

The Peace of God: A Reflection

2 Kings 5:1 – 19

Mako Nagasawa, April 1993, April 1994

¹ Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. ² Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, 'I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.' ⁴ Naaman went in and told his master, saying, 'Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.' ⁵ Then the king of Aram said, 'Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.' He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes. ⁶ He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, 'And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, 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 kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me.' ⁸ It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.' ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean.' ¹¹ But Naaman was furious and went away and said, 'Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' ¹² 'Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, 'My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?' ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. ¹⁵ When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, 'Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.' ¹⁶ But he said, 'As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.' And he urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷ Naaman said, 'If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. ¹⁸ 'In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.' ¹⁹ He said to him, 'Go in peace.' (2 Kings 5:1 – 19)

What a strange passage to develop a message about God's peace! I thought God's peace was something along the lines of Psalm 23 where we can sense the cool still waters and the kind hand of the shepherd upon us. Or maybe the Upper Room Discourse in John's Gospel where Jesus promises his disciples the Holy Spirit and the comfort that He would bring. But from the Second Book of the Kings? The most political and turbulent book of the Bible? Surprisingly, yes.

There has been much here for me in my own struggles. And I think there is something here for a believer who is dealing with a situation of tension or pressure. We can draw a lot of encouragement from this character, Naaman, and his relationship with God's spokesman, the prophet Elisha. The healing of the leper is full of many lessons about God's patience and love and compassion. I was particularly encouraged by Jacques Ellul's comments on the passage in his book, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, and much of this study borrows from his writing. Let's become acquainted with the story.

Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. Now the Arameans had gone out in bands, and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, 'I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria. Then he would cure him of his leprosy.'

First, we are introduced to this man, Naaman. He is a prominent man with much power and prestige associated with him. The word 'captain' can be misleading for us since we take that title to mean a mid-rank officer. Naaman was, in fact, the highest ranking officer of the Syrian army. He was its commander. We also observe that

he is an Aramean, a Syrian. He is the commander of the army of Israel's enemy. He, presumably, has led more than a few excursions to raid the land of God's people and is probably well known in the neighboring states. As we see, even the Jewish historian calls him a valiant warrior. He is a man of violence and bloodshed and yet we have to understand that even he is not excluded from the love of God.

Again, Naaman holds enormous secular power. He is the king's right hand man and confidant. But he also has one peculiar flaw: he has leprosy. Leprosy, in Levitical symbolism, is a type of sin. We may extrapolate the significance or symbolism, then, of this particular man thrust into this particular situation. He is a Gentile and a proven enemy of the people of God as we once were. He is exalted by the system in which he has been raised up, probably by the virtue of his ability or perhaps by some early personal compromise. And he, like we did before we came to Christ, bears the mark of humanity's stain: sin. We can strongly identify with this man.

Now we consider God's dealing with Naaman. Of all the profound ways God could have used in drawing Naaman to Himself--a visit by a prominent emissary of Israel, the strength of Israel's army--God speaks through a little girl in her remark on his condition. This girl is a slave at Damascus in the household of Naaman. Incidentally, this suggests that there were indeed battles between Syria and Israel in which this girl had been captured and enslaved. She is a child. But she is the first of God's chosen instruments. Notice that God does not use things that Naaman himself would look for: a ranking ambassador, Israel's military prowess, etc. Naaman would certainly understand such things since he is a person of the state, yet God does not use those signs. God uses humble people. The girl speaks with simple conviction about Naaman's certain healing. But after she has spoken this truth and testifies to her faith, she disappears from the account.

And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, 'Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.' Then the king of Aram said, 'Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.' And he departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, 'And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy.' And it came about when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me.'

Now Naaman responds and seeks his king's permission to visit this prophet of Israel. Why? We suspect that he may have gone upon his wife's informing him of the opportunity. God perhaps used a relationship that was impeded by his leprosy. Surely Naaman's marriage was not assisted by his condition. And here we sense that the brilliant general, who is publically esteemed and respected and feared, faces a barrier to intimacy that grieves him. We are not told anything about Naaman's wife, nor the state of their relationship, but we may surmise that this inner gnawing, this lack of inner life, whether it be the leprosy or the impact of the leprosy on his marriage, bothers Naaman, since he seeks permission to depart for Israel and be healed.

How this mirrors our lives! We may be successful in our profession and even in the visible ministries we are involved with. But somehow we're unable to form deep relationships with people. Perhaps all the public activity we are involved with is a cover. Is it to mask our fear of being rejected? Are we afraid because we see that our performance mentality that made us so successful professionally does not apply in the area of relationships? When we think about intimate relationships, sometimes we look down at ourselves and say, 'If someone were to truly get to know me, I mean beyond the roles I play in the world, would they accept me or reject me?' And we're terrified at the thought. We feel the inner gnawing, the lack of inner life that Naaman felt. We feel the need for substance and meaning. We want to be healed. This makes the gospel attractive.

And here we must ask the question that we should constantly have in view as we follow Naaman's story. That question is: What is the depth of Naaman's faith? Certainly it begins with a simple yet hopeful response to the information provided by the little servant girl. He has a flicker of hope to be healed. That is all. Yet we shall see it develop.

The king of Aram therefore accommodates Naaman's desire to visit the prophet of Israel. The gifts with which the king sends his servant Naaman reflects how valuable the general is, and what high standing he has. But both the Syrian king and Naaman expect the healing to take place because of their own prestige and position and wealth. The king is under the impression that his message, his letter, his own power has weight. Naaman, too, is under that impression as he takes silver, gold, and clothing to give in exchange for his health. But such is not the case. Healing from God cannot be bought or bargained for. Man cannot leverage it or wrest it from God, as it were. It is only God's gift.

We see also that the king of Israel suspects a political plot. We chuckle at him. Here is the titular head of Israel, God's chosen nation, unaware of what God's intention is for this man. Like the ordinary man, he sees

Naaman's search for God only on the surface. It appears foolish and awkward and even threatening to him. This is the secular person's response to one who seeks God.

And it happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.' So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean.' But Naaman was furious and went away and said, 'Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.' Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage. Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, 'My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean'?' So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Here we see the intervention of the prophet Elisha. Our interest with Elisha can be very broad. In this case, however, we will be interested in Elisha as a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Where do we get this relationship? John the Baptist was said to be the prophet Elijah, or at least to be performing the ministry of Elijah. Christ, therefore, as John's successor, parallels Elijah's successor Elisha. If we are attentive, we may see some fascinating similarities in their characters.

In any case, Elisha has been informed by God as to what God's purpose is for this one Naaman. He relieves the king of Israel in a statement that sounds suspiciously like, 'You of little faith,' and sends for Naaman. The Syrian general appears and is greeted by a messenger with a strange message. First, let's think about Naaman's reaction to the circumstances. The general expected a level of courtesy befitting his station. The least this prophet could have done was make an appearance. But instead, Naaman is met at the door, so to speak, by a servant and consequently dismissed. Clearly this is an affront as we see in Naaman's reaction. Compounding his fury is the message itself. Bathe in the Jordan? It is ridiculous and humiliating for the valiant soldier. If Elisha had given a challenging task like slaying some wild animal or performing some labor, then Naaman would have some sense of having earned or worked for God's miracle. There is no challenge, no feat that would attest to Naaman's competence. We observe that Naaman still has very little real faith. Yet before we criticize Naaman too harshly, recognize that we, too, always seek to make ourselves deserving of God's grace or at least make the gospel more palatable to our own pride.

Furthermore, Elisha's advice seems irrelevant to Naaman's situation. How will bathing in the Jordan cure him of leprosy? Surely Naaman asked that question. And it is a question we, too, ask because this is the way God's love frequently appears to us. How will God's love help me? I need an answer to a specific problem; the gospel is wholly unrelated to my daily routine. I need help dealing with the real hardships of life. I need to concentrate on succeeding in the home, at school, or at work. I cannot afford to spend my time with this. Of what importance is the gospel today? It is a question we face every morning. How is Jesus Christ relevant? Similarly, Naaman asks, of what use is dipping myself in the Jordan? Naaman, like us, sees the act only on the surface; he does not understand his deeper dilemma of sin and life without God.

Thus, Naaman's response is one of utter incredulity. He remarks that Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of his homeland, are much better than the Jordan. What is so special about the Jordan? It is smaller, muddier, and slower than these other rivers. Naaman's outlook is typical of the world. He believes that what is better according to the world's standards must be better in God's sight. The Abanah and the Pharpar are much better than the Jordan. But God's standards are not thus. We have seen that God chose to speak His words through an Israelite slave girl. Now we notice that God again speaks to Naaman through Elisha's servant and Naaman's own lowly servants. And how do Naaman's servants view the matter? They say, essentially, 'Why not try it? It's harmless.' The slaves move the issue along. Naaman henceforth acquiesces, but not because of the prestige of Elisha or the power of the prophet. He is persuaded by his own servants, who he has known for years and who he knows are certainly not magi. 'It is not complicated. It is straightforward and can do no harm.' Of course, this is not the model for evangelism for the Christian church although we see God at work in this. It is noteworthy, however, in that it reaches Naaman where he is at. He is an ordinary man and is convinced by the logic of another ordinary man. We should not condemn it. 'Why not try it?' the servants say.

Thus, at every turn Naaman has a decision to make. He is confronted largely by servants and people of humble demeanor. These people enter his life, interact with him, and he is subsequently left with a decision: Will I pursue God or not? There was the slave girl who spoke with profound conviction. There was Elisha's servant who offers a remedy that is foolish and somewhat humiliating. There are the servants who reason, 'What is there to lose?'

God works through each one of them. None can claim the glory of propounding the way to God for Naaman. One plants, and another waters, writes Paul, but God causes the growth. Not even Elisha, the one who in fact knows God's purpose for this individual, can take credit for the moving of God's Spirit upon this person. It is interesting that the prophet does not act or appear himself but delegates his role to his servant. But Naaman always must make the decision. There is no coercion. No overwhelming burden. God always respects Naaman's choice.

God does not crush Naaman's will by sending him to Elisha directly. He does not force Naaman to do what He wants. He allows Naaman to act according to his own intentions and draws him slowly using various agents. There is no overwhelming evidence or certainty, no rendering of man into an automaton. Even Elisha's word is nonsensical to him; Naaman can therefore choose to not listen to it. This is precisely why Elisha does not appear. Naaman must decide for himself based upon the words of a few servants that seemingly tie themselves together, but can also be dismissed or ignored as coincidence or foolishness. This is the mysterious presentation of the gospel that leaves room for the will of man. This is God's tremendous respect for the liberty of those He loves.

But now we inquire of the seven times Naaman washes himself in the Jordan. What is the depth of his faith at this juncture? Why does he continue to bathe? Or, alternatively, why does he continue to hope? What personal decision does he make after the sixth immersion? It could be the decision to resignedly humor the servants and wash for the seventh time. Or it could be that he believes the waters are something magical; Naaman could be superstitious. Or it could be the very act of faith that heals Naaman. If it were the former, then what causes the healing? The waters of the Jordan? We know such a thing to be untrue because there is nothing magical about the river. It could be the second, but why did it require a seven-fold immersion? What river functions like this? We again recognize that it is not magical. Instead, it is in seeing that the river is quite ordinary that Naaman recalls that he was told by the slave girl at the outset to heed *the word of the man of God*. Therefore, the seventh time is the act of faith for Naaman. He trusts God and is healed of his leprosy by Him.

When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, 'Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.'

But he said, 'As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.'

And he urged him to take it, but he refused. And Naaman said, 'If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no more offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.'

And he said to him, 'Go in peace.'

Full of gratitude, Naaman returns to Elisha to present his statement of faith – his confession. Immediately, we ask the question: What is the depth of Naaman's faith? Evidently, he is enormously thankful, as he beseeches the prophet to accept the gifts. I must say that at this point, we can view Naaman's faith pessimistically or optimistically. Let me simply state that I view him optimistically. On the one hand, he could be making an offering still believing that he can repay God for His grace. Such a thing is of course impossible. Or, he is simply struck by God's sovereignty and love for him. Because of what we see Naaman experience, this is the view I uphold. He recognizes God's generous gift once the eyes of his heart are opened in faith.

Next, Naaman asks for something peculiar: two mules' load of earth so that he can worship God instead of other gods on it when he returns home. 'What is Naaman doing?' we ask. At first glance, it seems that he believes God to be a local God that is attached to the soil of Israel. Naaman has a diminished view of Jehovah and asks for enough soil to build a plot of land to build an altar for sacrificing. Perhaps he thinks if he can carry the soil, he can carry Jehovah; he can be viewed as superstitious. Well intentioned as it may be, we may add, this is an affront to God. His conversion to the true Lord has not stripped him of his cultural background and assumptions.

But Naaman does indeed recognize God and His mercy. He is impressed by the power of this God. He is also surely struck by the difference in the actions of Elisha and those of all the other magicians he has known. And he is convinced that God does not want to be worshiped except on the soil of this land. He believes that a sacrifice offered to God on other soil will not be pleasing to Him. We would comment that that is a silly idea. But the text does not tell us that Elisha corrects or condemns Naaman, nor does it tell us that Elisha offers him a lesson in theology. Instead, he allows Naaman to subvert the ideas of his culture to the worship of God.

Naaman makes a concrete stand against his idolatrous society in the best way that he knows how. This is how God's presence transforms the believer even while it leaves him or her in the world. Naaman uses the most blatant customs and traditions of his society to attest to his break from it and to his new allegiance with the Eternal God. 'The soil of Syria is not worthy to contain the worship of the one true God.' This is an affront to Naaman's

culture. And it is scathing. This is something from which we can learn: identify, then cast aside or subvert the wayward values of our society to honor God. Naaman's absurdity is accepted by God because it pleases Him.

Still the story becomes more interesting. Naaman asks Elisha to grant him pardon for continuing to enter the house of the worship of Rimmon. Naaman knows that this god is a false god. He recognizes that this behavior--bowing down before an idol--is sinful. He knows that even though he has made a break with his culture, his public position demands this act. He is required by his master the king to do this, even though it places him in conflict with his allegiance to God. And when he accompanies his liege, Naaman knows that he will appear to be worshipping Rimmon. Wait, we interrupt, Naaman is taking the easy way out! Naaman intends to go home but we do not see any of the characteristics of the new believer. He does not intend to witness. He demonstrates no burning desire to convert his king. Instead, he remains in the state in which he was called (1 Corinthians 7: 20), and in full honesty, admits that he will sin. Hence, before Elisha, Naaman throws himself upon the mercies of God.

We are confronted by an attitude that we are not accustomed to seeing and again we question his faith. We are perhaps more familiar with seeing a new believer filled with zeal. We expect such a one to make an effort to learn Christian terms and to become a part of the fellowship of the brethren. This may be how we evaluate a new believer. If this behavior at least is not exhibited, some doubt is cast as to his or her faith and salvation. And so it is with Naaman. In fact, his attitude seems to be one of compromise. Naaman justifies his conformity to societal pressures by pointing to his inward reality. It is a simple-minded tactic, this doing of one thing and saying of another.

Are we, however, any less guilty than Naaman? Are we not susceptible to an easy reconciliation between two realities? For example, is it really serving God to do what the world expects of us and pass it off by saying that by doing such and such we are actually serving the Lord? Just participating in our world means that to some extent, we behave according to a value system that opposes God. Christ calls us to befriend, to lay down our lives, and to submit to one another. The world teaches us to defend, to be self-sustaining, and to compete against one another. When I pray to do well, am I not praying for someone else to do poorly? By whose value system are we truly living as shown by how we spend the majority of our time and even what we pray for?

Thus, are we certain that we have identified all the idols? We accuse Naaman of not allowing God to be Lord over all his life, but if we were to peer deeply into our own hearts and acknowledge the things that we do not allow God to be Lord over, what would we find? What about insisting on that particular career, aspiring for more education, earning more money, or gaining social status? We accuse Naaman of serving some other god. Then what about the advancement of science, the growth of technology, the triumph of democracy, the political causes of one's own people, etc. Each of these competes for our allegiance and tempts us to conclude that God can be served while (and even because!) we pursue these things. Do we have the same discernment as the Syrian general? When we serve idols, do we have the honesty to admit that they are idols? We would consider Naaman's request to be reprehensible. To the contrary, Naaman is noteworthy in that he does not seek inner reconciliation. He sees the contradiction between his belief and his action. He recognizes that he cannot serve God and Mammon at once. He knows that God calls him to seek Him and His kingdom only, yet understands that as long as he participates in his society, he must entertain certain practices that are not pleasing to God. Yet he does not do what we often do. He does not compromise God's identity by synthesizing Rimmon and God. Nor does he compromise God's will by saying that when he serves his king faithfully, he will be in fact serving God. Instead, in defending God's integrity, the general does the only thing left available to him. Naaman condemns himself.

Integrity is at issue. Naaman appeared to be a compromising new believer who just wanted to escape the responsibility of following God. We might have said that Naaman, having for so long been a man of politics, knows how to maneuver the situation so it best fits him. And thus he unscrupulously plays on God's grace to excuse himself. Certainly it seems this way at first glance. But could it be otherwise? Naaman knows that the call to obedience is radical. He knows the real implications of following his new Lord. And because he is a man of loyalty and service before he is a man of politics, Naaman sees the ramifications even more clearly than we do today. All other authorities that he bowed to previously, including his own cultural background, are now enemies that turn him from the course of loving and serving God. So Naaman knows that to ask for forgiveness is the only viable action because he has been left in the world and commissioned by God to go into it holding the Word (John 17:15-18) which he never lives up to. And while he remains in the world for God, he must come face to face with the realization that his behavior will always paint of himself the testimony of a traitor.

Christians have the same mission and we face the same ambiguity in resolving our identity. We carry a book that commands us to regard the status symbols of men to be equivalent to their excrement (Philippians 3:8), to abandon the treasure of this world (Matthew 6: 19), and to reject the use of worldly power (Matthew 5:38-48) in order that we would be free to love God and love and disciple others more fully. Yet we do not. Today, we are more insecure than ever about the world even though Christ commands us to be anxious for nothing. Externally, the pressure is enormous just to survive in our frantic culture. And we, groping for some semblance of internal order

and integrity in our lives, ease our consciences by diminishing the true sacrificial nature of the cross-bearing life. For example, in present day America, we believe that God's will is less about making disciples and more about finding the proper career, improving human civilization via the state or science, and making our society more pleasant for the family. And thus we have less time for actual love. Robert Coleman, in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, correctly observes, 'The church has obviously failed at this point, and failed tragically. There is a lot of talk in the church about evangelism and Christian nurture, but little concern for personal association when it becomes evident that such work involves the sacrifice of personal indulgence.'

Naaman's struggle has been important in helping me understand my own dilemma. God, I believe, has called me to teach in a public high school at some point in my life. I want to do this because of the great opportunity to disciple young people at that age and beyond. In terms of being accessible to people, no place is more fantastic. Yet whose servant will I be as a public high school teacher? Will I be serving Christ or the state? First, there is the issue of curriculum. What can't I teach and what must I teach? Will I be able to present the Bible during school hours, or only during lunch and after school? Second, how much time must I put into teaching regular material? Will this detract from discipling kids and Biblical teaching? And most importantly, by being a high school teacher, what will I be communicating to students about the most important thing in life? Will it be academic success, or following Jesus even at the cost of academic success? My bowing before Rimmon, my servitude to the state and the society, may severely mislead others about God. And thus my only recourse is to condemn my position by pointing this out.

Naaman understands this. He knows the position that his faith, his new loyalty, has placed him in. He describes the situation to Elisha. His life, which was once characterized by unswerving allegiance, will henceforth be one of inner struggle and tension. He has exchanged the burden of leprosy for another. Perhaps his relationship with his wife will be helped, but he knows that there is now more to his life. He perceives his own inability to love God and live as God would have him live. Yet still, Naaman does not ask for inner peace. He does not ask for a way to resolve the conflict because he knows as well as Elisha that there is no solution. It is the situation of every conscientious Christian who takes part in any way in the activity of any society. There is an inescapable pull of loyalties between the Word and the world. And every Christian must deal with the fact that he or she will never be able to live a life of full integrity. An unbeliever may not be a hypocrite because he may have no standards. The Christian is a hypocrite because he claims to live a life according to the Word, yet falls ridiculously short.

However, while Naaman may seem ridiculous (carrying the earth) or compromising (bowing before a false god), he is in truth extraordinary. He breaks publically with everything sacred to his society to the extent that he is able. On the other hand, he accuses himself about remaining in relationship with his king, knowing that his behavior involves wrong. And Naaman asks for forgiveness in advance. But in doing so, Naaman also testifies to God's disapproval of the idols of his society and so testifies against the world. Although I do it, this is wrong. Will God pardon me for this? he asks. Naaman's recognition of this contradiction is a mark of his authentic conversion.

Several observations about Elisha's reply are significant. Elisha does not give Naaman ethical advice, telling him to resign or do otherwise. He does not disclose a solution that will resolve Naaman's inner strife. He does not offer a theological rebuttal to Naaman's requests. No. Elisha leaves Naaman with the responsibility for making his own decision, however Naaman perceives that to be. But he does not allow Naaman to leave empty-handed. Rather, Elisha says, 'Go in peace.'

Elisha declares the blessing of shalom to Naaman. A blessing of the gospel.

Jacques Ellul's conclusion to the passage is quite insightful: 'Elisha, then, gives him the blessing of peace. This means on the one hand that in spite of the tension between his faith and his public acts, peace is made with God. God has made peace and assures him of it. God sees beyond appearances. He knows the reality of the human heart. And since from now on the mighty general is poor in this conflict and penitence, he assures him of his peace. But again, when Elisha says: 'Go in peace,' this implies affirmation of the unity of Naaman's being. In spite of the tension, in spite of the rift between his faith and his conduct, in spite of the accusation his conscience brings against him, Naaman receives attestation that his being is not double, that he is one, that he exists in a unity that transcends the formal unity of the person. Naaman can now be what he is, not without questions and repentance, but whole and entire, a man who is no longer gnawed away by leprosy physically, a man who, resting in the peace of God, ceases to be gnawed away by the idolatry of the state which divides and corrupts the innermost depths of man.'

Go in peace.