

## Faith on Display

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The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 5:21-43

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### Introduction:

A few months ago I was sitting in my office on a regular Friday afternoon when Rebekah, our Executive Assistant, contacted me on my office phone. She told me that someone had called the Church office looking to speak to a pastor and since I was the only pastor who was in at the time, I took the call not knowing what to expect. On the other end was a person who informed me that they were terminally ill, with only a few months left to live, but wanted to know more about the Bible, about Jesus, and how to be saved. Their voice sounded tired and weary, but they expressed genuine concern for their eternal destiny and was earnestly looking for answers. And so I shared the gospel of Christ with them. I told them about our separation from a holy and righteous God because of our sin, of God's love for us expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ His son, of the repentance of sin and forgiveness given to all those who put their faith for eternal salvation in Jesus... But for some reason, this person was resistant to that message. What transpired over the next several months were intermittent phone calls with questions about Scripture. "What did Jesus mean when He said \_\_\_\_\_." But inevitably during our phone calls, we would always land on the same topic: believing and trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. I urged them to trust in God's promise of salvation, but still, they were hesitant... It is evident that they had some notion of what was right, but still offered up justifications for their hesitations. They said things like "I've been a terrible person, how could God possibly forgive me?" or "What if I fail and keep sinning after I've asked for forgiveness?" and "I'm scared to ask for forgiveness. What if God doesn't accept me?" Despite my pleading with them to have faith in the promises of God, their doubt persisted. Sadly, I haven't heard from them in a while and I hope if they are alive that they put their faith in the redeemer...

What is biblical faith? When I was younger I used to think that faith simply meant being religious or feeling the need to go to church and do "Christian things," or learning more about what the Bible says. But as I grew in my walk with God, it's clear to me now that faith is so much more about learning or going through the motions of what we think a Christian should be like. Faith, biblical faith, is trusting wholeheartedly in the promises of God despite our circumstances, no matter how grim or desperate things may seem. It is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. As Martin Luther said, "Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it." Last week, Pastor Ben started us on a journey that Jesus takes with His disciples. That journey revolved around a simple question regarding Jesus' identity. Throughout chapter 4:35 to the end of chapter 5, Mark invites his readers to ask themselves the question "Who then is this?" Last week we saw how Jesus showed His authority over the creation when by a word of His mouth He calmed the winds and the waves. Then He showed His authority over the spiritual realm by casting out a Legion of unclean spirits from a man and restoring him to health. This week, we'll see Jesus display His authority and power over the most brutal effects of sin itself: disease, shame, separation from God, and death. Our question about Jesus' identity now turns to a question regarding our response to His person. If this Jesus has authority and power over all things, how then shall we live? Today's text is complex in that it is a story sandwiched within a story, but we must have both in order to understand Mark's purpose in writing it: to urge us to have faith in Jesus.

Mark 5:21-24

And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. 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.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.

So after Christ and his disciples encountered the demon-possessed man on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee, they return once again to the Galilean side where his reputation as a teacher and healer is well known. Immediately, a great crowd surrounds Jesus like a swarm and it is very likely that they are there to see and experience His miracles rather than sit at His feet to learn. Jairus is likely no exception to this, judging by his approach. Mark tells us in verse 22 he was “one of the rulers of the synagogue.” He was a community leader. Everyone knew him. He was well-off. He probably didn’t need a lot from others. But then his daughter got sick. And as time went on, she grew worse and worse until she was at the point of death. As he looks out his window, he sees a crowd. He sees Jesus has come to town. He looks back at his dying twelve-year-old daughter and decides to run to Jesus for help. He falls at his feet and says, “My little daughter is at the point of death.” It was an urgent plea. She was at death’s door. Hospice wasn’t just called in; they were preparing for the final moments. He needs Jesus’ help right now. “Jesus, will you help me?” He’s desperate, pleading. Being a ruler of a synagogue did not mean that he was a Pharisee, but rather that he organized the services, picking what scriptures would be read, who would pray, and who would give a sermon. But even though he wasn’t one of the religious elite that often argued with Christ, he likely would have been more aligned with them. So, then, it is surprising that this man would not only seek out Jesus’ help but also that he would throw himself at his feet to beg. Yes, this man had a position of honor as a leader of the synagogue, but he was willing to risk the consternation of the Pharisees because he trusted in Jesus’ power to rescue his daughter from death. And so Jesus, moved by the man’s actions and the desperation of the situation, follows him. But then something curious happens on the way to Jairus’ house, amongst the crowd is someone who is just as desperate for the healing touch of Jesus. Someone who has lost so much because of the fallenness of this world. Disease, and the pain and suffering caused by it, were never the original intention of God’s creation. It is a byproduct of sin entering into the world. Sickness is the reason for which Jairus begs Jesus for mercy on his daughter, and it is the reason for Jesus’ next encounter.

Mark 5:25-28

25 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.”

Mark goes into great detail regarding this poor, suffering woman to give us a sense of her hopelessness. For twelve long years, she has suffered a constant flow of blood and likely a great deal of pain. According to the book of Leviticus, this kind of condition would have made her ceremonially unclean, preventing her from worshiping in the temple for those 12 years. On top of that, anyone who would have come into contact with her would have been marked as unclean until sundown and would also not be allowed into the temple grounds. She would have been avoided and shunned. She’s a social outcast and has been isolated from the rest of her people and separated from being near God’s presence at the Temple. On top of that, her prolonged condition would have made it extremely difficult for her to get married in that culture because it was impossible for her to have children. Back then, barrenness in the Bible brings with it a lot of shame. Think of women in Scripture like Sarah, the mother of Isaac, or Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Their prayers to God had been answered and their shame removed. But for this poor woman, that was not the case. If anything, shame was added to her by her circumstances. Even if she was once well off financially, she’s now destitute. She’s flat-broke from doctor bills and no healthier for it. She’s tried all that medicine has to offer and suffered not only from the disease but also from the so-called “cures.” She’s at the end of her rope. She’s without hope. She’s desperate, and as she sits in the street, she sees the crowd coming her way, and the one whom she’s heard about is among them. It’s the teacher with the large following who heals the sick and casts out demons. Of course, she thinks, “He can help me.” For the past 12 years, she’s had everything taken from her piece by piece, but for that small moment, she is given a spark of hope for recovery that blossoms into faith. Notice

what she confesses with her mouth: "I WILL be made well." But here she is, weak and out of options, but just strong enough to come, which is all the strength Jesus requires. As she makes her way through the crowd, everyone she touches becomes unclean because of her. Then she reaches out her hand, and touches the edge of Jesus' garment and something happens. In almost every way she is different than Jairus, she has no social standing like he does, she doesn't have a family like he does, neither does she have any wealth. They only have two things in common: that same desperation for healing and that Jesus is the answer. And yes, he is.

Mark 5:29-32

29 And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 And he looked around to see who had done it.

You know, lots of people touched Jesus that day and nothing happened. There was a crowd pressing in on Jesus and His disciples, but just being around Jesus isn't enough. Proximity doesn't necessarily change things. A lot of people think it does. A lot of people think that nearness to the church or nearness to other Christians is enough like the holiness just rubs off. But it doesn't work that way. Proximity isn't enough. There is a way of touching Jesus without really touching him. There's a way of touching Jesus without receiving his power. A lot of people touched Jesus that day in that crowd, but only the woman got his power after the touch. So, what was it that unlocked his power? Was it her perfect theology? Probably not. Just this: personal need of a savior and the empty hands of faith. That's all this unnamed woman had. And that's all she needed. She was desperate for what he could do for her, even willing to risk further social isolation if someone noticed her, but it made all the difference. She was convinced that Jesus was her Savior. Being healed by Him would mean redemption from the suffering, the pain, and the shame and until you understand your personal need for Jesus, his power will be withheld from you. So come to Him, if you have not. We are all suffering in one way or another by the consequences of sin. Come to Him with the empty hands of faith. Come to Him today. And don't worry about how you come to him. You can't defile him, but he can cleanse you. The woman is proof. When she touched him, her touch didn't make him unclean; Jesus' power made her clean. When I initially read over this passage in preparation for this sermon, for some reason the Lord made my mind think back to the prophet Haggai in the Old Testament. In this short book, the prophet gives 4 different messages to the people of Israel after their return to Israel from Babylon. In one of those speeches, he goes to the priests and asks them a religious question regarding whether or not holiness or uncleanness can transfer to other things from indirect contact.

Haggai 2:11-13

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: 12 'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered and said, "No." 13 Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean."

I bring this up because Jesus did a double miracle in this moment. He healed the woman by indirectly touching her but He also made her clean. His authority over sin and the effects of sin is so powerful and absolutely sovereign that even in a moment like this He will not be defeated. His mere presence in this world changes everything. Going back to our story, Jesus stops on His mission to save Jairus' daughter to address what just happened. Christ asks who touched Him even though it's my opinion that He already knew exactly who it was. He's giving the woman an opportunity to be honest likely for several reasons. First, He may have healed her physically but there is more redemption at hand. And second, so that she could serve as an example to Jairus and to all those watching what faith really looks like.

Mark 5:33-34

33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. 34 And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

We don't know why the woman was fearful and trembling, maybe she was afraid because of how many people she had made unclean from her touch. Or maybe she was afraid that she made Jesus unclean. Or maybe she was overwhelmed by what just happened, her 12 year long-suffering was finally over, she was finally healed. So, like Jairus, she falls down at Jesus' feet and tells the whole truth to Him. Jesus' response is nothing but striking; it's the climax of this story inside of a story. Had Jesus been anyone else, their meeting would have been one of rebuke and reprimand, but instead, He meets the woman with tenderness. There is only one other instance in the Gospels that records Jesus using the term "daughter" and He wasn't addressing a specific person. But this woman, who we do not know the name of, is called daughter by the King of Kings. In his commentary on Mark, James Edwards explains their meeting like this

"The persistence of Jesus in discovering who touched him rivals the woman's persistence in reaching Jesus. She wants a cure, however, a something, whereas Jesus desires a personal encounter with some one. He is not content to dispatch a miracle; he wants to encounter a person. In the kingdom of God, miracle leads to meeting. Discipleship is not simply getting our needs met; it is being in the presence of Jesus, being known by him, and following him."

And so, after their brief encounter on the way Jairus' house, Jesus gives her the one thing she had truly been longing for all this time. He says to her "go in PEACE." I don't think that the English captures what He is saying to her very well. The Greek word used here is *eirēnē* which has the idea of wholeness. He's saying "you are whole." Jesus is never too busy to redeem those who come to Him in faith. Nonetheless, because of this interruption, tragedy has struck, and Jairus' worst nightmare has now come to pass.

Mark 5:35-37

35 While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.

I wonder what was going through Jairus' head in these moments. To be completely honest, if it was me I know my first reaction would probably be to get mad at this random lady that stopped Jesus when he was on His way to heal my daughter. But Mark really doesn't clue us in on any of Jairus' internal dialogue. All we can say about the man is that his desperation has now turned into hopelessness. He had failed in his mission, and there was no turning back the clock. Had Jesus failed him? Did he trust in the wrong person? Of course not. But Jesus, turns to the man and says simply "Do not fear, only believe." He's saying, "you have nothing to be afraid of, just trust me. Pay no mind to the circumstances that are around you right now, no matter how bleak and hopeless things may seem, just trust me. Let the faith of this poor woman who had been suffering for 12 years be an example to you, Jairus, that even when it looks like everything is at a loss, trusting in me is what you need to do." That is what biblical faith looks like! Do we have faith like that? Do we trust in Jesus despite how terrible our circumstances get? Do we trust in Him so much that it doesn't matter how small or how big of a problem we face, do we give it up to the Lord? I don't want to make any false promises to you. For whatever sovereign reasons He has, God doesn't always heal our diseases, or heal our relationships, or heal our hurts. But that shouldn't stop us from falling at His feet with these things. Despite the uncertainty of life and the fallenness of this world, I know for certain that He is still a healing God; and I know for certain that He is always good. Even if he does not save me from tragedy, He is still good because He has saved me for eternity.

Faith not only comes, faith stays when all seems lost, because in Jesus all is never lost. No doubt Jairus reached a new low. But Jesus was there at the very bottom to catch him. He'll be there for you too. Yes, Jairus had exercised faith already. He had come. But now Jesus came to him in a new way. He directed his faith beyond his circumstance to the God who ordained them.

Mark 5:38-40

38 They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.

When Jesus arrives at Jairus' house, there are professional mourners there. In that culture it was customary for everyone who dies, even the poor, to hire professional mourners. The girl is really dead. Everyone knows it. She's not mostly dead. She's all the way dead. So when Jesus says in verse 39, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping," the point is totally lost on them. They laugh at him. But he knew what he was saying. Death to Jesus is no unconquerable enemy. It is interesting that Jesus puts them all outside at this point. Maybe it was the size of the room that the girl's body was in, or maybe he only wanted to show those who trusted in Him what He planned to do. Whatever the case, Jesus is about to do something that, again, would have made Him unclean. According to Leviticus, touching the body of a dead person would have made you unclean for seven days. But, like the unnamed woman earlier, instead of their unholiness infecting Him, His life flows into them.

Mark 5:41-43

41 Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." 42 And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. 43 And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

He enters the room, takes the child by the hand, and says to her, "Talitha, cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Christ shows us here that He has authority even over the wages of sin. He cannot be defeated. And the girl gets up immediately. She is healed. She eats, proving she's really alive. This is no illusion. When his little girl died, did Jairus' faith die with her? Biblical faith is more than trusting Jesus for physical healing. Biblical faith is trusting Jesus for resurrection healing. Jairus was desperate for a solution to his crisis, but Jesus was directing him and us to a lasting hope, a resurrection hope. Jesus will ask more from us than we may want to give, but he'll give more than we could ever imagine. The faith God looks for in us is the faith he's directing toward himself. And every trial and hard circumstance in your life, when placed in God's hands, becomes a building block of faith in him. He is faithful, and he will never fail you, no matter what the circumstances around you may say. "Do not fear; only believe!" In closing, I don't think that I need to give an illustration to you. The modern world is filled with saints who are great examples of biblical faith. Think of those who right now are struggling with health issues, offering up their pain into Christ's healing hands. Or the beloved brothers and sisters who continued to trust in Christ to their final moments in this earthly life. Think about the missionaries who leave everything behind to share the gospel in foreign lands, believing that Christ will continue to guide them. Or think on the countless martyrs across the world who have faith that their Savior is always good, even when evil is done to them. On that day when we all first put our trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we found cleansing. The disease of sin that had plagued us all our lives had been replaced with His life. And though trouble may come, I know this to be true: that the same God who redeems and raises us to new life in Him has conquered sin and death. And because I am His, I have nothing left to fear.