

The Little Maid and the Servants of God

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Obedience as to the Lord — Not to Men

Ephesians 6:5 was written to men and women who were literally slaves: Bondmen, obey masters according to flesh with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your heart, as to the Christ. Not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, serving with goodwill as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good each shall do, this he shall receive of the Lord, whether bond or free.

These words were addressed to people who had no control over who their master was, what work they were required to do, or how they were treated. And yet the principle the apostle lays down transforms the situation entirely: the true object of obedience is Christ, not the earthly master. That single reorientation changes everything. It means that when an earthly master commands something that conflicts with God's will, the servant already knows the higher authority. And it means that every act of faithful service — unrecognised, unrewarded by any earthly master — is nevertheless known and rewarded by the Lord.

A brother of a previous generation held a senior position at a well-known company. He was sent around the world to resolve manufacturing problems. On one such assignment his manager explicitly instructed him to lie about something. He refused. Before long he lost his position. Whether that loss was directly connected to his refusal cannot be said with certainty, but the testimony was unmistakable — and the reward that comes from the Lord for such faithfulness is equally certain.

Not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, serving with goodwill as to the Lord and not to men. — Ephesians 6:6–7

The Little Maid of Israel — A Slave Who Knew God's Mind

The story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 is well known, but one figure in it deserves more attention than she usually receives. A little maid — unnamed, young, seized from her home in Israel during a Syrian raid — had been given to serve Naaman's wife. We do not know her age. We do not know what her village looked like after the war party had finished with it. We know only that she was there in the household of the captain of the host of Syria, waiting on his wife, when she spoke the words that set the whole story in motion.

Her words are striking not for their length but for their conviction. She did not say: I have read that Moses and Miriam were cured of leprosy, so perhaps God could heal my master. She said simply: Would that my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria — then he would cure him of his leprosy. She was not hedging. She was not offering a possibility. She was stating what she knew.

How did she know? She knew God's history with His people, and with it she had something the king of Israel conspicuously lacked: a sense of what God's mind was in this moment. When the king of Israel received Naaman's letter he tore his garments and cried, Am I God to kill and make alive? He had no thought that this was precisely the kind of thing Elisha was there for. The little maid did. Her knowledge of God's ability was matched by an understanding of His will — that it was according to God's purpose for Naaman to be healed, and that this would bring glory to God among a nation that was Israel's enemy.

We do not know her name. The Spirit of God did not see fit to record it. But the Lord Jesus did see fit to speak of her work. In Luke 4:27 He said: there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was

cleansed but Naaman the Syrian. In that brief reference, the Lord acknowledged what that unnamed maiden had set in motion — a testimony to the glory of God among the Gentiles that came through one humble, displaced, forgotten slave girl.

Naaman's Healing — and the Humility of a True Servant

Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his garments, and he sent word: why hast thou rent thy garments? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. Elisha's response is a portrait of a servant who knows his place. He did not go to the king to establish his credentials. He sent a message. And when Naaman arrived at his door with horses and chariots and the full pomp of a great man, Elisha did not even come out to meet him. He sent a messenger: Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee.

Naaman was furious. He had expected something dramatic — a ceremony, a wave of the hand, a prayer to the prophet's God. Instead he was told to dip himself in a river. His servants talked him round, and he went. He dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh became again like the flesh of a little child.

When he returned to Elisha, Naaman's words were unambiguous: behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. He was not fooled by the simplicity of what he had done. He understood that no dipping in a river had cured him. God had cured him, through a word from His prophet. And Naaman wanted to pay. Elisha refused: as Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. All Elisha had done was speak what God had told him to speak. The messenger does not accept payment for the message. That reward belonged to God alone.

Gehazi — The Contrast

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, is a study in the opposite spirit. As he watched Naaman's caravan depart, his thoughts were not on the glory of God that had just been displayed. They were on the talent of silver and two changes of raiment he had just watched walk away. His master had spared this Syrian — apparently too naive to recognise what was on offer. Gehazi would correct that error.

He ran after Naaman and fabricated a story. Two young men had just arrived, sons of the prophets — could he take a talent of silver and two changes of clothing for them? Naaman, still warm with gratitude, gave him two talents and urged them on him. Gehazi took them, hid them, and returned to his master.

The judgment was precise: the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to thee and to thy seed forever. Elisha already knew everything. Gehazi had thought he had done this privately — but the servant of the Lord said, did not my heart go with thee? And Gehazi went out from his presence a leper, white as snow.

The contrast between Gehazi and the little maid could not be more complete. She was a slave with nothing, whose only thought was that her master might benefit from the goodness of God. He was the servant of the greatest prophet of his generation, surrounded by evidence of God's working every day, and his only thought was that the Syrian was carrying three and a half million dollars and his master had been foolish enough not to ask for any of it. She had no interest in her own comfort or advancement — only in the glory of God. He had no thought of God's glory at all.

And there is another contrast. The little maid's conviction and deportment were such that Naaman — a great man, a powerful man, a man not easily moved — went immediately to his king on the strength of what a slave girl had said to his wife. Something about that girl made him believe it. Gehazi's greed, on the other hand, allowed Naaman to pay for his healing — and in doing so he corrupted the testimony. The free grace of God was made to look like a transaction. That is what a servant without God's mind will always do to the gospel.

David Fleeing from Absalom — Fact and Truth

Second Samuel 15 opens with David in flight. Absalom had stolen the hearts of Israel, and David, on hearing the news, said to his servants: arise, let us flee, for we shall not otherwise escape from Absalom. Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly. And all his servants, all his household, all the Cherethites and Pelethites and six hundred Gittites who had come from Gath — they all went with him.

Why did David flee rather than fight? He was the anointed king. He had God's promise. He had loyal soldiers. But David understood something that his situation did not announce: this was the government of God upon him. He had sinned grievously with Bathsheba. God had pronounced that four of his sons would die as a consequence. David had humbled himself, confessed, and been forgiven — but the government of God on a forgiven man is not the same as the removal of consequences. David knew that. He knew that to resist Absalom by force would be to resist what God had permitted, and David would not do that.

There is a distinction here that is easy to miss, and a brother drew it out well: the difference between fact and truth. The fact was that Absalom was coming and the kingdom was being taken away. But the truth was something different. We hear it in David's own words in verse 25: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and show me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee — behold, here am I; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

That is a subject soul. The facts were grim: the king dispossessed, the city in the hands of his son, the throne lost. But the truth was that God was still sovereign, still good, and still David's God — and if it pleased Him, He could restore all of it. David committed himself to that truth rather than fighting the facts. We tend to do the opposite: to live under the facts, crushed by circumstances, unable to see past them to the truth that our Father is over all and that His purposes cannot be

frustrated.

If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and show me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee — behold, here am I; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. —
2 Samuel 15:25–26

The Servants Who Went with David

The faithfulness of those who followed David is a quiet but powerful thing in this chapter. They said to him: behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. These were not men staying with the winning side. Absalom had the hearts of Israel. Staying with David in his flight was the harder path. But they acknowledged David as the one God had placed over them, and they followed.

Among them was Ittai the Gittite, a man who had only recently come to David and who had no prior claim on his loyalty. David urged him to go back — you are a stranger and an exile, why should you come with us into uncertainty? Ittai's answer belongs with the great words of Scripture: as the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. It is an echo of Ruth's words to Naomi, the same spirit of faithful attachment that does not calculate the cost.

The Cherethites were the executioners; the Pelethites were the runners. Nothing of the capacity for righteous administration that had belonged to David's court was lost in his flight. The rejected king still carried with him all that was needed for the exercise of his government — it simply waited for its moment. There is something in this for those who live in the time of the Lord's rejection. The divine centre remains; the capacity to honour Him and to carry out His will is not diminished by the world's indifference; and those who follow the rejected One carry with them, in their little companies, what is needed for His service until the

day He comes to claim His own.

