

Mark: A Touching Story

Mark 5:21-43

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June 6, 2004

Last week we were looking at the story in the gospel of Mark of the Gaderene—or was it the Garesene - or was it the Gargasene?—demoniac on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Tonight we come back across the lake, and once again we discover Jesus involved in a healing ministry.

There are a couple of issues that are often raised with regard to this story. The story is one that is told not just in Mark's gospel, but it's also told in Matthew's gospel and it's also told in Luke's gospel. The first issue is, where exactly did this incident we're about to read—the healing, especially, and raising of the dead, of Jairus's twelve-year-old daughter—where exactly did that take place? In reading Mark's account (and perhaps somewhat naughtily if you're reading the NIV account of Mark's gospel), the setting is very definitely beside the sea. Matthew places the story earlier in the ministry of Jesus, and in Matthew's account it comes right after the calling of Matthew as a disciple. You remember Jesus went to Matthew (or Levi)'s house that evening for dinner, entered into a conversation with the Pharisees about fasting? And it was during that meal that Jairus comes, informs Him that his daughter is “nigh unto death,” according to Matthew's gospel. The Internet is full of hysterical pieces claiming this is evidence that the Bible isn't inspired. This is another one of those contradictions. The answer it seems to me is not to say...as, actually, a good friend of ours, Robert Stein taught at Bethel Theological Seminary. Robert Stein saw this as such a problem that he says that Jesus raised Jairus's daughter twice from the dead. I don't think that's the way to go about it. I think the way to go about it is to understand that sometimes the gospel writers are not telling the story in chronological sequence. They have an agenda: they have a *theological* agenda. Mark very especially wants to show the deity of Jesus, that He is indeed the Son of Man coming to the world to save sinners. He's grouping together here a whole lot of miracles in chapters 4 and 5. I think the chronology is probably Matthew's and that Mark is actually telling this story out of chronological sequence. And that's probably the answer to that.

The other issue is the issue of whether the girl was dying or whether she was dead. In Mark, the account (we're about to read it), the first news is that she's

dying; she's close to death. But Matthew tells us that she was already dead. I think the answer to that is what I heard Rosemary saying last night as she was watching the Braves game in the seventh inning, "This game is over." Now it wasn't over. There were two more innings to go, but as far as she was concerned it was over. And Matthew is telling the story knowing what the outcome is going to be. He's saying, 'Look, she's dead.' And actually the Greek is capable of being translated, "She's right at the point of death." So, no need for us in any way to have any distrust of the Bible as we read it...and that's the only point in telling you this. You can trust the Bible to be the inerrant word of God. Before we read it together, let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank You for the Bible. We thank You for the way it challenges us, mystifies us at times, warms and encourages our hearts, teaches us everything that we need to know about You, about our Savior, about the way of salvation—all things necessary to make us into the men and women of God that we ought to be. Now, Holy Spirit, come as we read Your word. Give us illumination, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

21When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23and implored Him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.' 24And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse-- 27after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28For she thought, 'If I just touch His garments, I will get well.' 29Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My garments?' 31And His disciples said to Him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, "Who touched Me?"' 32And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.' 35While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, 'Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?' 36But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, 'Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.' 37And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly

weeping and wailing. 39And entering in, He said to them, 'Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.' 40They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, 'Talitha kum!' (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). 42Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.

Amen. May God bless the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Now I bought a television about eight years ago, and it boasted this wonderful thing called "picture in picture." I have never been able to get it to work. I have read the instruction book which is in Egyptian hieroglyphics. I've no idea what it's saying and, in any case, Rosemary does not want this little box when the Braves are on TV.

Listen to what Mark is doing here. He's giving us a picture within a picture. There are two different stories going on here, but they are intimately related to each other. There are some wonderful, quite extraordinary pastoral lessons to be drawn out and learned from these two stories. We think we know Jesus. We think we know Him well. We think we're able to discern what His next move might be, how He might respond to this or that. And then He does something that baffles us, angers us, frustrates us. How many of you are dealing with that right now, and dealing with the consequence that follows in its wake?—Cynicism, cynical about the promises of the gospel. He says He loves you, but if He loved you He wouldn't do what He's doing to you. Isn't that the problem? So let's look at these two stories because they bring us right up close and personal to that issue we've just raised together. The first thing I want us to see...and I want us to see three things.

I. Jesus will sometimes ignore your faith.

The first thing I want us to see is that Jesus will sometimes ignore your faith. I put it like that. Jesus will sometimes ignore your faith...or at least that's how it looks. That's how it will feel to you. This man, Jairus—he's a ruler of the synagogue, verse 22. His daughter is gravely, gravely ill. She's at the point of death. She's twelve-years-old. She's mortally ill. She...within minutes, an hour at most, she is going to be dead. There's an urgency about the situation here. When Brister and Billy receive a call from one of the hospitals that one of you is in there and you're facing surgery, there's a problem; they leave. They're there within minutes. I've seen them leave staff meetings. Brister's been buzzed on his buzzer and away he goes. That's one of those things that I live with. I don't think I need therapy

about it but I live with it.

I remember receiving news my father was dying. I was in Belfast; he was in South Wales. I got on the first plane that I could catch, drove immediately at great haste—and, yes, I broke the speed limit. I remember driving at great haste to the airport, got on the first plane I could. He died roughly 20 minutes before I got there. It took me several hours, probably all of five or six hours to get from where I was to where he was...20 minutes. You know what I thought? I still think it. I still say, what's 20 minutes to God? You know, what, what part of this universe would be changed? What would be broken? What would be denied if He'd have given me 20 minutes? I still live with that. It's one of those things that's locked up there in my mind. It's one of those things...and you all have them. You can give your own testament, your own example of that.

I was thinking of, you know, *Fiddler on the Roof*, that wonderful lyric, “Lord, who made the lion and the lamb, You decreed I should be what I am. Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a wealthy man?” Well, it's not wealth we're thinking about here; it's health—the health of someone that we love, the health of a child, a little child. We feel it deeply when our children are sick. We feel it deeply when our children are terminally sick. We Calvinists especially go through this because we believe that God is sovereign. God orders all things from the end to the beginning. Everything happens because God wills it to happen, because God wills it to happen before it happens, and because God wills it to happen in the way that it happens.

Jairus was a synagogue ruler in Capernaum. Actually the ruins are still there. It's one of the great sights. Forget about Jerusalem, but Capernaum is a wonderful place to go. You can almost shut your eyes. You can blot out that monstrosity of St. Peter's church. Just blot that out, and you see the lake, the Sea of Galilee and there, right there, is the synagogue. And some archaeologists, some evangelical and Reformed archeologists will tell you that some of the floor mosaics go right back to Jesus' time, to the time of Jairus. Jairus was apparently one of the ones who had contributed some money for the erection of this synagogue. He was the chief of the synagogue, the *ro'sh ha-keneseth*, the man in charge, the man who had oversight of the synagogue, the man who'd decide what readings would be read on the Shabbat, on the Sabbath day, the man who would decide who would do those readings from the scroll. He would be the one who would decide who would preach and explain the Torah. Ordinarily there'd only be one and sometimes there were two.

Jairus is a public figure. He's well known in Capernaum...and he's taking some degree of courage. He's a Jew, remember, and head of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum, and he's taking some degree of courage now in coming to Jesus. And coming, as we were saying earlier, not maybe to the lakeside as such...but Mark is telling somewhat out of sequence...but perhaps to Matthew's house, to that dinner as Matthew records it. And he falls at Jesus' feet. His little daughter is

at the point of death. Matthew says that she's dead, you know...she's as good as dead. Jairus has heard Jesus speak. Capernaum was home base. He had done much ministry already in Capernaum and maybe, maybe Jairus had given Jesus permission to speak in the synagogue. Maybe it was Jairus who had said to Jesus, 'You read this portion from the prophets today,' or whatever. He'd heard of the ministry that Jesus had had. He has faith, some kind of faith that brings him now to the feet of Jesus and then falls at His feet because his little girl is dying. He has faith that Jesus can do something, that He can heal her. Note what he says in verse 23, "...And implored Him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.'" It's not, it's not an issue of "can You?" but "will You?" He knows that Jesus can do this. It's an issue of whether Jesus will do it. 'Will you come? Will you please come? Please come.'

There was a desperation here in the words of Jairus and Jesus leaves immediately. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it? Immediately Jesus goes with him. You know He's still like that. When He hears the cry of an anxious parent for a child He immediately responds. He hears it immediately. And He goes towards the man's house.

They're out in the street now, in the streets of Capernaum, heading towards Jairus' house, and they're walking along the streets of Capernaum. And there's a crowd, a large crowd, following them, pushing and shoving and wanting to get up into the front so that they could overhear what it was that Jesus might have been saying. And Jesus is no doubt walking briskly and Jairus is walking even more briskly and looking back and sort of urging Him on, 'Come on; come on; come on. We've got no time to lose.' And you can imagine the scene because Jairus is still walking briskly and suddenly Jesus isn't there. And he looks back and to his consternation Jesus is stopped and He's talking to a woman. And he's hearing Jesus say, "Who touched Me?" 'What?!' The disciples say, 'Don't you see this crowd? Everybody is touching you.'

And you can imagine Jairus' mind: it's racing in a hundred directions. You know when you're trying to get to...um, I'm thinking in British terms...the A and E, the Accident and Emergency, the Casualty...you know when you're trying to get there in a hurry and your mind is racing, and you're trying to think ahead about where you're going to park the car and whether you're going to bother locking it, and have you got your health card with you? Have you got your wallet in your pocket and you're anxiously looking at the one sick. You just want to get there. And you can imagine Jairus and he's just totally bamboozled now because Jesus has stopped. And he's panicking and there's a mixture of disbelief and anger in his mind. And as he waits and as he looks in disbelief that Jesus is stopping and talking to this woman when He knows the urgency, some friends from his house are coming down the street and they say to him, 'Your daughter is dead. It's too late.'

And put yourself in Jairus' mind now. 'If only Jesus hadn't stopped. If only we'd have kept on going we could have got there in time. Does He even care? Does He even care?' He's ignoring this man's faith...or at least that's how it looks.

You remember the disciples in the boat waking Him up? He's sleeping in the midst of a storm and they wake Him up and they say, 'Lord, don't You care? Don't You care that we perish?'

Does Jesus care when someone He loves is sick? That's the question in this story that's before us tonight. He cared enough to go with Jairus in the first place. He went immediately in the direction of Jairus' house but He stopped...He stopped and ignored him...or at least it looks like that. I wonder if that's where you are tonight, my friend. It looks as if Jesus is ignoring you. It looks as if He's forgotten about you. You had some hopes; you had some aspiration; you had some indication that Jesus was actually going to do something that you've asked Him to do and He stopped. He stopped and you've become angry. And you've become cynical and you're listening to those people who are saying to Jairus, 'Don't bother Him now. Don't make a fool of yourself now because it's too late and you are a fool to have gone to Him in the first place.' Jesus will sometimes ignore your faith.

II. Jesus will grow your faith.

But, in the second place, Jesus will grow your faith. It's an important lesson about suffering. God's providence is always instructive; it's always educative. There's a purpose to what God does. There's always a purpose. News comes from Jairus' house that his daughter has died and they're urging him not to make a spectacle of himself. And note what Jesus does immediately, verse 36: He ignores what's just been said. His little girl is dead and Jesus ignores it. He doesn't offer Jairus any sympathy. He doesn't hug him and say, 'I'm here for you.' He doesn't urge him to cry because "it's okay for men to cry." And all the time I think there's this little worm going around in Jairus' head, 'This man really doesn't care. He really doesn't care. What a fool I've been to think that He would.'

And then He hears Jesus speak directly to him, 'Don't be afraid; only believe. Don't be afraid; just believe.' Notice a couple of things...that He recognizes that Jairus is afraid. Afraid of what exactly? Well, afraid of life without his little girl, afraid of the strain that it's going to put on him, on his marriage, on his future. I think it's more likely the fear of putting faith in something that looks absolutely hopeless, of making a complete fool of yourself. The fear that your expectations are going to be dashed again, that your faith is going to let you down.

And you notice the other thing is the command to believe: "Just believe." Jairus already believes, of course, but Jesus is growing his faith. He's growing his faith. Nothing illustrates this more than this incredible story. It's one thing to believe

that Jesus can heal someone; it's another thing to believe that He can raise the dead. "Just believe," He says to him. 'Commit yourself now, to Me'—You know, faith, knowledge, ascent, trust, knowledge that Jesus can raise the dead, believing that that is true and then committing yourself to it, launching forth. Like that scene in *Indiana Jones*, you know, when he puts his foot down and there's nothing there; and he has to trust there's something there. "Just believe."

That's why this story about the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage is here. That's why it's this picture-in-picture. What did she do? That's exactly what she did: she believed. She reached out and touched Him. I can't tell you what her problem was. I can hear my mother saying, 'It was women's problems.' And we'll leave it at that. It was an issue that would "render a woman unclean," Leviticus 15. She's had a terrible life for the past 12 years, socially an outcast. Anyone coming into contact with her would be rendered immediately unclean. She'd spent a fortune on doctors, medics, quacks. One can imagine the kind of things that have been done to her. You know, the Talmud, which is an extensive Jewish commentary on the law and the prophets, lists eleven cures for this problem. One says that you're to take gum—not chewing gum now, but resin and a crocus—and bruise them together and put it in some wine and give it to the woman. And if that doesn't work, take some onions and boil them in wine and give it to the woman and say, "Arise from thy flux." And if that doesn't work, you're to go to a place where two ways meet and with a cup of wine in your right hand let someone come behind her when she doesn't know and frighten or scare her to death and say, "Arise from thy flux." Maybe she had tried all of those quacky things.

Instead, she had gone to Jesus. She went to Jesus anonymously. And Jesus, Jesus felt that virtue had gone out of Him. I can't explain that. I don't know how He knew that but He felt it—something had gone out of Him. And He stopped and kept Jairus waiting in the process until his little girl was dead. You see what He's teaching Jairus - a lesson about faith. 'Jairus, look at this poor woman. Look at this poor woman. Everybody despises her. Nobody wants to be near her. And she knows that I can heal her.' Her faith is uninformed. It's bordering on the superstitious.

That's why Jesus has to stop and explain to her and draw her out. She can't go around in this anonymous way just poking a finger at Jesus' cloak and then perhaps thinking months, years later that there was something magical about Jesus' garments. No, she has to understand that it's faith in Jesus' person that saves and that's why Jesus stops and talks and instructs her. It was her faith that saved her. But it was a little faith, because of her little...It was a superstitious faith; it was an uninformed faith.

A weak faith can lay hold of a strong Christ. The promises of God, my friends, are not addressed to those who have mighty faith but to those who have real faith. The promises don't come to sinners and say, 'We want you to know that those who have giant faith and who can work wonders and who can walk on

water and can raise the dead and can stop the mouths of lions—these are the people who shall be saved.’ No, “whoever trusts in Jesus Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life.” If your faith is as strong as a bruised reed, my friend, as a bruised reed, the Lord will not break it. He will not break it.

How much knowledge did the dying thief on the Cross have?....very, very little. But it laid hold on Christ. That's the thing. That's the thing. “She only touched the hem of His garment, as to His side she stole. Amid the crowd that gathered around Him, and straight way she was made whole,” that 19th century hymn says. Jesus is growing her faith. He's growing her faith. Her faith was superstitious and He needed it to grow and to teach her.

III. Jesus will test your faith.

But in the third place, Jesus will test your faith. Oh, He was testing Jairus. The whole thing about being made to wait was a test. Jesus gets to the house and already the professional wailers are there. He'd already told the crowd back in the street to stay where they were and He tells the people who are at the house to go out and to stay outside. And only He and Peter, James, and John and the parents are allowed inside the room where the little girl was. And then, and then He does something. He's done something extraordinary because He said to this crowd outside of the house, “She's not dead but she's sleeping.” “She's not dead but she's sleeping.”

Why did Jesus say that? She was dead. You understand the problem that that brings because you can guarantee that night in the inns in Capernaum people are saying things like, ‘She wasn't dead at all; she was just sleeping. Jesus said so. And all this talk about Jesus raising the dead, it's all...it's all nonsense. She was just sleeping. They're exaggerating it.’

And it's as though Jesus has almost said that story. Why is He doing that? Why didn't Jesus bring the girl outside into the street and have all the crowd there watching Him and have someone come, poke her, pinch her, listen to her heart, breathing, open her eyes, shine a light, see if the pupils—I don't know whether they knew all that back in the first century, but—whatever, test to see whether she was dead? And then in a very dramatic way, give a little sermon about ‘I am the Messiah and I can raise the dead. Now just watch Me do it.’ And perhaps wait a day or two before He did it and this little girl's corpse is beginning to decompose and putrify, and then in a glorious, spectacular way, raise her from the dead.

Why wouldn't Jesus do that? You'd do that if you were Jesus. Isn't that the sort of thing you would want to do? If God gave you the gift of raising people from the dead, you would want people to see it. Why does Jesus keep people outside and why does He sow this little seed that she's not dead but sleeping?

Now Jesus meant sleeping in the sleep of death that He can bring to life again, of course, but the crowd didn't hear that. They just heard that she was sleeping. And the only reason that I can see is that for the rest of Jairus' life that was going to be a test to him, because whenever his little girl would be coming up the street, there would be those saying, 'Oh, here's Jairus who thinks Jesus raised this little girl from the dead but actually she was just sleeping. She was in a deep sleep, and Jesus just woke her up.' And you understand how much of a test that was going to be to Jairus that his faith would be rooted and grounded in the person of Jesus Christ—no matter what people said, no matter what accusations they would make.

He would recall how Jesus had uttered those words, "*Talitha kum!* (Little girl arise)." Actually, they're the words that her mother would have said to a little girl in the morning when she went in and she was asleep in bed. She would say, "Talitha kum," you know, "Little girl, get up." No histrionics, no holy water, no "Hail Mary's," no "Let me bring out some of my teeth or hair or this little pouch that contains something of the dead," no hocus pocus—Just a word, just a sovereign word from Jesus and she gets up and He says to her...oh, He says to her the most extraordinary thing...well, at least to the parents, "*Give her something to eat.*" It's so homespun, isn't it? It's so down to earth. "*Give her something to eat.*" And they're amazed. They are totally, completely amazed, as you would be.

In Revelation 1:17-18 there is a text, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Andrew Bonner tells of a lady he was speaking to who said after citing those words, "If Jesus has the keys to death and Hades, the first thing that I will see when I walk through that door, is Jesus. If He's got the keys, when I walk through that door, He's the first person I'll see." That's why this story is here, to encourage you, to bring joy and faith and hope into your hearts, to give you courage and shed this hope abroad in your soul. For the first hand that you'll see, the first hand that you'll take hold of, the first voice that you'll hear on the other side of death—will be His...This sovereign, omnipotent, powerful Lord Jesus Christ who sometimes ignores our faith and grows our faith and tests our faith. Amen. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for this word, the beautiful, beautiful story. Grow our faith as we discern on so many occasions that indeed you are testing our faith, and sometimes it seems to us, O Lord, wrongly that you are ignoring us. Help us to turn our eyes upon Jesus and to look full in His wonderful face that the things of earth may grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. Hear us Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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