

You Can't Buy the Cure

Forgotten Lives . . . Remembered Truths, Part 2

2 Kings 5:1-14

The most famous monuments or memorials in America are located in and around the Mall in Washington DC. One of the most famous is the Lincoln Memorial. It has 36 columns, representing the number of States at the time of Lincoln's death.

On one wall is His Gettysburg address and on another is his inaugural address – filled with references to God, which makes me glad it's not hanging on the wall, but etched in stone.

Every day when the sun rises over Washington, DC its first rays fall on the eastern side of the city's tallest structure, the 555-foot Washington Monument. The architect wanted those first rays to catch and reflect off the aluminum capstone where these words are inscribed, "Laus Deo" which is Latin for "Praise be to God." I think it's in Latin so most people can't read it and sue the government to have it removed.ⁱ

If you were to walk up all 897 steps to the top, there are 50 landings where you can catch your breath and at those landings there are memorial stones which communicate a message.

One is a prayer offered by the city leaders of Baltimore; further up is a memorial stone presented by Chinese Christians; further up is a stone presented by Sunday School children from New York and Philadelphia quoting Proverbs 10:7 – the memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will pass away.

Imagine – the first thing to catch sunlight in our Capital are words that speak praise to our living Lord.

Frankly, the reason that might catch you by surprise is the simple fact that the higher you travel up the ladder of power and prestige and position, the

harder it is to kneel in humility before another authority . . . before a greater and higher power.

The gospel is troubling to so many people because it demands their abdication from the throne of their own importance.

Spiritual humility comes before spiritual healing.

That truth will be dramatically acted out in the life of a forgotten man from the Old Testament. He was at the top of the ladder – an impressive, wealthy, powerful man . . . he was a man who could do just about anything, but kneel.

Humility wasn't in his vocabulary. And it almost cost him his life.

His brief mention in scripture – which is only 14 verses long, appears in the Book of 2 Kings and chapter 5.

Let's try an experiment – it could be dangerous – let me throw out a word or two and you give me the first word that comes to your mind.

Ready?

- Peyton Manning and the Denver Broncos – Victory.
- Christmas Vacation –
- Children –
- Cell phones – exactly, turn them off.
- Krispy Kreme – health food.
- Grandchildren – forget the sermon and let's talk

Here's one more – don't answer this one out loud, but what comes into your mind when you hear the word, leprosy?

Hmmm . . . makes you think, doesn't it?

Take your Old Testament and turn to the Book of 2 Kings.

We're about to meet a very proud man who had everything going for him, except one obvious problem.

2 Kings 5 and verse 1 records, Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior . . .

Now if we put a period there, here's what we would know about Naaman.

The Hebrew text informs us that he was actually the leader of the army – we would use the title, Supreme Commander. Think of him as a 5-star General.

Other Hebrew words or terms inform us that Naaman was a great man – that is, he was a man of high social standing whose influence had reached to the king himself.

The Bible tells us that he was highly respected – literally, one who was lifted up of face.ⁱⁱ

By the way, we use the same expression when we refer to someone who loses face – that is, he loses respect.

Naaman had the highest respect you could imagine.

Did you notice that he was also called here – ***a valiant warrior to whom the Lord had given victory to Aram –the king?***

It's interesting to discover from ***1 Kings 22*** that Naaman was commanding the army that defeated King Ahab, the husband of Jezebel – you might remember that wicked couple who ruled the northern tribes of Israel after it had split away from the southern tribes of Judah.

None of the northern kings followed after the Lord, and Ahab was among the most defiant and eventually, the Lord allowed the Syrian army to defeat Israel and Ahab is killed.

And in that particular battle, King Ahab disguised himself but was fatally hit by an arrow, shot randomly toward Israel's army by an anonymous Syrian soldier.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian recorded in his antiquities that the nameless archer was none of than Naaman.ⁱⁱⁱ

It could have been nothing more than an urban legend, but it does reveal that Naaman was indeed a living legend within his pagan Syrian empire.

Now if you put a period right here, in ***verse 1***, after all these titles, Naaman would have been at the top of the heap. In control of everything in his

world –prestigious, wealthy – in fact, you can translate the term “***valiant warrior***” to mean he was an extremely wealthy man.

One author wrote, Naaman was in command of everything. However, there was one thing he could not command – his health.

Notice the last part of ***verse 1*** – ***but he was a leper.***

He was wealthy, respected, victorious, in command, second only to the king, a living legend . . . ***but! . . . he was a leper.***

Just the sound of that word changes everything.

Hey, did I ever tell you about my neighbor in the cul-de-sac where we live – he's a millionaire, many times over, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. You're probably wondering how I can live on that same cul-de-sac . . . use your imagination. You should see his house – with a 6 car garage that houses his fleet of expensive cars – his picture was on the cover of Time Magazine last year – he told me just the other day the President of the United States had invited him and his wife to dine with them at the White House.

But he just told me last week that, he'd just gotten word from his doctor – he has incurable leprosy. It's expected to be a constant irritation . . . and it will spread . . . his hands and feet will be terribly affected and eventually rot away . . . suddenly, a big garage and a magazine cover just don't matter anymore.

There are numerous kinds of leprosy by the way – we're not given the specifics.

It could be like the Hansen's disease that Paul Brand spent his life battling among his patients in India. Leprosy had a numbing effect which numbed the pain cells in hands, feet, nose, ears and eyes. Without the warning system of pain, the victims wouldn't blink and their eyes would lose moisture and eventually sight. Brand's patients might reach directly into a fire to retrieve a potato or stick and feel no pain – and go untreated as the sores on their hand festered and eventually brought gangrene and amputation.

Dr. Brand wrote on one occasion that he was trying to open a rusty padlock that would not yield. A patient – a little malnourished 10 year old boy said, “Let me try.” He reached for the key, and with a quick jerk of his hand he turned the key in the lock. Brand was dumbfounded. How could this weak youngster out-exert a grown man? Then his eye caught the sight of blood drops on the floor.

Upon examining the boy's fingers, he discovered the act of turning the key had gashed a finger to the bone – and the boy was completely unaware.

Let me tell you how desperate this is here . . . it won't be long before Naaman can't grip his sword properly; or squeeze the sides of his stallion with his legs; he won't be able to lead the charge or even walk. He will no longer be sought out by his soldiers, much less the king.

The text implies that Naaman has only recently contracted this disease . . . and starting now, he will over time become an outcast . . . a person to avoid . . . a tragic story on everyone's lips. There wasn't a person in Syria who envied him now.

Of all his awards pinned to his chest – of all his titles he enjoyed – the title now as people cast their pitiful glances in his direction will be – “There's Naaman, the leper.”

Dr. Brand wrote, leprosy is death by degrees – bodily injury, physical scarring, ignorant abuse; a thousand different disorders – all because the ability to sense it no longer exists.

This, by the way, makes leprosy the perfect illustration for sin in the Old Testament.

Sin is also death by degrees – as sin develops and the conscience hardens, there is the inability to sense any danger and any self-destruction that it brings.

Ask an unbeliever how his weekend of sinning and carousing went and he'll say, “It was great.”

“Do you feel badly about it?”

“Are you kidding – I can't wait til next weekend

. . . what a life.”

Warren Wiersbe made the excellent analogy between leprosy and sin – he wrote, like leprosy, sin is deeper than the skin; it spreads; it defiles; it isolates; and it is fit only for the [judgment of God].^{iv}

Throughout the Old Testament, the judgment of God was often seen in sending leprosy to an unrepentant person. As if to say, “Listen, you don't think you're a sinner – you don't feel like you're sinning . . . well, I'm going to give you a physical picture of what it means to be unable to recognize the danger you're in.”

Which actually then became an act of grace – that God would give a clear, outward, physical reminder to the sinner to repent and be healed.

Evidently not many Israelites cared to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. Elisha, the prophet, who was ministering during the days of Naaman and

Israel, evidently didn't have many conversion stories to tell of.

And I say that because of an interesting connection to this story found in the Gospel by *Luke and chapter 4*.

Jesus is delivering His first sermon in the synagogue as He launches His public ministry. And in that sermon he makes the comment that his audience was just like the audience back in the days of Elisha.

It created such rage in His audience that they took Jesus out of the synagogue and tried to throw him off a cliff to kill Him. And what was it that Jesus said just before they rushed him and carried him away?

Jesus said this – *And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27).*

In other words, the only person to repent of his sin and listen to the word of God was a pagan Syrian Gentile – not an Israelite.

The Jewish audience was infuriated: “Don't tell me I'm a sinner! Don't tell me I need forgiveness like some Gentile leper?”

Don't you know the respectable, dedicated person that I am?

So this is the story of a Gentile leper . . . a man who will discover that the grace and forgiveness of God cannot be bought . . . the cure is free.

Notice 2 Kings 5: 2. Now the Arameans had gone out in bands, and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3. And she said to her mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria (that's Elisha)! Then he would cure him of his leprosy. 4. And Naaman went in and told his master (the king, that is) saying “Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.”

By the way, this shows you how desperate Naaman is to be cured. He's heard from his captive slave girl about a prophet that can cure him.

Look at verse 5. Then the king of Aram said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” And Naaman departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes. 6. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, “And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” 7. And it came about

when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me.”

Now get this scene. Here’s the commanding officer of Israel’s enemy army showing up. They’re not friends. They’re enemies.

And now this 5-star General arrives in Israel’s court, no doubt surrounded by his own guard, with a letter from the Syrian king demanding that Naaman be healed.

The King of Israel assumes this is all a trick by Naaman the living legend to simply start another war.

By the way, the king of Israel – himself an unrepentant man – never even thinks of calling Elisha for help.

Notice what happens instead – *verse 8. And it happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the kind of Israel had torn his clothes (and why), that he sent word to the king saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? In other words, why have you not thought of God and His salvation? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.*

In other words, the word of God is alive and well . . . send him to me.

Let me point out that as Naaman and his entourage get back on their horses and in their chariots and take off to Elisha’s home – **Naaman is under 2 misconceptions.**

1. The first misconception is that healing is something you can buy for yourself.

Notice verse 9. So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha.

Keep in mind that Naaman has arrived with gifts in exchange for his cure.

Back in *verse 5* we’re told that Naaman came with *ten changes of clothing* to give the prophet – these weren’t ready made suits – these were rolls of cloth used for the making of clothing – enough here to make 10 garments, which would have been quite a wardrobe in this day and time.

We’re told he also had *10 talents of silver*. A talent is approximately 844 troy ounces of silver – so he’s got 8,448 ounces of silver.

We’re also told he’s ready to hand over a chest containing *6,000 shekels of gold* – which archeologists have helped us understand was somewhere around 2,400 ounces of gold.

Listen, in today’s economy Naaman is standing on Elisha’s doorstep, ready to give him in exchange for his healing, 3.1 million dollars.^v

Which is another way of saying, Naaman has no doubt leveraged everything he has and probably had friends and family chip in whatever they could – they were rooting for Naaman . . . cheering him on, “Go get that cure, Naaman, there’s no price too high.”

Now, you would think Elisha will be rushing for the door to greet this living legend and receive a prophet’s pension for life!

The truth is he doesn’t even answer the door himself.

Look at verse 10. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean.” Oh, and thanks for stopping by.

Are you kidding? You can almost see Naaman’s face turning purple.

Verse 11 tells us he was furious.

Elisha knew that Naaman needed to be humbled before he could ever be healed.^{vi}

And so does every unrepentant sinner in the world today.

In Naaman’s reaction, you discover the second misconception he – and the entire world of unbelievers – has about cleansing from God.

First, they think the cure is something they can buy for themselves.

2. Secondly, they think the cure is something they can create for themselves.

Naaman is fuming – notice verse 11b – “Look, 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 cure the leper.”

In other words, “I expected that my healing would be – you know – this prophet comes out, prays a short prayer, waves his hand in the air and says, abbra cadabbra and calamazoo or something Disneyish and walaa – I’m cured, I can pay the bill and go home.”

And what’s this about the Jordan River – come on, nobody wants to swim in there – *verse 12 – Are*

not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus better than all the water of Israel. Could I not wash in them and be clean?

I mean, if you're going to make me take a dip or two – or seven – why can't I go home and plunge into the crystal clean waters that flow down into Damascus from the snow-covered Amanus Mountains?

In other words, let me get the cure my own way! So that I can sing one day, the secular song recorded more than any other tune in history – I Did it My Way

My way! Let me create my own cure!

Elisha knows that these misconceptions are eternally more significant than an incurable case of leprosy.

You can't buy forgiveness from God. And you only get the cure for sin if you follow the word of God.

And Naaman illustrates the heart of man. The problem with the gospel isn't that it's too hard – the problem is it's too humiliating.

To admit you're a sinner . . . to depend entirely upon the work of Jesus Christ.

To believe any other cure – any other name – any other way – is not the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) found in Christ alone.

Does this mean that if you believe in Buddha you will find out one day too late that you were wrong? Yes.

Does this mean that if you place your faith in the Dalai Lama you are wrong? Yes.

Does this mean that if you follow your own concoction of a religion that picks and chooses from this and that to fit your own comfort level and leave you in control of your own destiny that you will be wrong and lost forever? Yes.

And that's the problem with the gospel; the problem with God's cure for terminal sin, isn't that it's too difficult – the problem is it's too dogmatic.

Either believe in Him or die a leper . . . an outcast forever from the splendor of heaven and the glory of God.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, the former pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church and a faithful expositor once said, 'Everybody has the privilege of going to heaven God's way, or going to hell their own way.

The cure for sin is not an option . . . the only antidote is found in the blood of Christ.

For Naaman, this Old Testament illustration of sinful pride and the cure from God's prophet that

required the destruction of his misconception that cleansing can be bought and self-made, he's headed home – **verse 12b – in a rage.**

Then some anonymous servants tug on his sleeve, and say – **verse 13 – if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more the, when he says to you, "Wash, and be clean."**

In other words, humble yourself and kneel to the command of the prophet of God.

And so they traveled the 20 some miles – **verse 14. And he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God.**

Where'd Elisha get the number 7 from? "Oh, 7 times will absolutely drench this guy . . . he'll be one arrogant wet duck . . . it'll serve him right."

No, according to the Old Testament pattern of cleansing, prescribed by God and recorded in Leviticus 14, for a leper to be cleansed, he is to be sprinkled by the blood of a sacrificed animal, making atonement and bringing reconciliation with God.

It also involved a complete bath in water by the leper, including his clothing.

Elisha was playing the part of the priest; and God was allowing the waters of the Jordan to play the role of the cleansing fountain – and Naaman became a picture of a humbled repentant sinner, cured by faith in the word of the prophet and the work of God – free of charge.

Makes me think of the lyrics:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stain.*

And the Bible records in **verse 14 and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean** – like a new birth.

You can't buy this cure. You can't design this cure.

You simply plunge into it, by faith, and receive the work of Christ on your behalf.

Let's go back to the Washington Monument for a moment – and one of my favorite stories, told by Pastor Gary Tolbert, about a little boy who had come with his parents to see the sights and monuments of Washington, D.C.

When they arrived at the Washington Monument, the boy was speechless – staring up at the obelisk that stretched into the heavens. Then he noticed a

guard standing by it. The little boy walked up to the guard and said, "I want to buy it." He motioned toward the Washington Monument. The guard said, "Excuse me?" The boy said a little louder, "I want to buy that!"

The guard bent down and asked, "Well, just how much money do you have?" The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out 25 cents. The guard said, "I'm sorry son, that's not enough." The boy replied, "I thought you'd say that," and he reached into his other pocket and pulled out 9 more cents and held all of it up to the guard.

The guard looked down at the boy and then squatted down and said to the little negotiator, "Listen son, you need to understand some things; first of all, you don't have enough money to buy this thing - 34 cents or 34 million would not be enough to buy the Washington Monument; secondly, you need to know that the Washington Monument is not for sale. If you're an American citizen, the

Washington Monument already belongs to you – free of charge."

Forgiveness from sin and eternal life with God are not for sale. In fact, none of us would ever have enough money to buy things as priceless as those. They aren't for sale anyway because they have already been purchased by the grace of God through the death of Jesus Christ.

And the good news is this; when you place your faith in the cross-work of Jesus Christ, all those things belong to you now . . . the cure is yours, for free.

Naaman becomes a lasting reminder of the truth that we are not saved by bringing gifts to God; we are saved by receiving gifts from God – cleansing – and forgiveness through the river of Christ's blood, in which we are immersed and cleansed forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/11/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i David Jeremiah, What in the World is Going On? (Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 119

ii Ibid

iii Russell Dilday, Mastering the Old Testament: 1, 2 Kings (Word Publishing, 1987), p. 305

iv Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History (Cook Communications, 2003), p. 521

v Adapted from Dilday, p. 305

vi Wiersbe, p. 522