

## Out of the Mouths of Babes

Elisha: Living the Impossible Life – Part IV

II Kings 5:1-14

### Introduction

Children say the most incredible things. A recent issue of *Facts of Life* recorded statements of children in relation to love. They were asked several different questions about love and gave responses that included the following:

- How does love happen?

One little girl said, “No one knows for sure, but I think it has something to do with how you smell.”

A boy responded, “I think you’re supposed to get shot with an arrow, but the rest isn’t supposed to be as painful.”

- What’s love like?

A little boy said, “It’s like an avalanche and you run for your life.”

Another boy said, “Next to baseball, it’s the most important thing in the world.”

- What does it take to be in love?

A little girl said, “One of you should know how to write a check, because even if you have tons of love, there are still going to be a lot of bills.”

Another girl said, “I’m not rushing into it – fourth grade is hard enough.”

- How do you encourage somebody to love you?

“Well,” this six year old boy said, “tell the girl you own a candy store!”

Little boys must think girls hearts are won by food, because another boy said, “Take the girl out to

eat, and make sure it’s something she likes. French fries work for me.”

Now here is a deep response from a boy, “Don’t do things like wear smelly sneakers. You might get attention, but attention isn’t the same thing as love.”

- How do you make love last?

A little boy said, “Be a good kisser, she’ll forget you never take out the trash!”

(Son, I’ve tried that and it doesn’t work!)

Little Erin said (and I would love to know the background to this statement), “Don’t forget your wife’s name – that always messes things up!”

(I can imagine it would!)

And lastly, one other boy said, “Spend most of your time loving your wife instead of going to work.”

(All in favor say, “Aye!” Fellows, this is a good opportunity to make up for missing Valentine’s day. All in favor say, “AYE!”)

The amazing ability of children to say incredible, funny, deep things is nothing new. In fact, throughout the Bible, children show up at amazing times with refreshing honesty and courage. For example:

- when David confronted the faithless king of Israel and his army and then, single-handedly went against Goliath;
- when young Samuel corrected Eli as God’s mouthpiece;

- when a little boy shared his simple lunch with the Lord and became an example of selflessness and faith;
- when Timothy, as a child, proved that an understanding of scriptures could be had as a child (which serves as a biblical incentive for churches to teach the scriptures to children . . . as well as adults).

In the story of Naaman, that we have previously discussed, it is easy to miss someone. You may remember the story of this leprous man and his bath in the Jordan river that washed his leprosy away. Tucked away in that story is another story. It is the testimony of a little girl who said some profound things. In so doing, she provided an incredible example of something that every one of us should be today.

So, for our entire discussion today, I want to invite you to hear the testimony of a little Hebrew girl. It is found in II Kings, chapter 5.

## Setting the Stage

Let us go back to verse 1 to refresh our memories of this story and to set the stage for our discussion today.

*Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper.*

### The horror of leprosy

While the text does not give us chronological clues, it is clear that Naaman's leprosy did not surface or activate in his body until his later years. This brief description of Naaman shouts one clear message – apart from his current condition of leprosy, Naaman had it made. He was at the top of the heap in the kingdom; he was the respected, trusted confidant and friend of the king, and because of his victory over King Ahab, he was every soldier's idol.

Josephus believed that it was Naaman who shot the arrow into the air that found its mark in the disguised king of Israel. It was Naaman who killed Ahab, which immediately catapulted Naaman into legendary status.

Let your eyes wander over this description in verse 1 once again.

*. . . a great man . . . highly respected . . . a valiant warrior . . .*

(and then the shocking declaration),

*. . . a leper.*

A leper! A valiant soldier would no longer be sought out by his army. His soldiers would avoid him at all costs. The whispers had already swept through the camp and through the Syrian kingdom that Naaman was a leper.

### The horror of slavery

This is the horror of a terminal disease which repulsed everyone. It is so horrible, in fact, that it can overshadow the horror brought about in the life of a little girl. Notice verse 2.

*Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife.*

In the course of all the raids carried out by the Syrians against neighboring Hebrew villages, a young girl was taken captive. That is all the Bible records and yet, there is a volume of unspoken terror for her.

Can you imagine your home being broken into by a raiding party of enemy soldiers? The Hebrew verb that is translated "raiding party" is the verb that can be rendered, "to cut; to penetrate". One Greek translation of this passage recalls these men to be "one belted"; that is, these were soldiers dressed and outfitted lightly for guerilla tactics. They could quickly penetrate an unsuspecting village; killing and pillaging and then, just as swiftly, disappear into the night.

Suddenly, without warning, perhaps hearing the screams of her mother or watching her father die in a struggle, this young girl finds herself in the clutches of a barbarian. The Hebrew text indicates in verse 2, that she was not among captives taken, but instead, in this particular raid, she was the only captive taken.

One author wrote, "Few people suffered what she suffered; captured by enemy soldiers, exiled to a foreign country, forever separated from her family, consigned to a lifetime of slavery."

Imagine this girl in the capital square being auctioned off. We are not told how it happened, only that it did. Then, in one final twist of agony, she finds herself a slave in the household of the great warlord himself.

I say all of this to help you see how incredible it was that the words in verse 3 ever came from her lips.

*She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.”*

In that little phrase, from the mouth of this little girl, comes some profound, convicting challenges to every Christian in every generation.

## The Testimony of an Anonymous Servant

This is the testimony of an anonymous slave girl, as she lived her days in a foreign land. Let me give two qualities that stand out in this testimony.

### The quality of compassion

1. The first quality that I am struck with is the that of compassion.

Look again at the first part of verse 3.

*She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! . . .”*

Why should she care? The Syrians were enemies of Israel. Her master was a pagan warlord; an idolater. Why would she want him to live?

I would pillow my head at night and thank almighty God that that miserable man was suffering with leprosy and think, “Lord, let him die slowly.”

Do you have somebody at work who hates you; who ridicules your faith; who makes life as miserable for you as possible? How motivated are you that they enjoy good health?

This is Jesus Christ weeping over Jerusalem; this is the Lord extending forgiveness to the dying thief while He was in agony; this is the gospel, “. . . that while we were yet sinners, Christ [pitched His tent among us and] died for us.” (Romans 5:8b).

Whether we want to own up to it or not, that compassion in Christ is to be developed in us!

Do not overlook the fact as well, that Naaman has a disease that, according to Mosaic law, was the epitome of judgment and certain death. Lepers were to be avoided at all costs!

Josephus, recorded in his *Antiquities*, a first century history book, “The Israelite lepers were not

allowed inside the city at all, nor were they allowed to live with anyone else, as if they were in effect, dead.”

If anything, this little girl should have resented the fact that she was forced to not only be a slave, but to be the slave of a leper and having to live under the same roof with a dead man.

Yet, this little girl cared. She had the quality of a witness that will always move hearts and homes – she had compassion!

### The quality of faith

2. The second quality that stood out to me, in the testimony of this young slave girl, is that of faith.

Look at the last phrase in verse 3 again.

*. . . Then he would cure him of his leprosy.*

In other words, “Go to the prophet in Samaria. Don’t put more sacrifices out for Baal; don’t go to the prophets and priests of Baal. That’s a dead religion without hope. Go to Elisha. He can heal you, Naaman!”

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this little lamb had every reason to doubt the existence of Yahweh! The Israelites were losing. There was famine in the land. Baalism was the worship of the people. She had been ripped from her home. Where was the protection of Yahweh? She, though innocent, was forced to live in the home of a leper. Enough is enough! At a time when this young girl should have been doubting her God, she was affirming Him.

Let me show you the depth of her faith. Turn to a fascinating revelation in the gospel of Luke, chapter 4.

While you are turning, I think you would agree that it would not be such a great stretch of faith to believe that a prophet of God could heal leprosy, right? Surely the stories abounded of Elisha’s ability to heal lepers, along with any other disease, right?

Well, look with me at verses 25 through 27, as Jesus is preaching in the synagogue.

*But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time*

*of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.*

Jesus Christ is preaching with something else in mind, but did you catch what he said about Elisha's track record with lepers? How many had he healed? None. How many stories had this little girl heard? None.

Can you imagine going to a cardiologist for open heart surgery, who had yet to be successful in the operating room, and saying, "Listen doctor, I understand you've had eighty-five patients and none of them have survived. Would you operate on me?"

That would take great faith in that surgeon! In the same way, this young girl was saying, "Listen, Naaman, Israel is filled with lepers and Elisha hasn't healed any of them, but I believe he can heal you."

That takes great faith in the prophet, and therefore, great faith in the prophet's God.

Look back at II Kings and notice her specific words in verse 3.

*. . . I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then . . .*

*(. . . he might cure him; . . . maybe he would be able to help him. No!),*

*. . . he would cure him of his leprosy.*

My friends, instead of doubting her faith, she was declaring her faith! The qualities of compassion and faith make an incredible witness in any land, in any generation.

## **Application**

I want to suggest some principles that we can learn from this little girl about what it takes to becoming an effective witness.

### **Two misconceptions about being an effective witness**

First, I want to clear up some rather popular misconceptions about being an effective witness.

#### **Misconception #1 – Being an effective witness requires tremendous public exposure**

1. Misconception number one is that being an effective witness requires tremendous public exposure.

That is simply not true. Being an effective witness involves obedience . . . and it is God who determines the amount of public exposure.

The truth was, this little girl was anonymous. We are never even given her name. We do not know whether Naaman invited her to give her testimony of faith to his soldiers or not. We do not read that she ever met the king or that Naaman ever let her go free.

We can only be sure that this young slave girl impacted just one home with her faith. No sweeping revival occurs in the land. In fact, in the next chapter of II Kings, the Syrian king plots to invade Israel and capture Elisha.

The New Testament analogy of a witness is clear – we are salt. Salt is nearly invisible when it is sprinkled upon the food. It does not argue with the hand of the master about where it is sprinkled, or when, or how much. It simply falls onto the place where it is sprinkled and brings life to tastelessness; it provides preservation among decay, and, to the one who is influenced by its presence, it creates thirst.

The truth is, your sphere and scope of exposure has nothing to do with you and everything to do with where the Master sprinkles your life.

#### **Misconception #2 – Being an effective witness requires years of study and experience**

2. Misconception number two is that being an effective witness requires years of study and experience.

I am not even going to comment on this except to tell you to just take another look at a little nine year old girl who was simply overwhelmed with compassion and faith; someone who had a secret she was willing to share. Period.

### **Two truths about being an effective witness**

Well then, what is the truth about being an effective witness? From the mouth of this little babe, we can learn at least two truths.

#### **Truth #1 – Being an effective witness requires honest courage**

1. Truth number one is that being an effective witness requires honest courage.

This young girl had the courage to sound the alarm. Perhaps everyone around her avoided the

subject with Naaman. You can almost hear the conversations, “Whatever you do, try not to notice the blotches on his face and hands; don’t let him catch you staring. Compliment his clothes or talk about the weather instead. But, whatever you do, don’t mention the word leprosy!”

Before anyone can be healed of leprosy, or cancer, or leukemia, or pneumonia, some doctor has to look them in the eye and say, “You’re sick . . . but here’s the medicine!”

Before our society of perishing people can be spiritually healed, someone has to look them in the eye and say, “You are sick with sin . . . but here’s the Messiah. I want to tell you about the living cure.”

## **Truth #2 – Being an effective witness requires heartfelt compassion**

2. Truth number two is that being an effective witness requires heartfelt compassion.

This man, Naaman, was dying. This little girl knew it . . . and she cared.

The apostle Paul has a message for you and for me. He writes:

- in I Corinthians 1:18a,  
*For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing . . .*
- in II Corinthians 2:15,  
*For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are . . . perishing*
- in II Corinthians 4:3,  
*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing*

Perishing or dying, all of mankind is infected with a terminal disease called death. And the statistics are impressive – none survive the disease.

Being an effective witness means living, as Paul did and as this little girl did, with compassion and recognizing that those around you, like Naaman the leper, are as good as dead. It will make you view altogether differently, that professor, that student, that boss, or that coworker. They are dying and you have the eternal cure; you possess the secret of eternal life. Will you share it with them?

I recently read a story about another little girl. She was eleven years old and was from the land of central Chile. The March 1980 edition of *Mountain*

*Movers* carried her story. Maria had come to faith in Christ and for months, she and her missionary friends had been praying that her daddy would receive Christ’s gift of salvation as well.

“Take the book, Dad, please take the book,” pled eleven-year-old Maria, “you can read it tonight during your break.”

“No, Maria, I don’t have time. Where’s my lunch?”

“On the kitchen table, Daddy.”

As he disappeared into the kitchen, Maria slipped the little book into her dad’s coat pocket. Lunch in hand, he picked up his coat, gave Maria a kiss, and walked out the door.

“Please, Lord Jesus,” prayed Maria, “make Daddy read that book. I want him to come to know You.”

Two years earlier, Maria’s mother had died. Alone, she took care of her dad, washing his clothes and cooking his meals. Nothing she could do seemed to interest him in spiritual things and her efforts to take him to church had been futile. When a missionary came by with some Christian books, Maria had a thought, “Maybe Daddy will read a book!”

After she explained her need, the missionary recommended one of the books, saying, “I think he might read this one.”

All Maria could do now was pray and hope. Perhaps tonight her dad would find the book in his coat and read it.

The explosion at 1:10 a.m. shook the mining town awake. Sirens started wailing. The villagers rushed to the mine entrance, fear clutching their hearts. Of course, Maria was among them. She watched apprehensively as a beehive of men desperately tore at the caved-in mine entrance, pushing out debris and shoveling out dirt to make a passageway for oxygen and hopefully, for any survivors.

After what seemed like hours, there was a shout of joy. Some had survived. With other girls and mothers, Maria huddled at the entrance to watch the men come out. Her father was not among them. The hours dragged by, on and on into the next day. With each passing hour, hope faded. The missing men had been caught deep in the mine, with the oxygen supply cut off from above.

Late into the second night they found them. One of the searchers described the scene, “As we were

digging deep in the mine well, the ground gave way suddenly. Once the dust had settled, we saw the bodies – all eight of them. One of them had a small book in his hand and it was opened to the last page. With a piece of charcoal he had scratched out a message, ‘My dearest little Maria, thank you for putting the little book in my coat pocket. I read it

several times and all the other men listened. I did what the book says and accepted Jesus as my Savior. One day we’ll be together in heaven. I love you very much, Daddy.’”

Education? No. Great exposure? No. Courage? Yes. Compassion? Yes. Out of the mouths of babes – may we be like them!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/18/1996 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1996 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.