

Hidden Heroes of the Faith (1 Samuel 9:1-14)

Introduction:-

How often is it the case in life that many so-called success stories are attributed to people "behind the scenes", whose names are not mentioned up front, but who nevertheless have had significant roles to play in the making of those success stories that we come to know so well. And a study of the books called Former Prophets in the Old Testament (Joshua to 2 Kings) reveals a number of these "hidden" or "unnamed" heroes of the faith, who make a short appearance, often as foils to the plot, and then completely disappear. Nevertheless, their contributions are significant. And for our passage today, the question may be asked: "Does the Lord's providence and interventions only relate to the major players or to the elite in salvation history, or does it also relate to the individual lives of his humble subjects as well? The passages before us, would suggest that Yahweh's baffling providence is not the exclusive privilege of some kingdom elite, but also reaches down to his common people, with some remarkable surprises. These stories would have been of great encouragement and delight to Israel during the periods of dispersion and exile (from the 9th to the 6th centuries BC), when the question of Israel's importance and identity as God's covenant people, began to loom large within the ancient world. When Israel's institutions and leadership began to crumble before its very eyes, the appearance of "unnamed servants" provided a way forward. Let this truth encourage us today, as we examine these passages further.

1. First we examine the "king-makers" behind the king (1 Samuel 9:1-14)

The story begins with Saul who had been sent to look for his father's lost donkeys. But providentially, Saul's father Kish had ordered an unnamed "servant" to go with him in search of the lost donkeys. As it turned out, this unnamed servant was largely instrumental in keeping Saul focused on the task at hand when Saul would have been content to give up. Does this strike a chord with our own lives today? How often has our own desire to give up, and throw it all in, been saved by the greater wisdom and encouragement of others around us? Contrast Saul's words at verse 5, "Let us go back" . . . , with the servant's words in verse 6, "Look, in this town, is a man of God" . . . Let's go there now." Further, the unnamed servant was not only the visionary in this situation, but provided the necessary encouragement and resources for Saul to seek the man of God in verses 7-10. This finally led to Saul's important destiny in meeting Samuel the prophet and seer, and being crowned as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1). And as they were going up the hill to meet the man of God, a second scene occurs in verses 11-12, where they met some young unnamed women coming out to draw water, and they asked these young women, "Is the seer here?" This is a frequent scene in the Old and New Testaments, where chance meetings are often held with women at wells. And on this occasion, the Lord also uses these unnamed young women as well, to further encourage Saul and his servant about their journey to meet with Samuel. In fact, the words and information of these young women is detailed to the point that if Saul and his servant now hurry, they will meet Samuel "before" he goes up to the high place to sacrifice, and this will be the ideal time to meet with him. And so they not only confirm Samuel's presence at the place to which they are going, but they also encourage Saul and his servant to hurry, in order to meet with Samuel at the right time. Finally in verse 14, Samuel the seer comes to the city at the same time that Saul arrives - the timing is perfect, and behind this meeting we discover that this

was only made possible by ordinary "unnamed servants", doing extraordinary things. Saul would have preferred to go back home. But Saul's unnamed servant, supported by the unnamed young women, really became the first "king-makers" and "queen-makers" behind Israel's first king. I believe that Heaven's story will be all about ordinary people who in God's eyes have done extraordinary things on earth. Their names have not shone in neon lights, but they have like the unnamed servants in Saul's story proved to be God's king-makers and queen-makers on this earth. At key points in our lives too are people who have encouraged and enabled our progress in the Christian life. They have blessed us. Let us in turn pass this same blessing on to others.

2. Secondly we discover a servant girl who leads a Syrian army general to healing waters (2 Kings 5:1-14).

Still within the Former Prophets, the story of the unnamed servant girl from Israel in the book of Kings, provides a contrasting sequel to that of the unnamed servant at 1 Samuel 9. In the first story of 1 Samuel 9, the unnamed servant helps Israel find its first king by consulting Samuel the prophet. In the contrasting story of 2 Kings 5, the unnamed captive servant girl from Israel, helps a foreign army general to find healing through consulting Elisha the prophet. But as we look closer at this story, the unnamed servant girl from Israel exits this story just as quickly as she enters it. But within the story line, she possess knowledge which surpasses that of others, including the mighty general Namaan, and the king of Israel himself. Waiting on the general's wife, the girl observes that there is a prophet in Israel who could heal Namaan of his leprosy. Ironically, both the Syrian king and the general misunderstand, and instead approach the king of Israel for this healing. The king of Israel sees only the impossibility of healing, but the servant girl sees its possibility. At last, they are directed to Elisha's door (verses 8-10). Progress is blocked again, as Namaan refuses to follow the advice of Elisha. The general was indignant at having to wash seven times in the dirty Jordan, as distinct from the superior rivers of Damascus. But again, unnamed servants of Namaan himself save the day in verse 13, encouraging Namaan to carry out the simple instructions as much as he would have carried out more difficult instructions. This provides a parallel to the second line of instruction given by the young women to Saul back in 1 Samuel 9, when they urged Saul to hurry to the city in order to meet Samuel. Finally, the flesh of this "great man" was restored when he heeded the advice of his unnamed servants. When he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, his flesh was restored as that of a "young man" (verse 14). Walter Brueggemann points out that perhaps now Namaan is in some sense like the young servant girl. The author has used the same Hebrew phrase in the masculine form for "young boy" in verse 14, as the phrase in the feminine form for "young girl" in verse 2. The girl is thus seen as an innocent, trusting, whole person - perhaps what the "great man" will become through his ministry of healing. In this respect, Jesus said, "Unless you become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

3. Thirdly, from a New Testament perspective, we encounter a young unnamed boy whose humble lunch feed five thousand people (John 6:1-15)

There are many aspects to this New Testament story which resemble the two stories that we have considered from the Old Testament. Firstly, like Saul's servant in 1 Samuel 9, who provided Saul with a quarter of a shekel of silver in order that they might finally see the man of God, and find direction for life, this small boy in the New

Testament story obviously also came prepared with his lunch-box for his journey in order to see the greater man of God and prophet, Jesus Christ, in order to find direction for life. But, the contribution of this young unnamed boy would far exceed his wildest dreams in terms of what Jesus had in mind. As the story unfolds, Jesus began to test his disciples as to how this multitude who had followed them, would be fed. But Jesus had a plan, that would involve a young unnamed boy, who would offer his humble lunch box to the Lord. And the Lord is pleased to involve even us in his plans today, no matter how insignificant in our own eyes, our lives might be, in order to do wonderful things for his name. Colin Kruse (John 2003, p. 162), says that it is hard to imagine that Andrew, who first drew attention to the small boy and his meagre lunch-box, would have thought that this would have been of any help in the situation. And so it is likely that Andrew only brought the boy to Jesus, because the boy himself had taken the initiative, and wanted to offer what he had. If this was the case, then this young boy stands in the company of Saul's resourceful servant, as well as the young girl in the book of Kings, who believed that God's prophet in Israel could perform miracles. Interestingly enough, a similar story is told at 2 Kings 4:42-44, just before the story of the servant girl in 2 Kings 5:1-14, where a servant gives Elisha 20 loaves of barley bread in order to feed 100 men, with the result that some were left over. Finally, John tells us that that the feeding of the five thousand took place as the Jewish Passover festival drew near. And after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, the people said that surely this is the prophet that should come into the world, which they would have seen as a fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18:15, understood as the prophet like Moses, who feed Israel in the Wilderness with mana. And just as Moses led Israel out of Egyptian captivity, now the people wanted Jesus, as the prophet like Moses, to free them from Roman occupation as their king. But like Israel's request for a king at 1 Samuel 8, this was not the kind of kingship that Jesus had in mind, for his kingship and kingdom, were not of this world (John 18:36). Rather, Jesus would fulfil the meaning of the Feast of Passover, as the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world. But just think of the part that the young unnamed boy played in Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus had a plan, and it is amazing in our sight!!

Conclusion

These stories remind us that behind every Saul and Namaan there stands unnamed servants who are finally recognized as "hidden or unsung heroes of the faith". In God's economy, "small is good", and Jesus measures true "greatness" in terms of our ability to become servant of all (Mark 10:43-45). Heaven's story will be all about ordinary people who in God's eyes have done extraordinary things on earth. Here we have also drawn attention to the young unnamed boy in John's Gospel, who offered his humble lunch box to Jesus. Finally in Paul's words, "God has chosen the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Let us be encouraged to continue as these unnamed servants. These will shine forever as the stars of heaven, not only in the biblical story, but in our story as well. Amen.