

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Women of faith: The Little Maid

Is it possible, do you think, that a nameless young girl, could have a profound impact upon a man who lived some 850 years later? Yet it is just that astonishing fact that will become clear in our talk today. This is the fourth in a series of talks entitled 'Women of Faith'. So far, we have looked at Jochebed, the mother of Moses, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Ruth with her mother-in-law, Naomi. We have seen something of the remarkable way in which God was able to use these women. That same lesson will become evident in our talk today and will, I trust, be an encouragement to all of us, women and men alike!

The story of this young girl is quickly told and can be found in 2 Kings 5:1-4. We'll read those verses now. "Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honourable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, 'If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.' And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, 'Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel.'"

Just suppose for a moment that you were that young girl - snatched from her home in Israel, perhaps having seen her parents killed, separated from her friends and now brought into this strange land with its foreign gods and forced to worked hard for her mistress, Naaman's wife. It would have been all too easy to have given in to despair, ready to blame God for her difficult situation. If God had abandoned her, then she would abandon Him! If she was unhappy, then she would make others unhappy also. Sadly, some of us may have given in to feelings just like those when we have found ourselves in difficult situations. Yet we shall see that this was very far from the attitude of this young girl.

In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus taught the multitudes, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45). This young girl was evidently a daughter of her Father in heaven!

It was John Wesley, the founding father of Methodism, who, some 26 centuries later than this young girl, would write,

*"Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can  
In all the ways you can  
In all the places you can  
To all the people you can  
As long as ever you can."*

Clearly that young girl had already learned something of that secret of happiness. Would that we might learn it too! The Apostle Paul had also learned something of that secret when, from his prison cell, he wrote to his young son in the faith, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

We need now to look at what the Bible tells us of her master, Naaman. It's an impressive CV! "...commander of the army of the king of Syria ... great and honourable ... mighty man of valour" (2 Kings 5:1). Yet all these achievements could not deliver Naaman from that sentence of death laid upon him. 2 Kings 5:1 ends on the solemn note, "...but he was a leper". What was true of Naaman's physical condition is also sadly true of our spiritual condition. Whatever our achievements in life, be they great or small, they cannot nullify that sentence of death that lies upon all of us sinners before a holy God: "The wages of sin is death", Romans 6:23, but that same verse continues, "...but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Only the grace of God can meet us in our spiritual condition, as Naaman was to learn that only that same grace of God could meet him in his physical condition.

Before we leave Naaman, it is just worth noting the reason the Bible gives for Naaman's success: "...because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria" (2 Kings 5:1). What a solemn statement! The people of God defeated by a heathen general! Naaman was probably totally unaware of this fact. Despite the efforts of prophets like Elijah and Elisha, the nation of Israel had by and large turned away from God to worship their idol, Baal. God's hand of judgement, yet a

judgement tempered by love, fell upon His people so that they might learn their need of Him and turn back to Him. That fact ought to have a voice for us in the difficulties which currently face us as a nation. By and large, we have replaced the worship of God by a worship of wealth, pleasure, sport and a multiplicity of gods.

We are not told just how our little girl learned of Naaman's condition. As far as possible, he would have hidden it from everybody for its discovery would have led to his banishment from society (see Leviticus 13:1-59). His wife would first have learned about it and perhaps one day her serving maid had found her in deep distress about it and the whole sad story would have come out. The answer to this little maid was obvious. The prophet of God, Elisha, would heal him!

We need to consider, now, what a remarkable statement of faith this was by this serving maid. To do this, we need to go forward in history nearly 900 years. The Lord Jesus was in the synagogue in His home town of Nazareth. It has been said that the hardest place to be a Christian is at home. That is because we tend not to be on our guard so much as when we are outside. When the Lord Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, which had been handed to Him, Luke tells us, "So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22). But their attitude changed drastically when He told them that Elijah was sent to a widow in Zarephath, outside the borders of Israel, and then went on to say, "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). That statement makes clear that this maid would never have seen a leper cleansed in Israel, yet she had this unquenchable faith that her God could do just that!

Here is a group of children at play. One of them says, "My dad can run a marathon." Another says, "My dad can fly an aeroplane." Finally another, not to be outdone, says, "My dad can do anything!" Whatever optimism our children put in our abilities, sadly our children have to learn sometime that we dads fall short! But this maid's confidence in her God would never be misplaced! Paul had this same supreme confidence in his God not only to meet his personal needs but also the needs of others when he wrote to the Philippian believers, firstly, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me", (Philippians 4:13) and then, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Would that we all could have that same faith in our heavenly Father!

It says much for the maid that this statement of hers was not dismissed by her mistress as childish fantasy. Indeed, when her mistress shared it with her husband, Naaman, he had sufficient confidence in it to go to the king of Syria and get him to write to the king of Israel. Moreover, his confidence in the maid's word was such that he was prepared to make a journey of around 200 miles on the strength of it. It's good when we are known as men and women of our word. One of the saddest stories in the Bible is that of Lot, Abraham's nephew (see Genesis 19:1-38). When he was warned that God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness and that he should leave Sodom with his family, we read, "So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law ... and said, 'Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!' But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (see Genesis 19:14). Only Lot and his two daughters were eventually saved (Genesis 19:30-38).

The New Testament lays considerable emphasis on the fact that Christians should be characterised by truthfulness. Such a lifestyle will contrast markedly with what goes on in the world today. So Paul writes, "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbour ... Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Ephesians 4:25, 29). The aged apostle John would write, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). As followers of the Lord Jesus who could declare, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6), we need to be those whose word can be depended upon.

Naaman comes to the king of Israel with a letter from the king of Syria and laden with presents with which he hoped to buy the favour of this God of Israel. We read, 'And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? ..." So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel'" (2 Kings 5:7-8).

Here is this mighty king of Israel, yet totally ignorant of what a humble maid, carried away from his kingdom, most certainly knew. But then, knowledge of God does not depend on rank, status or wealth but rather on a willingness to learn. Years before, the psalmist, David, had written, "The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). The Lord Jesus Himself would say, "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know..." (John 7:17). When the cities in which Jesus had ministered and worked miracles refused to believe in Him, Matthew tells us, "At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight'" (Matthew 11:25-26).

Naaman is told by Elisha to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times (2 Kings 5:10). He would have gone away in a huff, expecting much more reverential treatment (2 Kings 5:11-12). However, his servants persuaded him to do just as the prophet of God had said (2 Kings 5:13). Can you picture him as he stood there, ready to dip himself? That leprosy, once

so carefully hidden, would be there for all to see. His great need was obvious! We read, "So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, 'Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel'" (2 Kings 5:14-15).

Similarly, if any of us are to come into blessing from God, it will only be as we come to Him, stripped of all pretensions of self-righteousness and merit, and depending totally on His mercy. In Philippians 3, we see the Apostle Paul, as it were, in the stripping room. After writing, "Though I also might have confidence in the flesh...", he goes on to detail his impressive pedigree as a Pharisee. He then continues, "... but what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:4-11).

In gratitude to God, Naaman takes with him two mule-loads of earth, so that, back in Syria, he might erect an altar of sacrifice to the God of Israel (2 Kings 5:17). Just think of that! In a land given up to the worship of the idol god, Rimmon (see 2 Kings 5:18), now, perhaps for the first time, there would be an altar to the one, true God. And how had this come about? Through the faithful witness of this little serving maid! Wise King Solomon wrote, "A word spoken in due season, how good it is" (Proverbs 15:23). This girl's message to her mistress was certainly "a word spoken in due season". May the Lord help each one of us in our different situations to be such messengers!

At the beginning of this talk, we raised the question as to whether a nameless young girl could have an impact upon a man who lived some 850 years later. It's time now to look at how this came about. We referred earlier to Jesus' message in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). After He had told the congregation that no leper in Israel had been cleansed, we read, "Then all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff" (Luke 4:28-29). This would have been prior to stoning Him. The Lord Jesus had come to die, but that time was not yet. Nor would that death be by stoning, the Jewish method of execution, but by crucifixion at Calvary, the Roman method of execution so that the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, would be implicated in His death. The Lord Jesus Himself forewarned His disciples of this: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again" (Matthew 20:18-19).

What an amazing transformation! Within the space of a few minutes, that congregation would be reduced from marvelling at His gracious words to baying for His death! It is true that the little maid is not mentioned explicitly in this record, but what caused the incident was based upon what she was the means of bringing about.

Fellow believer, never think for a moment that you are too insignificant to be used by God, to be part of His plans. Indeed, Paul had to write to the Christians at Corinth, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

In His grace, God wants to use each one of us, not for our glory, but for His! We close with a verse from the hymn by Elsie Yale (1873-1956):

*There's a work for Jesus  
Ready at your hand,  
'Tis a task the Master  
Just for you has planned.  
Haste to do His bidding,  
Yield Him service true;  
There's a work for Jesus  
None but you can do.*

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