

Royal Service

2 Kings 5: 1-4; John 6: 5-9.

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The normal and proper result that should flow from our meetings is that we should on our part be stirred up to serve more diligently our Lord Jesus Christ. I remember, of course, that there are two ways in particular in which we may serve Him. We may serve Him in what the Apostle Peter speaks of as our "holy priesthood" capacity. Thus there is a service, the main drift of which is *upward*, in responsive praise, adoration, worship; and there is the service, the main drift of which is *outward*, in which we show forth as royal priests, the excellences of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2).

This evening I am going to deal with the second of these two ways in which every one of us is privileged to serve the Lord, and I want to begin with the fact that *everyone of us is privileged to serve Him*. So I have chosen a Scripture in the Old Testament that shows the way in which a little maid served the interests of her God, as also a Scripture in the New Testament which shows how a small boy did likewise.

The *little maid*, and a *small boy*. Speaking generally, little maids are not noted for anything of a striking order. You do not expect the little maid, the little drudge of the household, to make very striking remarks. But if she is taught of God that is what she does. You do not expect much of a small boy. He is generally considered a very troublesome appendage. He makes a noise and distracts the proceedings when he should be quiet; and, as the older people would say, makes himself a regular nuisance. But again a small boy may be a vehicle of very, very good things; and if the little maid and small boy may serve the interests of God then no doubt *there is hope for everyone of us*.

Let me point out one or two things about the little maid, which show how very strikingly she was characterised by the *essentials* of true service; in other words, how excellent was her spiritual state. It is only, of course, when you sit down and think about it, that these things strike you. Here was a little maid who had been captured by a marauding band of Syrians. Poor thing — carried ruthlessly away and possibly her parents slain — separated from her loved ones, and now a little slave girl whose duty it was to wait on the wife of the man, who above all others in Syria was the cause of her troubles. The irony of it! That of all people in the world she should be the little slave girl to wait on the wife of the man who had taken her away from her home. I ask you, how would you have felt? I fear I should have been nursing very dark thoughts of revenge in my heart. I should not have loved Naaman, or Naaman's wife.

One day the news goes round the household that Naaman was smitten with the dread disease of leprosy. He had allowed the fact to leak out, and even the most menial in his household knew all about it. It touched the heart of the little maid, and one day evidently in the most artless way possible, when waiting on her mistress she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." She had *a great heart of compassion*, and here she is desiring the welfare of the man who might be considered her greatest enemy. There was something of the kindness of God in her little heart. She was little but morally and spiritually she was great. She evidently had great thoughts of God, and she had entered very largely into His divine compassion. She desired blessing for the one that most she might have hated; and not only had she very great love, but she had

the most amazing faith. Elisha, said she, "would recover him of his leprosy." How did she know that? Even had she lived somewhere in the vicinity of Elisha's house, she had never seen the good man do it. She had never even heard of it. The thing had never been done.

Our Lord has told us that, "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and *none of them was cleansed* saving Naaman the Syrian." Naaman came in and seized the blessing that possibly a thousand Israelitish lepers missed. Now what possessed her to talk like this, and assert that the prophet *would* recover him of his leprosy. It was either madness or very great faith. I can tell you what it was — it was very great faith, and underneath that very great faith lay *very great courage*. She added to her faith that virtue or courage of which Peter speaks in his second Epistle. She had the courage of her faith.

Why did she not say to herself, "Well I think our God is a very great God. He is infinitely greater than those sordid gods of the heathen world. I believe our God *could* cleanse a leper. *But would* He? Well, *I think* He would. But I had better not say anything, because *supposing* I make some remark of this kind, and *supposing* Naaman pays attention to it, and in consequence starts to the land of Israel, and *supposing* he does not get it, my life would not be worth ten minutes purchase"? No, she rather said with sublime assurance, without the flicker of an eyelid, without a tremor of doubt: "He *would* recover him of his leprosy." AND SO HE DID! God took the little maid at her word. He accepted her bold witness.

What great faith! Behind the curtains in the quietness of her life, whether before her captivity or afterwards I do not know, she must have had transactions in her spirit with the God that Elisha knew and served. And she had such sublime confidence in the compassion of God! She boldly spoke as she did not on a public platform but in the quiet of the women's quarters, in the presence of her mistress; and by these few words she set in motion the whole sequence of events which was for Naaman's blessing and to the glory of God.

The little maid ought to teach you and me this lesson, that which counts in the service of God is that *we know the God whom we serve*, and we have *faith* in Him, and courage to confess our faith, and that our hearts are *overflowing with love and compassion* for those whom we seek to serve. I verily believe that the secrets behind the words of the little maid are those which lie behind successful service. He serves best and most effectively in this world who has faith in the greatness and glory and grace of our God) courage with his faith and a heart of compassion that leads him to speak as the little maid spoke.

Then we turn from the little maid to the small boy. Here was the Lord Jesus Himself, multitudes thronging around Him. The incident is well-known for it is recorded in all four Gospels. The Lord distributed the loaves and fishes through His disciples, for normally He carries on His operations through His people, but only in John's Gospel do we read about the small boy. How was the multitude to be fed? "Whence shall we buy food for this great multitude?" He said it to prove His disciples, because it significantly adds, "for He Himself knew what He would do." The initiative ever lies with Him. He knows, but He delights to take up and to use His people, and He would even use a small boy. Andrew said, "There is a lad [small boy] here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes." From the human standpoint that sounds a very ridiculous proposition. Yet the little boy brought these to the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like all of you to remember this, especially those who are young in the faith, that the Lord is not looking for great people to serve Him. He is great enough Himself. The greatness, that is required, is found in Him. He is so great that He can afford to take up and use what is very small. Our

Lord Jesus Christ is supremely great. He carries on His service with very small instruments. He can afford to do so. As one looks over the history of things we see again and again the most disastrous things happening — things turning in the wrong direction. Again and again evil raises its head, threatens to engulf everything. Again and again just those people, whom you and I would have marked as being the key men, are removed from the battlefield.

It so happened at the very beginning of the world's history. If we had to choose which of the patriarchs before the flood should live a long life of witness, we should have said, "Enoch of course, Enoch is the man. He is the man who walks with God; he is the man who bears unswerving witness." We should have been wrong. Enoch was taken in early life. Look at Methuselah — 969. Enoch has 365 years and he is gone. The very man we want is gone! Have you found that happen? You have seen it again and again.

Ever since sin entered it has looked as though our Lord is fighting a losing battle. His greatest servants go when most needed, yet He will bring victory out of what looks like defeat. We have *an immensely great Lord*, One who is big enough to bring about glory all along the line. Consequently He can do with *very small servants*.

You should not be precluded from serving the Lord because young and likely to make mistakes. Do not be like the boy who would not come into the water until he had learnt to swim! You remember that Solomon said, "Where no oxen are the crib is clean." Here is Solomon's recipe for a clean stable — keep nothing in it! Those who keep no oxen, however, lose their useful labour. Let us not do nothing, for fear we will make mistakes. Go ahead in dependence upon God.

It says, "Jesus took the loaves." If Andrew had tried to take them or if impetuous Peter had grabbed the little boy's bag, there would have been a commotion! No one could say the Saviour nay. The little lad was brought near — "There is a lad here." He was on the spot when wanted; he was ready. Would to God that we were like this little boy. What a lovely thing to be as he was, on the scene when wanted and able to see and hear the Lord Jesus. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." A small boy who is *here* with his loaves and fishes is better than a whole convoy of provisions ten miles away.

The boy was small, the loaves were only of barley and not wheat, the fishes were small, yet when the Lord Jesus said, "Let me have your loaves," how quickly he handed them over; and in His sacred hands the loaves and fishes were multiplied, and the great crowds were fed, and more was recovered than they had at first. They started with five loaves and two fishes and they ended with twelve baskets full of fragments. Remember the normal way of the Lord Jesus is to work through His people, especially now that He is seated in His glorious seat in Heaven. He is God's right-hand Man; He knows all, and all the planning lies with Him, but He works through His people.

God help us so that we may not miss the opportunity. You and I have got opportunities now that we shall never have in Heaven. We are not going to speak a word to a weary soul in Heaven: there are no weary souls to speak to. There will be no opposition in Heaven: there is no one to oppose. If we miss these present opportunities of serving the Lord Jesus Christ, if we don't yield ourselves to Him, that our members may be His servants in righteousness and holiness, we shall miss them for ever. Don't let us miss the opportunity.

We shall praise Him soundly above, but we shall never be able to serve Him as we are given the opportunity of serving here, in the place where He was rejected, and in the day when the great masses forget Him and turn their backs upon Him.

God give us greater affection for the souls of men and for the God whom we serve. God give us

grace in our day to be humble and simple, not waiting for the opportunity to be great or to do something great, but being little and doing the little things brought to our hands in devoted service to our Master. In due season, if we are faithful, He will find greater things for us to do.