

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: CLEANSING POWER THROUGH FAITH

MARK 5.21-43

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1. Last time we saw Jesus save the Demoniac in the region of Gergesa, on the east side of Lake Galilee, in Gentile territory. When the people of the region see that Jesus possesses more power than the former demoniac, they plead with Jesus to take a hike, which he does. Now Jesus and the 12 have returned back over the Lake to the west side and that's where our story picks up.

THE TEXT

1. Jesus is surrounded by a crowd near the Lake when he is approached by a Synagogue Official named Jairus in v22. Synagogue is basically the Jewish equivalent to our church gathering, and there were elders or rulers who administrated in the synagogues, planning the order of worship and selecting volunteers from among those who attended. It's possible there was a group of rulers per synagogue, with one being chief among them, or it's possible there was only one ruler per synagogue. The way Jairus is described makes it sound like he is one of the rulers but not the chief. This would make Jairus a very important man in the community.

2. Jairus falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to come heal his daughter, whom he says is near death. Jesus consents to go with the man and a large crowd goes with them, pressing and jostling Jesus the whole way.

3. Mark then describes a certain woman in the crowd. This woman has suffered from some kind of bleeding, likely feminine bleeding from the womb, for 12 years. In Jewish society this bleeding would render her ceremonial unclean, and would effectively isolate her from social contact and religious worship. Here is a passage from the Law which speaks to such a case:

Leviticus 15:19-27 When a woman has a discharge, *if* her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. Everything also on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean, and everything on which she sits shall be unclean. Anyone who touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. Whoever touches any thing on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. Whether it be on the bed or on the thing on which she is sitting, when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening. If a man actually lies with her so that her menstrual impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean. Now if a woman has a discharge of her blood many days, not at the period of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond that period, all the days of her impure discharge she shall continue as though in her menstrual impurity; she is unclean. Any bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her like her bed at menstruation; and every thing on which she sits shall be unclean, like her uncleanness at that time. Likewise, whoever touches them shall be unclean and shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

4. Later on in the same passage, at v31, God warns anyone who contracts the above uncleanness and then enters the tabernacle that they will die. This means it was serious business for observant Jews to avoid contact, not only with this woman, but even with everything she touched, sat on, or laid on. Of course this condition would make marriage impossible as well.

5. This kind of case was also of such concern around the time of Jesus that an entire tract was devoted to discussing and regulating it within the Mishnah, which was a collection of Jewish teaching, finally compiled around 200AD but containing traditions which went back earlier to the time of Jesus and before. This means there is good reason to believe that the writings about menstrual impurity in the Mishnah reflect to some degree the thinking of the Jews around the time of Jesus.

6. Mark also tells us the woman had "suffered much" from many physicians, had spent all she had and only grew worse. It's easy to imagine how helpless the medicine of the day would be in the face of her chronic bleeding. Consider the following quote from one commentator about the useless remedies of the day, applied to such a condition:

"One remedy consisted of drinking a goblet of wine containing a powder compounded from rubber, alum and garden crocuses. Another treatment consisted of a dose of Persian onions cooked in wine administered with the summons 'Arise out of your flow of blood!' Other physicians prescribed sudden shock, or the carrying of the ash of an ostrich's egg in a certain cloth."

7. These are the sorts of things the woman spent her money on, all she had, and of course she grew worse instead of better.

8. Now the picture Mark paints with his phrases in verses 25 and 26 is one of trouble and affliction piled on top of each other in all the woman suffered. It would be like saying, "Then I went to the airport, and missed my flight, and a lightning storm began, and my car wouldn't start, and I fell and broke my wrist." This woman is in a desperate and tragic situation.

9. The woman hears about Jesus and in v27 she makes her way behind Jesus in the crowd and touches his cloak. Mark tells us she was thinking that one touch of Jesus would heal her bleeding. Presumably Mark knows what she was thinking because once discovered, in v33, the woman "tells the whole truth," which likely included her motive for touching Jesus.

10. Now this kind of thinking, that merely touching Jesus, even without him knowing, would lead to healing probably reflects the somewhat magical view of healing which was common at the time. Of course in spite of this wrong view of the woman she also has faith, and so she does experience healing. The story itself guards against the idea that Jesus' power did work merely in a sort of magical way

based on the fact that numerous people are touching Jesus, yet only this woman experiences healing power, and the thing that makes the difference is faith, not any magical consideration.

11. So in v29 the result of the touch is immediate healing, so fast and complete that the woman can feel, on the spot, that she's been healed. And Jesus feels it, too. There is this interesting parallel between 29 and 30 where both Jesus and the woman experience this secret, invisible, supernatural, redeeming transaction between them, right in the midst of the crowd, without anyone else knowing what happened. She touched him in faith and immediately they both know power has been activated and received.

12. Now one commentator says Jesus' perception of power leaving him here serves to single him out as having supernatural knowledge, and that may be, but I think the picture is slightly different. I suggest rather the point is to single out, not Jesus exactly, but the woman's touch as different from all the other physical contact Jesus is experiencing in the bustling crowd. The exchange which follows between Jesus and his disciples supports this idea.

13. Once Jesus experiences the activation of his power, he turns and asks who touched his garments. The disciples think this strange and say as much, since Jesus is getting pummeled by the whole crowd; how could he possibly ask who touched him? Everyone is touching him! But the point is clear enough: There is touching Jesus and then there is touching Jesus, and they are not the same thing. Something about the woman's touch sets it apart from the rest of the crowd, possibly even from the disciples as well! So what makes the difference? We'll see in just a moment.

14. Apparently after touching Jesus the woman tried to quietly escape, very possibly because of her situation. Recall that she is ceremonially unclean because of her bleeding. Also recall that she transmits uncleanness to everyone she touches! That

would make Jesus and everyone she pushed past to get to Jesus unclean! She has good reasons for wanting to go unnoticed.

15. As Jesus is looking for the one who touched him she returns and falls before him, telling him the whole truth.

16. Now Jesus doesn't respond with rebuke for her violation of the ceremonial law. What he does is refer to her as "Daughter," praise her for her effective faith, and pronounce a blessing over her regarding her future spiritual and physical wellbeing.

17. Now it's at this point messengers come from Jairus' house bringing the news that his daughter has finally died. The delay caused by the bleeding woman has proved fatal.

18. And as far as the messengers are concerned, asking Jesus' help has now become pointless. The girl is dead, and Jesus is only a healer, so what more could he do?

19. Jesus hears this conversation between Jairus and the messenger and he interrupts. He speaks to Jairus and he forbids fear and commands faith alone. This would be a very strange comment. Of course religious people can pray and have faith God may heal a sick loved one but once they pass away the time for faith has ended, and the time for acceptance and grieving has begun, right?

20. Jesus proceeds to Jairus' house, allowing only Peter, James and John to come with him. This is something Jesus does on multiple occasions, as apparently these 3 disciples enjoyed a closer position to Jesus or perhaps a higher rank within the 12. A few times Andrew is let in on some private teaching or event as well.

21. When they come to the house they are met by loud wailing, weeping and commotion. Now this would be far more than just extended family gathered to mourn the loss of the child. It was actually a social expectation of the time that the

bereaved would hire professional musicians and professional mourners as part of the funeral process. The following quotes fill in the picture some:

"Mourners formed a professional guild in first century Judaism and were required at funerals. The mourners, usually women, accompanied the bier from the house to the grave, clapping their hands together and wailing haunting laments."

"The wailing consisted of choral or antiphonal song accompanied by handclapping. Since even the poorest man was required by common custom to hire a minimum of two flute players and one professional mourner in the event of his wife's death, a synagogue ruler would likely be expected to hire a large number of mourners."

"The women form a circle around the leader of the dance of death, and dance rhythmically from left to right with their hair hanging down. Gradually they increase their mournful lament and the wild movement of hands and feet until their faces become flushed to a high degree and appear especially excited as the time of burial draws near."

22. So this is what Jesus finds when he comes to the house, and he responds by telling them to stop wailing and making commotion since the girl is not dead, but sleeping! This strange comment elicits various explanations from the commentators; what I think we can be sure of is that the girl really was dead and so we are about to observe an actual resurrection from the dead, not merely a resuscitation. But why then would Jesus make this comment? I suggest a possible answer connected with Jesus' command to silence in v43.

23. In v43 Jesus has resurrected the girl, to the amazement of her parents and his 3 disciples, and Jesus strictly orders the parents to tell no one. Now this is a strange command since the surrounding community would likely know of the girl's condition and death, and the large group of mourners and musicians at least would proceed to spread the story, in spite of the prohibition. It would seem impossible to obey Jesus and keep the thing quiet. But this command to silence may make more

sense if what Jesus wants them to do is perpetuate the cover-up story that the girl never really died, but was only unconscious, the subject of a misdiagnosis. If this is the case, it explains why Jesus would say she was only sleeping when in fact she was dead; he was beginning his cover-up effort from that point. And it would explain his command to silence since by it he would indicate the parents should perpetuate the cover-up that she never really died. What he wanted the parents to keep quiet was the fact of resurrection, and they would do so by spreading the cover story.

24. Now back to v40. There the professional mourners and musicians laugh at Jesus **for saying the girl is only asleep. They know it isn't true. Jesus drives them all out** and takes the parents and his 3 disciples into the girl's room alone.

25. Jesus takes the girl's hand and commands her to get up. Mark preserves the original Aramaic phrase Jesus used; one writer mentions this is typical of Mark's interest in vivid recreation of the scene.

26. The girl comes to life and gets up to walk, Mark says because she was 12 years old; this may be Mark clarifying she was not so young as to be limited to crawling. She walked because she was old enough to do so; this was not an infant or a crawler. Of course this causes amazement in the witnesses and Jesus directs them to give her something to eat. Possibly the eating and walking also both serve to show the completeness and effectiveness of the cure.

SUMMARY AND MAIN POINT

1. So what are these stories about? First, notice we have another Markan sandwich, which tells us these two stories have something in common which Mark wants us to compare. I believe that common point is that faith is the instrument which accesses the redemptive power in Jesus.

2. Then, notice there is a common thread which runs not only through these two stories but all the way back through the demoniac story which began chapter 5. That theme is uncleanness. Remember in the last story how Jesus crossed over into

unclean gentile territory on the east side of the lake, and was met by a man with unclean spirits, who lived among unclean tombs, and Jesus sent the spirits into unclean pigs. Then in our present stories Jesus heals an unclean woman of her bleeding and raises a little girl from her unclean state of death.

3. And lastly, remember that the point of Mark's gospel is to present Jesus as the divine, authoritative Son of God who is revealed by the working of the power within him. With all that in mind I think we could describe the purpose of our present stories this way:

4. Jesus is the divinely powerful Son of God who has come to confront our world of multifaceted uncleanness and overcome it by the exercise of his power, and the way unclean people access that power is through faith.

5. But again, I think the specific point of these stories before us is that faith is the instrument which accesses Jesus' redemptive power. So let's reflect on that truth for the sake of application before we finish.

APPLICATION

1. The moral of the story of the unclean woman is that we should have faith. Notice the emphasis which is placed on Jesus' question about who touched him when everyone is touching him! The point is that by faith the woman really touched Jesus while everyone else remained at a superficial level of touch. The result? She accessed his redemptive power and no one else did. In case we were uncertain this is the point, Jesus tells her it was her faith which healed her. The word for "healed" here is often translated "save" in terms of spiritual rescue. Undoubtedly, Mark expects his readers to witness the physical "saving" of the woman and reflect on the deeper issue of spiritual salvation with which his gospel is concerned. This salvation, physical and spiritual, is only in Jesus and can only be accessed by faith.

2. If this were not enough, when Jairus gets the news his daughter has died and it is too late, Jesus again responds with a call to faith. This time Jesus even isolates faith

as the one and only thing that must be done: "Only Believe"! If Jairus will do this one thing, if he will trust Jesus and refuse his agony of fear all shall be made well. Faith is clearly the common point which holds these sandwiched stories together.

3. And we can go further, because both stories shed light on the kind of faith Jesus is calling for.

4. First, in the case of the bleeding woman, note that living, saving faith exists side-by-side with superstitious, even magical ideas about Jesus and his power. This is an important reminder that while some informational content is required for real saving faith, it can't be very much. This woman cannot have the fully developed theological understanding of Jesus which we do, sitting here with open Bibles in our laps. And she actually has some very wrong ideas about Jesus. But none of this makes impossible a real saving faith. RT France puts it this way:

"Such pistis consists more of a practical conviction of Jesus' exousia than of a theologically developed understanding of who he is; even this woman's superstitious belief in healing by physical contact is sufficient to count."

5. Practical conviction of Jesus' authority, not precise Christology. We see the nature of the woman's faith; she is convinced that if she can get to Jesus she will be healed. Her faith is confused, mistaken, and possibly even magical to some extent, but there is reality to it nonetheless. Everyone who looks at Jesus and says, "That guy can fix me," is on the way to being saved. If she were suddenly quizzed about the hypostatic union, she would be speechless. Maybe we'd be better off speechless more of the time, too. This has implications for people with twisted theological ideas, such as Catholics, who nevertheless, in spite of their error, can have real, saving faith. Salvation is not merely a matter of checking all the right boxes on the theology test, though that is very important. Salvation is a matter of being granted supernatural insight into the person of Christ and responding with certainty that "That guy can fix me!" And faith becomes visible as the unclean sinner pushes and fights her way through the crowd to get her hands on Jesus.

6. Theological mastery does not equal saving faith. The Lord can overflow this woman's heart with confidence in Jesus which she cannot even explain and certainly cannot defend, and in so doing she is exercising the saving faith which heals internal bleeding and soul bleeding alike. All of this long before she ever attends a Bible study, or ever takes a theology class. We are redeemed through faith in Jesus alone. Not perfect understanding of Jesus alone, not recitation of the Chalcedonian Creed alone, not faith alone plus Calvinistic theology; FAITH IN JESUS ALONE.

7. Jesus is so glorious he doesn't need any help saving you; no help from your works and no help from your theological knowledge. He needs no help at all! Have you been given insight into his person by the Father? Have the eyes of your soul been opened by divine revelation? You don't need any man for that; no man could do anything about it if he wanted to! If you can see that Jesus is the answer to your deepest problem, and ultimately to your every problem, then push through the crowd to get him, and he will be yours. Believe.

8. The second thing we learn here about saving faith is that there is never a time in which it should not be exercised. Please realize the position Jairus was in. Have you ever lost a child? Someone here probably has. It's common enough. If it happened to you, would you be humble enough and Christian enough to submit to someone telling you to your face, "Do not fear, only believe?" I worry Christians are often a proud people, unwilling to submit to Biblical direction whenever suffering convinces them they are entitled to unbelief. But there is no pain or suffering, however acute, which gives us the right to disbelieve God. We are always obligated to humbly trust Jesus with every area of our lives. And the faith which saves, which Jesus calls for every day of our lives is one which is universally applicable. It is at home in every situation of life, no matter how tragic, no matter how shameful, or painful, or ruinous.

9. If I were Jairus I would be tempted to tell Jesus, "What do you mean 'believe?'" Believe in what? Believe for what? She's dead, in case you missed it! The chance to fix this problem is over. Disease has passed into death and no one returns from there. What exactly do you want me to believe?"

10. But the real disease, the one that's far more vicious than whatever killed Jairus' daughter, is the heart disease we all have which refuses to give God his due as Completely Sovereign and Completely Good. I don't want to humble myself to suffer the pain God has allotted me and so I deny his control over the situation, or his goodness in administering it. What Jesus is calling Jairus to do is to forsake what his eyes see, forsake all he's ever known about the irreversibility of death, forsake his very self with all its pain and grief and horror. Jairus is to become humble as a little child, ignoring his own mind and heart and trusting rather in the Person, Word, and Work of Jesus Christ. And if Jairus does that, like Martha and Mary, he will see the glory of God.

11. So we see saving faith needs very little theological knowledge to function and that it is appropriate in every situation we will get into, however horrible.

12. With that in mind, how are we doing? Are we caught in the snobbish trap of despising the faith of those who know less than we? Maybe we arrogantly wonder how all those stupid Christians could even be saved at all, ignorant as they are? But I hope you've had another experience. I hope you know what it feels like to witness some simple, humble Christian person, with not a tenth of the knowledge you have, totally blow you out of the water in trust for Jesus, humble love and service, simple belief that God will make it right in the end. And I hope it confused you to the point where you saw that for all your knowledge you would be better off to trade half of it for the faith they have.

13. Or maybe you are the Christian who knows little about Scripture and Theology? Should you happily remain ignorant on purpose? Absolutely not. Study the Scripture to show yourself approved. Crack that Bible and get familiar. But

don't think for a second God can't use you because you know little or think less. Do you see Jesus is Savior? Do you see He's the only hope any of us miserable sinners will ever have? Then run with that and point others to him all day long! Yes, be humble and foolish! A fool for Christ! Do your service to God faithfully and humbly and watch as in the end you are exalted to dizzying heights while some of us snobbish Christians don't even make it into the kingdom!

14. I would also ask how we're doing in bringing saving faith into every area of our lives. Is there anywhere it doesn't belong? Faith will not be cordoned off to one area of your house, like a baby behind a baby gate. It demands to fill every room and both floors like a saving fragrance. And no suffering ever entitles you to keep it out. You could lose a precious child today and Jesus' command to you wouldn't be a whit different. That doesn't make Jesus heartless; recall that Jesus weeps at the tragedy of death. But it does make him Lord. And it does make him the greatest soul physician the world will ever see. Jesus knows what it takes to get you through the most painful, shameful hell of an experience you could ever face. And the crucial answer is always the same: "Do not fear; only believe." If we will go on trusting God's good purpose and complete control, like a humble child forsaking self and clinging to Jesus, we will see God resurrect the situation.

CONCLUSION

1. So. Mark presents Jesus to us as the supernatural Son of God come to confront our world with all its uncleanness and to cleanse it by the power resident in himself, which power can only be accessed by living, active, saving, faith.