

Place: Lurgan Baptist Church 29:7:2007

Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-14

## A HOLY MAN OF GOD

### 11. A MOST UNLIKELY EVANGELIST

In May 1855, an eighteen year old boy went to the deacons of a church in Boston. He had been raised in a Unitarian church, in almost total ignorance of the Gospel, but when he moved to Boston to make his fortune, he began to attend a Bible-believing church. Then, in April of 1855, his Sunday School teacher had come into the store where he was working and simply and persuasively shared the gospel and urged the young man to trust in Christ. He had, and now he was applying to join the church. One fact quickly became obvious. This young man was almost totally ignorant of Biblical truth. One of the deacons asked him, “*Son, what has Christ done for us all, for you which entitles Him to our love ?*” His response was, “*I don’t know. I think Christ has done a great deal for us, but I don’t think of anything in particular as I know of.*” Hardly an impressive start.

Years later his Sunday School teacher said of him, “*I think the committee of the church seldom met an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of Gospel truth, still less to fill any space of public or extended usefulness.*” Nothing happened very quickly

to change their minds. The deacons decided to put him on a year-long instruction course to teach him basic Christian truths. Perhaps they wanted to work on some of his rough spots as well. For not only was he ignorant of spiritual truths, he was only barely literate and his spoken grammar was atrocious. At his second interview, there was only a little improvement in the quality of his answers, but since it was obvious that he was a sincere and committed Christian, they accepted him as a church member.

Over the next years, I am sure that many people looked at that young man, convinced that God would never use a person like that, they wrote off D. L. Moody as “*A Most Unlikely Evangelist,*” but God did not. For by God’s grace D. L. Moody was transformed into one of the most effective servants of God, a man whose impact is still with us. If I were to ask this company, “*what kind of Christian does God use ?*” I believe the answer would be as varied as the people here gathered. You see we all have an image of the person God uses and invariably we see ourselves as being a long way from fitting that image. The conclusion is inevitable, I am not what God requires, so the Lord cannot use me.

But when we turn to the Word of God we discover a delightful truth. God is not stuck on one pattern. He does not have a heavenly mould into which we must fit or else we will be discarded. The world produces conformity, God produces *individually*. Our God is a God of infinite variety who uses people of all kinds, shapes, and colours, and He has a wonderfully unique purpose for each of us. To prove this, we need only

consider this little maid in Naaman's house. What a priceless treasure she was. A little captive maid who not only knew God's power but a full measure of His grace stored up in her heart. What a wonderful little gospel preacher she was. Suppose she had harboured natural resentments against Naaman. Suppose she had said,

***“Leprosy it serves him right.”*** Then the world would have been robbed of this wonderful story of salvation. My .... this little maid is one of God's precious nobodies who have a great reward awaiting them in Heaven. Notice the story commences with,

### **(1) A STRANGE MYSTERY**

The days in which this *“little maid,”* lived were hard and cruel. There was continual warfare between Ben-hadad the King of Syria, and Jehoram the King of Israel. ( 1 Kings 20:1 6:24 ) According to Jewish tradition, indeed Josephus the Jewish historian tells us that it was from the bow of Naaman that the arrow sped which smote and killed Ahab the King of Israel ( 1 Kings 22:34 ) The war ended with that battle, but not the defeat. The army of Israel was dispersed. ( 1 Kings 22:36 ) Syria no longer encountered resistance, and the result was that marauding bands of Syrians continually invaded the borders of Israel and carried away whatever they could get their hands on. Now it was on one of these raids that this *“little maid,”* was kidnapped, brought to Damascus and providentially brought into Naaman's house. What A *Strange Mystery*. What a mysterious hardship for here *“He that keepeth Israel,”* ( Ps 121:4 ) allowed this

*“little maid,”* to be taken captive. (1) For notice that in this mystery,

### ***(a) A HOME WAS SHATTERED:***

Look if you will at ( 5:2 ) My .... that may mean little to us today, but it meant much to certain people that day !

Rawlinson tells us that ***“the marauding expeditions of ancient times had for one of their main objects the captures of slaves.”*** A home was rendered desolate. Can you enter into the feelings of these parents who had their young daughter ruthlessly snatched from them ? Can you think of the anguish of that poor mother, wondering what would become of her daughter ? Can you see her grief-stricken father in his helplessness, unable to rescue her ? ***How would you feel as a mother or father if your daughter was kidnapped ? Would you not be deeply distressed ? Would you not be sorely tried by this mysterious providence ?*** Think of the heartache, the tears, and the anguish as this precious child was snatched from loving parents. Why ? Oh why ? Why had the Lord allowed this child to be taken ? Why had God permitted the joy of this home to be shattered ? Why this cruel captivity ? *Why ? Why ? Why ?* (a)

About 29 years ago I stood in a similar home. For one morning the peace of a small farm-stead in Crosskeys Co. Antrim. was disturbed. An I. R.A. murder gang had come to murder a policeman in that home. A Christian mother was awakened from her sleep and as she peered

through her window to discover what was happening, they shot her dead. A day or so later I gazed around that home that was riddled with bullets, I looked upon the tear stained faces of her daughters as they cried, “ **Why ?**” Is that the question on your lips this .... ? As you think about a loved one who has been taken are you saying why ? As you think about a friend who is suffering are you saying why ? *As you think about a relative who is battling with terminal illness are you saying why ?* Are you anguished today about something tragic that just doesn’t make sense ? My .... has some domestic circumstance, some tragedy entered into your home, that has shattered it and you’re asking why ? (a)

**(b) A HAND WAS SHAPING:**

For this event which seemed to originate in the will of man was the start of a plan through which Naaman was physically and spiritually healed. ( 5:15 ) My .... God had a purpose in this trial. ***His hand was shaping things.*** He was working out his good and wise purpose. Does this not shed some light upon the mysterious ways of God in our lives ? My .... we cannot always trace God’s providential dealings in our lives, but what we can be sure about is, that as His children nothing happens to us by chance. God has planned every detail in our lives and we can say with the psalmist “ *My times are in Thy hand.*” ( Ps 31:15 ) I have a feeling that the “ ***bad things,***” that stalk our lives are accomplishing purposes that we may not fully understand today.

My .... we can’t explain each individual case, but the total pattern seems to be clear. God is in control and is working our His purposes for our good and His glory. ( Rom 8:28 ) As the old Puritan Thomas Watson used to say, “ **Where reason cannot wade, there faith must swim.**” My .... this .... in those tragic circumstances you may not be able to ***trace the hand of God but you can trust the heart of God.*** For

***God knows the way, He holds the key,  
He guides us with unerring hand  
Sometime, with tearless eyes we'll see  
Yes, there, up there, we'll understand.***

**(c) A HEART WAS SILENT:**

We have only to use a little imagination to sense the distress this girl would have felt as she was snatched by the fierce and warlike Syrian raiding party. Then there was the sense of loss and grief she must have experienced as she was abducted from her family to a strange land in order to make a new home with an alien people. Think of it. She had been brought to a strange land, to a strange culture, to a strange home, to a strange owner. Now you put yourself in that position and I’m afraid it would be easy for us to lapse over into bitterness. ***She might well have hated both God and people.*** But she didn’t act like that at all. Rather here was a young lady who was submissive to the sovereign will of God. My .... there is not a hint that she gave way to bitterness or self-pity. On the contrary, this girl seems to have sensed instinctively in her heart the truth stated by Paul centuries later in ( Rom 8:28 ) “ *And we*

*know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”*

Her kidnapping had been an unqualified evil, but like Joseph she knew that “ *God intended it for good.*” ( Gen 50:20 ) Her heart was silent. My ... how do we react when life falls apart ? Do we blame God ? Do we blame others ? Do we become bitter ? Or like this “ *little maid,*” do we “ *glorify the Lord in the fires ?*” ( Is 24:15 ) This story commences with a (1) but notice this story continues with,

## **(2) A SIMPLE TESTIMONY**

For although this girl was small in stature she was big in heart. “ *And she said, unto her mistress, would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.*” ( 5:3 ) A more positive assertion of faith can hardly be found anywhere else in the Bible. My .... where did such faith come from ? Did it not come from a fathers teaching and a mothers prayers ? No doubt this child had often heard the story of God’s dealings with her fathers. Often she must have listened intently as they spoke of “ *the prophet that was in Samaria.*” ( 5:3 ) She had not only learned about Elisha but she had learned respect for him. And now the seeds of godliness that had been sown in earlier days are bringing forth fruit. My .... are you seeking to instil the truths of Gods Word into the minds and hearts of you children ? ( Deut 6:7 )

Do you see here the wonderful results of early

Christian training ? This captive maid, because she had been taught to trust and know God, was so strong in faith that she was the means of bringing salvation to the home of her captivity, and of raising up a testimony for God which rang through the whole land of Syria. Note,

### **(a) HOW COURAGEOUS SHE WAS:**

Look at ( 5:3 ) if you will “ *And she said unto her mistress,*” Now in speaking about Elisha, she was really speaking about Jehovah for he was God’s representative ( Heb 1:1 ) My .... in spite of the dangers, the darkness: the depravity (5:17) that surrounded here she did not keep silent about the true and living God ! Do you remember Daniel ? Like this “ *little maid,*” he too was snatched away from his godly home in Jerusalem and transported 1,000 miles away to Babylon. There they tried to brain wash him. Think of the changes he had to contend with. A new home, a new university, a new name, a new curriculum, a new diet. My .... the Babylonians could change Daniel’s home, text-books, menu, name, but they could not change his heart. ( Dan 1:8 ) *What about you young folk ?* Are you being tested at college, university, work ? Are you being tempted to be disloyal to the Word of God, the People of God, and the Cause of God ? Like this “ *little maid,*” like Daniel are you willing to stand alone ?

My .... we are either *conformers* or *transformers*. A conformer is someone who is controlled by the *pressure* from *without*, but a transformer is someone

who is controlled by the *power* from *within*. Which are you? Are you moulded by the world's standards? Or do you set the standard for the world? (a) But,

**(b) HOW COMPASSIONATE SHE WAS:**

She expressed a genuine love for people. She was an unwilling captive in Naaman's household yet she could not bear to see her master suffer. I tell you if most of us had we been in the little maid's place, we would probably have been glad that Naaman had leprosy. We would have felt it served him right for being so cruel and heartless to us, and we would have kept silent about possibilities for his healing but not this young Jewish lassie. She did not return a curse but only a blessing to her heartless captors. Here was "a little maid," who saw her master as a needy soul a stranger to the God of Israel, someone who was experiencing a "living death," ( Lev 13:45-46 ) and she was concerned.

My .... is there a Naaman in your life? Is there someone you know who suffers from sin's leprous effects? Is there someone who does not know about Christ and His ability to cleanse and forgive? Have you a genuine concern for them? Have you a heart felt compassion for them? My .... ***am I right in saying that so often our evangelism is done out of a sense of compulsion rather than out of a heart of compassion?***

General Booth once received a letter from one of his officers lamenting that he saw very little fruit for all his preaching and asking the General's advice. The reply

came in two words "Try tears." Does this "little maid," not put us to shame? Oh, our churches are fundamental, our preaching is doctrinal, and our hearts are clinical. Did you notice,

**(c) HOW CONFIDENT SHE WAS:**

Do you see what she says, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria for he would recover him of his leprosy." ( 5:3 ) The best physicians in the land of Syria may be helpless but her God was not. Indeed so convincing was she, that even the King of Syria, as well as Naaman, discerned the ring of truth in her confident assertion. She didn't say "I think Elisha can meet your need, Elisha as the representative of the true and living God can meet your need." She didn't say "It might work." But with confidence she said it could be done. My .... there was not even a hint of doubt in her testimony rather this was confidence and faith in God and in His power to save!

***Faith, mighty faith the promise sees  
And looks to God alone,  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries, it shall be done***

In a world of uncertainty are folks not looking for a word of certainty? A sure, sound voice. My .... as you think of your Naaman this .... ask yourself the question "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" ( Gen 18:14 ) I mean was there ever a more unlikely person to come to a knowledge of the true and living God, than Naaman? That son, that daughter, that mother, that relative who

because of their sin, is breaking your heart this .... is nothing to God. For our God “ *is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.* ”

( Eph 3:20 ) So this story commences with (1) it continues with (2) and it concludes with,

### (3) A SUPERNATURAL RECOVERY

You see Naaman was healed of his leprosy, and not only that he was brought to a knowledge of the true and living God. ( 5:14-15 ) And it all began with the testimony of “ *a little maid.* ” My .... it will be one of the delights of heaven to meet this little Hebrew girl. You see,

#### (a) *THE HELP SHE RENDERED WAS VITAL:*

A maid in captivity. Who would be inclined to listen to her voice ? Her age, her nationality, her position was all against her. Does it not speak well of the impact this girl’s character had made upon Naaman’s household that no one questioned or doubted the credibility of her testimony. Not only did she blow a clear note on the trumpet of truth, but she held aloft the blazing torch of a holy life. You see, this “ *little maid,* ” moved her mistress, her mistress moved a servant ( 5:4 ) the servant moved the King of Syria ( 5:5 ) the King of Syria moved the King of Israel ( 5:7 ) the King of Israel moved Elisha and the result was Naaman was delivered from leprosy and idolatry and it all began with some simple but sincere words from a “ *little maid.* ”

Talk about *A Most Unlikely Evangelist !* She was the first link in the chain that eventually brought Naaman to the place of salvation. George Trench says “ *We never know when the simple, feeble words we speak for God , which seem to bear no fruit, are links that will ultimately lead to the saving of a soul.* ” Dr. Ted Rendall reminds us of three challenging facts.

1. You are a link, therefore do not keep silent, lest you be “ *the missing link,* ” and that soul be lost.
2. You are a link, therefore do not lose heart if you don’t have the joy of leading that soul to Christ. Remember there are in the chain other links which God is using.
3. You are a link, and should be the one to lead that soul to Christ, don't forget the other links. Be humble and thankful. Yes, (a) and,

#### (b) *THE HONOUR SHE RECEIVED WAS PERSONAL:*

I wonder did Naaman honour her in Syria ? One thing is sure God honoured her, for she got a place in the Word of God and many have spoken well of her as I have been trying to do. My .... does this “ *little maid,* ” not illustrate the principle, “ *them that honour me I will honour.* ” ( 1 Sam 2:20 ) *A Most Unlikely Evangelist.*

A teenager who used the opportunity that was hers to bring one of the greatest men in all of Syria to healing

in his own life and to know the God of Israel as his Saviour and Sovereign. Some years ago in a church in England they were serving out the Lord's Supper. The wine was in a goblet and it was passed along, and you would take it, and drink from it, and then you would take a cloth and wipe the edge of the goblet and pass it on to the next person. The officers of the church had got around about half of the congregation, when one person took it, and began to drink it and wouldn't pass it on.

He just held it, would drink again, and just hold it to himself. The ushers began looking at him and saying, "*Pass it on, pass it on.*" He just shook his head, and drank again, and he did this until he had literally drunk the cup dry. My .... ***is this not what most of us are doing with the grace of God ?*** It was given to us to drink from the cup of salvation but rather than send it on, and pass it on, we have become selfish, we just want to consume on ourselves, and the rest of the world can go to hell for all we care. Is this you ? Or are you like this little Hebrew girl ? Do you have the mind, the heart, the spirit of the Lord Jesus ? Are you taking the cup of salvation and passing it on ?

Hudson Taylor as he looked back over thirty years during which he had seen 600 missionaries respond to his vision to reach China through the China Inland Mission said this, "***God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do His great works by large committee's. He trains someone to be quiet enough, and little enough, and then He uses Him.***" My .... the God who used this "***little maid,***" can and will use

you. The great question is, *will you step out in faith and trust God to use you ?*