

Mountain Moving Faith

Mark 5:21-43

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This morning we are going to look at two miracles. One miracle is embedded in the other. The third season of *The Chosen* depicted these miracles in a beautiful and powerful way. Those of you who saw that episode won't be able to help but see the picture in your head.

I will comment on these two stories but what I really want to focus on is the fact that Jesus commends both Jairus and the Woman with the issue of blood (*The Chosen* called her Veronica) for their faith. We are left thinking, "If we had enough faith, we would see God do extraordinary things as well."

Then we remember that Jesus says all we need is faith as big as a very tiny mustard seed, and we will see incredible things happen. What a humbling statement. Is our faith really that pathetic that it is not even as big as a mustard seed?

If you look at the book of Hebrews (11:1) we get this definition of faith, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It is a succinct definition, but I'm still trying to comprehend what faith really is.

Some people define faith as wishful thinking or even more cynically, it is believing something even though we know it isn't true. That is not what the Bible means by faith! As we look at these two accounts let's be detectives and see what we can learn about faith from the text.

The first example of faith is found in verses 22-24

²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." ²⁴ And he went with him.

We are told Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue. This would have been a person who organized and managed the activities in the synagogue (think local church). Most of these rulers were Pharisees. We already know that the Pharisees were not fans of Jesus. Imagine the desperation that led this leader, a Pharisee, to Jesus to beg him to heal his daughter.

Undoubtedly, this man had either witnessed or heard convincing testimony of the ability of Jesus to perform miracles. The Greek word used here for death means she was at the very end of her life . . . as if Hospice had done everything they could and now the end was near. Jairus fell at the feet of Jesus and spoke words that declared his belief that only He could help save his daughter. At this point, this ruler did not care what other Pharisees thought. Jesus agreed to go with him to save his daughter.

On the way to this dying girl, we read of another person in need who has great faith,

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."

We are given several facts about this woman. First, she had had a discharge of blood for twelve years. Physically this would have made her extremely tired. It also made her unclean. The Jews were taught that God is holy and those who want to enjoy God's favor had to strive to be clean and holy also. The idea was that any kind of discharge from the body meant they had less "life" in their body than they did previously which made them unclean and unholy.

The Law in the Old Testament said Mothers are polluted by the (post delivery) discharge for forty days after giving birth to a son, and for eighty days after bearing a daughter (Lv. 12). (I could find no good explanation for the difference between the sexes). It takes time for the organs of a woman's body to return to normal after delivery. During this time, they were unclean. Sexual intercourse also polluted both parties for a day and menstruation makes a woman unclean for a week (Lv. 15:18–19). Long-term discharges (like this woman) made people unclean for as long as the discharge continued.

Anyone who had contact with an unclean man or woman (even by sitting in a chair they sat on) would have been considered unclean for a day, and they would have to go through a cleansing ritual. As a result, people who were bleeding in any sense would have been isolated until the bleeding stopped. After 12 years, this woman would have lost her family and her friends because they did not want to defile themselves.

There is one more thing to notice about the woman: she had spent all she had on Doctors, and nothing helped her condition. She felt alone, cast aside, financially impoverished, and felt she was in a hopeless situation. She too had heard about the healer, Jesus, and determined that if she could just touch his cloak, she might then be able to be healed.

We know the story, the woman does touch the fringe of Jesus' garment, and Jesus feels the power go out of him to heal this woman. Jesus stopped and called her forward. Perhaps he wanted her to know that this was not something magic that had to do with touching his garment . . . she was healed because of her faith!

When Jesus called her "daughter," and perhaps even bent down and touched her, these were acts of love she hadn't experienced for twelve years.

While all this is going on, Jairus had to be concerned about his daughter. He may have even resented the delay brought about by this woman. I am sure he was a little encouraged by the healing he witnessed, but his daughter was his biggest concern as it would be for any parent.

As they neared the home, Jairus received messengers who told him his daughter had died. Jesus looked at him and said, “Do not fear, only believe.”

The mourners were already doing their mourning and surely neighbors were gathering with their casseroles. Jesus came into the house and told them the girl was only sleeping. They knew what a dead body looked like, so they laughed at him and likely were also angry with him for what they considered to be an insensitive comment.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him into the girl’s room. He knelt down next to her, took her hand (thus risking his own uncleanness), and whispered for her to get up. And she did!

Jesus instructed everyone to keep the matter a secret. He didn’t want the chaos that would result when people learned about the little girl’s resurrection. Of course, people would know something happened as soon as she came down the stairs to get a sandwich!

These are the facts of the story. The question we want answered is: what made their faith great? Why don’t we see things like this happening today? Our response often is to scrunch up our eyes and try to muster more faith.

We Must Recognize that Faith Recognizes Our Own Weakness and Inability

The first thing we notice about the faith of both of these people was they came to the end of themselves. There was no longer anything more they could do. Jairus had exhausted all medical means. The woman has no money and nothing she could do to stop her bleeding problem. Tim Keller, in a sermon, wrote these insightful words,

the main first reason people don’t find Jesus is not because they have too little faith but because they have too much pride. (read that again!) See, this is a wonderfully comforting story. This is not saying, “Faith is something you have to conjure up.” Faith is simply admitting, “I am helpless. I am weak.”¹

In Matthew 17 the disciples who had been out on their great missionary journeys and seen God use them in a great way, were bewildered. While Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration these disciples were asked to deliver someone from demonic occupation, they tried, but they failed. Jesus healed the man when he came down from the mountain and the disciples asked why they couldn’t deliver the man. Jesus told them they needed faith “like a grain of mustard seed.” We immediately think of size but it may be more than that. It was not simply the size of their faith but the *object of their faith*. Pastor John Stark writes,

It’s possible they had begun to trust their gifts and resources instead of the power of Jesus. Their greatness, success, and status defined their faith rather than Christ and his kingdom. Previously confident, they were now bewildered by their failure. It surprised

¹ Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

them. They seemed to believe they had everything they needed to drive out this demon, and more. You could say they had faith the size of mountains, but the object of that faith was themselves. Their faith was beginning to follow the methods and strategies of Babylon, not the kingdom. Jesus was correcting them by saying, in effect, “Just have a mustard seed–sized faith in me.”²

We will always try to do something to solve our problems. We trust our ability, our ingenuity, and our determination. We do think of faith as something we need to create. We need to think the right thoughts, push the right buttons, give the right amount of money, practice the right disciplines, or learn the right words to say, to reach the desired end. We can't have real faith in the Lord until we realize that faith is not what we do, it is whom we trust.

We live in a world that spotlights success stories (even in Christian books). That is the focus of the world: “You can do it, if you set your mind to it.” If we are putting our confidence in our ability, we will not see the power of God working in us. That leads us to the second point.

We Must Use our Head

Many people say faith comes when we stop using our heads because, in their mind, faith is illogical. It is taking a leap in the dark; it is believing what you know cannot be true. It is believing in something even though all the evidence points to the contrary.

Both Jairus and the woman had to make some decisions. They needed to decide if Jesus was the One who could help them. For Jairus, this meant seeing beyond what his fellow Pharisees were saying. He needed to look at Jesus with fresh eyes to see the one who really did possess the power of God. He also needed to believe Jesus would even help someone who was a Pharisee.

The woman had to get past the fear that Jesus was going to disappoint her just as all those Doctors had done. She had to believe that if she could just get close enough to Him, she could touch his garment without making him unclean like she had done to so many people in those years. She believed He was her only hope.

We increase our faith as we increase our understanding of Jesus and the heart of God. We do this by looking at His past faithfulness, in our lives and others. We can also recall God's promises and place them against His sure character. We need to see that He alone is worthy of our trust. However, we still have not reached the faith God desires from us.

True Faith is to Step out and Be Vulnerable

Jairus knew about Jesus but didn't show faith until he went to Jesus and asked for help. He could have easily talked himself out of going to Jesus using the same arguments many of us use,

² Starke, John. *The Secret Place of Thunder* (pp. 49-50). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

- He would never listen to me!
- What would others think?

It is the same with the woman. She could have said things like,

- What if He rejects me?
- What if he responds to me as everyone else has done?

Faith requires us to trust the Lord enough to take action . . . it is to risk and to put all our weight on Him.

Suppose three guys are wandering around in the woods in winter when they spot a bear, and more significantly, the bear spots them. The guys take off running. They reach a cliff that overlooks a lake. They have no idea how thick the ice is. They realize their only hope of being saved is to jump and trust the ice to hold them.

The first jumps yelling, "I am going to die!" The second jumps and yells "I hope the ice holds, I can't swim!" And the third guy jumps saying, "We're going to be OK." Which man had more faith? The answer is: they all had faith because they didn't let other things get in the way of jumping.

"Jesus doesn't give techniques or tips on how to get the job done. He doesn't give a step-by-step TED talk on how to cast out really big demons. Instead, he instructs his followers on how to get humble enough, low enough, and hidden enough"³ until all we see is the sufficiency and wisdom of Christ.

How do this show itself in our daily lives? It is seen when,

- We talk to someone about Jesus trusting that God will give you the words and help you know how to answer questions that are asked of you.
- We make a significant donation of money or time because we believe that is what God wants us to do even though we have lots of things we could spend that money on.
- We start a new ministry. It is always easier to do what is safe. When God opens a door for us, faith walks through that door. We certainly saw this with our radio ministry. A door opened and we didn't know how we could do it, how we would pay for it, or whether anyone would listen. Faith is holding on and going on an adventure with Him.
- We dare to Forgive. It is certainly more comfortable to nurse a grudge. When we forgive, we are giving the hurt to God. It shows we trust Him to do what is right and to help us let it go.
- We go and visit someone that God has laid on our hearts. If we are listening, there are times when God nudges us to visit someone. Much of the time we silence those "whispers" by saying, "I don't have time," or "I don't what to say to hurt people." Or

³ Starke, John. The Secret Place of Thunder (p. 51). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

even, "I'm pretty tired." As we listen to God and act we will find God speaks more clearly as we tune our ears to Him.

- We obey God when the rest of the world will ridicule us. This kind of faith is not without a cost. It will lead us to swim against the cultural norm.

Faith is action rather than lofty words. It is trusting Him enough to follow Him.

This is the Kind of Faith that Saves Us.

It is important that we define faith carefully. You hear it from many people, "I believe in Jesus!" or they say, "I have placed my faith in Christ." Some will say, "I have been a Christian for most of my life." It is always important to find out what someone means when they say these things.

Like the disciples, with the demon-possessed man, we may like Jesus, but still trust our understanding, our performance, our words, our family heritage, or even our results.

The only true faith is when we put all those things aside and recognize that they are worthless to salvation. God wants us to recognize that our need for forgiveness and new life can only be gained through what Christ has done for us. We must call out to Him as Jairus, and this woman did. He was a well-respected man; she was a woman cast aside. Yet they were both equaled commended for their faith. What this tells me is the opportunity for people to be saved by faith is open to anyone who will confess their inability, humble themselves, turn to Christ as the only one who can rescue us, and then trust we are forgiven and follow Him wholeheartedly with our lives.

- Those who are broken because of their failures in life.
- Those who are addicted to something they say they can leave at any time, but they know they cannot.
- Those who have spurned Christ in the past.
- Those who are full of themselves because of their knowledge, success, or performance.
- Those who have convinced everyone else they are fervent believers, but inside they feel lost and even a little ashamed of their hypocrisy.

Look at your own heart today. Do you have this kind of mountain-moving faith? Is it possible you are trusting yourself instead of Christ? Is it possible that we as a church are trusting our programs, our outreach, our leaders, our Pastors, our skillfully written mission statements or even our attendance figures instead of trusting Him? If we want mountain-moving faith we must come to Him as the only One who can move the mountains, humble ourselves and then do what He tells us to do.

John Newton summed it up nicely in one of his beloved verses of Amazing Grace

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come.

Tis faith that brought me safe thus far and faith will lead me home.