

## ***THE GIRL WHO SPOKE UP, 2 KINGS 5:1-19***

Salt & Light #2

◆**Intro:** Pastor and seminary professor Fred Craddock tells a story of being invited to dinner, in an elegant home, complete with cloth napkins! In the course of the meal the wife blurted out, "I don't like these forks." At that the husband pushed back, got up, and slammed his chair into the table while uttering a few obscenities, took his cloth napkin, threw it onto his plate, and left the house. Fred, being a person of the cloth, thought he should say something, so he looked at his fork and said, "Seems like fine forks to me!"

◆The wife cried, "Oh I don't know why I said that! This silverware is the only thing he brought with him into our marriage. When his last marriage broke, his wife threw them out on the lawn as he was leaving and screamed, "And take your mother's [blasted] silverware with you!" (pause)

◆Imagine for a moment the power of words. In this case, the word "fork". Memories of human maladjustment, marital break up, the search and hope for acceptance and personal significance –all triggered in an instant by one seemingly innocent little word... "fork".

◆Each of us have our own "fork" stories, buttons that husbands and wives, or brothers and sisters can push; buttons well-worn with edges smoothed from frequent use at just the right wrong moment. We all know the power of a word and while we claim "all I said was" in reality much more got across than the mere linguistics. And so it should not surprise us that on the positive

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side good spiritual power can also be conveyed by the spoken word. Today let's think about one little girl who spoke up and what resulted. You already know the end of the story: the commanding general of a foreign land becomes a believer in Israel's God! How likely was that to happen? But what do we learn from the little girl who was salt & light in her place?

◆**1. If I really want the world to change, then somehow, somewhere, I gotta say something about my God.** This is where it all began; the healing and conversion of a foreign dignitary. This little girl simply says out loud, "I know someone who can help" (v3).

◆**A.** She's openly and overtly pointing toward God of course, whom the prophet represents. And you will notice too that Elisha does the same; uses no elegant incantation, no ritual, not even a prayer uttered in a very religious tone, all of which Naaman expected (cf.v11). Naaman was basically invited to simply believe the God in Israel could make it happen. He was invited to faith, not to be impressed with Elisha (which is perhaps one reason Elisha never even appears). And that's exactly what happens.

◆And here's an initial challenge: speaking up for your faith is at it's heart a pointing to the person of God, not yourself, or that you have the "right" faith, or that the other person is wrong, or lost, or foolish. Put the focus on God, and you will

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lose much of your self-conscious nervousness about saying anything out loud about him!

◆ Naaman is so converted that he intends never to worship any other god again. He asks for dirt so he can bring a little bit of Israel home with him, and so also Israel's God. Sort of a mini Israeli embassy in Aram. (In those days people believed gods were territorial, bound to the certain lands.) Naaman is wrong of course. God was already in Aram and very active.

◆ v1 He was "highly regarded because through him *the Lord had given victory to Aram.*"

◆ We can forgive Naaman's oversight. He's just a new convert, though he is aware enough to anticipate the fact that back home not everyone is going to accept this (v18). He knows he'll have to "go to church", so to speak, with the King at a false temple or lose his job, maybe his head.

◆ **B.** We have an amazing set of contrasts going on in this story: A little girl shares a verbal witness to God's power. But the King of Israel has no idea where to turn for help. And the general who has just been miraculously healed fears speaking up in the face of political pressure back home. The obvious consideration for each of us is, which one are we like?

◆ The larger challenge is to those of us who have been believers in the one true God a long time. You know someone who's life is coming unglued. What do you say? Do you have the courage of the young maiden to tell them that

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God can change their life? Do we even believe God will come through if we mention him? This small child was a slave to in a far away country, but we can assume from her compassion (which we'll consider in a moment), that she was dutiful servant. Her example is that she easily, and quite naturally goes beyond being a "kind, silent witness." Here's the point. In introducing people to God, in being contagious christians, there always has to be verbal witness at some point. It's essential. We can give rides. We can wipe tears. We can bring food. We can listen to hurts. But somewhere, somehow we have to say something about God out loud. Don't worry. God will use it.

◆ *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11, NIV).*

◆ The political climate give us enormous opportunity to speak of God! You simply explain your position as connected to your faith. For example, "Well, in this election I'm concerned about \_\_\_\_\_ because the God I worship teaches \_\_\_\_\_. That's a lot different than picketing and calling the other side haters, and sinners, isn't it?"

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◆ It is quite amazing how hesitant many who follow God are to say anything about him. So let me suggest a little **exercise**: *turn to anyone and tell them one thing you've heard or experienced about God that impresses you...* (Go ahead and practice talking about God out loud.)

◆ C. Now, one more thing about speaking up. Testimony, sharing my own experience, carries enormous power.

◆ *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11, NIV).*

◆ John here speaks of the Devil himself. Your speaking of your faith destroys the kingdom of evil! And another thing; your confession of faith in Jesus is at the center of your salvation!

◆ *But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:8-10, NIV).*

◆ Do you see? Sharing your experience of God is a spiritual weapon of mass destruction! Years ago at a Promise Keepers convention an Indian from South America spoke. He told of a hostile tribe that came into his village and surrounded the churches with guns, ordering all to renounce Jesus or be shot on

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the spot. Some went to one side, others to the opposite. The Pastor sided with those who would renounce, and pleaded with the rest of the congregation to do so as well. "What does it matter what we say? We can ask God to forgive us when it is all over." Then the leaders of the hostiles ordered all the renouncers to be shot, saying, "It's people like you who have no conviction the are the real threat to our land."

◆Matt. 10:32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

◆Conviction moves people. Don't be ashamed of your faith. Live it and speak it. Every additional witness increases the credibility of the story!

◆**2. If I really want the world to change, somehow, somewhere I gotta love someone near me.** Why did this little girl in our text speak up? She was captive in Aram, an enemy to Israel. Naaman was one of their "strategery" masterminds, a central target of their sharpshooters. The story sweeps over some detail. It doesn't mention her family, but of course she had one. Now they have an empty place at the table. She'll never see her little brothers grow up. He pink bike stands idle in the shed. What we might expect from this captive child is "If only my master would go ahead and die from this leprosy, then you'd know you shouldn't mess with Israel!" Or maybe a

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comment to another slave like, "Our prophet could cure him, but that's what he gets for fighting God's chosen people." Why did she speak up? Because the love of God flowed through her, even to her captors. This slave girl spoke up because she was courageous enough to point to God, and because she was loving enough to want good for her enemy.

◆ Everyone is getting a lesson about the God of Israel here. Ben-Hadad ("son of Hadad" the Aramean god) saw gods as vending machines; you pay your money, they deliver the goods (v5-6). The gods work for us. So he sends Naaman to Israel's King, as though the prophets of God work for the king. But Elisha works for someone else. Sadly it never occurs to the king.

◆ Furthermore, this is not a hire. Elisha refuses money. This is a gift. God is a giver. You do not pay off God and his healing by being a great person. All Naaman's entourage meant nothing to Elisha. Naaman needed to shed his pride, so that he truly knew his healing was all gift of love. Thus the washing in the clay-mixed Jordan River when Damascus was known for its crystal clear river. Everything starts with the love of God.

*◆ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made...Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made...The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving towards all he has made. (Psalms 145:9,13,17, NIV).*

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◆ Remember verse 1 of our text: *“through him the Lord had given victory to Aram”*? It is not who you are that determines his love for you. And so likewise, it should not be who someone is that determines our sharing of that love with them.

◆ **Conclusion:** Have you ever taken your children to a playground and noticed how quickly they can make friends? Have you ever noticed how slow the adults are to do the same thing? Take a lesson from a young, Israelite girl: you don't have to be a general in the army to change the course of things. Where prideful kings are failing, a godly child makes a difference. Her childlike openness allows her to speak the truth. Her faith allows her to do it in love.

◆ Now I realize how intimidating it becomes to speak your faith as you age and become far more self-conscious, and concerned what people will think about you. And often we don't speak up because we fail to realize that God is in charge in our neighbors world too. Already at work. He directs the way of the wicked as well as the righteous. All men are in his grasp.

◆ *Jeremiah 10:23. Lord, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.*

◆ If we could just remember this how much easier might it be to speak up!

◆ One final thought not about speaking up, but about listening... Jesus refers to our text when preaching in his home town. In Luke 4 Jesus preaches to his home town that he is the long



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awaited fulfillment of the OT promise that God would come and heal.

◆ *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.*

*Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."... "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

◆ But then he adds...Luke 4:27 "And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

◆ His point is this; you don't get the healing power of God in your life by mere association with other people who have it. Lots of OT Church missed it, while one Syrian found it!

◆ Maybe people have been speaking up in your life, maybe all your life -but your healing doesn't come until you by faith dip your self into the Jordan, God's water, who is Jesus himself. Being on the rolls here won't do it. The ceremony of getting baptized doesn't do it. Your salvation and healing come when you accept God as your God. Don't miss the opportunity. Turn to him even now.