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NAAMAN, THE SYRIAN.

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NAAMAN had obtained an unusual share of the honours of this world. He commanded the armies of his sovereign, with whom he was high in favor. He was distinguished for valour and wealth, and deservedly honoured by all his nation, who remembered that in a time of danger he had been the means of their deliverance.

We may also gather that he was an amiable man in private life, and that after appearing in public, or before the king, covered with the honours, and followed by the applause of a whole nation, he could retire within a domestic circle, where his private virtues not merely graced the husband, but made the master beloved by all who served him.

But Naaman was afflicted with an unsightly and incurable disease. He was a leper. And this one thing marred the enjoyment of a life, which, in the opinion of most persons, and perhaps of himself too, was otherwise wanting in nothing to render it completely happy.

But, enviable as his lot, upon the whole, appeared, there were some who would have been sorry to have exchanged theirs for it, even if he had not been a leper. Naaman was a Syrian and an idolater. Although he was "a great man with his master," he was not great with God, and he gave to his idol Rimmon the praise of that deliverance which the Lord alone had enabled him to effect for his country.

C. & S.

Those who are accustomed to look upon sin in the light of a misfortune, rather than as that which, in every human being, deserves the punishment of God, might not think the false religion of Naaman much disparagement to him. They might feel more for the disease of his body than for that of his soul. But let us refer to the Scriptures to see what *God says* of the condition of the Gentiles, of whom this man was one. We find them described as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. ii. 12).

Reader, has it ever occurred to you that it is very possible for a native of *England* (a Gentile by nature as much as Naaman) to live with "no hope, and without God in the world;" that the natural heart may have other idols besides the Syrian Rimmon; and that intellectual and moral qualifications of the highest order, and worldly reputation of the most brilliant kind, may be found in one who is at the same time in the condition described in that verse? Perhaps it has never occurred to you that it really applies to the greater part of the professing Christians of this and of other countries.

If, whatever else you may be, you are yet a stranger to the way of life, the history of the Syrian Naaman may concern you, perhaps, more nearly than you imagine; more especially if you happen to be like him, rich or noble, or distinguished in the world.

There is another reason for inviting you to attend to it. Do you think that there is no analogy between your case and Naaman's, because you profess to be a Christian; and are you displeased at the idea of a parallel between yourself and a Syrian idolater? Perhaps then I can find another more suitable, and remind you of a certain rich man, no idol worshipper, but a professed believer in Moses and the Prophets; no Gentile either, but a son of Abraham; one too against whose worldly character nothing is on record; but of whom we are told that having in his lifetime received his good things, he "died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments" (Luke xvi. 19—31). Can you



see no analogy *here*? Will mere nominal belief in Christ lead men to any other end than this?

But look again at the household of Naaman. A little captive maid out of the land of Israel waits on his wife. She appears to be one of the few who, in Israel even, believed God and his prophets in those days: and she says to her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

So Naaman, provided with a letter from his master to the king of Israel, and with valuable presents, prepares to set out to obtain his cure. Reader! you are not a leper like him, but if a more terrible disease than his cleaves to you, the leprosy of a nature unrenewed, and of sins unforgiven, will you take a seat in Naaman's chariot, and see if there be not a cure for you too from the prophet of Israel?

We are told that Naaman brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." So extraordinary did this message appear to him! But the king relied not on God or his prophet; and a poor maid servant knew more of them than he did. "And it was so, when Elisha, the man of God, had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." Perhaps he did not know that his presence as a leper carried pollution with it to any Israelite. But doubtless there was a further reason why Elisha did not come out to him, but sent a messenger. We are told that Naaman took with him

ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment; but what else had he brought with him?—a heart that needed humbling, self-importance that must be broken down, before he can receive blessing.

But listen to what the messenger is saying; “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean.” A wonderful kind of remedy! and terribly offensive to the dignity of the Syrian noble. “And Naaman was wroth, 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 strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.” We see that the pride of Naaman stood in his way: he wished to be recovered, but in a way that would preserve his self-importance; and he had his own *thoughts* of what the way should be.

But, Reader, here is a message for you also. If you wish to be cleansed from your sins, do you likewise “*wash and be clean.*” But a nobler stream than any of the waters of Israel is flowing at your feet, a stream of precious blood from God’s dear Son. Wash there ONCE and you are cleansed FOR EVER. But what! Are *you* angry too? Then it is probable you also have your *thoughts* on the matter. What are they? What may *your* Abana and Pharpar be? Are you rich, or noble, or talented, and do you disdain to be saved like a servant or a beggar? Do you think one kind of religion suits the cottage, and that God has something more refined and intellectual for the well lighted and carpetted drawing-room? Do you expect to be saved by your good works? God says of the children of men—“There is none that doeth good, no not one” (Ps. xiv. 2, 3; Rom. iii. 10—12). Do you think to be saved in part by them? How can this be if you are *by nature* (to say nothing of your practice) a child of wrath even as others (Eph. ii. 3). If you

are "dead in trespasses and sins" only a complete Saviour can quicken you (Eph. ii. 1).

But perhaps you think you are too great a sinner, and must first amend yourself? The Word of God says, "When we were yet *without strength*, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. v. 6). Christ is either everything or nothing to a man. His blood, whenever trusted in, cleanses from all sin. Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15). Do you think, however, you must pray, or have faith first? When God says, Wash, and be clean, are you thinking of your prayers? What! *you* pray, who cannot trust God for the pardon of your sins! And can you possibly have faith whilst you refuse to obey? does not faith take God at his word? But do you think you must first *feel* differently to what you do now, because of the insensibility and coldness of your heart? You will never feel happy *before* you have washed. You want to make a saviour of your *feelings*. But once more.—Does your love of the world or of sin keep you back? Are you after all not *in earnest*? Will you also turn and go away with Naaman? Like him, are you *too proud to be happy*?

"The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Ps. xciv. 11). The thoughts of Naaman about his cure had well nigh kept him a leper to the day of his death. Take care that *your* thoughts about the salvation of your soul do not cause you to lose it for ever. In short, *think* what you may, "he that *believeth not* God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John v. 10).

But "Naaman's servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" Memorable words indeed! Men's minds are ever bent on *doing* something, and often great things, for their salvation: but what *has God done*? That is the question. Then Naaman "went down, and dipped him-

self seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Wonderful things had taken place in Jordan before now (Josh. iv. ; 2 Kings ii. 7, 8), but never yet had its waters been known to cure leprosy, and never more did a poor Syrian leper find in them such healing virtue. Yea, "Many lepers were *in Israel* in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke iv. 27). But would you see what the blood of Christ has done?—"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.... And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white *in the blood of the Lamb*. Therefore are they **BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD**" (Rev. vii. 9, 14, 15). Do you *really* wish to be found among them? Then, dear fellow-sinner, trust in *nothing* else—renounce your thoughts—wash, and be clean.

And Naaman "returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Striking contrast! A little while ago it was, "Behold, *I thought*:" now he says, "Behold, *I know*." It was indeed a *fact* that Naaman was clean. He did not *think* about it; he did not *hope* it; he *knew* it. And every one who is washed in the blood of Christ should be able to say, "*I know* I am saved." Scripture never countenances the false humility which would substitute doubts and uncertainty for this blessed "*I know*." "These things have I written unto you, that *ye may know* that *ye have* eternal life" (1 John v. 13). "*We know* that we are of God" (v. 19). When you know this, there are many other precious things to be known; but God teaches them to his children on the ground of their knowing him as their Father. Surely this is not presumption. Naaman is

presumptuous when he *reasons* about the message : not when he speaks in grateful acknowledgment of its truth.

And in gratitude he now urges the prophet to accept a present. But if Elisha had valued gold at any time, *this* was not the time to receive it (verse 26). Naaman shall return with all the treasure he brought; his wealth shall have no place in this matter; he shall feel, and all Israel and Syria shall know, that he was healed "without money and without price" (Is. lv. 1). So, eternal life is now offered to you, Reader, as the free "gift of God" (Rom. vi. 23).

"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." He now knows the only true God, and desires to be one of his worshippers. And when you know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, and so have *life* in you (John xvii. 3), you too may *worship*. There is no altar now but in the holiest, that is, in heaven itself; and it is only by the blood of Jesus that you can enter there (Heb. x. 19); Jesus is the only altar on which offerings can be made to God. No worship is acceptable now, but that which is in spirit and in *truth* (John iv. 23). If you have not believed in the *sacrifice* of Christ, you have no interest in his *priesthood*; you have never stood within the holiest, but, like the woman of Samaria (John iv. 22), have been worshipping you know not what.

But Naaman has something further to say. Let us hear it,—“In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon : when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.” He has not only a new heart, but an awakened *conscience*. And what a wide field for the exercise of *conscience* is opened to the converted sinner! *All* his thoughts, habits, and ways, are now subjected to a test he never knew of, or applied to them

before. He is ever asking himself, Does this please *the Lord*? Naaman doubts how far this compliance may be right. His master of course would be unable to understand his scruples, and he would perhaps risk all his worldly good by refusing to accompany him more to the house of Rimmon? Cannot the prophet relieve him? Rather let Naaman decide for himself: and in words that neither sanction his compliance, nor impel him to act beyond his own actual faith and conscience, Elisha answers, "Go in peace."

And could a more precious word than this have closed their interview? Dear Reader, the Gospel offers to *you* "*peace* by Jesus Christ" (Acts x. 36). "He came and preached *peace* to you (Gentiles) which were afar off" (Eph. ii. 17). To all who rest on the finished work of his dear Son, God is the "*God of peace*." May he make this tract the messenger of life to your soul. You will be able then to praise, with all the people of God, "Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. i. 5). Then you also may take to yourself the comfort of the parting words of the prophet: in the possession of a "*peace that passeth all understanding*" (Phil. iv. 7), *you* will then rejoice with Naaman and all God's ransomed family, for a greater than Elisha bids you "Go in peace."

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