

Sunday 10th April 2016 AM - Sin like leprosy - 2 Kings 5

Title: Sin like leprosy - 2 Kings 5

Purpose: To look at the biblical picture of leprosy as something that represents SIN.

INTRODUCTION

Car crashes

Back in 2009 the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety celebrated its 50th anniversary, they are an organisation that specialises in conducting crash tests to improve upon car safety. And for their 50th anniversary they took a 1959 Chevrolet and a 2009 Chevrolet and crashed them at 40mph front on with a 40% overlap.

I want to show you a brief video clip of that controlled car crash - shown in the obligatory SLOW MOTION accompanied with a nice Mozart Serenade!:

***** PLAY VIDEO CLIP *****

And it is not unusual that we come to see clips like these as part of a CAMPAIGN to stop us driving:

- PERHAPS while tired
- OR under the influence
- OR doing things like txting at the wheel

The approach of these short bits of footage is by way of using **SHOCK TACTICS**.

Q. So why is that necessary?

Well simply because we think:

- that these things will **never happen to us**
- that life, the ordinary normal life that we all lead, **is basically not like that**

SIN - shocking thing

I want to say something about SIN - and I don't know what you "**gut reaction**" OR "**first impression**" will be to this:

BUT ==> "SIN, as the Bible depicts it, is **not unlike a human CAR CRASH.
IT IS, a CAR CRASH, **sure enough**, only one that takes place **IN SLOW MOTION**."**

Now you might feel well:

- Q. Surely that's a tad DRAMATIC isn't it? Q. To liken SIN to a CAR CRASH?
- Q. Is it not just hyping it up? Q. Veering badly to the OVER-SENSATIONAL side?

Well one reason why we might feel that SIN has nothing whatsoever to compare it to a CAR CRASH spiritually, comes down to our language, to the words we usually use in connection with SIN.

Bible Answer Man - Hank Hanegraaff

Years ago I used to love listening to a man on the radio by the name of Hank Hanegraaff - he had a Radio Programme

called "The Bible Answer Man" and people would ring in with the various questions.

And I'm sure I learned a lot just listening to the way in which he carefully, methodically AND biblically answered people's questions. He was very good.

And one particular phrase that he would use, from time to time, which I thought was quite clever was: "**TERMINOLOGICAL INEXACTITUDE**" (apparently Winston Churchill was the first person to use this back in 1906).

In essence what he was saying was that wrong thinking was occurring BECAUSE people weren't using the right, or the most accurate terms to identify or describe things.

And this can be a bit of a problem when it comes to us thinking about SIN.

A brief exercise

So let's do a brief exercise to maybe illustrate this a bit.

Now for the purposes of this exercise I am going to assume that we accept the Bible's proposition that all have sinned and all, therefore, fall short of the glory (or the perfect standard) of God.

- When you think of yourself as a SINNER, you accept that you FAIL
BUT: Q. Do you see yourself as a CRIMINAL?

Q. Are your SINS in the category of FAILINGS or CRIMES?

- When you think of yourself as a SINNER, you accept that you do WRONG
BUT: Q. Do you see yourself as a REBEL?

Q. Do your SINS fit in the category of ERRORS or MISTAKES OR in the category of REBELLION against God?

You see how important our terminology is when we talk about SIN.

Maybe when you speak of SIN in connection to your own or other people's lives::

- you say things like "that's BAD" - BUT NOT - "that's DISGUSTING"
- you say, "well this SIN is DISAPPOINTING" - BUT NOT - "this is GRIEVOUS" or "this is a TRAGEDY"

Today - another metaphor - LEPROSY

Now today we are picking up another metaphor or picture for SIN - one that is drawn for us PRIMARILY IN THE OT - and it is that SYMBOL of LEPROSY.

A quick RECAP

This new symbol is going to take us on from the one we looked at last Sunday - where the symbol was that of YEAST or LEAVEN - and you may recall that we made **3 simple connections from this Bible picture of SIN:**

- **FIRST - that "Sin is hidden"** - it goes on underneath the surface, it is internal, a matter of the heart, it is our attitudes, our intentions, our thoughts.
- **SECOND - that "Sin goes everywhere"** - it goes right the way through the spiritual dough of our lives, it is a lot more comprehensive than we might think and therefore we have to be a lot more serious in the killing of the

sin within.

- **THIRD - that "Sin destroys sweetness"** - yeast converts all sweetness, all sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide and so sin, in like manner, will be degrees remove all the sweetness that should be an aspect of your spiritual portion.

Leprosy - background

In the Bible, the word for *leprosy* (or its related words: leper, leprous etc.) is mentioned nearly 70 times:

- In the Old Testament, the instances of leprosy most likely meant a variety of infectious skin diseases, and the Hebrew word (tsara'ath) is even used to refer to **mold** and **mildew** on clothing and walls.
- The precise meaning of the leprosy in both the Old and New Testaments is still in dispute, but it **probably includes** the modern-day **Hansen's disease** along with other infectious skin diseases.

Leprosy was common in Bible times, and one of the main reasons why leprosy is talked about so much in the Bible, (especially in the OT), is that:

- it is a **graphic illustration of sin's DESTRUCTIVE power**
- in ancient Israel leprosy was **a powerful object lesson of the DEBILITATING & RUINING influence of sin in a person's life**

Leviticus 13&14

The chapters that have the most to say about leprosy in the Bible are there in Leviticus 13&14. Between them they have half of all the mentions of this subject.

And I want to read probably the most devastating of the verses - which are there in

(Leviticus) Chapter 13 and Verses 45 and 46:

"The person with such an infectious disease must wear **torn clothes**, let his **hair be unkempt**, **cover the lower part of his face** and **cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'** As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. **He must live alone**; he must **live outside the camp.**"

Just itemizing those things to get something of the force:

- you are a "**MARKED MAN**":
 - you have to wear **TORN CLOTHES** - *not* exactly a fashion statement!
 - you have to let your **HAIR GO EVERYWHERE** - again, *not* the latest "in-style"!
 - you have to wear **A FACE-MASK** - again - can't be particularly fetching or even comfortable

and just in case that lot won't get you noticed:

- you have to **SHOUT AT PEOPLE** whenever they come your way saying: "Unclean! Unclean!"

As well as being a "MARKED MAN"

- you are a "**STRANDED MAN**":

- you have to **LIVE ALONE** AND if that is not isolating enough
- you have to **LIVE OUTSIDE THE CAMP** - away from everyone else in the community

Leprosy, as you can see, is pretty bad - your immediately MARKED OUT and STRANDED.

Jewish List of 61 Defilements

The Jews around Jesus' time had a lot of laws that had been passed on orally and also other laws that had been put down in writing in the Talmud and they had **a list of 61 things** that brought **DEFILEMENT** to a person.

At the very top of the list of defilements was death - and any contact with a dead body BUT next down the list was that of LEPROSY.

Beyond death itself - LEPROSY was that KILLER thing that could INVADE and INFECT a persons life.

Naaman - 2 Kings 5

Well the story that we had read for us a little earlier on was from **2 Kings 5** and the connection is an obvious one because here we have a man by the name of **Naaman** who contracts this KILLER disease of LEPROSY:

2 Kings 5 verse 1 "Now **Naaman** was **commander of the army** of the king of Aram. He was **a great man** in the sight of his master and **highly regarded**, because through him the LORD had given **victory** to Aram. He was **a valiant soldier**, **BUT** he had leprosy."

Small words - significant "BUT"

We've often seen before that "small words" in Scripture can be particularly revealing and here in this opening verse of the chapter we have that rather unfortunate BUT at the end of the sentence: "BUT he had leprosy."

You could hardly have a better CV than this person **Naaman** had:

- he had an important, high-level job - Commander of the army for the Arameans or Syrians (that's another name for them).
- as far as the King was concerned he was a great man
- as for those below him (which was pretty well everyone) - he was highly regarded
- he had a victorious track record
- and as for his own character he was brave - truly valiant in battle

It appears from **verse 18** that his role was not restricted to solely military matters - he was, it would seem, the no. 2 person in the Kingdom next to the King - kind of like a prime minister - evidently a key power-player in the Kingdom of Aram.

BUT THEN - everything changes.

It's just like someone takes Naaman's PERFECT LIFE and presses the PAUSE BUTTON!

One moment, old Naaman is cruising down the fast lane of life in his Aston Martin when all of a sudden Almighty God turns on the flashing blue lights and he is pulled over to a complete stop.

External Brokenness to address Inner Brokenness

It is not unusual to find in the Scriptures and this is quite common in the way that Jesus deals with people that He uses an aspect of External or Outer brokenness in order to address a deeper inner problem.

So an obvious example would be the case of the paralysed man in Matthew chapter 9:

- his visible and external problem is that of paralysis
- HOWEVER Jesus does *not* say to him "Son, your paralysis is cured - pick up your pallet and go home"

Rather he says "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

God prefers to deal with the uppermost problem, that inmost problem and then only to remove the outward symptom as a final act of closure.

Naaman's Inner Problem

So Naaman has LEPROSY and this is masking a deeper problem within.

We need to look at this man in order to see what type of "SPIRITUAL LEPROSY" his life is being destroyed by.

And there are **A COUPLE OF WAYS** we can see this:

- one is by **working our way through THE PASSAGE** and **noting the different things that we see** - (and we're going to do that in a moment)

But another important way:

- is to consider **THE OTHER 2 OT OCCASIONS** when certain **people end up with LEPROSY** and see if there is, perhaps, **A COMMON FACTOR**

1] Miriam - the prophetess - Numbers 12

The first OT person to become afflicted with LEPROSY is a woman - she is an important woman in her own right, she is the first person to be named in Scripture as a prophetess - this is Miriam, the senior sister of Moses and Aaron.

The story is in Numbers chapter 12 and in a nutshell - she appears to instigate a rebellion against Moses because she feels that Moses is altogether getting too much of the limelight and she wants to have a larger slice of prominence.

Well God steps in, makes it quite clear that there is no-one else that is in a category the same as Moses and as punishment LEPROSY breaks out on her:

Numbers 12 verses 9-12 reads "The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."

Moses cries out to God, that He might heal her and God's reply is instructive:

Verse 14 "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back."

Miriam arrogantly steps out of her proper God-given place and she badly over-reaches herself and God uses LEPROSY

to show the SPIRITUAL SEVERITY and DESTRUCTIVENESS of her action.

2] Uzziah - the King who wanted to be Priest as well - 2 Chronicles 26

The other person who "comes a cropper" is a King of Israel by the name of Uzziah who decides that he wants to be somewhat more than just a King - let me just read the relevant verses there in 2 Chronicles 26 starting from verse 16:

(2 Chronicles 26 verse 16ff) "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. They confronted him and said, 'It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God.'

Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him."

It is not too hard to see the COMMON FACTOR(S) between Miriam and Uzziah:

- BOTH had prominent positions - a PROPHETESS, a KING
- BOTH were people standing & people of influence
- AND BOTH OF THEM over-reached themselves

2 Chronicles 26 verse 16 nails it down pretty well - "PRIDE LED TO HIS (to both of their) DOWNFALL"

Stepping through our passage

So let's now step down through our Naaman passage - so this is now 2 Kings 5 - and:

- **THE FIRST THING** that we notice is the Israelite slave girl.

This is the one who God is choosing to use as a vehicle to ultimately turn Naaman's life around.

It is worth noticing that God uses someone very humble in order to slowly break down someone very proud.

When you think about this slave girl from her perspective - she has been taken captive during a raid (which probably means that her parents have been killed and she has been separated from any siblings that she might have had). And yet she is not embittered by all this. She commits herself to God and allows herself to be a channel of blessing where she finds herself.

Q. I wonder what you would do if you found yourself in her position?

- **NEXT THING** we know is that Naaman is soon on his way to the Prophet Elisha in Samaria via the agency of the King of Israel.

Well, if Naaman thought that his silver and gold would buy him a comfortable welcome, he was sorely mistaken. The King of Israel, was not an especially godly King and was probably himself on the proud end of the spectrum and so now God deals with PRIDE by way of someone else who is perhaps EQUALLY PROUD.

- **WELL EVENTUALLY** - Elisha the prophet saves the day and gets Naaman, the Syrian army commander, to be forwarded across to him.

So just try and imagine the scene for a moment:

- Naaman is an important man in his own right - he kind of like a vice-president, like a Joe Biden, maybe like a George Osborne - somebody with real clout
- he arrives with something of an entourage. If it were in the modern day, then it would be a convoy of limousines, back in the Bible times it was a case of horses and chariots.
- perhaps, when he stops outside Elisha's official residence - there would have been someone whose job it was to announce, maybe with trumpets, the arrival of His Excellency - Commander and Chief of Staff - Naaman.

And so out trots some servant from Elisha and says politely and simply - a message:

Verse 10 "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored & you will be cleansed."

Now perhaps you or me - we might have said - "Well that's wonderful! That is the best news I've heard all day! So which way is it. Righty - 30 miles due East - we'll be there in just over the hour, excellent - see you later!!"

But once again Naaman's PRIDE is being assaulted head on and he flies into a rage!

How often it is that the word of God, the gospel of God, is something that begins by insulting us - there is an offense of the gospel - because God tells us plainly how things are and how deeply entrenched in sin we are.

- **Q. SO WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?** Q. Is it all over? Q. All bets off? Well no! Once again God uses those that are humble to confront those that are proud - and this time it is not Elisha's servant BUT Naaman's servants that do the speaking.

They reason with the unreasonable Naaman and point out that if Elisha had asked him to do something very hard, he would have gladly done it - so now given that he has asked for something simple - how much more should Naaman be happy to comply.

You see our PRIDE is such that we do not like to receive anything that feels like CHARITY. We do not like to have no part in our healing. In effect our PRIDE is saying that we should be able to PARTNER with God in our salvation. We find it offensive to our PRIDE to have to admit that there is nothing we can do, nothing in the slightest that we can contribute EXCEPT for all the UGLINESS and LOATHSOMENESS of our "SPIRITUAL LEPROSY".

- **THE TURNING POINT FOLLOWS** and Naaman at last humbles himself and surrenders to the simplest of words:

Verse 13 "...Wash and be cleansed!"

He dips in the dirty waters of the Jordan River seven times, that number of completion and his healing is such that his skin is like that of a young child.

How great an OT picture that is of the Jesus' NT concept of being "**born again**" - that no one who does not humble themselves like a little child will ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

- **ONCE AGAIN** - Naaman is back with Elisha and this time they meet.

Naaman is transformed and in his great enthusiasm he expects to pay his way BUT Elisha adamantly refuses to allow him.

Elisha cannot allow Naaman to go away thinking that he has, in some way, contributed to his own healing.

The **HIGH BARRIER** of Naaman's "**Leprotic Pride**" (I don't know if that's a word) - has been taken down hammer blow by hammer blow:

- the SIMPLE MANNER OF THE CURE was one blow
- the FREENESS OF THE CURE was another
- the EXCLUSIVE NATURE OF THE CURE - the fact that he could not chose his own rivers in which to be cleansed

Is this not a rather commonplace story - truly this could be "everyman's every woman's story" - maybe you have been rather offended by these various sides of Christianity:

- maybe you feel so much more comfortable "CONTRIBUTING", somehow earning your onward passage to heaven!
- maybe you don't like the overly simple-sounding words of Jesus and the apostles: (Romans 10 verse 9) "...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." - it insults your intelligence, your sophistication - it really is all-too primitive sounding!
- maybe you find your Western mindset offended by the idea that there could, in fact, be just ONE way and not MANY ways by which we can be saved.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude by considering **the 2 different endings** that 2 Kings 5 - this story of Naaman the Leper - gives us:

ENDING #1 is the "**Happy Ending**" and that concerns **Naaman**

Leprosy, all through the Bible, is somewhat "provisional" in the sense that, like a CAR CRASH - it doesn't have to be fatal.

We had someone who came to this church and they were racing down the A4 way too fast and they ran out of road and wrapped themselves round a tree BUT AMAZINGLY just got out and walked away pretty well unscathed!

And Naaman walks away - more than unscathed - he is totally transformed - you can see this because his whole outlook on life is different:

- before he had his gods - now he has just the One God , the One True God
- before he was in the master position and everyone around him were at his beck and call - now he is the one addressing himself as servant

- before he would have been one who was climbing the ladder, one essentially "on the make" and now we see he is only too ready to part with his money - this transformation has opened his hands in thankfulness and opened his hands in generosity as well

ENDING #2 is the rather "**Depressing Ending**" and that concerns one **Gehazi** (who is the servant of Elisha the Prophet)

Here we come to what is effectively an epilogue to the story from Verse 20 onwards - the story could so easily have ended at Verse 19 with a kind of "and everybody lived happily ever after"!

Well Gehazi cannot help but feel that Naaman has got away lightly and all that massive amount of Silver and Gold that was on offer it a little hard to resist and so he goes off to get his hands on some of it - little perceiving that God misses nothing.

Q. See the judgment that comes in the last verse?

Verse 27 " 'Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.'
Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow."

So there we are - SIN symbolized by LEPROSY -> Something HIDEOUS, Something HORRENDOUS.

Now I suggested that SIN, as the Bible depicts it, is not unlike a CAR CRASH, just one that takes place in SLOW MOTION.

Now, finally to try and close the loop and also bring this picture a little closer to home as ordinary and everyday people:

- I want to mention a recent article
- and then play you a testimony

1) Article from TIME magazine

TIME magazine just published a main article called "Porn an the threat to virility" - it was detailing the worrying effects that internet video porn was having on a whole generation of men.

One blog post commenting on this article started in this way:

"It was one of the saddest, most horrifying cover stories I have ever read. It is not horrifying like the carnage of war. It's horrifying like the carnage of a culture that is committing slow-motion suicide."

Here common, widespread SIN, so very like unto LEPROSY - the CARNAGE of one more SLOW MOTION CAR CRASH.

2) The Video Testimony of Danny Velasco

Well if that story was rather "Gehazi-like" - with no very happy ending in sight.

I want now to play you a clip (that is just over 4 minutes) and this is somewhat more like a Naaman testimony.

We'll end with this video....

Let us pray AMEN