

Sermon Transcript for January 23, 2022

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's lessons, we have an interesting contrast between the Old and the New Testament. We have two lepers and two leaders of armies. So we have the Syrian commander of the army, Naman, and we have the Centurion. Kind of equal portions, both leaders of troops, leaders of men, both really enemies of the nation of Israel. Syria, although it seems odd, but Syria is one of the nations, one of the many nations that God sent to Israel after multiple times of calling Israel to repentance. Now, if you remember right, Israel at this time is the Northern kingdom. This is after the kingdom had been split in north and south. And the Northern kingdom had denied the Word of God and denied the rightful king, the son of David. And so now they were a separate nation. In theory, the same beliefs, and yet they set up false places of worship in Bethel and Dan. Golden calves, if you can imagine. Now it seems really odd that you would pick golden calves again to worship. It's as if they didn't learn in the wilderness, way back when. Which I guess, the reality is they didn't learn. Which gives me comfort because if God can still love them, then there's hope for me, because I don't seem to learn, myself.

One of the things that we hear throughout the theme is that every time we face a sin, we seem to have been through this pattern before. One, there's nothing new under the sun. There's no sin that you and I can conceive of that hasn't been done by somebody else at some other time. But also in our own lives, I don't know if you've noticed this with yourself, but with me, it seems like I commit the same sins over and over again. The same things that I'm sorry about, that I want to change, are the same things that I go back to almost every single time. Now my sins and my proclivities might be different than yours, but we all tend to go back to the same events and the same sins and the same doubts that we have, over and over again. That's why Peter gives me great comfort when he was asking Jesus, how many times should I forgive my brother? And Peter being generous, said, seven. Double the number plus one, of what the law demanded. And Jesus said to Peter, seven times 70 times. In other words, a lot of times for the same thing, over and over and over again. Which is what God has been doing with the Israelites and with us from day one, constantly bringing back people, nation groups, Syrians, Assyrians, Palestinians, Canaanites, somebody to attack and discipline the nation to try and draw them back. Draw them back to the truth of God.

Now, oddly enough, even then, Naman is considered to be blessed by God because through Naman, God brought victory to Syria against the Israelites. And yet this man had leprosy. Even though he was commander of the army, he had leprosy, some skin condition that made him unclean. So, he goes before his king, gets permission to go to the king of Israel. The king of Israel, now, again, this is not the son of David, but this is a separate kingdom that set up a separate rule that decided that worship of God could be done with golden calves. So he wasn't exactly the most theologically astute. And so, Naman comes to the king and says, here's a letter for my king. It says please heal me. And the king, though he should have known better, said why, you're asking me? What are you trying to do, pick a fight? This is not... I'm in trouble here. Syria has already beat us once. And now they're just sort of picking at the wound, trying to get me to say something stupid so that they can attack again.

And the prophet goes, "King, just send them over to me. I'll heal them." It's like the prophet Elisha is not only ministering to Naman, but he's also ministering to the king. He says, "King, get it right. God still loves you."

There's still a prophet here. Even though you've gone your separate ways, there's still a prophet. God is still desiring to draw you back into the fold." The king doesn't get it. And at first, neither does Naman. Now again, we have Naman coming up to some false expectations. He expects the prophet of God to do something grand and marvelous.

And don't we often wish that that's how God would act? Don't you often wish that God would just come down in a pillar of fire and smoke or the clouds would part and a voice from heaven would speak and you would know exactly what God was going to do? We all wish for something like that. We want God to show His majesty and His might. How often do we pray that in this nation, that God would show His majesty so that people would finally understand who was God and believe in Him and repent. But no matter how often we pray for that and no matter how often God shows up, the demonstration of power, for whatever reason, doesn't do the job, partially because that's not how God works. God does not want us to follow Him because He's the biggest bully on the block and we better get on the right side of things or else. Unfortunately, that's often how people see God. But God doesn't come in the same way that we expect. He comes with power and He comes with majesty, but it's hidden. It's hidden in things that are so normal and mundane and average that you might not think they're real, a little bit of water, some bread and not very good bread at that and some wine. And yet through these great, simple, mundane, everyday things, the power and majesty of God is revealed.

And it's the same thing in Naman's case, go wash seven times in the Jordan. And Naman's like, "Seriously? Jordan is a muddy, nasty river. It's practically a creek to the rivers in Damascus. I mean, those are nice and clean." We got these beautiful springs here in Florida. Maybe if I washed in one of those, there'd be some healing power. And yet the water has nothing to do with it. See, Naman really wanted to see something, to point to something and say, now there it is, there's the magic formula. But again, God does not want us dependent upon the things of this world or our own ideas about the things. He wants us to depend upon His Word and only His Word.

So finally the servant says to Naman, look, didn't the prophets say, if you wash, you will be clean. Why not try? Why not put your trust in the Word of God? If He truly is God, then His Word is sufficient. And what His Word says is what it will accomplish.

Now on the other side of things, we have this Centurion who comes to Jesus. He's not the leper, but he's a Centurion and he's got a servant who is very ill. But this Centurion, this foreigner seems to understand much better than anyone else what's going on, because he says, he trusts the Word of God from the get-go. He understood that Jesus had the authority to heal and that by a mere statement of His Word, it would be sufficient, because he understood power and authority and delegation.

But what an interesting way to start it, to state your confidence in Jesus. "I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me." He starts out by saying, "Jesus, I understand that You are under the authority of the Father." This Centurion does not have a full blown theology about the Trinity, and doesn't fully understand who Jesus is and God is in relationship, the three in one. That's not there yet. But he recognizes that Jesus is a prophet and a man of God, maybe even the Messiah, even if he doesn't fully realize what that means. But that's okay. Do we really fully understand the nature of God? If we had to understand the nature of God before He acted and before He forgave our sins, we'd still be waiting.

And so it's okay that this Centurion doesn't have a full picture. He has enough of a picture to understand that Jesus was under the authority of the Father. You see, the plan of salvation, the plan of redemption that God worked out, He had worked out well before He created anything. See, He worked out all the details, not just what He was going to create on each of the six days of creation, that He had planned out beforehand as well, but also how He would save this creation. Because even though He created us and He gave us all good things, He knew that we would be tempted. He knew that we would reject His Word. He knew that we wanted to be like God and determine good and evil for ourselves. And so He put a plan in motion for our salvation.

So Jesus is not acting just on a whim. Jesus is acting under the authority of His Father to do what God had intended, what they all had intended, the whole Trinity had put together and put in place beforehand to save us from our sin, to cleanse us from all that corrupts. And so this Centurion, "All you have to do is say the word and my servant will be healed." What an amazing statement of faith.

There are a lot of times where I'd like to think that I have that faith, but how many times do we act as if God's Word is not true in our own lives? How many times do we worry and fret about the things of this world, about our life situation, about our health, about our well-being, about any number of things, about the state of our nation and the state of this world. We worry and we fret. Why? Because when it comes right down to it, we don't really trust the Word of God.

He says, "Do not be afraid. Do not worry. I am with you always to the very end of the age." There is nothing to be afraid of, your illness, your death, chaos, whatever might come. Do we honestly believe that God's Word is sufficient for us? We are called to, and we must hold firm to His Word and trust His Word alone, because we're not going to see signs and wonders more often than not. The clouds are not going to part and a sunbeam shine down on you and give you exactly what God's will is for your life today. It's not going to happen very often, if at all. But His Word that is written down in the Scriptures is the same thing, has the same authority and power and majesty and might. It's just a little more mundane. But that's okay. That's the whole point. God came to dwell with us, to be with us, to touch us, to clean us up.

With this leper in the New Testament before the leper was cleansed, Jesus touched him. As he's speaking, I will be clean, He touches him. He takes the uncleanness of the leper upon Himself, inevitably driving Himself to the cross. You see uncleanness, sinfulness, rebellion against God must be dealt with. It's not like God can say, "Eh, it's okay. I'll just forget about it." No. Justice must be served. So every time Jesus looks at a sinner and says, "Your sins are forgiven", every time He heals somebody, He takes upon Himself their disease, their illness, their spiritual death. And He says, "I'm going to deal with that. I'm going to take it upon Myself." And where does He take it? He takes it to the cross where it is wiped clean, forgiven, and made perfect in His sacrifice.

Does His Word remain true for all of us? Can we trust His Word? If He says, "Be at peace," do we honestly think we can be at peace? His Word says it's true. This is the Word of God. It does what He says it will do. Trust Him and trust His Word. He is with you always to the very end of the age. And He will never leave you and He will never forsake you. And you are His child. He has said so. His Word is true. Never doubt. Amen.