**BEHOLD, I THOUGHT**

 ***Veni Vidi Vici***

Ever since I was a little boy listening to my mom and dad tell me Bible stories I have been fascinated by the story of Naaman of Syria. Recently while reading 2 Kings I was reminded of the words he said to Elisha’s offer to simply dip seven times in the Jordan River to be healed of leprosy. In anger he replied: “***Behold, I thought,*** *'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy*.'

This Syrian captain had a serious problem, he was going to die from this disease! There was no known cure for leprosy. But the heroine of this story is the Israelite maiden who had been taken captive and served the wife of Naaman. She knew of Elisha the prophet and his miracles from God. “*There is a prophet in Israel who can heal my master*.” But as the story unfolds we see that the captain’s pride got in his way and nearly cost him his life.

The famous line of Julius Caesar, quoted by Plutarch in his *Life Of Caesar*, and by Suetonius in his *Lives Of The Twelve Caesars* was “*Veni, Vidi, Vici*.” It means “I came, I saw, I conquered.” It is a reference to a swift and conclusive victory. Caesar, speaking in the first person (“I”) was boasting of his great power and military genius. Muhammed Ali, the heavyweight champion boxer of the 1960’s and 70’s, was fond of shouting after a victory, “I am the greatest!”

Pride leads men to think they are greater than they really are. Caesar had his Ides of March in which his best friend Brutus led a group of assassins to murder him. Ali had his March 8th 1971 “Fight of the Century” against Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden in which he lost a 15 round decision. Truly, “*pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*.” (Prov. 16:18).

Naaman was like all other prideful men. His military career had obviously trained his mind to think he was invincible. His status as army Captain led men to do his bidding. Whatever he thought he could then command and it would be done. It reminds me of the quote by Yul Brenner (playing Rameses – Pharoah of Egypt) in Cecil B. DeMille’s movie *The Ten Commandments*: “So let it be written. So let it be done!” In other words, whatever I think, I get. I have the power. Thus, Naaman had come to believe he could just command something and it would be instantly obeyed.

But Naaman had a serious problem. He had a deadly disease he couldn’t just command away. When he rode to the tent of Elisha he fully expected the great miracle-working prophet to come out and honor him as an important man, wave his hand over the leprosy and heal him. Instead, Elisha simply sent his servant out with the instructions to “*Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored to you*.” This sent him into a rage. “*Behold, I thought*…” was where his weakness was exposed. It is where the weakness of most men is exposed. When someone walks by sight, not by faith, he follows his own line of reasoning, believing his way is better than God’s. Indeed, pride goes before destruction.

In a huff Naaman storms off into the sunset. But his servants reason with him that if the prophet had asked him to do some great thing he would have surely done it without hesitation to be healed. Instead, Elisha had only asked him to do a simple thing - - - ride over to the little dirty river called Jordan and immerse yourself seven times. Easy-peasy. He reconsiders and decides he has nothing to lose. His way was not working, so why not try God’s way.

Dip 1. Still diseased. No better.

Dip 2. Still diseased. No better.

Dip 3. Still diseased. No better.

Dip 4. Still diseased. No better.

Dip 5. Still diseased. No better.

Dip 6. Still diseased. No better.
 Can you not hear him muttering, “This is just not working. Why bother?”

 Then the servant reminds him, “Master, he said seven. Just do it one more time.”

Dip 7. Cleansed!!! No more leprosy!!! I’m healed!!!

Can we not easily see the lesson to be learned? How many will go to hell because they said, “Behold, I thought?”

Some will say, “Behold, I thought… faith only would save me.” Read Matthew 7:21-23 where the Lord says to such a crowd: “You thought wrong, depart from Me.” Jesus said “*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mk. 16:16).

Some will say, “Behold, I thought… works would save me.” Read Ephesians 2:8-10 where Paul says “*not by works of righteousness which we have done*.” You thought wrong if you think doing a bunch of good deeds will stack up in your favor and tip the scales on judgment day. We are saved by grace through faith.

Some will say, “Behold, I thought… God is loving and so all will be saved.” Read Acts 17:30 that says, “*The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commands all men everywhere to repent*.”

Pride kills. Solomon said in Proverbs 6:16 *“These six things the LORD hates,
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him.”* Then take a look at #1 on God’s list of things He hates: “***A proud look***…”. It’s not enough to “think” you are right, you must know you are right when you cry out, “Speak Lord, thy servant hears.”

“***Behold, I thought***” might possibly be the three most quoted words of the Bible when God calls men to His judgment bar on high. Naaman has a lot of company when it comes to assuming man knows what is best for himself. The Syrian captain would have died in his leprosy if he had only done what he thought. Far worse, millions will die in their sins by only doing what they think is right.

God help us all to swallow our pride, like Naaman, and just:

“trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, then to trust and obey.”

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