

NAAMAN who lost a great opportunity  
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(2 KINGS 5:18)

Dear Naaman,

I have often wanted to speak with you, for your amazing story has caused a great amount of discussion. You will probably be pleased to know that millions of people are grateful that your history has been placed on record. I, for example, first heard of you when I was a small boy. My Sunday-school teacher told me how you went to battle and brought away captive out of the land of Israel, a little maid. I sometimes felt sorry for that girl, but eventually the greatness of your story captivated all my thought. I saw you marching to the palace of the king of Israel, and I laughed at the tantrums of the outraged monarch who thought the whole thing was a plot against his regime. Yes, Naaman, my childhood days were coloured by stories of great heroes, and you were one of the greatest. And then, I discovered something about you that spoiled everything.

Your Great Salvation

You were very angry, weren't you, when the prophet failed to make a fuss of you. Because you were a great man in your country, you thought the prophet of God should have been honoured by your visit. You did not know that all who come to God must possess the humility of children. Were you very surprised when your servant suggested that your wrath revealed folly? And were you a little ashamed when obedience to the prophet's command brought healing to your body? I imagined your going down into the water, and the subsequent return to the home of Elisha. Surely even the angels smiled when they saw the change in your attitude. Your testimony really thrilled me. "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel . . ." (2 Kings 5:15). Yes, your conversion was outstanding, and preachers have used this story on innumerable occasions. They tell their audiences that in like manner men may be cleansed from the leprosy of sin; that what the waters of Jordan apparently did for you, the precious blood of Christ will do for all who will "wash and be clean."

Your Great Suggestion

Naaman, what a grand idea you had when you stood before the prophet. "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" (v. 17). In thought I watched as you filled the sacks with earth, and I visualized the small altar which you made in your own land. Yes, your idea was very fine, and suited your earlier confession. Henceforth God alone would receive the thankofferings of your heart. He had become the God of your salvation, and was worthy to be praised. That soil was holy ground, where you often knelt as you drew near to God. For that we commend you heartily; but oh, dear friend, why did you ruin everything? Naaman, you were a mean coward!

Your Great Silence

Do you refute the allegation? Listen, then, to your own words. "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that

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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, the Lord pardon thy  
servant in this thing" (v. 18). Didn't you realize that all  
Syria awaited your return? Didn't you realize that the  
great God had placed within your grasp the most magni-  
ficent opportunity? Your fellows were heathen, and had  
no knowledge of God, and your testimony might have been  
instrumental in evangelizing a nation. Had you refused  
to bow before Rimmon, and had you become a prophet  
to your own people, thousands of Syrians might have  
called you "blessed." Instead, when the thanksgiving  
service was held in the temple; when the king returned  
thanks to his idol, all the people gathered there, watched  
as you followed his example. Oh, Naaman, why were you  
ashamed to own your Lord? Were you fearful of losing  
your position of importance and rank? Were you scared  
lest another should supersede you in the affections of a  
heathen king? Naaman, you revealed in the cause of God  
a cowardice unknown in your military career. You let  
God down. What a pity!

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