

The Danger of Corrupting the Gospel

By Dr. Steve Jones

In this series of articles we've been looking at Luke 4:16-30 and the amazing statement of Jesus that he has fulfilled prophecy given hundreds of years earlier from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. We saw that—at least initially—the Jewish people at the synagogue that Sabbath morning in Nazareth, “spoke well of him.” Jesus goes on to talk at length about two miracles that happened in the Old Testament and the importance of those miracles for what he was proclaiming.

The first miracle happens at a time when the prophet Elijah is sent by God to Zarephath which is in Sidon, to a widow that God had commanded to feed Elijah during a lengthy famine (1 Kings 17). As he arrives at the city, Elijah sees the widow gathering sticks and he calls out to her and says, “Bring me a little water in a vessel so that I can have a drink. Also, bring me a piece of bread because I need something to eat.” The widow responds, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son that we may eat it and die.” Elijah responds, “Don't be afraid. Just go and do just what you said, but first make me a little cake of bread and bring it to me, and then after that make some for you and your son. For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour and the jug of oil will not run out until this famine is over.’” God gave this Gentile woman the faith to believe and the amazingly gracious miracle happened just as Elijah said that it would.

The next story that Jesus shares with those gathered at the Nazareth synagogue is the story of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5). Naaman was a warrior, a commander of the armies of Syria and he was looked on with much favor—but he was also a leper. Now as it happened the Syrians, on one of their raids, had taken a little girl captive from the land of Israel. She was put to work in the service of Naaman's wife. One day the girl said in effect: “Wouldn't it be a good thing if my master, Naaman, could go down and see the prophet who is in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.” When he heard of this, Naaman was excited! He told the king what the little

girl had said and the king sent a gift with Naaman to the king of Israel so that he might consider favorably Naaman's plea for healing. When the prophet Elisha heard that the man had come seeking healing, he told the king of Israel to send Naaman to him so that he may know that there is a prophet of the living God in Israel.

Naaman came with his horses and chariots to the house where Elisha was staying. Elisha didn't even go out to meet him but rather, he sent a messenger and told Naaman to, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River and your flesh shall be restored and you will be clean." At this, Naaman was furious! "I thought that he would come out here and call on the name of the LORD his God and wave his hand and cure me. Why did I have to come all the way down here? Aren't the rivers in Damascus better than all the waters in Israel? Why couldn't I have washed in them and be clean?" As we listen to the words of Naaman, we may hear echoes of our own spiritually destructive complaints. "Why do I have to do what God's word said? Why can't I do things my way?"

Naaman's servants came to him and they said, "Did the prophet actually say to you if you wash you will be clean?" In other words, "Is that all you need to do to be totally cured of this terrible disease?" Naaman came to his senses, went down to the Jordan and dipped himself seven times just as Elisha had said, and the scripture says that, "...his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean."

As we return to the synagogue at Nazareth, the people that day weren't ready to hear that God also shows mercy to those who are not Israelites. Their response to Jesus was that they were "filled with rage!" Collectively, they drove him out of town with the intent of throwing him off of a cliff to his death! But, Jesus evaded their rage that day.

The gospel message has often been corrupted through false belief and teaching. Thankfully, the gospel is for all those who, by grace, repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Salvation in Jesus is not exclusive to any single ethnic group. Unlike the Israelites that day in

Nazareth, may we be truly thankful that the message of the gospel of grace goes out to all people.