

## **The little girl and Naaman 2 Kings 5**

The picture on the screen is Lambert Jacobsz painting of Naaman talking with Elisha. Naaman is the central figure offering Elisha gifts including an extremely expensive purple robe after he has been healed.

Elisha, the old man on the right with his hand on the Bible, is explaining that it was God, not he, who has healed him and that he can accept on gift.

Now the natural thing is to concentrate on these two big central figures when we look at this story, they are the ones that take up the bulk of the words and, in Jacobsz picture, take centre stage. But they aren't really the key characters. Yes, Naaman is in need of healing and yes, Elisha is the one who points him to God's healing. But none of this would have happened if it hadn't been for someone else.

There's a figure in the picture who shines out. The clothes Naaman and Elisha wear are quite matt but one figure has robes that seem to shine. It's the girl on the left, the servant girl. She doesn't seem to take centre stage but she is the one who shines out. And in the story, without her faith, none of this would have been possible.

We don't know her name, it isn't mentioned and she is only in 3 verses but they are enough to tell us what we need to know. War bands from Aram go out to Israel and in doing so they capture this young girl and sell her into slavery and she ends up at the house of Naaman as his wife's servant. There are gaps in the story here. What happened to her family? Are they alive or dead? What horrors has she seen Naaman's soldiers commit? We'll never know – but best case is that her family are alive but she will never see them again; worst case is that they are dead and she'll never see them again.

Just think for a moment, if you were that little girl, how would you feel about Naaman?

I'm guessing that most of us would hate the very ground he walked upon. You'd look at him, see he has leprosy and think `that serves you right` and you'd wait with eager anticipation for the day he dies a painful death. There's a real chance that hate would eat you up and spit you out.

But what she does is the astonishing thing. Despite everything that has happened to her, to her family, despite everything she looks at Naaman and she acts in love. "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.` This isn't an act of hate, this is an act of love, of compassion, of faith in a God who can make a difference. And I think it's plain that this faith has brought a degree of healing to the heart of this girl.

Love not hate; forgiveness, not hurt.

Think of your own life. Can you remember a time someone when someone hurt or upset you. What was your reaction then? How has that moment left your heart now? Is there still healing that needs to take place?

We leave the little girl behind now but she ripples through the story.

Naaman goes off to Israel but he goes to the King's palace. An important person like him needs to go to an important place. But the king of Israel is just bemused, "Am I God? Can I cure anyone?" He says!

Fortunately, Elisha hears what's going on and sends a message that Naaman should come and see him. So Naaman trots off to Elisha's house and when he gets there, Elisha sends a messenger to

Naaman. He doesn't go himself and he sends a message that Naaman should wash in the river Jordan seven times. And boy does that annoy Naaman! "He doesn't dignify me but coming to see me and he then tells me to wash in that dump of a river! I've got better rivers at home! Is this man just taking the... proverbial"

You realise that the first thing that Naaman needs curing of is his pride. How often does our pride get in the way? If you think of the servant girl, there's no pride there. She is a nothing and a nobody. She is simply a servant. But with that comes humility. That lack of pride enables her to act in a faithful, loving and godly way.

When Naaman drops the pride and does as Elisha told him, then he receives that bodily healing. But, again, note that he had to listen to his servants, those beneath him.

But as he removes the pride, as he is healed physically, so also, he is healed spiritually. "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." And he begs to take soil home with him so that he can carry on worshipping God but offering sacrifices on Israel's soil!

But how different could this have been? What if the little girl hadn't acted in faith? What if her faith hadn't enabled healing to happen in her heart? What if she had harboured that hate and looked to hurt?

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also... You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

The interesting thing about Lambert Jacobsz who painted the picture is that he has a Mennonite. Mennonites are Anabaptist Christians who believe in non-resistance and reject any kind of violence. This little girl really taps into that thought pattern. Reject the chance to hit back when you're hurt and instead choose to love.

So, may God strip away any pride in our lives. May he bring his healing into our hearts. And may he give us that faith that this little girl had to reject hate and instead bring love and hope to those we would normally call enemies.