



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

1st September, 2023

During Autumn our 'Thoughts for the Weekend' are going to focus on some of the 'background' characters of the Bible; those -some not even named- who step briefly onto the stage, who might have been thought of no importance, but whose words or actions were not only significant and far-reaching, but also exemplary for us in our day. Here is the first.....

"Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.""

2 Kings 5:2-3

Slaves, captives, hostages, prisoners have always formed part of the tragic story of human conflict. Ancient Israel was no exception, and neither are children. Sadly, such violations of human rights and freedoms still feature our own times, as the abduction of Ukrainian children into Russia, or the kidnapping of children from schools in West Africa testify. As we often hear, modern slavery, trafficking, abuse, etc. are still very much with us, even perhaps not far away.

The young Israelite girl abducted by the Arameans (Syrians) in around 900 BC is a case in point. She was probably over 100 miles from home, traumatised, lonely and fearful. She could have been resentful and sullenly silent. But she had developed a loyalty to her mistress and a feeling for her master, Naaman. She could have left him to suffer his fate with leprosy and kept quiet, but no, she boldly and kindly shared the knowledge she had of a way her master could be cured.

We are not told her name, and we don't hear of her again, but let's think of the effects of her courageous and compassionate words:

Firstly, she was *trusted*, and Naaman was desperate enough to act on the words of a 'non-entity', a foreign captive slave-child whom he might more normally have ignored. There must have been something about this child: something of God-given credibility.

Secondly, the result (after all the politics and posturing in the story!) is that Naaman is healed.

And thirdly, the result of that is that not only does Naaman turn to God (v. 15), but he carries his newfound faith (and some earth, v. 17!) back to his own land, and surreptitiously brings the presence of God into the pagan temples where his duties demand his attendance (v. 18).

Elisha sums up the 'smile of God' on the whole situation when he says, *"Go in peace."* (v. 19).

Imagine the thrill for our young servant girl when her master came home with his health restored, praising the God she knew and loved and from whose community she had been torn away. Perhaps in some ways the home from which she had been stolen returned to her.

Two thoughts arise: first, that God can and does use 'insignificant' people (in the world's eyes), often in the most inauspicious -even traumatic- circumstances, to bring about change in a situation, or in someone's life, to unimaginably good and far-reaching effect (Ephesians 3:20).

And second... like the young girl in our story, that 'insignificant' person could be you, or me.