

July 24<sup>th</sup> 2011: A Little Child Shall Lead Them: #1 The Value of a Word  
2 Kings 5:1-14

The story we had read to us this morning is one of the great OT stories. It has a very strong connection with the New Testament. It stands as an **illustration of sin** which destroys our souls as much as Naaman's leprosy was destroying his body. **Of Faith** which Naaman required to act on the prophet's commands and to plunge himself in the Jordan in his search for cleansing. **Of the sovereignty of God** who finds lost souls anywhere and everywhere and rescues them. **Of Grace** for like us Naaman was an enemy of God yet God chose to deliver him and give him new life. **Of One Way Salvation** for just as Naaman could only find physical cleansing through his immersion in the Jordan river, so we can only find our spiritual cleansing through our immersion in the death of Christ. And so on, and so on.

But as well as that this story contains so many amazing characters. I recall that when the current TV series 'Downton Abbey' was first being aired the critics praised it for its characters. 'They have stories which are so believable and they compel the viewer to connect with them', they said. 'You find yourself involved with them very quickly—either loving them or hating them'. Well what they said about a fictional story shown on our television sets can be said even more about this true account from the Bible.

We have General Naaman to start with. A great soldier who we are surprised to read had been used by the Lord to give victory to (Aram)Syria, for Naaman was a Syrian and enemy of the Jewish people. He was well thought of by the king and those who counted and was even seen as a good Master by his slaves. Yet the thing about Naaman; about this man who enjoyed a good relationship with his wife and was prepared to listen to her words, even when he knew they were based on the utterings of a servant girl. This upstanding man—highly efficient soldier and leader—he had leprosy.

Then we have the king of Syria. A powerful man it would seem who was used to being obeyed. An ancient ruler who had no hesitation in ordering the king of Israel to cure a General who led Syrians effectively in battle against Israelites. A fierce ruler, and yet one who had a soft spot in his heart for his general that led him to act on his behalf. To send a letter with gifts rather than an army with drawn swords, simply because he wanted to achieve the best outcome for Naaman.

Along with these men we soon meet the king of Israel, who is as weak as dish water, anxious and scared. The crusty old prophet Elisha who cared little for pagan power, be they Generals or kings, and didn't even go outside to greet this mighty commander, but sent his servant with non-negotiable directions to give him.

We discover the servants of Naaman, so concerned about their Master that they dare to question his decision when he was already in a foul and angry move, and what's more, convince him to change his mind. These heathen servants stand in surprising contrast to the servant of Elisha who, in a moment of greed lied and cheated, and at the end of the story is left with the leprosy that Nathan is now free of.

And above all these, of course, we have our Almighty God. Awesome in His power and control, involving Syrians and Israelites from the very mighty to the very weak, in His plans and purposes.

Yet with all these different characters there is one that stands out for me whom I have yet to mention. It is the Jewish slave girl who have such faith in the power of God working through His prophet to cure her Master. She is the key person in the story, for without her contribution the rest would not have followed.

We are told very little about her. We know she is a young girl and I picture her as maybe an eleven or twelve year old. We also know that she is a slave girl who had been taken captive by one of the several bands of Syrian soldiers who would regularly attack, burn and destroy the Israelite villages that lay unprotected within the boundaries of the nation of Israel. We are not even told her name.

It doesn't take much though, to imagine the trauma she had seen in her young life. Trauma like nothing we would ever have experienced. Her parents and family hacked to death in front of her eyes by bloodthirsty warriors, or maybe carted off with her to become slaves elsewhere in Syria. Her being dragged from their arms never to see them again.

Yet this young girl had retained something from her childhood in that Jewish village that had stayed with her. A belief in the power of God and His prophet Elisha. A Faith that is active, and is presented in this story as a total contrast to the faith of the king of Israel himself! In Isaiah 11:6 we read in

an entirely different context that a 'young child shall lead them', and that's exactly what we see happening here.

Here is a truth that we as a church, are basing so much of our outreach into this community on. That information about God—about Jesus—has a high chance of sticking in the mind and heart of a young child, giving God the HS the opportunity to use it for the sake of that child or others around them.

Just last week I experienced the reality of this as I spoke to an 11 year old girl from the school next door, whose family are not church goers but she had been a member of one of the groups I had spoken to about 'hot cross buns and the Easter story', a couple of months ago. I said to her, 'you were in the class I told about the hot cross buns'. 'Yes, I was', she replied, and then the grandmother and mother added, 'And didn't we hear about it! Every time we ate a hot cross bun we were reminded about what it all meant.'

And a child shall lead them!

On the 14<sup>th</sup> August we will commence our Jesus Kids 6 week Winter outreach. Targeting the children in our community that don't attend Sunday School anywhere, we will invite parents to drop them off here at 10.00 and pick them up at 11.15 and hopefully, stop and join us for morning tea as they do so. Your prayers, support, understanding and encouragement are needed so much for this, for who knows how God will use knowledge gained by a child, to create the same type of active faith that the young girl in our story had.

One preacher talking about this little girl featured in the story of Naaman said that she had "Unlikely Faith—Unlikely Love—Unlikely Success". And when you stop and think about it she definitely did.

What faith she had in God's power to heal through His prophet. Her words to her mistress were: 2 Kings 5:11

***"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."***

Do we who are older in years and in our faith reveal that type of faith in our words to on-believers?

And what Love! How unexpected that she would show such love and compassion for her mistress and master. They were her enemies. They

represented the force that had destroyed her home and family. Yet she loved enough to make the suggestion that led to her master's healing. Do we show that type of love to those who hurt us? To those others would see as our enemies?

And what success. Who would have thought that her simple yet heart meant remark would bring about what it did. Only God who inspired it and then empowered it.

And it is this that brings me to the reason for my title this morning—"The Value of a Word". She was young; she was a slave; but the value of the word she spoke to her mistress was priceless in the sight of God.

How different it would have been if she had responded to the nudge that God gave her by listing all the reasons why she shouldn't speak.

Like: → but I'm too young and unimportant. They won't listen to me anyhow. They are pagans, they know nothing about God and won't understand what I mean. Supposing I make a promise that God won't or can't fulfill. I know very little, so any word I may speak has little value and won't achieve anything.

But she didn't. She spoke as God led her and the value of her word was amazing. It led to a change life

Do we believe in the wonderful value of our words about God when spoken as the result of His leading? Maybe we don't, because if we did we would not be as slow to speak or as unwilling to commit. Or maybe we do, and pray constantly for God to use us in speaking the word in season.

Whatever the case may be this OT story leaves us with a real encouragement to speak out for God whenever He gives us the opportunity. For the awesome God who use the words of a young but obedient girl to change lives of the mighty and the rich will use us too, as he moves by His Spirit across our community, across the lands.