

The Little Maid and Naaman I

Introduction.

9th March, 1934, a little boy was born in the USSR. Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin. In WWII, his 2 older brothers were taken as slave laborers. Yuri and his parents lived in a mud hut whilst a German officer commandeered their home. He became a pilot, and when the USSR was seeking 20 pilots to join the new space program, he was chosen.

On 12th April, 1961, Vostok I blasted off into space, and Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to enter space. He orbited the earth, and on re-entry allegedly whistled '*Rodina Slichet, Rodina Snaet*', 'The Motherland hears, the Motherland knows, where your son flies in the sky.' He became a national hero and international celebrity. World tour, awards, speaking engagements.

A Soviet teacher was praising Gagarin's flight, the seeming absence of God, the technological prowess of the USSR, the inevitability of world class struggle and liberation from faith in God, the 'opiate of the masses' according to Marxist theory, when a small child put up her hand and spoke: 'Please Miss, my God lives higher up.' Wherever the story of Yuri Gagarin is told, so is the story of the faith of this little child. God works wonders through faithful children, and today we learn of the faithful witness of another little child – the little maid.

The Story.

Ahab was dead, killed in battle by Ben-Hadad, the king of the Syrians. Ahab's son Ahaziah became king, and was a wicked king, as was his brother Jehoram, who succeeded him. Elijah had been taken to heaven, and Elisha was God's prophet in Israel.

2 Kgs. 5.1. There was no outright war, but the Syrians would send raiding parties into Israel, to kill and capture what they could. Naaman, the Syrian general and mighty warrior, would lead these raiding parties. Though a national hero – he had a problem. He had leprosy, a living death sentence.

2 Kgs 5.2. On a raiding party, the Arameans captured a 'young girl', a 'little maid'. She was taken from her home and family to Damascus, the capital of the pagan Syrian kingdom, and forced to serve as a slave in the house of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian armies. Can we imagine her grief / pain?

In time, the little maid noticed that beyond the glamour / prestige / wealth of Naaman's home, there was a ghost at every banquet....a cloud hovered over the home....her owner had leprosy. What to do? Rejoice at God's judgment on this wicked heathen general who had kidnapped her? Speak vindictive words to her master? Rejoice at the imminent and painful death of her oppressor?

2 Kgs. 5.3. The little maid told her mistress that if Naaman would go to Israel, and meet with Elisha, God's prophet, then Naaman would be healed. Amazing words. What do they reveal about the little maid? In the midst of bitter personal grief, she had found forgiveness, peace and healing. No longer was Naaman that wicked general whose soldiers had forcibly kidnapped her into a life of slavery, but she saw him also as a victim, of a painful and deadly disease, and just as the little maid wished for God's deliverance in her life, so she understood that Naaman also needed God's deliverance.

2 Kgs 5.4. Naaman went to the king, and told him the words of the little maid. The KJV translates this as 'Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.' 'Thus and thus'....I wonder what the little maid said. What did she talk about? Maybe about Elisha's miracles, Elijah on Mt. Carmel, God's power to raise the dead? Whatever that little maid said, her witness was shared with Ben-Hadad, the pagan king of Syria. Unfortunately, her witness got kind of lost in translation, for the king of Syria thought the little maid was referring Naaman not to Elisha, but to the king of Israel, so he sent Naaman with gifts to the king of Israel, asking him to

heal Naaman of his deadly disease. The king of Israel was distraught, and tore his robes in distress. ‘Am I God, to give life or death, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me (2 Kgs. 5.7).

Elisha, God’s prophet, heard of the situation, and sent messengers to bring Naaman to his home. When Naaman arrived, Elisha sent out his servant, Gehazi, and told Naaman to wash 7 times in the Jordan. Naaman was upset. His pride was hurt. Were not the rivers of Damascus cleaner and deeper and better than the waters of the Jordan? He turned away, intending to ignore the prophet’s command.

But his servants, being wiser, counseled him to at least try. **2 Kgs. 5.13.** God’s command was too easy for proud Naaman. Surely God wanted something special from him, something noteworthy, something so difficult it would be spoken of for generations....yet the command for Naaman to be cleansed was easy. What was required was not the fulfillment of a difficult task, but a demonstration of obedience.

2 Kgs 5.14. So, finding a suitable spot, Naaman went down into the river Jordan. 1-2-3-4-5-6-still a leper-7-clean! Imagine the lifting of burdens! Imagine the sheer joy when Naaman realized that God had indeed cleansed him and given him the gift of life! Just as Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, so was Naaman – although he was baptized 7 times, representing God’s perfect healing and perfect deliverance.

The little maid is referred to in vv. 2, 4 as *na’ar-ah*, and Naaman comes up out of the water (in v. 14) as a *na’ar*. The masculine form. Naaman’s experience with God is like that of the little maid’s experience. Although enemies in human terms, both were caught in desperate circumstances, both were facing separation from their loved ones, both needed and both received the healing touch of God.

2 Kgs 5.15-19. Naaman rushes back to Elisha’s home, his body healed, his fear relieved, his proud spirit humbled, his heart converted. He is now a worshipper of the true God, and asks for 2 mule-loads of earth to take home, so when he prays to the God of Israel, he is kneeling on soil from Israel.

Elisha says ‘go in peace.’ Naaman has the assurance of God’s forgiveness. In v.1, we first meet Naaman as a ‘commander of the army of Aram...a great man....a mighty warrior’....a man of war....but in v.19 he is now a man of peace. A diseased man is now a healthy man. A dying man is now a living man. A pagan is now a God-fearer. A man facing separation from his wife is now looking forward to being reunited with his wife. A man of war is now a man of peace. And all because the little maid spoke up!

In our next Worldview, we will focus on what the little maid did say....did not say...and the lessons for us as we nurture the next generation of outreach workers.