

**“STEWARD OF GOD’S GIFT OF ADVERSITY:
A LITTLE GIRL USED BY A BIG GOD.”**

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

April 21, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: II Kings 5:1-14

Introduction.

Our text opens in the foreign country of Syria, north and east of Israel. Syria was a powerful enemy of Israel. We are in Damascus, the great and beautiful capital of Syria. Syria was a pagan nation, full of idolaters, godless people, a land living in darkness. Here we meet the principal character.

Naaman was the commander and chief of all the military forces of Syria, a five-star general, a Patton, a MacArthur, a Schwarzkopf. He was second only to King Ben Hadad II. We are told he was a mighty man of valor; a great man held in high regard.

He was also a man of great wealth. He had a palace in the nicest suburb of Damascus, with a three-chariot garage, stables, servants and all the rest. He had no trouble coming up with ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold, 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold.

Naaman was as great as the world could make him and yet there wasn't a soul in Damascus, even the poorest outcast, that would trade skin with him to gain everything else he had.

But. One little word changes everything. But, he had leprosy, he was a leper. That word hits like a thud in our text, like saying he had AIDS.

But that's not the most surprising or shocking thing in our text. Did you hear something else in this story that struck your ears, that got your attention?

God's sovereignty over nations.

What does it say about God, about Yahweh, the God of Israel?

We are told Yahweh gave victory to Naaman and the army of Syria over Israel. God was not just sovereign over His people Israel, not just a Jewish God. God was also sovereign over the politics and foreign affairs and military of Syria. God gave the enemy of Israel success.

God is God of His people, but that in no way means pagans and unbelievers and godless evil men are running around unsupervised. Whether we are thinking about Iran or Russia or China or North Korea or America, the heart of the king is like a stream of water in God's hands, He directs them wherever He will (Proverbs 21:1).

God is Lord of the earth, and God has a purpose and a will for all nations and for all the peoples of the earth and He will exercise His will when and where and how it pleases Him, whether the people involved believe in Him or not. That is no hindrance to His will.

God's sovereignty over little girls.

Now maybe verse 2 is even more shocking or surprising. God is not just God over nations, not just God over politics and foreign policy and the movements of great armies and superpowers. God is also sovereign over the smallest of circumstances and events, even little girls, which makes this a great text for GLOW Sunday.

The whole story hinges on this little girl, and we aren't even told her name.

From just a few fragments of details, it's a heartbreaking story. Caught up in the chaos and terror of an invading army's raid in her little town, she is captured, ripped from her home and family and carried off to a foreign country. Is her family alive and grieving the loss of their little girl? Did they send out an Amber alert? Was her picture on the back of milk cartoons?

Was her family killed, would she never see them again? What a frightening trauma for such a young girl. Now she is a slave, a servant to Naaman's wife in Damascus.

What do we make of this? What do we make of life when it doesn't go the way we expect or plan? What do we do when our world is turned upside down, when circumstances turn tragic?

What do we do when we are humbled by life's twists and turns? What do we do with those sobering words, "the Lord gave victory to Syria." The Lord let the enemy prevail and purposed for the little girl to become a slave in a foreign country. Do we see the hand of God in this?

What happens when God takes away something precious to us, something important, something even as important as our family? Is God still God? Can life still go on?

This little girl's testimony is truly remarkable. Her compassion is all the more remarkable when you consider what this man had most likely done to her people and her country.

What a good and godly family she must have had. She was raised with true faith in the God of Israel. She believed He was sovereign, powerful and good. She was raised to trust in God and not in circumstances, to believe God was God wherever she was. She had complete confidence God could heal her master, even while He made her a slave.

What faith and what compassion and care for others. She is concerned for her master's condition, perhaps more than for her own. She didn't return evil for evil.

We don't know her name and we never hear about her again. This is the decisive event in her life, to bear witness to her faith and to deliver the truth of God to Naaman.

It would be hard to imagine a more impossible scenario and a less significant messenger. She has four strikes against her, she is a child, she is a girl, she is a slave and she is an Israelite.

God's ways are not our ways, God's purposes and plans are not ours.

God is always at work in our world, and everything must serve His purposes, even the painful, traumatic, life altering circumstances. The hand of the Lord is in everything.

This little girl learns her life is not her own, even her family is not her own to be held on to, God is Lord over her life and her circumstances. Her purpose, her calling, her mission is simply to love God, to serve God, to be faithful to God, and leave the rest to Him. So she is faithful where she is.

God's sovereignty over unbelief.

The rest of the story is an interesting contrast to this little faithful, Israelite, servant girl.

Naaman believes her and goes to his king for permission to go to Israel to seek out this prophet who can heal diseases. And the King of Syria is all in, he goes along. Of course he may just be a normal pagan king who believes in magic.

But the king of Israel, the leader of God's people, (probably Jehoram) who should be a man of faith, he goes berserk. A little girl has more faith than the king of Israel; a pagan general has more faith than the king of Israel. He is pathetic. Of all the people in this story he shows the least faith and the least obedience to the will of God.

He thinks the king of Syria is asking something impossible so he can pick a fight. He doesn't even stop to think about Elisha.

And then Naaman falls into his own pride and arrogance. He is an important man, he should be treated like the important man he is. Elisha should show him more respect. He expected something more, saying some magic words, waving his hand, snapping his fingers.

What Elisha tells him to do is utterly absurd, stupid, ridiculous, an insult on so many levels.

So it is with the Word of God. It always comes across to us as absurd, as foolishness, as asking too much or the wrong things. God's ways are often offensive. God's ways are always meant to humble us, to break our pride. Paul said the Jews want to see power, the Greeks what to see intellectual reason, they don't like the simplicity of the Gospel or the narrowness of the Gospel.

What is more absurd than putting all your faith and trust in a man who was crucified on a cross two thousand years ago and believing He can forgive your sin, and renew your life and take away the fear of death and give you eternal life?

Naaman expected this to go the way it does with the magicians in Syria. He brought plenty of money, he expected to get what he paid for, vending machine grace with a little razzmatazz.

Elisha stays out of it completely, he does nothing. Why? To show this is not about him or from him, it is all about God. Go off to the Jordan and see what God does.

And once again God uses some humble servants, this time pagan slaves, to convince Naaman of the simple logic of the request. It isn't complicated, what harm is there in trying it.

So who is this story about? Is it about Naaman, or a little girl, or a prophet named Elisha? Or is it about God? The Bible is about God. This world and this life and everything that happens in it is about God.

God is sovereign, totally sovereign, totally in control. And when it seems like things are the most completely out of control, that is when God is actually most in control. The cross is proof.

God is in control of international affairs and politics, God is in control of dictators, tyrants, terrorists and army generals. God is in control of armies and missiles and borders. God used violence and hatred, political strife and division to accomplish His plan to save souls.

And God is in control of all the details of our personal lives, even the lives of little girls. God is in control of pimples, soccer games, math tests and mean friends. He is in control of the big picture and the little picture.

God doesn't just know when a sparrow falls to the ground or one of the hairs of our head falls off, God is in control of it, He ordains it, and it doesn't happen unless He decides it will.

Implications and application.

Now let me apply all of this to the GLOW girls, but the rest of you can listen in because it applies to all of us. This year the GLOW girls have been working with five themes.

I am VICTORIOUS (because God is victorious for me) - Deuteronomy 3:22 & Eph. 6:10-17

I am SAFE (because God is in control) - Isaiah 41:10

I am CONTENT (because God is only and always good) - Psalm 34:10

I have HOPE (because God has a purpose for my life) - Romans 5:2-4

I will do MY BEST (because it brings God glory) - 1 Corinthians 10:31

Our text this morning illustrates those five themes.

I am VICTORIOUS (because God is victorious for me) - Deuteronomy 3:22 & Eph. 6:10-17

In Jesus we are victorious over sin, Satan, the world and death. God has proved His power in the world, and He uses His power for us. For this little girl, she was not at the mercy of the power of kings or armies or circumstances. God was victorious over all of that for her.

God allowed the evil tragedy of her captivity to accomplish a greater good. His power is at work and made perfect when we are weak.

I am SAFE (because God is in control) - Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

God was in control and with that little girl every step of the way.

I am CONTENT (because God is only and always good) - Psalm 34:10

Psalm 34:10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

If we believe what the Bible says about God is true, then we can trust God is always good and we can give thanks in all circumstances because He is able to bring good out of everything.

What do people do in terrible circumstances? Sometimes they become bitter and resentful, they complain and grumble. They become unhappy and miserable and they make those around them feel it.

They seldom have a good testimony, a good word to share. People who sing in prison end up having a huge positive impact. Those who have joy in the midst of suffering get our attention.

Faith sees the hand of God at work in all things.

I have HOPE (because God has a purpose for my life) - Romans 5:2-4

God had a purpose for the little girl's life that she had no idea about. Our hope is in Christ, not our circumstances. When life seems hopeless, remember God is still in control. While you may not have much hope in your situation, you always have hope in God. He's still always and only good.

I will do MY BEST (because it brings God glory) - 1 Corinthians 10:31

That little girl instead of complaining or being mad, did her best for those she served. She sought their good, not her own, and she was salt and light in a distasteful and dark place. You can be salt and light for Jesus at school, on the playground, with friends and strangers.

Her life, the way she lived and worked was a part of her testimony. She worked her best for her master, she was faithful, she didn't grumble or complain or try to be mean or do her worst or hate them. She glorified God.

We can always be content and have hope in spite of our circumstance because God is in control and is always and only good, and always with us. Even if we don't like what is going on, by faith we know it is God's hand. The wise parent teaches this over and over and over again.

Blessed are those who trust in God as their Lord and Savior and who have complete confidence and assurance that all the events of their life are ordered by the unfailing wisdom and goodness of our sovereign God. Such that when things seem most dark and unexplainable, God will bring glory to Himself and good to us.

Let those here this morning or watching know if you need healing for your body or soul, healing in your home or relationships, help in some trial or affliction, turn to Jesus Christ, seek Him with all your heart. You don't need silver or gold, but the truth of the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God likes to use small tools, little things, mustard seeds and a little girl who loved God, had faith in God, had a kind heart. You are not too small or too young to be used by God to do big things.

Give your life over to Jesus, completely. All you have and are. Love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Trust Him completely with whatever and wherever and however He leads and guides and uses you.

Psalm 25:8-10 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.