

Salvation Is A Gift From God

Sometimes our greatest strengths are our greatest weaknesses. The bible describes Naaman with two phrases. He was an **אִישׁ גָּדוֹל**. He was a big man. And he was a **גִּבּוֹר חַיִל**. He was a powerful leader. These were his strengths. And he used these strengths to his advantage. When he went out to battle his power and his strength were his greatest friends. But, as brave and powerful and strong as he was. No amount of courage and strength could defeat the disease that infected his body. He had leprosy. And so, when he heard that there was a man who could heal him, he went to find him. He took mass amounts of gold and silver and expansive clothing along with him. With these he would buy a cure to his leprosy. He goes to the house of Elisha. He knocks on the door. And what happens next? Elisha doesn't even answer the door. Instead, he sends his servant to Naaman with a message. The servant tells him to wash in the Jordan river seven times and he would be healed. Naaman heard the words. But he was insulted. After all, he was a *big man* and a *powerful warrior*. He expected a big show because he was such a big man. He expected Elisha to call on the name of the LORD and wave his hands in the air. But, Elisha didn't. So Naaman took all of his gold and silver and servants and left to go off by himself and pout.

Naaman wanted a complex cure. He wanted to approach God *his way*. He wanted to buy what the LORD was giving to him as a simple gift. After all, the message of the bible is pretty simple. The bible speaks to us a simple message. It tells us that when we were born we were not really good, or kind of good, or a little good. No, we were completely evil. And there is nothing we can do to get into heaven. Now, there are many people out there who *try* to get into heaven their own way. Some think that if they feel bad enough and decide to let Jesus into their heart, then God will do his part and forgive them. But this is not true. Likewise there many out there who work so hard, doing good things, in order to appease God. But, all of the things they make up to get on God's good side do not take away their sin. What the bible says is very simple. When you were born, you were full of sin. And what is the result of sin? Death is the result. Charlene was a sinner. She was God's enemy and she showed it throughout her life. How do we know? She died. And Sam and Barb, how many times and in how many different ways did your mother show you that simple, brutal fact, that you were sinners too?

The simple message of the bible is that we are born evil and we earn death and hell for ourselves. No effort of decision or work will change that fact. No, instead, Jesus comes with a different, simple gift. What we could never earn with our hearts or our minds or our hands, Jesus gives to us as a free gift. That is the gift that Naaman received. He finally went into the river Jordan. He went in hoping to find a cure to the disease of his sin. He came out finding a cure to the disease of his soul. For, if the LORD could take away leprosy, he could also save Naaman from death.

Such a simple gift it was that the LORD gave to Naaman. But it was also a powerful gift. Charlene was baptized long ago. And, if we looked at her in her last days, it might seem that whatever her baptism did for her when she was young didn't last when she was old. Because, if we were looking for her to prove to God that she deserved to be in heaven, in her last years, she could never have done it. She could never have been happy enough or sad enough or intelligent enough to earn salvation for herself. In fact, just several months ago, I visited her a day or two after Easter. I asked her what great holiday we had just celebrated. And she said: "I don't know." I reminded her that on this day Jesus rose from the dead proving that all our sins were paid for. Then, she told me "Who is Jesus?" How could she get into heaven if she didn't even remember who Jesus was? And that's exactly the point. She could do nothing to earn salvation. But in her baptism Jesus put all the salvation he had won for her into her heart. It was a simple gift. But it was also a powerful gift. It was the sort of gift that forgave her sin, even when she didn't feel like her sins were forgiven. It was the sort of gift that made her a child of God even when she didn't feel like a child of God. It was the sort of gift which held her trust in Jesus even when her mind returned to the little girl she grew up from. For this gift is so powerful that it can bring infants out of hell and put them in God's kingdom. This gift of salvation is so powerful that even when she has forgotten Jesus in her mind, Jesus will never forget her.

Sam and Barb, I don't speak these words to you because they are new. You know your mother is in heaven

because you have the same gift of salvation that she has in her baptism. You are a child of God. No, I speak these words to you to encourage you. You spoke of your mother making sure that you were in church every Sunday. You spoke of her great love for her Savior and her faithful life. My question for you is as simple and powerful as the gift of salvation you hold in your hearts: Will you continue to hold on to this gift? Will you gather together with your brothers and sisters in Christ to grow with them in faith? Will you gather with them to study God's word? For Satan will make the way to heaven complex with lies and he will water down the powerful gift of salvation he has given to you. Continue to grow in your faith and run your race. Your mother finished her race and now you follow after her. And I know that you will not run off the track, but follow in her footsteps.

Lastly, I speak to those of you who do not have a church home or those of you who may have been away from church for a long time. Now is the time to see this gift as Naaman and Charlene did. There is nothing you could feel or do to get to heaven. You are a sinner. But, what you could never do for yourself Jesus did for you. He took away your evil thoughts, words and actions. He forgave them all. And he gives this salvation to you as a free and powerful gift. Find a church that preaches about this simple and powerful gift. And then then serve the LORD for the rest of your life and forever in heaven. Amen.