

Naaman - or the Second 'but.'

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of coming to God with a willingness to obey, abandoning preconceived notions and dictating terms, and trusting in His promise of pardon, purity, and power to obtain the experience of the second 'but'.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:25, Matthew 18:3, Luke 4:27, John 6:37, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 13:5, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "Cleansing from Sin"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the transformative journey of Naaman, who, despite his high status, was a leper, illustrating the profound truth that many privileged individuals may still miss God's blessings. He contrasts Naaman's cleansing with the lepers in Israel who remained unhealed, highlighting the necessity of personal appropriation of God's grace. Morgan urges listeners to recognize their own 'first but'--the acknowledgment of sin--and to seek the 'second but'--the experience of being cleansed by Christ. He outlines the threefold need for pardon, purity, and power, affirming that Jesus meets these needs through His sacrifice. Ultimately, Morgan calls for a complete surrender to God, encouraging believers to come to Him without preconceived notions or demands, trusting in His ability to heal and transform.

Transcript

"And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." (Luke iv. 27)

I thank God that the New Testament comes after the Old, and that the words of Jesus light up for us that old-time story of Naaman the Syrian with great suggestiveness. From the words of the Master we find that Naaman had a second "but" in his life. We were introduced to the first one in the Old Testament, and it was full of sadness. He was a great man with his master; he was honorable; he was rich--BUT he was a leper! Now, Jesus says "there were many lepers in Israel, and none of them was cleansed BUT only Naaman." Naaman got into blessing. Naaman found a place where the leprosy passed absolutely out of his life. Sweetest word of all, it seems to me, in that story-- "his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child,"

The law of life in the physical realm, as revealed in the healing of Naaman, is the law of life in the spiritual realm. The Master confronts all those smitten with leprosy, the leprosy of sin; and He says to us: "Except ye turn and become as little children ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

I do not propose to dwell at any length upon the story of Naaman. It is familiar to us all. We know all its points and its beauties. My business is to find out how we may get the second "but" into our lives. We are all conscious that the first "but" is there--at least, if we are not, we shall never find our way into the second. We are all ready to say:

"It is quite true that we have almost unnumbered blessings, health, reason, friends, and countless mercies; But we are sinners."

The supreme question for every one of us is, how we may obtain the experience of the second "but," not theoretically, but actually, definitely, positively, that it may also be said of each of us: "BUT he was cleansed."

There is a very terrible revelation in the word which Jesus utters about Israel: "There were many lepers in Israel."

Lepers in Israel! Lepers among the children of the covenant! Men and women living right in the region of blessing and yet lepers. How absolutely and utterly useless was privilege to them, because they did not make use of it; because they did not take hold of the great blessing of God which was theirs as a nation, and in the covenant, and appropriate it to themselves 1 Yet this man outside of the covenant; this man who had not lived in the realm of privilege; this man who had not been brought up in the knowledge of the oracles of God; this man who knew nothing in his family or in his past history of the wonderful working power of the Most High; this outsider passed into blessing, while the men who were inside missed it!

The great truth that is impressed upon our minds from this thought is that it is not enough that you and I have been among the privileged people; it is not enough that we know the power of God; it is not enough that we have been brought up and nurtured in the fear of the Lord; there must be a personal appropriation of all the blessing presented to us in Christ, or else we miss the blessing. "And they shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" while the children of the kingdom are "cast forth without." It is not enough that we know these things. We must do them.

I want to say a word first as to the need of every heart that has found the first "but" in their lives. Then a word as to the message of the Gospel to such needy hearts. And then I want to press home a final practical message.

I believe there is a general conviction of need. People generally agree that they need the pardon and the cleansing that Christ alone can bring; but I want, if I may, to analyse that general sense of need, and ask as through my own heart's experience:

"What do I need?"

I answer it by a threefold statement: (1) I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; (2) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-day; (3) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-morrow.

I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; for yesterday was the day of sin. The years that have passed have been years of wrongdoing, actual wrongdoing; years of carnal, self-pleasing rebellion against God. What am I going to do with these years? Suppose that I now surrender myself to Christ, accepting His invitation,--what about the past? I need that something shall be done with the past, or else I can have no peace, no sense of purity, no blessing.

And then I know that something must be done in the present moment. Supposing it be possible to deal with the deeds of the past I shall still be the same being; still in my own nature there will be that which will propel me towards wrong, and towards sin, and therefore I shall still be unacceptable to God. I need forgiveness. I need also the consciousness of acceptance with God.

And then, when I have faced these two needs, if there be a message in the Gospel that shall meet my need as to the yesterday of my life, and the to-day of my life, I still have another need. I look out to the future. I see to-morrow coming on, with the same old forms of temptation, the same old suggestions to evil from without, and I reverently say that if God forgive me yesterday, and accept me to-day, yet am I helpless, unless He make aome special provision for me to-morrow.

The general sense of the need is analysed for my own heart when I take this threefold outlook upon my life--yesterday, to-day, tomorrow. And what need I ? I need first of all pardon for the past; I need that in the present moment purity shall be given to me in order that my nature shall be changed, and I shall be accepted with God; and for to-morrow I need power for all that may come. Pardon, purity, and power; pardon for yesterday; purity for to-day; power for to-morrow. I stand amid the years of my life, coming and going so swiftly that they seem to glide away before I know it, and I say:

"In the past I have sinned; I want pardon. In the present I am impure; can I have purity? And to-morrow--I dread it, because of my own weakness--can there be for me a power that shall come into my life, and energise me in the future?"

Now, is not this the Gospel that you have heard through all your lives? Is not every need thus expressed, met in the message that Jesus Christ sends to you again to-day?

What about the past? He meets you by His cross, and He says to you: "I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions," Do you know what it is to blot out a transgression? Do you know what it is to have sin put away at the cross of Christ? He does it by His own blood-shedding.

But what is this blessing of the blotting out of sin?

A boy ran in to his mother one day after he had read that promise, "I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions." And he said:

"Mother, what does God mean when He says He will blot out my sins? What is He going to do with them? I can't see how God can really blot them out and put them away. What does it mean--blot out?"

The mother, who is always the best theologian for a child, said to the boy: "Didn't I see you yesterday writing on your slate?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, show it to me."

He brought his slate to his mother, who holding it in front of him, said:

"Where is what you wrote?"

"Oh," he said, "I rubbed it out."

"Well, where is it?"

"Why, mother, I don't know."

"But how could you put it away if it was really there?"

"Oh, mother, I don't know. I know it was there, and it is gone."

"Well," she said, "that is what God meant when He said, 'I will blot out thy transgressions.' "

My brother, are you troubled about the past? Are sins of the past haunting you today? I do not ask you to make a list of them --you cannot do it; but I ask you to remember that the list is made. The whole black list of sins is before thee, and there comes thy way to-day the Man of sorrows and of tears, the Man of suffering and of triumph, and He says: "I will blot out thy transgressions." He will put across that list of thy sins His own pierced hand, and His own precious blood shall cleanse the page of all thy sins. It is His promise. He is able to promise because He has been into the darkness of His death, and out of that darkness He has brought authority by which He blots out the sin of the past, and puts it all away.

But I need more than that: I need purity; I need to know that I am accepted by God. And again He calls me to His cross, and at the cross He tells me that He will not only forgive sins, but cleanse from all unrighteousness. He tells me that He will take my nature, and purify it, and make it like unto His own; and that in Him, and in the power of His life communicated to me, I shall be accepted of God.

But how may I know this?

On His oath, on His covenant, on His blood, I am to depend, and He says: "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

"Ah, but what about to-morrow? How am I going to manage to-morrow?"

The Master bends over the trembling soul that asks that question, and says: "Lo, I am with you always."

Some years ago, in Scotland, a Scotch lord gave to his old servant Donald, a little farm. He called him in one day and said:

"Donald, I am going to give you that farm, that you may work it for yourself, and spend the rest of your days there upon your own property."

Donald, with all the canniness that characterises a Scotchman, looked up into the face of his lord, and said to him:

"It is nae gude to gie me the farm; I have nae capital to stock it."

His lordship looked at him, and said: " Oh,

Donald, I think I can manage to stock it also."

And Donald said: "Oh, well, if its you and me for it, I think we will manage."

Trembling soul, if Christ Jesus pardoned thee, if He purified thee, then say to Him:

"Now, Lord, I thank Thee for the pardon; I magnify Thee for the purity; but, Master, I have no capital; how am I going to live in the future?"

And He says: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Lo, I am with you."

"Jesus, Master, if it be Thee and me for it, we can manage."

Thus far we have seen the need, and the provision: yesterday, pardon; to-day, purity; to-morrow, power. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; pardoning the past, purifying to-day, and energising for every moment of the pathway to glory.

Now we come to the point of actual dealing with God for ourselves. I cannot help you here, except to say what Naaman's servants said: "Try it." Even if you are very weak and trembling and doubting, never mind. Try it. Venture on God. Take some risk in the matter. Two men in the life of Jesus came to Him--and one never can read the story of either without feeling how poor was the faith of each.

One said:" Lord if Thou wilt, Thou canst."

Don't you see, he wasn't perfectly sure that the Master was willing, but he ventured on Him. He came to Him on a crutch, because he could not walk straight, and the crutch was a little "If"--"If Thou wilt."

The other had to get another crutch, a crutch for the other side, and he said: "If Thou canst do something for my boy, do it." And how did the Master deal with this man? Did He say, "No, I cannot help you; your faith is not strong enough; you haven't confidence enough"? Not He. If a man got to Him, He didn't care. It is better for a man to come with, "Lord, Thou canst," "Thou wilt," and "I believe"; but if you cannot come that way, come the other way. Come with your "if." "Lord, if Thou canst make me clean, do it; only I come to Thee."

Do you remember those four leprous men that sat in the gate of the city of Samaria? One of the most sensible committees that ever sat in the history of the world, was that committee of starvation. There in the city of Samaria famine stared them in the face. The host of the besieging army had cut the city off from supplies. The committee of four lepers held one of the only committee meetings I ever cared to attend; and I like to go there, and watch these men as, discussing the situation, they propose a resolution, and carry it. What is the resolution? Said they:

"What do we sitting here? If we go into the city we shall die. That is very evident. If we sit still here we shall die. If we go down to the host of Syria, while they may save us alive, they may kill us. That is the outlook: first, certain death in the city; secondly, certain death sitting here; thirdly, half a chance of life down yonder. We move as a resolution that we turn our back upon the certain death in the city, certain death in the gateway, and venture upon the half chance of life down yonder."

Wasn't that a sensible thing for a committee to do? &nd you know how it worked. They took the half chance of life, and found that it wasn't only a chance of life, but it was more abundant life, life for everybody except the men who didn't believe God could do it.

My brother, I want you to come to Jesus Christ that way now, if you feel that you cannot come any other way. It is certain death to go back to the old life. It is certain death to sit in the gateway sighing for virtue, and never finding it. You are not quite sure Jesus can do for you what He has done for others, but you

think He may. Then try Him on the off chance! Venture on Him. Come to Him now and say:

"Lord, if Thou canst do anything with such as I am--Lord, I give myself to Thee!"

How will it work? Many a believer could

tell you:

"I came to Jesus as I was--

Weary, and worn, and sad;

I found in Him a resting- place,

And He has made me glad."

Accept that testimony. Come, venture on Him.

How was it that Naaman nearly missed cleansing? Two things very nearly wrecked his faith. The first was: "Behold, I thought" --preconceived notions of how God was going to deal with him; and the second was: "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than the Jordan?"--an attempt to dictate terms to God as to how he should get healed. First of all, he had an idea as to how God should work, and because God was not going to work that way, he nearly missed his blessing; and then he wanted to say that he knew a better way-- Abana and Pharpar were better rivers than the muddy Jordan.

Thousands of souls have been wrecked upon one or other of those rocks at the entrance of the harbour of safety. "I thought" --what did you think? Did you think God was coming to wave over you some magician's wand, and give you some strange feeling? He never does. His way is the way of obedience. "To the Jordan! Dip seven times! To Christ, in absolute abandonment of self!" Along that line only comes His blessing. And the only way in which some men and women will ever get through into salvation or sanctification is to sweep out of their life, by a determined effort of their will, all preconceived notions, and to say:

"Oh, God, get Thy way, in Thy way, whatever I think."

The other danger is that we want to dictate terms. That is so often done. I remember years ago conducting a mission, and at the back of the chapel sat a man. In the very first after-meeting, as I moved around speaking to various persons, I came to that man. I found the Holy Spirit of God had been dealing with him, but he looked at me, and said--I had been inviting people to come out into an inquiry-room:

"Can't I be saved without going in there?"

Now, when a man begins to ask that question you must deal with him just in one way. And I said:

"No; I don't think you can."

"Why," he said, "is salvation in the inquiry-room?"

"No, it is in God; but just as long as you sit here and want to dictate terms to God, you are proving that you have not got to the end of self, and there is no salvation for you. That is the trouble with you."

"Then," he said, "if I cannot be saved without going into that room, I will go to hell."

"My brother," I answered, "that is not God's choice for you. If you have chosen it for yourself, I cannot help it."

Every night that man came and sat there. Oh, how gracious God is! He does not take us at our word. He does not leave us alone when we have said some rash, foolhardy thing.

I had warned the workers, and said:

"Don't talk to that man. Leave him alone. Let God have His way with him."

I shall never forget the last night of the mission. Before I had time to ask a soul to move, that man came forward over the backs of the seats to the altar. I looked at him and said:

"I thought you were going to hell, my brother?"

He said: "Oh, I have been there all the week."

Praise God! it does a man good to get there a little while that way sometimes.

As long as you are dictating terms-- "Can't I be saved right here?"--you are likely to miss the blessing. You can be saved there. You can be saved without a man knowing of it at the time. Somebody is bound to know of it soon, however. Nobody ever became a Christian without it flaming out sooner or later. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both tried to be Christians in private; but by and by there came the day of crucifixion, and these two men got the body of the dead Christ, and laid it to its last rest. You cannot be a Christian and keep it under a bushel long; the light will either go out, or set the bushel on fire. You may think you can get to Jesus Christ quietly; but as long as you are trying to dictate terms, as long as you are saying, "I don't like this noisy, babbling, rushing, muddy stream of Jordan; let me have the quiet, placid, sweet waters of Abana," just so long you are not in a condition for blessing. It is when you come to say: "Anywhere that He points the way; any means that He mentions to me; any cross He puts in front of me, I will take to get to Him, to have His cleansing"--when men "come there, then they are in the way of blessing. There were many lepers in Israel, but none of them were cleansed save Naaman; and he was cleansed because he entered into the spirit of true relationship to God by obeying. And there are many who are suffering from the leprosy of sin, but they, and they only, will have cleansing who in the divinely marked way come to Him Who alone can cleanse, and abandoning all preconceived notions, and sweeping aside every temptation to dictate terms, say:

"Just as I am, without one plea,

But"--(best plea of all!) "that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,

Oh, Lamb of God" (through doubt, darkness, difficulty, in spite of obstacles,)--"I come."

God help us all so to come!

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