

Session 6

God Heals Naaman

(2 Kings 5:1-19)

Focus

Theme: God's Ways vs. Human Expectations

Law/Gospel Focus

Our sin dooms us to eternal damnation—separation from God. But God in His love for us has devised a plan for our rescue—a plan that could never be conceived by humans. God sent His only Son into this world to live a perfect life on our behalf and then suffer the punishment we deserve—death on the cross. We receive the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life not through any merit of our own, but instead simply as an undeserved gift of God through faith in Jesus. The means for healing the sin-sickness that dooms us to death is “foolishness” to those who continue to perish. We confess through faith that God’s ways do not always follow human expectations, but through the “foolishness” of the cross God accomplishes His plan of salvation.

Objectives

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word, we will

1. summarize the events in the account of the healing of Naaman and how God’s prescription for healing is received by others;
2. describe how God uses the slave girl to accomplish His will and purpose;
3. confess the means through which God provides us healing from sin-sickness;
4. share with others that which is beyond human comprehension—God became one of us in the person of Jesus; and then suffered and died on the cross to win salvation for us.

Opening Worship

Read in unison Psalm 119:161-68.

Rulers persecute me without cause,
but my heart trembles at Your word.
I rejoice in Your promise
like one who finds great spoil.
I hate and abhor falsehood
but I love Your law.

Seven times a day I praise You
for Your righteous laws.
Great peace have they who love Your law,
and nothing can make them stumble.
I wait for Your salvation, O LORD,
and I follow Your commands.
I obey Your statutes,
for I love them greatly.
I obey Your precepts and Your statutes,
for all my ways are known to You.

Introduction

Many people today have become “religious.” They seek fulfillment in this life and a hope for a future after they die. They say, “I am getting in touch with my spiritual self.” “I seek the guidance of a higher power.” “I am trying hard to live the perfect life.”

Satan might delude these individuals into believing that their lives are more fulfilled and that they can look forward to a life after death just by being religious or spiritual, apart from Christ.

1. What ultimate consequence do these people face?

2. Why do you think that salvation by His grace through faith in Jesus is at times “foolishness” to those seeking fulfillment in this life and assurance of life after death?

3. How can we witness our faith to those who seek religious fulfillment?

In today’s session, God uses a young girl to witness His power to a high-ranking official suffering from an incurable skin disease. The remedy and cure seem unreasonable and illogical. But God’s ways are not our ways, and through simple means God provides healing to Naamaan and foretells the spiritual healing He offers to us.

Inform

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19.

About the Text

The story of Naaman’s healing is set in Aram, a powerful nation located on the northern border of Israel. David once conquered the Arameans, but during Solomon’s reign the leader and people of Aram regained their independence. Now, in the time of the divided kingdom, the Arameans frequently raid Israel’s property and livestock. They pose a serious threat to the people of God and the nation’s stability.

Naaman is commander of the Aramean army—an influential man, next in authority to King Ben Hadad. Yet Naaman lives under a dark cloud—an incurable skin disease. (*Leprosy* translated from Hebrew designates several different skin diseases, not necessarily

leprosy as we know it.) Though persons in Israel who suffered from skin diseases were obligated by the law to live apart from the larger community, no such restrictions are placed upon Arameans. Despite his condition and his perhaps unsightly appearance, Naaman rises to a high position and commands the respect of his fellow citizens and soldiers.

The young Israelite girl is the victim of a raiding party; she is most likely sold to Naaman as a domestic slave. This tragic injustice, however, is quickly redeemed by God. The girl becomes a chosen instrument to accomplish the divine purpose. Her courage in speaking to the commander’s wife is striking; she testifies to the living God, to His prophet Elijah, and to the miracles worked in the name of Israel’s God.

As though by divine arrangement, Naaman believes the girl’s word. He immediately requests a formal delegation to Joram, king of Israel. The purpose of the audience is simple: “Cure Naaman of his disease.” Joram, of course, is mortified by the message; he interprets the demand as a pretext for war or a border dispute. He dismisses or ignores the power of God revealed in His prophet Elisha.

Elisha’s faith in God and his sense of God-given authority and mission allow the prophet to address Joram directly. He knows the reason for Naaman’s visit and is ready and able, by God’s grace, to heal the commander. Yet God’s ways do not always correspond to human expectations! The command to wash “seven times in the Jordan” appears to Naaman as hollow advice; surely a genuine man of God would require an elaborate rite as a means of healing. But Elisha’s prescription is to call forth faith. He doesn’t need to dazzle or amuse his audience. Naaman will be healed by the power of God, and the only response is to believe in and confess the true Creator and Savior of the world.

Naaman’s reluctance to obey Elisha is overcome by the gentle persuasion of his attendants. When Naaman is healed—precisely as Elisha said—he returns with all his servants and acknowledges God as the only God. He even begs to be known as a believer in spite of the idolatrous duties he fulfills. Elisha refuses a gift from the Aramean leader, since God’s gift of healing is free and without limit. Naaman’s new faith finds expression in his desire to sacrifice to Israel’s God even when he returns to his native Aram.

Though a believer, Naaman understands the obligations he faces as the king's officer and confidant. In the future he will stand in the temple of the Aramean god Rimmon to offer sacrifice for the welfare of the nation and its ruler. Yet his act of "worship" is meaningless; from now on, Naaman will serve the true God, though his duties might require his presence or participation at pagan rituals. In a fervent explanation to Elisha, Naaman asks for understanding and patience in his predicament. Elisha's dismissal, "Go in peace," signals the forgiveness and hope that God gives through faith.

Discussing the Text

1. Who is Naaman? What dark cloud hangs over the life of Naaman?

2. How does God use the injustice of the enslaving of the young Israelite girl to accomplish His divine purpose?

3. Why does Elisha's command to wash seven times in the Jordan River seem like hollow advice to Naaman?

4. What is the purpose of Elisha's prescription for healing?

5. How does Naaman's newfound faith find expression?

Connect

Naaman's disease is an indirect result of human sinfulness, an inevitable part of a fallen, decaying world. He suffers, not for his own sins, but as a human being who shares in the guilt of the first man and woman. He is a proud man, whose position and prestige in society blind him to God's quiet strength and grace. Naaman demands signs and wonders, impressive displays of authority. God's ways, however, are beyond human thought. Any attempt to manipulate God, to exploit His kindness for selfish human gain, will fail: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked" (Galatians 6:7).

All healing and wholeness are divine gifts. In mercy God extends His blessing to His chosen people, without any merit or effort on our part. The key is love: "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8; see also Ephesians 2:4). In His ministry, Jesus heals people with many different kinds of diseases as a sign of God's love toward His creation. His death on the cross brings us full healing—forgiveness and eternal salvation. Like Naaman, we have been washed in the waters of Holy Baptism and made a new creation: "The old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The story of Naaman's healing celebrates God's grace at work in ordinary means: water and promise. Today the Lord still bestows His life-changing grace through water and the Word. In Baptism, God's people, including children of all ages, are brought into a covenant relationship. The forgiveness purchased at the cross and confirmed in the resurrection is granted to all who believe the Savior's Word: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). With one voice, the apostles proclaim the truth of God's healing and redeeming love in Holy Baptism. We are marked, sealed, and renewed as we are united to Christ.

1. How does God demonstrate that His ways are beyond human thought and understanding?

2. Disease is a result of human sinfulness. Healing and wholeness are divine gifts. How has God in Christ granted us full healing?

3. Similar to Naaman, how have we been washed clean and made new creations?

4. God works through simple means to heal Naaman. How does God continue to work through simple means today to provide healing and strength to sinners?

Vision

To Do This Week

Family Connection

1. Review the events of the healing of Naaman.
2. Point out how God used a young girl to accomplish His purpose. Ask, "How does God use children today to accomplish His purpose?"
3. Remember Baptism experiences. Talk about the cleaning, the thorough washing, that God has provided to each of us through Holy Baptism. In Baptism God cleanses us from our sin and makes us His own dear children.
4. Send Baptism birthday cards to family members and friends to help them remember how God worked mightily through water and His Word at their Baptisms.

Personal Reflection

1. Consider how God has cleansed you from the deadly disease—sin.
2. Thank God for the washing and renewal of life He provided to you at your Baptism.
3. Think of at least one person with whom you can share the message of love and forgiveness won through Jesus' death on the cross. Pray that the Spirit will provide you the opportunity to witness your faith to that person. When the opportunity arises tell the person how God has worked in your life.