

LUKE - Part 17 - Particularly for ... < you > ...

Luke 4:24-27 - ²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

In Luke 4 Jesus describes His ministry to the people of Nazareth through the story of Naaman the Syrian and the widow of Zarephath. We are easily shocked as the same people who were amazed at His teaching suddenly want to kill Him. As we investigate the meaning of the stories though, the angry response of the people becomes understandable and very quickly becomes a mirror showing us that this is still the message we need to hear.

In 2 Kings 5 we find the remarkable story of Naaman the Syrian which gives us an incredible insight in the graciousness of God. Which sounds like great news until we realise that this story of Naaman was like telling the Jews after WW2 that Jesus came and graciously healed and restored Hitler while not dealing with the atrocities of the Jewish people.

Lessons of the Grace of God from Naaman the Syrian:

1. Grace offends our religious upbringing

We live in a world where people look beautiful on the outside but are dying on the inside. Jesus came in the complete opposite attitude. He came with nothing special on the outside but was beautiful on the inside. God wants to deal with us but He does that from the inside out, when we are at our worst God is at his best!

2. Your self sufficiency will not satisfy the deep longings of your heart

Despite Naaman being an incredibly power man, he could not use any of the 3 greatest instruments of power: His **connection**, **power** (strength) or **money** to cure the disease within. Sooner or later God brings us all to the end of our resources to open our eyes to the fact that we need a prophet not a healer. We need to be pointed to God and not to a circumstantial change.

3. God has put us in this city to serve

Through two servants in this story we see incredible examples of serving those around us. From the respect Gehazi shows to Naaman ("My Father") to Naaman's humble servant's attitude in an immensely challenging situation. We can only imagine her thoughts as she washed the blood of her countrymen off the outside of Naaman's breastplate and at the same time washing the blood of her master off the inside. We see grace shine through as she ministers too Naaman in this situation by pointing him to the cure of his disease, even while he is the oppressor of her people.

4. I thought he would surely come out to me? Surely our rivers are just as good?

No matter who you are or where you come from, God will confront your arrogance because man wasn't made for fame. We are all called to meet God in the same way and at the same place and that is humbly at the foot of the cross.

Through Naaman's encounter with the grace of God we see a powerful arrogant army commander transformed. His religious framework is turned upside down, he is confronted with the limitations of his resources and as he is brought to end of himself he finds the grace of God. This grace encounter changes Naaman into a **generous, servant** of God who makes practical changes to how he lives and worships.

The grace of God is simultaneously the most beautiful and the most challenging of Jesus' teachings. Through the correct lens we can understand the peoples response in Luke 4 but in their anger they missed the gracious invitation. As our religious upbringing is confronted and God uses the hard knocks of life to bring us to the end of ourselves **how is the grace God challenging and transforming you into a generous servant?**