessment of, of who they lean upon when it comes to matters of faith.

The two stories that we heard in the scriptures absolutely bear this out.

Staying with Paul for a second: there was clearly a segment of the Galatian church that said unless you were circumcised that you were somehow a second-class citizen in the church.

Paul is saying, 'no! Jesus has come! Our boasting is not in how ritually pure we have allowed our bodies to be. That is of the world! That is of man! Our only boasting should be in the good things that God is able to do through us so that the world might be lifted up in their need. That is the work of the Spirit. The movement of God that allowed those good things to be done, that can and should be celebrated.' Paul wants us to understand that these are the sorts of seeds that we should spread as we live in the world. The earthly stuff doesn't matter: the Godly stuff does.

This is what our opening story wonderfully exemplifies. Naaman was powerful, he was influential, he was rich, and you know what?

He still felt empty, at least in part because of his skin disorder.

So when he hears that there may be a way to be healed, what does he do, where does he go?

First he goes to a king; then he takes money to hopefully influence, no let's call it what it is, bribe the Israelites into healing him. Finally he leans upon his own strength and influence: people are afraid of the power that he yields through the army he commands (and you can be sure that more than a few of his soldiers were with him as he traveled to Israel). He uses all the earthly tools under his control ...and he gets nothing.

Well, that isn't exactly true. What he gets is a prophet who tells him to have faith, and then take a bath in the river.

How does he respond to this different way of not only thinking, but living? How does he respond to placing his faith in someone else other than himself or the world? Initially he walks away. But then his servants, his servants, implore him to take this smallest of faith steps, and when he did, he was blessed.

Naaman reaped what he sowed, both prior to stepping into that river, then absolutely after. Prior to taking that step in faith, he placed his trust in his king, his influence, his money, and his

sword and he still felt like he was on the outskirts if not an outcast. He sowed the seeds of the world and he reaped that which ultimately left him unfulfilled.

But when he took that step out in faith and leaned upon God, then he received a blessing that the world could never give him. He sowed the seeds of trust in the Divine and what he reaped allowed him to be lifted up.

The same is true for us. We reap what we sow. If you sow the seeds of the world, if you lean upon yourself believing that you are the purveyor of what is right and true, then you will reap that which of the world, which will, just like Naaman, ultimately leave you unfulfilled.

However, when we lean back and trust in God, and strive to do those good things that Paul calls us to do in his letter to the Galatians, then we will reap a harvest that allows us, even in the most difficult of times, to know that we are not alone, to know that we will be cared for, to know that we will be uplifted even to the point receiving the gift of eternal life.

It is so easy to think that we're in control, and that we know what's best. I know of faithful churchgoers who absolutely live in this mode of life where they're the ones who are in charge.

What our passages remind us of this morning is that we need to lean back upon God. As we move forward in worship this morning, let us lean exclusively upon God.

As we move beyond these doors, let us lean exclusively upon God.

As we move into our lives, let us lean exclusively upon God. Not only will God work through us so as to be a blessing to the world, but God will bless us beyond our greatest expectation.

You reap what you sow. Let us lean upon God, and sow the seeds that are of the Divine.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, it's so easy to think that we're in control and we lean upon that understanding, an understanding that ultimately leaves us feeling lost, vacant, and alone. Lord, help us to lean upon you so that we are able to step out and sow the seeds of Your love and care. Lord, let it be so. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.