

Words Matter - Rev. Calum Iain Macleod

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 May 2025

Preacher: Rev. Calum Iain Macleod

[0 : 00] Well, for a short time, as the Lord enables us, let's reflect on the passage we read from 2 Kings 5.

She said to her mistress, would that my Lord were with the prophet who is Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy.

Thank you.

We're going to explore two things, her work and her witness. Now, the following words have been attributed to Francis of Assisi.

Preach the gospel and, if necessary, use words. Well, let me stress that words do matter.

[1 : 47] There are occasions when words are necessary. Because this young missionary in Syria finds her voice and when she does, she speaks out.

And what she says makes a significant difference. And her legacy continues to speak to us today. Now, we know nothing of her name, her background, other than that she was from the land of Israel in verse 2.

Yet, this little girl, this unsung hero makes a significant personal contribution to the life of a Syrian commander battling with leprosy.

She is instrumental in bringing healing to Naaman's leprosy. Here is a man who is, you might say, without God and without hope.

[2 : 56] A dying man. A man. A man otherwise without hope of being restored. And in no small measure, through the timely intervention of this godly, young, Israelite mission worker, he is healed.

She is instrumental. She plays her part. And that should not go unnoticed. You also might say that she fits the description of the nobody of the kingdom.

We alluded to the boy in the context of the feeding of the 5,000 in a similar vein this morning. And we're going to do the same this evening.

A nobody telling everybody about somebody who can save anybody. She believes Elisha's God, the God of Israel, can bring complete restoration to Naaman.

Nobody else does, but she does. So, in verse 3, she tells his wife, whom she serves, that he can be cured if he will but make himself known to the prophet Elisha.

[4 : 30] Now, let's stop there because there's much we can glean from this little girl's life, her example, and her witness.

Granted, little is spoken, but much is said. And what is said carries tremendous weight and substance.

There is also much here that encourages you and I to witness in challenging circumstances. Not unlike this young girl.

She is up against it. To speak out carries tremendous risk for an Israelite girl in Syria.

Because a young girl like this is to be seen but not heard. Look at verse 3. Her words to her mistress amount to a calculated risk.

[5 : 40] Perhaps she thought twice, three times, about suggesting that Naaman should speak to Elisha. She might be scolded, reprimanded, rebuked, or worse.

She may well be told in no uncertain terms to mind her own business and remain silent. But here is a young girl who speaks with the wisdom of Solomon.

She knows that there is a time to be silent. But she's also discerning. Because in this moment she senses that this is a time to speak.

There are times when you and I are constrained to speak. The dilemma you and I often have is knowing when to remain silent and when to speak.

Well, this is such a time to speak, and speak she will. And as we place this young girl under the spotlight tonight, we are left asking ourselves, what would you and I have done in her circumstances?

[6 : 59] How should we witness in such perplexing, pressing circumstances? It's interesting as you go through the vocabulary of a concordance from time to time.

When you come to the letter W, you will encounter the following. Words, followed by work, followed by worker, and followed by world.

That's not insignificant. Words, work, worker, world. There's a message there.

Because this young woman was a worker in an alien, pagan world. Work she must, but she will speak.

And her words in this alien world are not without impact. I want us to notice that her work ethic is commendable.

[8 : 07] Now, others may well have resented being in her sandals. Because, well, look at verse 2. Let's be clear, she's not in Syria by choice.

She was kidnapped. She was kidnapped. Taken by force. During one of the many raids or skirmishes between Israel and Syria.

We're talking about a long history of tension. This girl was snatched. Taken away. You might say, well, she was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Taken captive. But don't the words of the book of Esther resonate with us as we explore her circumstances tonight? For such a time as this.

Yes. Taken captive from her parents. I want you to try and imagine what this must have felt like for a young girl.

[9 : 11] It's unimaginable. Snatched from her parents, her loved ones, her home, her community, her people. A stranger in a foreign land.

This young girl in 2 Kings 5 has every reason to be bitter when news filters through that Naaman has leprosy.

Can you imagine the day the news breaks and she gets wind of it? She knows, everyone knows that leprosy is a terminal illness.

It was back then. And she may well have said, do you know what? I don't care. Who cares if Naaman has leprosy?

He deserves it. So be it. After all, her abduction from the land of Israel would have been with Naaman's blessing.

[10 : 09] And now she must work for his wife. How despicable can one's circumstances get? Let him die, she might have said under her breath.

But she doesn't in any way. She's working for Naaman's wife for good reason. Her diligence and responsible attitude have not gone unnoticed.

Her work ethic is not unlike Daniel in Babylon. Her conduct, her behavior, her manner, all of the above, have brought her into higher service within the Syrian corridors of power.

And she's there for good reason. God has a plan. God has a purpose for this young girl. There's a wonderful line as you're reading through Paul's letter to the Philippians.

In chapter 1, Paul is in prison. He's no longer able to actively minister. His mission work is on hold.

[11 : 25] Does he resent being in prison? No, he doesn't. Does he resent being in chains? Does he ask the question, why?

Or how did it get to this? Questions this young girl may well have asked, but there's nothing to indicate that she did. Instead, if we come back to the Apostle Paul, as he writes to the church at Philippi, he says, I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Isn't that remarkable? Coming from someone who is chained, a prisoner, under guard, and yet God's work goes on, and Paul is instrumental in that work, not least because there are those within the prison environment.

The guards, he mentions, at the close of his letter, some are coming to faith through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Don't the words of Romans 8, 28, resonate too, that God is at work, working all things together for the good of this young girl?

And for the greater good of the Israel of God, and the glory of his name, of course. The reformer John Calvin, as he grappled with the mystery of providence at a difficult time in his personal life,

said, God still reigns, though it is after a dark manner.

[13:22] There are times when perhaps we lack clarity. Why is this happening to me? This young girl may well have asked during these long nights, robbed of her sleep, thinking of her loved ones, the family she was taken from.

And then we have the words of Samuel Rutherford, who once said, God can make one web of contraries.

In other words, God is in the business of taking opposites and perplexities and complexities and obscurities and working all these things together for the greater good and for the extension of his kingdom and the advancement of the gospel.

Well, this girl that we meet here, she leads by example. Her witness, her testimony is powerful. Yes, little is said, but much is conveyed. And her appearance here on the stage of Scripture speaks to us tonight.

[14:49] Well, what more can we say? We've explored a little of her work situation, but there's overlap between her work and her witness. So let's focus a little on her witness.

Her consistent, reliable, and dependable manner, all of these things speak volumes. The workplace matters.

Our conduct and our attitude to others, particularly in the workplace where we are to be salt and light and lead by example, it matters, particularly when it comes to those who are in authority over us.

Remember the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, 1. He reminds young Timothy that conduct matters. Conduct yourself, Paul says, doesn't he?

Again, in Philippians 1, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. One must regard, Paul says, one's master as worthy of full honor and respect so that the name of God may not be slandered.

[16:04] Be submissive, Paul says, to Titus, to rulers and authorities. Be obedient, ready to do whatever is good. and as you scan the landscape of the Bible, you will find individuals like Joseph and Daniel and Esther, they all worked in different contexts with integrity, with due diligence, in very challenging circumstances at times.

and as they worked, they witnessed, they spoke as appropriate and necessary and their words, their words made a difference.

Words matter. All of which encourages you and I as followers of Jesus Christ to do the same. Now, some of us may not relish going to work on a Monday morning, but we are all reminded that out there, and you're reminded of that every time you walk out of church as you look above the door, it is a mission field out there.

You may not have thought of your workplace as a mission field, but believe me, it is. The windows of opportunity we have to serve, to make a difference, more often than not, are found in the workplace, where we're encouraged to be beacons for goods.

We work to witness, we strive to serve, and to walk the talk. So take encouragement, if you will, tonight from this anonymous young woman, this young girl who had the courage to speak when it really, really mattered.

[17:57] But what of the significance of what she actually said? How does all of this end? Well, notice that she respectfully commends Elisha to Naaman.

She does so with caution, perhaps. Because what she says may not be without implications, but we believe that any confidence she has is fueled by prayer.

This young girl is confident that Elisha's God, the God of Israel, will cure Naaman. And should Naaman have the humility to bring himself to go to Elisha with the faith to respond to this girl's counsel, then he will be provided with a cure.

Again, she says little, but the little she says carries much weight. Perhaps she thought over several days about saying something, but held back.

But then the acid test comes. That point at which she is constrained to speak. She can't hold back any longer, and her words are not in vain.

[19:29] This is her time and window of opportunity, and she makes the most of this moment. And you and I are encouraged to do likewise.

And there is so much to encourage us here, an unassuming, self-effacing, unassertive, ordinary, but godly young woman making a significant contribution.

And so can you and I. She's no Hudson Taylor, but she is exercising faith. And the other lesson, of course, for us tonight is that we need not say much.

Sometimes we get tied in knots. What will I say? How will I say it? How will I engineer this sentence, this paragraph? And we rehearse, and we pull back.

We need not say much. A few words of encouragement and intentional kindness go some distance, and here these words are not without irony because, again, 2 Kings chapter 5 tells us, doesn't it in its own certain terms, that Naaman is a Syrian, much despised by your average Israelite, no love lost, yet she leads by example.

[21 : 05] There is a pivotal moment in the Sermon on the Mount on the pages of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 44. Jesus breaks with convention, you might say.

There's much that is unconventional about the Sermon on the Mount, not least this line, love your enemies, in Matthew 5, 44, and pray for those who persecute you.

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. She does so. She does precisely this. And her words matter as ultimately Naaman takes her at her word, and through his interaction with Elisha, his leprosy is healed.

Now, if we just fast forward here to verse 13, notice that it takes Naaman's servants some time, it seems, to persuade Naaman to immerse himself in the said river as prescribed by Elisha, the man of God, the Jordan.

But isn't this an interesting question? The servants, who were they? After all, they seem to be behaving like evangelists in their own right. Could they have been of Israelite descent, like this little girl serving Naaman's wife?

[22 : 47] It's clear that they have been eavesdropping, listening attentively, a lot more than their indecisive and dithering master has, and they respectfully urge him, Naaman, will you not just do it?

Will you not do it? You have been promised, with all due respect, they are saying to him, you have been promised restoration and cleansing.

Now, in as many words, they are saying to Naaman, swallow your pride. Let go of your pomp and your self-importance and your superiority.

Do not despise the prophet, the man of God. Instead, act on his words. And then we come to verse 14, with more than a little gentle persuasion, this broken leper, Naaman, in humility, he does so. He eventually responds in obedience to what Elisha has prescribed. There is no alternative. So he dips himself seven times in the Jordan as the man of God had told him, we read.

[24 : 11] And he's healed. He's cleansed. He emerges from the Jordan a new man with his skin likened to that of a little child, whiter than the snow of Psalm 51.

He is cleansed, not even so much as a speck of leprosy to be seen anywhere on his body. Now let's go back to verse three.

Because this little girl's plea, her counsel, it continues to speak as we said. It resonates with us generations later.

Thousands of years later, you might say. Because the gospel resonates, doesn't it, through 2 Kings chapter 5.

How? Well, 2 Kings chapter 5 commends to you and I one much greater than Elisha.

[25 : 23] His name is Jesus. And he is the ultimate prophet. And the question the servants ask, their master's name, and hasn't changed.

For his is a great word spoken, and so it is. The good news of the gospel resonates here. The symbolism is powerful.

Leprosy is a symbol of sin on the pages of the Bible. This points us to sin cleansed through Calvary's atoning sacrifice.

And his discipleship directive resonates with us through the timeless words of Scripture that we find as a recurring emphasis in the pages of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Two words, follow me. And the question remains the same that the servants asked. Will you not do it? Will you not just do it?

[26 : 33] Will you not just follow the prophet? Do what he says. You are assured of being cleansed. Wash and be clean.

Doesn't John say if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness?

Well, like David, will we cry out tonight, cleanse me, purify me, so that I too might be whiter than the snow? She was incredibly instrumental.

She brought Naaman to the man of God. It was the American evangelist Billy Graham who once said, and we see it here, don't we, in 2 Kings 5, sin is the great clogger and the blood of Christ is the great cleanser.

This passage points us to Calvary and that is where we end tonight. But the words of this girl speak to us so powerfully, would that my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria, would that he would listen to him.

[28 : 20] He would cure him of his leprosy. Wonderful words, the gospel in summary.

Amen. heavenly father, we give you thanks and praise for this passage of scripture.

We thank you for the words we have reflected on tonight. We thank you for the witness of this young girl and the young boy of John 6, both of which have left such a lasting impression.

And we thank you for the many characters who led by example on the pages of the Bible. And we too are encouraged to follow their example and place our hope in you the God of our salvation.

So may we tonight if we have not as yet done so place our trust in the one who is our prophet our priest and our king the author the perfecter of our faith Jesus Christ the Son of God our Savior Amen.

[29 : 54] We're going to conclude our service by singing Psalm 130 it's the Scottish Psalter rendering on page 421 Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear the great redemption song of the Psalter concluding with that great verse and plenteous or full redemption is ever found with him and from all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem to the praise of God Lord from the death to thee

I cried my voice Lord to thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord hear smirk in equity but yet with thee forgiveness that fear thou mayest be I wait for God my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than they had fought more day you watch my soul waits for the Lord I say more than they had to watch the morning I to see let Israel! open the Lord for with him mercy!

and plenty! and plenty of redemption is ever found with him and from all his voy