

Naaman said I thought

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev W.R.Mackay

[0 : 00] The words for meditation this morning you will find in the portion of Scripture read in the second book of Kings.

Second Kings chapter 5 and we might read again from verse 9. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

And Elisha sent a messenger unto him saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean.

But Naaman was wroth and went away and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper.

And the words around which our thoughts will gather for a few moments are two words in verse 11. Words which were uttered by Naaman.

[1 : 24] I thought. I thought. Without being uncharitable, I think it is true to say that the majority of people in this our day and generation do not think for themselves.

Whether we like it or not, if we face up fairly and squarely to the situation, we have to acknowledge that too often our opinions are mass produced for us.

And without realizing it, we absorb them, whether it be from the press or from the radio or from the television screen.

Oh, of course, we don't realize that. But just you think over it. And ask yourself if, whether when you see the same idea expressed day in and day out, if it is something which sort of appeals to you, you subconsciously make it your own, and you make it your opinion and you say, that's my line of thinking along that particular channel.

In other words, there is always the danger that we become brainwashed. Now, it is a good thing for men to think for themselves.

[3 : 12] And when our thoughts follow right channels, good will undoubtedly accrue. You remember the experience of the psalmist.

The psalmist, on one occasion, probably on more than one occasion, but he relates it of this occasion, he took stock of himself. He had a little period of self-examination, and he said, in the well-known words of the psalm, I thought upon my former ways, and did my life well try, and to my testimonies true, my feet then turned I.

He did a bit of hard thinking, and he realized that his life was not all that it should be. And he realized further that the secret of change, of success, as far as his life went, was by following the precepts of God.

And so he betook himself to the book of God. And what better recipe could there be for anyone?

And we must ever remember that when we do think, our thoughts are limited.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

[4 : 54] We can't aspire to think about certain things, which are hidden from our view. But God has given to us minds, which we should use, and we are called upon to use them, as we journey along the road of life.

Sometimes we don't always appreciate that our thoughts are limited, and consequently we dictate to God. And here we have a case in point.

Here was Naaman, a mighty man of valor, a great leader, a man, you might say, with the world at his feet, in one sense. And yet there was one thing which blighted everything.

He was a leper. He was in the grip of that loathsome disease. And no matter how much he did, no matter how hard he tried, he wasn't able to rid himself of it.

And in the court of Syria, there was a little maid. And surely this bears out what I was trying to say to the children, that God even uses the youngest among us sometimes to be his messengers. [6 : 19] And this little maid, who was a captive from the land of Israel, had been brought up to know and to worship the God of Israel. And she had heard about the wonderful prophet who was in Israel.

And a message was brought to Naaman, that if only he was able to go to Israel, there was somebody there who would be able to cure him of his leprosy. But you see, that was going to be a tremendous blow to his pride. To think that he should go and cast himself, so to speak, upon the mercy of someone in a strange country. Why could he not do it himself? Why was there not somebody in his own country who could help him? But he was prevailed upon. He was talked into it.

And then he set off on his journey, as you know. And when he arrived with great pomp and ceremony at the house of the prophet, he already had preconceived ideas in his mind as to what the prophet was going to do.

[7 : 34] There was going to be quite, it was going to be quite a spectacular occasion. The prophet was going to come out, and the prophet was going to lay his hands upon him and perhaps call upon the name of his God, and he was going to go on his way, a cured man.

But there was a shock in store for Naaman. The prophet didn't even condescend to appear at the door. And of course, Naaman was furious.

He was not accustomed to treatment like this. He was the kind of man who gave his orders, and everybody obeyed him. This was an insult, to say the least of it.

And the message which came out made it more insulting still. Go and tell your master to dip himself seven times in the waters of Jordan, and he will be cleansed.

The waters of Jordan? And if any of you have seen the waters of Jordan, you might have a little sympathy with Naaman, because the waters of Jordan at certain points are very muddy and very uninviting.

[8 : 56] And those of us who have seen the rivers of Damascus, just those clear, sparkling, those clear, sparkling streams which come down from the mountainside, very much like our highland rivers, would say, well, we don't blame Naaman.

It would be much better to go to those bright, sparkling rivers than to go to the muddy waters of Jordan. But you see, his treatment had begun. He had to be humbled.

He had to be humbled in the presence of God before he was going to be cleansed. And how true that is in the spiritual realm, isn't it?

that before we can be cleansed, before we can become new creatures in Christ Jesus, we've got to be humbled.

Our proud heart, our proud spirit, has got to be broken. Too often we have planned the way to heaven, and it is a way of our own making, a way which appeals to the flesh, the way of penance, the way of sacrificial giving.

[10 : 15] Yes, dare I say it, even the way of regular church attendance. And we think that all those things are going to be counted unto us for righteousness.

Good though they undoubtedly are, they will never, never save the soul of men. We've got to be humbled in the presence of God.

We sometimes pity poor people who make their way to the shrine of some heathen god, sometimes traversing the ground in a very uncomfortable manner in order to do their obeisance there.

And you say, how futile it is. How stupid. How foolish. How could anybody ever think that that was going to avail them anything?

And yet is it not true that sometimes we are guilty of the very same thing? Oh yes, in a more intellectual way, we live a good moral life.

[11 : 30] We try to do our best by our fellow men, and these are all to the good. But this all arises as a result of loose thinking.

It's good to think, but we've got to see that our thinking is along sound lines. And these things, I repeat, are the result of loose thinking.

There is loose thinking, first of all, about sin. Sin too often is glossed over. It's talked of as a mistake, as something which is very trivial, as something which is very minor, and it is not regarded as an offense against God.

Now, in the shorter catechism, the two aspects of sin are set before us. There is a negative aspect, and there is a positive aspect.

You remember the answer to the question, what is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

[12:41] There you have the two aspects of it. First of all, it's a coming short, and man by nature has come short, and through his instrumentality, he can never keep the law of God.

He can never meet up to God's demands and fulfill them. He's a sinner because he comes short, and that holds true of each one of us.

But he is also a sinner because he is a rebel, because he sets himself up in defiance against God, and he says, and this is what the natural heart says, we will not have this man to rule over us.

Sin is a transgression. Sin is something which is ugly. Sin is something which mars. Sin is something which stains.

Sin is something which sets us up in antagonism, in opposition to God. And not only is there loose thinking about sin, but there is also loose thinking about God.

[13:57] God is regarded, and how subtle the evil one is, because the line which he makes our minds work along is true or partially true.

God, he tells us, is benevolent. God is loving. God is kindly. And we cannot deny it. That is true. God is benevolent. God is loving. God is kindly. But he is also a just God. And the demands of his justice have to be met.

And it is because of the demands of his justice had to be met that there was the necessity for Calvary. Or otherwise, the cross would have no meaning.

And the sad thing is that all too often nowadays, the cross is pushed into the background of our religious thinking.

[14:59] In fact, sometimes it's forgotten or almost forgotten altogether. And great stress is laid upon those things which I suggested, those things which appeal to the flesh, those things which we think that we can do for ourselves.

But remember that because our God was a just God, he could not lightly look upon sin. Sin had to be atoned for.

And the cross was set up on Calvary's hill. And God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

It was he himself who bore our sins on his own body on the tree. And you see, even the disciples failed to realize at one point that Jesus had to die.

You remember when they were on the road to Emmaus and when the wondrous stranger drew nigh and they got into conversation and they said, as they talked of what had happened on Calvary, they said, we trusted, we fondly hoped and expected that it was he who was to have redeemed Israel.

[16:33] And now all our hopes have been dashed to the ground because we have seen our Lord and Master crucified upon a cross of shame. And he had to remind them that he had indeed redeemed Israel, that he had redeemed Israel with his own precious blood, for his people are redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

And he had paid the price of their redemption. newness of life became a reality, became a glorious possibility as we looked to the cross on Calvary.

And it was exactly the same idea which Jesus Christ had when he said to Nicodemus, except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

You see, we've got to do our thinking along God's lines, in conformity to his will, the way that he has appointed.

There is salvation in none other but in the name of Christ. We can be saved by no other name save the name of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[18:02] And talking about dictating to God, is it not true to say that even Christians sometimes dictate to God? You remember when Jonah was given his command to go to Nineveh and to preach to that wicked city, a city which was so given over to wickedness that Jonah just shrank from the very thought of going to preach there.

it was all going to be so futile. It was all going to be so useless. And he rebelled because he thought that he knew better than God. You know the details of the story and eventually Jonah had to go to Nineveh.

He was reminded that that was the mission which he was given to fulfill. And wonder of wonders, the Spirit of God was so poured out upon Nineveh that souls were brought into the kingdom. And you see, sometimes in our prayers we are inclined to dictate to God. We think that God is going to answer our prayers in the way in which we think is right, not in the way in which he thinks is right. You all know about the story about Monica, the mother of Augustine and she had a great love for her boy. And when she heard that her young son was going to Rome to that wicked licentious city, she prayed and no mother ever prayed more fervently that her son might not go to Rome because she trembled for his moral safety.

[19 : 46] And her prayer didn't seem to be answered. But wonder of wonders, God had a more wonderful way of answering her prayers. And there young Augustine came face to face with the challenge of the crucified.

And a mother's prayers were answered beyond her fondest dreams. We have got to learn to get into God's channel, to let our thoughts run parallel with the thoughts of God as far as that is humanly possible.

Always remembering that his thoughts are higher and that there are certain mysteries which we cannot understand. But always remembering that as we submit to his will and seek to do his will, then we have the assurance of his presence and of the blessing which he alone can give.

Sometimes, sometimes the question is asked, and asked quite sincerely, does it matter very much what I believe, if I am quite sincere in my beliefs?

Does it matter if there are certain things which I cannot accept and which I do not believe, and there are other things which I can accept and which seem to be contrary to some great truths?

[21 : 21] But after all, at the end of the day, does it make very much difference, provided I am sincere? Perhaps an illustration will bring the answer to us.

Many years ago, there was a young mother who was suffering from very severe headaches, and she went to the doctor, and the doctor prescribed a mixture for her headaches, and when she took that mixture, it always gave her relief.

And one night, in the middle of the night, she woke up and her head was really very bad. She didn't want to put on the light because she didn't want to disturb the young children, and her husband was also there.

She got up and she felt about in the dark, she went through to the bathroom, she went to the medicine cupboard, she knew exactly where the bottle was because she always put it in the same place, she put out her hand, she felt the bottle, she took some of the mixture, she went back, she lay down in her bed, and she fell asleep.

And it was a sleep from which she never awakened, because all unknowingly to herself, somebody unwittingly had altered the position of certain bottles in that medicine cupboard, and the bottle from which she had taken the medicine was a bottle which was labelled poison, and the poison had done its work.

[23 : 05] she was perfectly sincere in believing that she was doing the right thing, but did it make any difference? Did her sincerity make any difference?

Did it make any difference to her husband, and to the young family whom she left behind, that she thought she was doing the right thing, and all the time she was doing that which was wrong? my dear friend, I think you've taken the point. It's going to make a tremendous difference at the end of the day, if all that we can offer when we appear before our Maker is the shreds of the last few sermons which we have heard, or some good works which we have sought to do.

if we have never rested upon the sufficiency of Christ's promises, no matter how sincere we may have been in our lives, no matter how devoted we may have been in the service which we have given to others, Christ will undoubtedly have to say, and how terrible those words are, I never knew you.

I think would it be a good thing for all of us this morning if we were going to sort of face up to our responsibilities, if we were going to take a good hard look at our lives and ask ourselves upon what we are resting.

[25 : 00] And God grant that we may be able to say, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

And if we have Christ, that is what matters. That is what counts at the end of the day. that is the right way to think.

God grant that we may look to him and rest on the sufficiency of his promises. Let us pray.
O Lord our God, we know that thy thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and there is so much which we cannot understand, so much which thou hast not seen fit to reveal to our gaze.
And so we pray for faith, that faith which enables us to rest upon the sufficiency of a saviour sacrifice, that faith which enables us to cling to the promises of God, that faith which enables us to believe that because Jesus has died and rose again, they also who fall asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

[26 : 28] Bless us each and all very abundantly, help us to set our affection upon the things which are above, and to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and pardon our every sin, we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen.