

## 2 Kings 5:1-14

### Should we be grateful for pain?

**1. Be grateful for pain that causes us to flee to God.**

**2. Be grateful to our God who takes that pain away.**

Have you ever thanked God for pain? That might seem like an odd question. We have so much to be thankful for, why would pain be one of the things for which we are grateful? Although this seems to be an odd question, this is the very issue that we will consider as we look at our lesson for today. Would there ever be a reason that we would give thanks to God for pain?

In both our Old Testament reading and in the gospel lesson we hear about men who were suffering from the disease of leprosy. Now, what was leprosy? Most people conclude that it was some sort of skin disease. From the biblical accounts of leprosy we know that it was the source of physical, emotional, and social misfortune. A person was considered unclean because of unsightly sores or scales or flakes on their skin. They were often separated from the rest of society, and there seemed to be no cure at that time.

Some speculate that leprosy was a more than a plague against the skin. They describe leprosy as bacterial infection that affected both the skin and the nerves. Some claim that a person with leprosy could not register pain correctly and therefore those stricken with the disease would inadvertently and repeatedly burn or injure themselves, leaving their skin badly damaged. A hand would grab onto some hot metal and not let go or leg would remain near an open flame for too long. A limb would be cut or burned, scratched or injured, and the injury would go unnoticed and left unattended so that a serious infection or an unsightly mark would be left. This theory of the absence of pain as a result of nerve problems is one of the sad side-effects that have been diagnosed and reported with more modern day cases of what is known as leprosy.

Although the concept of the lack of pain would seem to be a blessing, on the contrary it seems that the lack of pain was actually a troubling symptom of this terrible disease, and that lack of pain brought even more trouble to the one who infected. The sensation of pain is something needed and very necessary to keep a person from further suffering. Our hand shoots back when we touch something that is hot. We quickly move away from the fire when we are too close for comfort. We are bothered by that wound so we treat that scratch in order that a much more painful infection is prevented.

And so after this explanation we may see the need for the physical sensation of pain, but what about emotional pain or trouble? Could you ever think of a situation in life that emotional pain was a cause for gratitude?

For a few moments consider the following scenarios. Perhaps at one time or another in your life you have had one of those aha or wake-up call moments in life. You were going the wrong way in life and you brought pain to yourself and to those around you but somehow while you were in that pain God's love was shown to you and God's love touched and changed your life. And then in that moment and in the moments that followed you were able to look back and with a certain clarity you realized that in a way all that pain was for your good. You could find the silver lining. You could see at least a glimpse of the good that God worked from the bad in your life.

Or maybe you lost someone, someone close, and it was extremely difficult at the time, but in that moment you leaned on your God more than you had in a while. In your pain you were drawn near to your Lord and Savior, and later it turned out that you were able to bring comfort to someone who was in a similar situation. You were able to share your faith with this person and your faith and their faith in Jesus was strengthened. You might have even found yourself wondering if this was why God allowed you to suffer. You wondered if this was at least part of the reason that God had allowed such pain to touch your life; so that you could be a source of comfort and love and strength and faith for someone else who needed it so badly.

Or there was a moment in your life when things just seemed to be going so well. You were set in life. You had respect at home and at work. You were comfortable except for one thing, one sudden illness, one problem, one ailment, one nagging issue that kept you humble, that sent you to your knees in prayer to your God of mercy and compassion.

This morning I want you to consider that statement that at first blush seems so strange and so foreign: "Thank God for pain." We of course recognize that this is certainly that is a statement that begs for clarification, so we will add to that sentiment these thoughts. **Be grateful for pain that causes us to flee to God. Be grateful to our God who takes that pain away.**

Naaman was a man that by all accounts fell into that last category that I mentioned. Everything was going well for him. He was a commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded. We are told that he was a valiant soldier. Naaman was set in life. He was well liked. He had money and success and respect, but there was this one nagging issue that seemed to throw a wrench into everything. After this long list of shining accomplishments, the last phrase in the first verse of 2 Kings chapter 5 reads this way, ***"He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy."***

But he had leprosy... Looking at Naaman's story as a whole, it is rather easy to see that God would use this problem to bring a proud man to humble himself before the Lord. God would use this issue, this thorn in Naaman's flesh, to create an

opportunity to bring Naaman to faith. Without this pain a young girl may have never had a chance to confess her trust in her Lord. A servant girl may have never sent her master to seek out God's prophet. Without this pain of leprosy Naaman may have never made time for the Lord. Without this pain Naaman may have never made the journey, never called out for mercy or help from the servant of the Lord. Without this pain Naaman may have never truly trusted in the Lord. He may have been aware of the God of Israel, he may have seen God as a good luck charm that brought him victories and personal success, but he may have never believed in him as he did after that young girl shared her faith and the LORD God cleansed him of his leprosy.

Our pain can bring us from being prideful and arrogant and instead cause us to trust in God more deeply. How often when things are going well at home and at work and in our life, how often aren't we tempted to ignore our God? In our pleasure, when things are going so smoothly, we might reason that there is really no reason to call on God; there is no pressing need for me to come to him in prayer; there is nothing that would necessitate that I lean on him or put my trust in him. Such human arrogance and pride is found in all of us, and we need that purged from our life.

At times that means being challenged by God's Word. Like the prophet challenged Naaman's pride by not coming out to him and having a servant tell him to wash in the Jordan, so too God's Word often cuts through our pride and arrogance and challenges us. God's Word reminds us of our sin. It shows us that we aren't as well off as we think we are. It shows us that we are needier than we appear to be; that we shouldn't be arrogant or proud, that we have no basis to be demanding of God, for we are sinners.

Sometimes we are challenged by God's Word on this and we may not like it much. God's Word tells us to come in him in humility and we come with pride and arrogance. We insist that he help us on our terms. We insist that things go just as we had planned, without pain, without trouble; and when God has other plans we may storm off in anger, we may refuse to listen. But in his Word he gives us a message that what we need to hear. We are not to come to God on our terms, but we must come on his.

However, with that said, our Lord is rich in mercy. He sees us in our trouble and he has compassion on us and cares for us. This does not mean that he will always give us whatever we may desire, but he will do what is best for our eternal good. To purge us of our pride we may be challenged by God's Word or we may be challenged by our circumstance in life. God may allow pain or frustration or trouble or even sorrow into our life to help us see how badly we need him. And so this is an axiom, or a truism, that applies to you and to me, and to all of us that are so prone to sinful pride, that without pain, without trouble we may forget about or ignore how much we need God and his help. There are also plenty of times that we are like that man in the gospel lesson. We may call out to God, he may hear our prayer and take away our pain, and

then we may just run off and forget the command and the will of the one who helped us.

And so there are several reasons to be thankful even for our pain and suffering. Such pain can prevent us from further much more terrible pain. Earthly pain may prevent us from eternal pain and suffering as it leads us to lean on God and trust in him through this life and onto eternal life. Pain and suffering may lead us to see how much we need God, it may push us to lean on and rely on God. Our troubles and problems may be seen as beneficial because such troubles can help us empathize and sympathize with and comfort others. The strength that we find in Christ, the strengthening of our faith through trial, as we trust in the LORD to help us and save us, this may have a positive impact on the lives of those around us. We may have an opportunity to share word of comfort and with those around us and the Holy Spirit working through these words may lead them to turn to their God and trust in him.

And so while we have so much joy that comes from God for which we can be thankful, we can also rightly add pain to the list of things for which we can be thankful. We can be grateful **for that pain which causes us to flee to God. And we can be grateful to our God who takes that pain away.** As the Lord directs us in the psalms, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me.*

The Lord delivered Naaman in his day of trouble and Naaman would honor the Lord. In his compassion God saw fit to take away Naaman's leprosy. He healed him and blessed him with restored health. He brought joy and faith to Naaman through this trial. In his compassion the Lord sees us in our trouble and distress and he has compassion on us. He has mercy on us and he hears our cry for help. In his goodness our Lord may very well take that burden away. He may even do this for you immediately, suddenly, miraculously. Or he may wait. He may wait to bring relief in order to strengthen you and bring you closer to him through this pain or problem. Or that trouble may remain throughout your life so that others may see the strength that God's Word brings to your life throughout this period of suffering and pain.

In his wisdom and love God may use pain and suffering to work out for our eternal good as well as the good of others and for that we praise him. But above all we praise and thank our God for coming to this world of pain and sorrow to keep us from eternal pain. We praise and thank the one who has cleansed us from our sin and watches over us and cares for us in his wisdom. In pain and suffering, in joy and happiness, and in all situations of life may we fall before our God in worship and praise, saying, *"Cleanse me from my sin and in your wisdom guide me and help me and lead me."* And in faith we are grateful to the one who hears our prayers. We are grateful for the one who is so powerful that he can take away our pains and relieve our sorrows. We are grateful to the one who is so wise that he can make all things work out for the good of those who love him. Ultimately in faith we praise and serve our God because we know that our Lord and Savior will one day take all our pain away when he brings us to the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.