

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We modern day Americans are able to make an incredible number of choices on a daily basis. It didn't always use to be that way. Henry Ford was the first to really utilize mass production when he made the Model T using an assembly line. And he used to quip when selling his car: "You can have any color you want as long as it's black." And look at the old photos from that time, and you see people dressed very similarly. There wasn't a lot of variety back then. Fast forward to today, and again I'll say the number of options and choices before us today are staggering. If you want to buy a vehicle, there are hundreds of makes and models to choose from in a rainbow of colors. Our choices for daily necessities are just as great. I'll never forget when we came back from Russia on our first furlough and we went to a Walmart. The size of the store and the choices were something we had forgotten. A Russian friend of ours that immigrated to America told us that going to a grocery store would give her headaches because of all the choices to be made.

We are so used to having options that this way of thinking has bled over into religion as well. When it comes to God, I will make my own choices as well. People pick and choose what they like, leave behind what they don't like, and custom pick their own religion. Therefore, following words Jesus are especially offensive to the American ear: "I am the way, the truth and the Life, no one comes to the father except by me." (John 14:6) And these words spoken by Peter are equally unpalatable: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

What we will consider today is that we all share a deep need: the need to be restored and cleansed. We will also find that in order to be restored and cleansed, we will have to listen to God. It will only happen God's way. Now if at first this sounds perfectly obvious, I will suggest to you that although you may acknowledge it with your heard, we all have a tendency to act as though God's way isn't the only way. Our sinful nature pushes back strongly to this truth that only God's Way restores and cleanses. Let's consider this in view of the text before us today: 2 Kings 5:1-14.

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram.

[It is in the 800's B.C. Joram, the son of wicked King Ahab, was king in Israel. The country of Aram (about equivalent to modern-day Syria) was the military power in the region. Naaman was one of Aram's leading commanders. Military bands from Aram raided the surrounding countries. Israel was a surrounding country, so Naaman is actually the commander of an enemy army that made frequent incursions into Israel. Keep this in mind as we read more.]

He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Naaman had quite the resume. He was a commander of the army. Highly respected by the king. He had many victories under his belt. He was a man's man, a valiant soldier, and well accomplished. But. But... there was this one thing. Leprosy. There was one thing holding him back. One thing that kept him from having it all. He had an incurable skin disease... one that doomed him to a slow and painful death. His status, fame, intelligence and past achievements do not really matters now. Everything looks insignificant. Of all the things happening in Naaman's

life, he could pinpoint with crystal clarity what had to be addressed and fixed at all costs: his leprosy. He was willing to do or pay anything to get rid of the dreadful disease.

APPL: If we were reading down your list of positive characteristics and accomplishment, what would we have to tack on the end for you? But... what? Maybe it's not even public or well-known. What is your fatal flaw?

For every one of us, wouldn't we have to say, "Sin?" List all our positives, but we'll have to end with a but... sin infects us all. How does it show itself in your life? What is your weakness? Where do you struggle the most?

Truth is, leprosy was an amazing blessing for Naaman. Without it he would have continued to worship false gods. He would have continued to ride the wave of his success. He would never have gone searching for a solution he probably suspected did not exist.

Do you need leprosy? ...or some similar crisis so that your life will be reordered? Do you need something that will shout in your face that your wealth, your status, your accomplishments... they will do nothing for your eternal future? Or will this message from God today suffice? Will you take an honest look and understand that God is pointing out your disease... your sin... and calling you unclean, alienated, decaying?

When we truly understand our sinful condition and its horrible consequences, we take on the attitude that Naaman did about his leprosy. Will pay any price and do anything, if only I can get rid of my sin, be clean and be restored.

2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have. This young girl, a war slave, spoke up to help her master. She knew the solution to his problem. She was bold to speak.

Might this message today be the unexpected solution to the biggest problem in your life? Is it possible that a pastor in the middle of Omaha in the middle of the United States at a small, old Lutheran church of relative insignificance in our city might have the one and only solution to your sin? Keep listening!

4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver [750 lbs = \$400,000, six thousand shekels of gold [150 lbs = \$4,000,000] and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

Naturally went to the King. If this prophet was able to cure leprosy, surely the king of Israel would know about him. Naaman was prepared to pay for this service. He had a massive amount of money. But... the king didn't know. He was a worshipper of idols... worthless, powerless idols. He was so ignorant of the true God and his power, he concluded Naaman must be trying to trap him to have a pretense to invade.

Contrast the King of Israel with the servant girl! The difference of a rightly founded faith. When looking for the solution to sin, let me give you a hint. God's solutions are rarely found

with the influential, the rich, the masses, with the smooth talkers. God has this habit of working and speaking through the humble

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.” 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

Can you picture the scene in your imagination? Elisha is in his humble home. Naaman rides up with horses, chariots, who knows how they carried the half-ton of precious metals! Riches, pomp and circumstance. Perhaps a trumpeter even announced the arrival of the most honorable General Naaman. And Elisha doesn’t even come out! A messenger exits the home. Shy and hesitant he announces, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” He gives one final look to the impressive entourage, turns, opens the door and disappears inside the house. The large company with Naaman is left standing there with stunned looks on their faces, looking at each other.

11 But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

13 Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’” 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

This was the challenge of faith for Naaman. The solution God’s prophet offered did not even closely resemble the solution Naaman was expecting. He wanted to see a spectacle. He expected the prophet to wave his hands and do something spectacular. He was expecting Elisha to do something big and amazing so that Naaman would say “WOW!”. He was expecting that whatever solution Elisha had it would cost him dearly... in money and/or in work he would have to do. He was expecting great expense and personal sacrifice. He got none of this. Just the servant of a prophet with directions that would have easily fit on one side of a business card. And to solution did not cater to his sense of power and position. The solution as somewhat humbling and did require patience as he had to bathe in a dirty river 7 times.

A dollar bill is received with the hand and place in the pocket. A promise is received with the ear and placed in the heart. Naaman rejected the promise of God’s prophet. He refused to receive, and therefore he refused to obey. It was too easy. Too simple. And the God who made the promise was an unknown to Naaman. So he wasn’t buying this treatment plan. And if he did wash in the Jordan and it didn’t work, he would be a laughing stock. So at first Naaman was not healed. And the problem was not at all with God. The cure God offered was rock solid and 100% guaranteed to work. The problem was with Naaman and his lack of faith in God’s promise. And so he forfeited God’s blessing of cleansing.

When his servants convinced him how foolish he was not to try God's simple treatment plan, he relented. He believed. He washed in the Jordan 7 times, he received what was promised.

APPL: Some of God's other promises seem just as unreasonable. Who would believe that the man on the cross is the Son of God, and that his shed blood atones for the sins of the world? Trust in him and be forgiven? Ridiculous! Insulting! Give me something harder! Give me something challenging! I believe I can do it! I believe in me! **We** expect that the solution to our sin would involve secret knowledge, strange rites and set words. We would expect a lot of work and much time. We would expect great expense and personal sacrifice. Instead, God gives us a solution that easily fits on one side of a business card. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Do you want to be restored and cleansed? Well then listen up. God is about to talk to you. Don't be put off by the messenger. That was the mistake Naaman made when Elisha's lowly servant delivered a message from God. This clay jar in front of you isn't much to look at, but what I'm about to say is truly from God.

Do you acknowledge that the sin and guilt you carry is a decaying, rotting disease that is destroying your life? Then hear the promise of God. Here is how to be restored and cleansed. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are cleansed and restored. Believe that he is the Son of God, true man and true God, sent to redeem us. Believe that his life on earth was a life of perfect obedience to the heavenly Father. Believe that his innocent death on the cross was the complete payment for all of your sin and guilt. Believe that the empty tomb is the guarantee and proof that you truly are forgiven and that you are a dearly loved child of God. Hold on to these promises of God and know that they will never fail.

One of my favorite cartoons growing up was Road Runner. Wile E. Coyote was always trying to catch him in imaginative and ingenious ways, but something always went wrong. And it always seemed like Wile E. Coyote always got to a point where he was falling off a cliff. Once when he started falling he was able to reach out and grab small branch on the side of the cliff. Firmly grasping the branch, he let out a "whew!" Just then, of course, the branch snapped, and off he went falling again.

This little illustration reminds us that it doesn't matter how firmly you hold on to something... if that something isn't strong and can't bear your weight, your firm hold on it is useless. Hold on firmly to yourself, your strength, earthly resources... and you're holding on to a branch that will not bear your weight. It WILL snap and leave you free falling. You will not be restored and cleansed. But hold on to God's rock solid promises made at the cross of Christ 2000 years ago, and you will never fall.

It's not a solution we would have come up with... it may not even make perfect sense to us. But it's God way. And it just works... 100% guaranteed. Wash in the blood of Jesus Christ, and you are completely restored and totally cleansed of your sin and guilt! Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name by which we must be saved. Abandon sinful pride. Give up your desire to make your own choices and find your own way. Stop and listen: You are restored and cleansed... God's way. Amen.