

"The trustworthy Word" Matthew 8:1-13 Epiphany 3 2022

Grace and peace in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What are the parallels and contrasts in our gospel and the Old Testament reading for today? Let's start with the parallels. Both stories speak of a leper. They both involve a military officer and his servant. In both cases, God healed the leper. In the Old Testament reading (2 Kings 5: 1-15), the leper was Naaman, the general of the Syrian army. In the gospel, Jesus Christ himself healed the servant of a Roman officer.

What are the contrasts? Naaman, a general of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man before his lord, and in high esteem, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a valiant man, but a leper. And out of Syria armed bands went out, and they carried away a young woman captive out of the land of Israel; who served the wife of Naaman, and said to her mistress, "If my lord should pray to the prophet that is in Samaria, he would heal him of his leprosy."

In Syria at that time, people worshiped many gods, but did not know the God of Israel. However, Naaman saw an opportunity to be free from his leprosy: When Naaman went to his lord, he related all to him, saying, Thus and thus has a girl said, she who is of the land of Israel.

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Because Naaman had his favor, the king of Syria said to him, go, and I will send letters to the king of Israel. So, he departed, carrying with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of garments. He also took letters for the king of Israel, saying, "When these letters come to you, know from them that I send my servant Naaman to you, that you may recover his leprosy."

Naaman had little evidence of the power of the God of Israel to heal his sickness, but it was only hope. And when the king of Israel had read the letters, he rent his clothes, and said, "Am I God, that I should slay and give life, that he should send me to heal a man of his leprosy? Consider now, and see how he seeks occasion against me." When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Come now to me, and you will know that there is a prophet in Israel." And Naaman came with his horses and his chariot, and stood at the gates of the house of Elisha.

Naaman, an important and respected man, came with all his men and horses. What happened? Then Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean. Naaman was angry because Elisha did not respect him. "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus,

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are not they better than all the waters of Israel? If I wash myself in them, will I not also be clean?" And he turned, and was angry. And his servants came unto him, and spake unto him, saying, "Our father, if the prophet should command thee any great thing, shouldst thou not do it? How much more, saying: Wash, and be clean?" He then descended and plunged seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God: and his flesh was as the flesh of a child, and was clean.

In our gospel, Jesus healed a leper. Then a centurion, an officer of the Roman army, came and said, "Sir, my servant is bedridden at home, paralyzed, severely tormented." And Jesus said unto him, "I will go and heal him." And the centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; But only say the word, and my young man will recover. For I also am a man under power, and I have soldiers under me: and I say unto this man, Go, and he goes; And to the other: Come, and he comes; And to my servant, Do this, and he does it."

Notice the difference between the officers. Both were important and respected men, but the centurion had more humility and faith. Naaman had a little faith; He accepted the testimony of a girl that a prophet and his unknown god could heal him. This girl from Israel is an example to us because she gave testimony of her faith as a captive

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slave. She is a model to us - we too can give testimony in whatever state we are.

However, the centurion believed by the word of Jesus alone his servant could be healed, Jesus did not need to travel to his house to heal the servant by hand. Therefore, Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, that I have not found so great faith in Israel."

In both stories, the sick were healed. But they were healed by the power of God, not by the power of their own faith, nor by the faith of their masters. Today, many people think that the answers to our prayers depend on the strength of our faith. This is not the truth. It does not matter if our faith is weak or strong, God answers our prayers according to His will. God is all-powerful, but He does not answer all prayers in the same way. Let us continue in our prayers because we trust in the good will of God. We do not always understand the will of God, but we trust in His Word.

Many people want to see miracles or signs in their lives to trust in God. This is a conditional faith. However, like Naaman, we have a letter in which is written the will of God, the Bible. In the Holy Scriptures, we find all the promises of God, above all, the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ. None of us have seen Jesus Christ face to face. We know the will of God, we know Christ in the Word written by the prophets

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and apostles, and preached by the ministers called and ordained by the church, to whom our Lord gave His Word and the means of grace, baptism and the Holy Supper. These should be enough for us. If we trust the Word of God, He will bless us. We cannot control the way God answers our prayers, and that's ok. All things in this world, good and bad, will pass away, but His Word will never pass away. Trust in Him, and you will be healed. Amen.