

# Maid in Syria

Sermon Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-05-16

**Introduction - Feeling insignificant, stuck, bad circumstances, shattered dreams, as if your life doesn't count? This girl gives ten challenges to our faith that can get us out of our "prison" of feelings and into an overcoming faith.**

So far in our Women of Faith series we have looked at Rahab (a woman rescued out of the gutter), Eve (the only *perfect* woman to have blown it), and the godly sisters (Martha and Mary). Today I want to look at a nameless slave girl who had been taken captive to Syria. And I believe this girl exhibited a faith that can inspire all of us to grow in grace - this sermon is not just for the girls in our midst. Though nameless and unknown and unloved, God knew her, loved her, and God made sure that we would cherish this girl in our hearts. I hope you *do* cherish her after today.

It can be difficult to feel insignificant and unable to contribute very much to the kingdom. We want our lives to count; I think God made us that way. And if you are an invalid on a bed, it may feel like your options are extremely limited. If you are trapped in a bad marriage, you can feel like your productivity has been drained way down. If you a little child, you might feel like no one pays attention. If you are an employee at a big corporation you might feel like you are a tiny cog in a huge machine. I think most of us wonder what difference our tiny little efforts can make in bringing our nation back to God. But God is in even the seemingly insignificant things of life. And I can assure you that each one of you have a divine purpose, and your life is critical to God's purposes on earth. You would not have been made if you were not critical.

Out in Ethiopia my parents knew a young girl who had become a Christian, and she felt the same way. She thought, "Who would listen to a girl's testimony in my village?" But she wanted to be a witness. God had put within her a deep desire to see others become Christians. One day as she was walking home, it began to rain and she slipped in the mud, hitting her head on a rock, and knocking herself unconscious. When she came to, a leopard was lying on top of her body, breathing into her face. It must have been lying there for quite some time because its tail twitching back and forth had rubbed her foot raw. She didn't freak out like most of us would have, but she prayed to God silently - "Lord, now that I am a Christian I am ready to come to You in heaven. If you let this leopard eat me, I will be happy to be with you. But please Lord, I want my family and village to know about Jesus. Would you please spare my life?" The leopard immediately got up and walked away. It stopped, looked back at her, and then walked a little further. It stopped again, and looked back at her. Finally, it walked off into the woods. You can bet she was rejoicing. She realized that it had been extremely cold during the night, and God had sent this leopard to keep her body warm in the cold. And He had also answered her prayer and shown Himself stronger than animals. God had also given her a renewed vision for her village. She told others about her testimony, and for the skeptics in the village, God had made sure that the leopard had peed on her clothing. They could smell the leopard all over her and could not deny that her story

was true. And as a result of this little girl's testimony, many of the other villagers became Christians too. She thought, "all I am is a little girl," but in God's plan, little girls have a great place in His unfolding providence. And she later began to realize that even the boring parts of her life could count.

That was certainly true of this girl in 2 Kings 5. As a result of the statement of faith that escaped her lips, Naaman became a true believer, and through his influence, King Benhadad acknowledged God as the true God in chapter 8. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that he is a true believer, but he at least *respected* Biblical religion after this event, and he stopped attacking Israel. This in turn meant that the influence of this little girl included a new freedom for Elisha to travel into Syria; a temporary freedom from wars for Israel as a whole. But what a privilege it was to know that there would be people in heaven because of something that she had said. Today I want to look not so much at the missions impact that she had (which I have preached on before); but I want to look at the impact that God had on *her* as he formed *her* into His image in this foreign land. The story of a Jewish maid being made in Syria - made for the Lord - is a marvelous story.

Have you ever wondered what aspirations this young girl might have had? She certainly did not have aspirations to be a slave. Verse 2 indicates that she was forcibly abducted from Israel. She had been taken captive during a war. But I think it is worthwhile thinking about her aspirations because many of the situations we find ourselves in are not to our liking either, and we need to be willing to give our aspirations over to God. Like other Israelite girls, she probably dreamed of marrying a handsome young Israelite, having a cottage by the sea, and had perhaps even dreamed of the ways in which she could serve the Lord with hospitality in that cottage. But God was going to make her life count in an entirely different way than she would have chosen. The point is, nameless as she was, her life did count. And it counted not because she was successful in the eyes of the world. Her life counted because she had a heart that was crafted by God. I believe that missions is first and foremost an issue of the heart, not an issue of where your residence might be, or what your giftings might be. She may have been an unwilling missionary, but she *was* one. Every one of us can develop the ten mission attitudes that this girl had.

## You Must Be Concerned About the Needs Of Others

First, you must be concerned about the needs of others. This is a big one. This is a hard one. Paul says, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (1 Cor. 10:24). That takes God's grace. This maid could easily have felt sorry for herself and been so wrapped up in self-pity and in her own needs and hurts that she would have been blind to the needs of others. Has that happened to you? Consider her difficulties. Verse 2 says,

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...

The implication seems to be that not a whole lot of time had gone by. Now you children, imagine being kidnapped and sent to Peru. It makes me cringe to even think about. And by the way, it reminds me that some of you kids should not be playing outside without adult supervision. Anyway, just imagine that you have been kidnapped. Your parents, if they are

even alive, don't know where you are. You know they are worrying about you. You are worrying about them. You have just been through the harrowing experience of war, you have seen death, you have been dragged from your parents crying and terrified, you have made a long journey to a foreign land. You are emotionally exhausted. You feel lonely. You are now being forced to work for your captors. What would you feel like if you found out that the master who had taken you away has this dreaded disease, leprosy? Be honest. You probably wouldn't be too concerned would you? In fact, you might wish that his wife would get it too.

Can you see that her concern for others was a God-given concern? This was much like Paul's deep concern for his persecutors in Romans chapter 9. It is remarkable that she even notices her master's misery, let alone cares about it. Yet she says,

If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.

You need to pray for that kind of concern - a concern that gives evidence of the grace of God. You need to pray that God would help you to not be wrapped up in yourself and to purge you from the sin of wallowing in self-pity. If you think you have a right to self-pity, compare your situation with this girl's situation. Pray that God would give you an attitude that puts others ahead of yourself. If you begin to develop the habit of thinking of the needs of others; praying for the needs of others; being concerned for the needs of others, God will make your life count no matter where you are. And interestingly, in the process you will be rescued from the shackles of bitterness and self-pity - and we will look at that in a bit.

## You Must Not Be Ashamed Of God

The second principle is that you must not be ashamed of God. When she said, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria!" she was basically saying, "The prophets of this country don't have the right message and don't have the right God." It was a bold contrast between the impotence of Syria's gods who could not heal Naaman and the power of Yehowah. She phrased it very tactfully and delicately, yet it showed a willingness to take risks for the honor of God; the risk of offending. She was not ashamed of God. And in our woke cancel culture there is huge pressure to be ashamed of God.

What about you? I think Christians learn to be ashamed about God from other Christians. But the most natural thing for a child of God is to identify with Christ. I remember one family telling me about how their children had no shame at all in talking about the things of the Lord at the grocery store or anywhere. I have to confess that early in my marriage I sometimes cringed at the truthful things that our children said to our neighbors when they were little kids - things like how praying to Mary is idolatry and an abomination to God and how salvation is by grace alone, and you are headed to hell if you don't repent. Why do we cringe? I think it is because there is an element of shame about God in us, and we have had to learn boldness from our little children. Kids might have to learn some tact from us (and some of you children could learn to be a bit more tactful), but I think we have learned from our children to be bold in the area of witness. My friend told me how his daughter often sings "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" or "Amazing Grace" in public places. You have probably

had your children do the same. And what's your reaction? Is it to teach your kids to be quite because there is a shame of naming the name of the Lord in our anti-Christian society? We need to learn from our kids rather than teaching them to be ashamed of Christ. Our Lord said, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Can you see how it would have been very easy for shame to keep this little maid from saying what she said? God was doing a work in her heart. He kept her from being ashamed of God. She is an encouragement to me.

## You Must Be Convinced That God Has The Answer To This World's Needs

The third principle is that we must be convinced that God has the answers to this world's needs. God providentially placed a need in Naaman's life, and the girl encouraged him to look to the Lord for the solution. You can do that. You can pray with your sick neighbors. Most people are quite willing for you to pray for them when they are sick. Why would you not? We must be convinced that God has the answer to this world's needs.

Her attempt to get Naaman to look to God almost got derailed in verses 5-7: It says,

So the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

He is looking to the state rather than to God as the solution. And unfortunately, that is what most evangelicals are doing today. They don't look to the true Messiah for their health needs or financial needs. They look to the Federal government to be the Messiah for everything. Or they will look to the doctor to rescue them. Kathy's father was a physician, and I loved the sign prominently displayed in his doctor's office. It said, "I treat. God heals." He wanted to make sure that people were looking to God in even the use of their medicine. Continuing on...

So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

He was hoping to buy himself out of his predicament. And there are many ways in which we look to our own resources to help. God in this story brings him to the place where he realizes he can't contribute a thing; that without God he could do nothing. Verse 6 goes on:

Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, "Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

Both the king and Naaman looked to the power of man for healing. Verse 7 indicates that the king himself lacked the faith of this little maid. He was not a man of faith. Starting at verse 7:

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? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.'" 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."

God tailor makes our situations so that we can take advantage of missions opportunities in some fashion. All of us can. Now, bear in mind that God has not brought Naaman into your life. But he may have brought into your life a person who is grieving over an abortion, or a person whose marriage is falling apart, or a person who has an alcohol problem, or a person who is a compulsive gambler, or a person who is lonely. And even if you can't meet the need yourself, you may know a person who can meet that particular need just as thoroughly as Elisha met Naaman's need.

Let me illustrate how this can work. I had a friend who was going through financial struggles when he was an unbeliever and someone gave him Gary North's book, *Introduction to Biblical Economics*. You might not think that Economics has anything to do with the Gospel, but God was preparing this man's heart through a felt need, and when he saw that the Bible had the answers to all of his economic needs, it got him excited and led him to ask more questions of this God. That book on Biblical Economics led him to Christ. There are others who have been saved by reading books on Christian education, or on marriage issues. They had no intention of asking about salvation, but when they became convinced that God had answers to *temporal* problems, it led them to seek God for their *spiritual* emptiness as well. I know of others who have been saved through marital counseling. Pastor Michael Ware talked about this at presbytery this past week. The point is, when you are convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that God's Word has answers to man's most asked questions, then you will begin to see missions opportunities springing up all over the place.

So how can you send a Naaman to the prophet in Samaria? Well, you can give or lend him a book. I cannot recommend enough that every member have their own lending library of books. And they have got to be Biblical books. You want to send these people to the *prophet in Samaria*, not to the king; not to the psychologist; and not to some other individual who fails to represent God. The king of Samaria wasn't able to help him because he wasn't a believer. So get Biblical books on marriage, on economics, on politics, on education, on welfare.

Even mathematics can lead people to the prophetic word, and I hope to show on the Biblical Blueprints website how Christians have the foundations for math in the Bible. It will be a witness to woke mathematicians who are skeptical about the truth of even math. So you can send people to the prophet in Samaria by sending them to a website or two. Or you can invite individuals to a Gospel music concert, a seminar that would meet their needs, a Christian movie, a church service, or a Bible study. There are many ways of directing someone to the prophet in Samaria. Maybe you can't speak very well; that's OK. But you can imitate this girl by sending them to someone who can speak well. But if you aren't convinced that God is the solution to this world's problems, then you won't see missions opportunities. You will be blind to them even though they are staring you in the face. So this point says that you must be convinced that God has the answers to all of this world's problems.

## Your Life Of Service Must Match Your Words Of Service

The fourth principle is that your life of service must match your words of service. And this is an important principle. You have got to have a lifestyle that matches your words. If you give your neighbor a book on Biblical principles of marriage and they don't see you trying to implement them yourself, it isn't going to be very good advertizing. We are not told much about this maid, but there is a lot that we can read between the lines. If she were a liar, it is unlikely that her mistress would have taken her seriously. If she had tried to run away, or was irresponsible it is doubtful that they would have trusted her. If she were lazy, her mistress might have thought she was hoping for less work. If she were resentful and angry, her mistress might have thought that she was trying to get even and play a cruel joke on them. I mean after all, lepers just didn't get healed in that day. And since she was there against her will, without having won the respect of her mistress, her testimony concerning Elisha would have been so much hot air.

Now, I will hasten to say that God does not expect you to be perfect in your marriage in order to point to a book that helps in marriage. But he does expect you to have begun to find victory through implementing the principles. Yes you will blow it, but you know what to do when you blow it; and admitting your failures and how God's grace is remedying your failures is part of the Gospel message. So both the fact that you admit that you blow it plus the fact that you are making progress will give others hope. A good lifestyle without testimony does not save, and a testimony without the lifestyle to back it up is empty. This is another way in which this girl is an incredible testimony to us.

## You Must Have A Burden For The Lost

Another condition we must have is a burden for the lost. This does not come naturally. The Hebrew in verse 3 for "If only" is אַחַלֵּה (achale). It is an interjection that always shows a burdened heart. It is usually translated, "Oh, that!" with an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. "Oh that my master was with the prophet." The "Oh" needs to be in the Gospel. We need to have compassion and a burden, and only a close walk with God can give that to us. But when we have this yearning to win the lost, the opportunities for witness will become apparent more frequently. A burden clears our eyesight and makes us see opportunities. Ask God to give you this burden for others. And by the way, there is an evangelism team that is willing to help you with this.

## You Must Not Give In To Resentment

The sixth principle is that you must not give in to resentment. This too is hard, and it also requires grace. Just imagine that you have been captured from your home city and taken to Cuba back in the time of Fidel Castro. And you were given to Fidel's wife, who expected you to serve her every whim. She tells you to sweep the porch, clean the laundry, fix her hair, now cook my dinner, now wash my feet, now clean up after the baby. And stop that crying about your parents. If you don't start getting happier about your work I'm going to give you

something to cry about. Mrs. Castro won't even let you grieve for your family. Day after day, work, work, work. Suddenly you find out that Fidel Castro has leprosy. Mrs. Castro is in tears. What are you thinking to yourself? The most natural thing to think is, "Good! God is judging him for taking me away. I hope Mrs. Castro gets leprosy too." Wouldn't it be natural to stew over your circumstances and think that all of life is against you? Do you think it is natural for this girl to say, "Oh that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."? I tell you, that is not natural. It would have been so easy to give in to resentment and bitterness, and that would have blinded her to a missions vision.

Bitterness has destroyed the effectiveness of so many people. Scripture calls us to forgive, trust God, thank God, implement Romans 12:9-21 which gives us a list of conquering actions of love - where instead of being overcome by evil, we are overcoming evil with good.

I've put a picture in your outlines of a girl's feet with a chain tied to a giant ball. That's what bitterness does to you. When you think, "Stop it Pastor Kayser! I have a right to be bitter." what you are really saying is, "Stop it Pastor Kayser! I have a right to be imprisoned by my bitterness and to be tied down by a ball and chain. I have a right to this ball and chain." OK, well, then don't complain to me about how miserable you feel. Put off bitterness and ask God to replace it with compassion.

## You Must Not Give In To Excuses

Seventh principle, don't offer excuses as to why you can't be involved in serving others. If we are looking for excuses why we don't have to witness, we can find plenty. If any person could be absolved from having to witness, I would think it would be this little girl. In the Syrian culture, girls were generally meant to be seen, not heard. The text says that she was young, and youngsters don't have to be witnesses do they? And yet Scripture says that you children can be missionaries to those you come in contact with. When you are friendly to visitors, you are being either a good witness or a bad witness. Your statements can turn people off from Christ or can lead them to Christ. What kind of conversations do you have with each other in this church? Are they the opposite of what Christ would have you say - things like gossip, complaining, tearing down? Your behavior, and your attitude, and your testimony make a big difference. Evaluate whether your speech is a good witness or a terrible witness.

She was a captive. Ah, there's a good excuse. I'm a victim of my circumstances. Have you ever felt like you were held captive by your circumstances? "If only I wasn't born into this family!" Or, "I could be a better witness if I had more money, or a larger dining room in which to entertain, or a better personality, or the gift of gab. But I doubt God would expect much from me, given my terrible set of circumstances. I'm a captive. I'm a victim of circumstances."

But when the Christian realizes that every circumstance is tailor made for our good, we realize that we are not captive. Rather, the circumstances are captive to us and to God's

purposes. And when we begin to view life like that, we begin to look for opportunities. Paul and Silas were cast into jail. I suspect that their jail was worse than the situation you complain about. But Paul and Silas saw this as a fabulous opportunity to evangelize those in jail, and to evangelize the Roman guard. They had a captive audience. So Paul does not describe himself as a prisoner of Rome. He calls himself a prisoner of Christ. That's the perspective we need to have. "Christ has put me into this bad situation and I can either glorify Him in it or be miserable. I choose to glorify Him."

This maid was a prisoner of Christ. She knew that God was sovereign. Of all the times in Israel's history to be born, God chose to have her born when the Syrians were in the ascendancy. God made her come out of hiding at just the right time to be captured. He kept her from being sold until Naaman's wife saw her and wanted her. God kept leprosy from afflicting Naaman till just the perfect time. And she saw herself as one of the threads in a sovereign tapestry. And I am convinced that only a supreme confidence in God could cause her to have such an attitude of contentment to her master and to her circumstances. Do you have her contentment? If not, why? Seek this from Christ. Put off excuse-making.

## You Must Have An Eye For Opportunities

The eighth principle is that we must develop an eye for opportunities to witness. Jim Moss was a retired missionary that was a member of our previous church for a couple of years before he moved back east. One of the things that I appreciated about Jim Moss was that he saw opportunities for witness everywhere. I asked him if I could follow him around and watch him witness, and I learned so much from him. One time a bunch of us were unloading things from the Shaeffer's house. On the first load out Jim Moss had gotten into a conversation with someone about spiritual things that had started from a point of conversation I would never have recognized as an opportunity. And some will be more skillful at this than others. But all of us can be looking for opportunities to share the things of God with others. Evangelist Michael Elliott can train you to see these opportunities. Gary North speaks of this as bread and butter evangelism. We can start by answering questions that people are asking, rather than jumping immediately to the questions they could care less about. The Bible speaks to all of life, and you don't have to be perfect to direct people to God's answer book.

## You Must Have Faith in God's Ability to do the Impossible.

The ninth principle of missions is that we must have faith in God's ability to do the impossible. We must have faith that God can save that difficult neighbor or that hardened relative. We do not have any record of lepers being healed before this. Talk about hard! But that was not an obstacle for this girl. She said,

O that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.

What made her so audacious as to suggest that? If she said that the king of Israel could do it, it would have been just as audacious. But she had witnessed Elisha in action prior to

being captured - or at least had heard the stories about Elisha. In chapter 2 of this book and verse 14 Elisha parted the Jordan river and crossed on dry land. Which is harder, parting this river or healing someone of leprosy? In chapter 2:19-22 he heals the waters of a bad spring. In 2:22-25 he sics two female bears on 42 teenage delinquents. Which is harder, commanding two wild bears he has never met before or commanding the microbes the cause leprosy? In chapter 3 he shows Israel and Judah how to destroy Moab's armies and does it in a miraculous way. In chapter 4:1-7 he performs the miracle of the continually replenishing oil. Now tell me if that wouldn't inspire confidence? She just kept pouring oil out of this vessel into more and more vessels until she ran out of vessels. News of these kinds of things would spread. Then in chapter 4:8 and following you have the raising of the Shumanites dead son. Which is harder, healing of leprosy or raising from the dead? I think this girl's head was screwed on straight. In chapter 4:38-41 we have Elisha neutralizing poison in the food. In chapter 4:42-44 we have the story of Elisha feeding 100 people with 20 loaves of bread. Can you see why this maid had no doubt in her mind that Elisha could heal Naaman if God willed it.

## You Must Have Submission

The last issue that was in place in this girl's life was submission. We have already seen that she submitted to God's providence without growing bitter. But she also submitted to the human authorities placed over her. Verse 2 says that she served Naaman's wife. She served her master, but not her master's false gods. All submission must be submission in the Lord, whether we submit to governments, employers, husbands, parents or the elders of a church. The fact that she still trusts the true God shows that there are limits to submission. But all of us are called to submission. And in some ways, that is the ultimate test of a missions heart. Are we willing to submit to God when he calls us to say something; when He prompts us to witness? A life that is devoted to the Lord is a life that will count for eternity no matter where you are or how humble your circumstances might be. Submission to God. God calls us to serve Him faithfully and the results can be left up to Him.

## Conclusion

I started this message by asking you if you felt insignificant. That is not a disqualification to be used by God. In fact, the more insignificant and weak that you feel, the more opportunity there is for God's power to be magnified in you. One person with God is a majority. One weakling with God has almighty power. Don't bail on your responsibilities because of your insignificance. Instead, find significance in the Lord Jesus Christ. My charge to you is to be willing to be used by God in whatever way that He chooses. Amen.