

## Notes on 2 Kings 5 : 1–19 ‘Taking the King’s Shilling the Naaman Way’

How was your experience of ‘Freedom Day’? Was it different to last week, last month or even last year? On ‘Freedom Day’ I was at Calow Hospital with Charlie for an appointment and there was no change at all, but when I went to Sainsbury’s I went in the wrong door just for the sheer fun of it!! ‘Freedom Day’ is ‘Naaman’s Day’ as it is a day when he was set free from his leprosy, his pride, the idols that had enslaved him and the folly of his arrogance. Naaman’s story is a story of discovering what ‘Freedom Day’ is truly all about and that strange and incomprehensible culmination of his request for mule loads of mud!! ‘Freedom Day’ is the heart and soul of the pool and it is as dramatic and as comprehensive for George and Gill as the river was for Naaman. But the pool is not just for Gill and George, it is an invitation to us all to discover what ‘Freedom Day’ in Jesus is all about too.

‘Freedom Day’ was also disturbing. It was the day when celebrities were able to return to their party circuit and being photographed in all their glitz and glamour for us to see. Naaman was very familiar with such glitz and glamour but in verse 14 the astonishing pictures the paparazzi could have taken would have given a very different meaning to glitz and glamour. These pictures of Naaman would have been of him standing wet all over in his birthday suit in the river Jordan and the play of words here in verse 14 would have made a fantastic headline. As you read this verse can you feel Naaman’s buzz of joy, his exuberance, his awe and wonder at the shock of his being made clean, whole, restored and renewed. Naaman’s experience though is not unique. Countless millions have experienced and known a similar joy, exuberance, awe and wonder in the discovery that in Jesus their sins have been forgiven, that their life has been made new and whole and that now they have been given hope, purpose and love in Jesus. This is what the splash in the pool is all about. As George and Gill are baptised this is what the pool celebrates and declares to be completely true; which is why we use so much water, because it wants to say so much.

The unseen play on words in verse 14 (which is, “his skin was restored and became like the skin of a small boy”) echoes verse 2 and the description of the Israelite girl there. In verse 2 she is described as someone who is innocent, trusting and whole and she bravely takes the opportunity to confess her God as the one who alone is alive and able to heal her master. In verse 14 Naaman becomes just like her and in verse 15 he himself confesses this God as the only God and his determination to turn his back on idols. His confession is not just about numbers though, that is that there is only one God, it also describes his desire to embrace this one God’s story as the Creator, the Promise and Purpose giver given to Abraham, the God of the Exodus, the Covenant and the Promised Land as his own. This confession is not only a matter of belief, it is also one of lifestyle too and like Elisha and the servant girl Naaman wishes to live out his God given vocation of being a means of God’s blessing to all. This unseen pun points to the pool and asks Gill and George is this is your confession, is this who you are and is this how you want to live too?

This brings me to Naaman’s seemingly very odd request in verse 17 for mule loads of mud!! This does not only reflect the Ancient Near East’s understanding that gods were territorial and so if you wished to follow a different god you had to

then bring some of their physical home with you too. This request demonstrates Naaman's utter commitment to be faithful to this life changing God. He wants to live a life of true discipleship as he follows and obeys this God in all of his life, which for him includes a definite political expression to it too. For George and Gill, it would be like them taking a phial of this water with them and carrying it around their necks to remind them of this moment. But they don't need to do this because this is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In baptism he meets us in the pool that we may know in our hearts that what baptism describes is truly true and he lives in us to help us live out day by day our following of Jesus. Or, as the sermon title says, to live our lives in the light of our taking the King's Shilling.

VE Day and VJ Day were like 'Freedom Day' but on steroids as they celebrated the leaving behind of violence and hatred and a whole host of wartime limitations such as rationing. They celebrated a new beginning of a world made new and this is what the pool says too. It invites all of us to know this in our lives whether for the first time, or the hundredth time. It invites us to know Jesus' 'Freedom Day' in our lives because this is the best 'Freedom Day' of all.

### Questions 2 Kings 5 : 1–19 'Taking the King's Shilling the Naaman Way'

- 1 Why is 'Freedom Day' such a good description of the story of Naaman and why is it also such a good description of baptism?
- 2 When you read verse 14 what comes to your mind as Naaman was restored as Elisha had promised?
- 3 What is your own experience of knowing your sins being forgiven?
- 4 What does it mean for Naaman to confess that there is no God in all the world except in Israel? Why is it more than just a matter of maths?
- 5 What does it mean for us to say there is no God in all the world except the God who is the Father of Jesus and Jesus is his Son?
- 6 Why does Naaman ask for mule loads of mud? What does this say about his determination to follow God in all his life.
- 7 How does Naaman's request for muleloads of mud describe the ministry of the Spirit in helping us follow Jesus in all our lives?
- 8 Why is Jesus' 'Freedom Day' the best 'Freedom Day' of all?