

## Faith and Desperation

*Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom*

Mark 5:21-43

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I want to say this morning what a blessing it was last week—and I hope for those of you who were able to be here—to hear Pastor Allen preach on humility from the book of 1 Peter. It was a blessing to have Pastor Harris back here preaching God's word to us. If you were unable to be here and are interested, that sermon is available through our website. And if you are a long time member here and know the fact that he was the planting pastor here and was a pastor for thirty-three years, and you were unable to be here, we strongly encourage you to go and hear that sermon. It was a blessing to my soul and to all those who were here.

It is a great preparation, still—even though he was in a completely different book—to recognize our humble estate, recognizing that we come to the end of ourselves, that humility often is the recognition that we are desperate. Having tried many things, having seen expectations fail, having seen our successes run their course, having tried everything at our hands—but something doesn't seem to work out. We are not experiencing victory. We do not experience peace. We do not experience joy. How do we respond in the midst of desperation? That question gives rise to a passage just like this, and why I am grateful for these stories—because it demonstrates to us the intersection between faith and desperation. But what is beautiful about this passage, it is two stories, but two stories that could not be any different, yet at the same time remarkably the same. Two people in very different parts of their lives, in very different experiences of desperation, but desperation nonetheless. And in it, by faith, they call out to Jesus.

How is that instructive for us? How is Jesus's response to them instructive to us? And how does this passage shed a light into the midst of our desperation, our circumstances? I don't know what you come in with this morning. Perhaps you aren't desperate. But maybe you are, and maybe that desperation is underneath a lot of layers. Maybe no one else knows about it. This message is for those who are outwardly despairing, but also for those who are afraid to acknowledge their despair. That the Lord Jesus meets us in it. Hear now God's Word to us: two stories in the midst of faith and desperation. Mark 5:21-43.

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet <sup>23</sup> 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.” <sup>24</sup> And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. <sup>25</sup> And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. <sup>28</sup> For she said, “If I

touch even his garments, I will be made well.”<sup>29</sup> And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.<sup>30</sup> And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?”<sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’”<sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

<sup>35</sup> 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?”<sup>36</sup> But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”<sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.<sup>38</sup> They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.<sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.”<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”<sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.<sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) You will see in your outline that this passage deals with two different stories. First we will see these two stories put right beside each other, **The Ruler and the Wretched**, and the **Response** of Jesus, and **Resurrection. The Ruler and the Wretched; Response; Resurrection.**

Will you pray with me this morning. Our Heavenly Father, we ask that this morning you would hear the mediation of your Son, the Lord Jesus. And in his mediation for us he promised that he would send forth his Spirit. Father, we give you thanks and praise that the Holy Spirit proceeds both from you and from your Son. Without your Spirit, no one can believe. Without the power of the Spirit, no one can come to life. And without your Spirit, how can we truly hear? So we ask you, by your Holy Spirit, make your presence known among us and help us to hear. But more than hearing, help us to receive. And may you enable us to experience faith in the Son who brings resurrection, whose light is enough for our path, because he is our salvation. Help us, we pray, and in the exalted name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

**The Ruler and the Wretched.** What's important, of course, is to understand just how different these two people are. Jairus, the text tells us, was a ruler of the synagogue. It would have meant that Jairus was a learned man. It would have meant that he was a man of financial means. He would have been a man of standing in society. He was a ruler among his people. He was respected and looked to for religious guidance and help. He was seen as one who, among

many, would have been a protector of all things that related to the religious life of Israel. Jairus, however, despite his means—though the text does not tell us this—we can only believe that if he was respected, if he was a man of means, if he was a man of social standing, his daughter's illness would have been known. And he would have likely sought out whatever care, healthwise, he could for his daughter. But he finds himself in desperation. But putting aside all of those things—his financial standing, his religious standing, his societal standing—he was willing not just to go to Jesus and ask him for a favor. The passage actually tells us that his body language tells us of his desperation. “...Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet (at the feet of Jesus) and implored him earnestly, saying...” Can you not imagine what that would have looked like. I know this is Mother's Day, but fathers, if we were at the end of our rope for our child. . . I imagine that would have been quite a commotion. He was willing to lay that aside and go and implore Jesus, the passage tells us. This idea of strongly urging, crying out. Lord, he says, ““My little daughter is at the point of death.”” But recognizing the power of Jesus, he simply says if all you need to do is just... All you need to do is just lay hands on her and I know that she will be well and live. A man of means, a man of respect, a man of religious faith now comes to Jesus saying, ‘*Help me.*’

Now a very different story, yet the same desperation, is this woman. We don't know and cannot pinpoint exactly what her disease is, but one thing is for sure. She would have had nothing of which this other man had. The passage tells us whatever money she had, she already spent it seeking healing. She would have been considered religiously and ceremonially unclean, meaning she was considered wretched among her own people. She couldn't go to worship. She could not touch anyone else. Can you imagine? She could not touch anyone else without also them being considered ceremonially unclean. Which means her desperation is seen by the fact that she's out in public in a great crowd. She took a great risk. She was likely known, but in the commotion and with all the crowd surrounding Jesus and attending to what he was doing, she was willing to put all that aside. At this point she doesn't care. She's at the end of her rope. She spent her money. And there is this phrase that sends chills down my spine, as I imagine it does to you. It says she “had suffered much under many physicians.” Having prepared for this study, it would not be appropriate for me to share with you some of the remedies that were believed to heal this disease. It would have been horrible for her. So not only is she considered wretched culturally, religiously. She feels wretched. And yet she was willing to go.

So if you take these two—very different walks of life, but both in the midst of desperation, both taking great risk. Perhaps both of them not understanding what their risk is, completely, but it didn't matter. And so we move to the **Response**. What's beautiful about the response of Jesus to both of these folks is, it demonstrates just how loving he is. His response to both of these folks is both personal and tender. He doesn't mock them for their desperation. He doesn't greet them well, why don't you come to me first? He looks upon them with understanding. The passage tells in verse 24: “And he went with him.” Jesus simply heard this man imploring him, and he says I'll go with you. This woman who touches his garment... Jesus saying, “Who touched my garments?”

Now we've been talking about this for a couple of weeks. Jesus in his human nature wasn't asking this just rhetorically. In his human nature he didn't know who touched him. His disciples didn't know. But he knew this. That even though he was crowded around with people and would very likely be rubbing shoulders with others, many people had touched him, but her

touch was something different. He knew that her touch was a touch of faith, a touch of desperation. And he knew—because he was filled with the Spirit—he knew that the healing Spirit had moved. That's what he's saying. It's not that Jesus, you know, had a full tank of power and he kind of felt...kind of went down to a quarter tank after she touched him. That's not what the point is. The whole idea that's translated for us in English—it sounds as though Jesus was kind of going around and you know, needed to go back to the soda machine and get a little bit more power. That wasn't it. He knew—and was sensitive and filled with the power of the Spirit—he knew that the Spirit had moved not only in him, but through him. And so he asks, "Who touched my garments?" And what is his response? "Daughter..." *Daughter*. That is a tender response. And let me say this again. It bears repeating every Sunday, does it not? Because we often doubt that God actually has a posture of love and grace. He doesn't just welcome us in; he wants us. He actually likes us. And if you are at a point of desperation and you've been trying everything out, and you think at the last moment, oh yeah, I need to reach out to God and God's going to say well, it's about time! You need to know that in this passage that is precisely not how God responds. Because he understands, Jesus does, the heart of man, just as you and I do.

I found this great quote from Abraham Lincoln, talking about how we go to people. And here he illustrates how not to go to people. Here's what he says. If you mark a person as despised, he says—and she certainly was—he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and to his heart. And even though your cause, being naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel, sharper than steel, can be made, and though you throw it with more than Herculean force and precision, you shall be no more able to pierce him than to penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a dry piece of straw. Jesus, the Son of the Living God, full of grace and truth, could throw a lance with Herculean power and pierce any one. But his response to these two people in desperation is not one of a spear towards them. Rather, he gives of himself.

But he does something else in the response, if you look a little bit closer. Now remember their circumstances. On the one hand you have a man who has enough to do—enough money, enough power, enough influence. But what does he ask him to do as they're walking along? After he heals the woman what happens? People come out of the house and they say hey, she's already dead. Stop bothering him. Now Jesus doesn't immediately respond to the crowds who are saying this, but what does he say? Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue—because imagine this, he's already healed this woman, which means they tarried for a little bit longer than what he desired. They're now finally making it to the house. And so after he's healed this woman of her disease they're now going to the house, and people are already coming out of the house saying hey, she's dead. The deal is done. Why are you bothering the teacher? Can you imagine what the father would have thought in that moment? He's hearing the commotion. And by the way, because he was a person of means it was regularly practiced in this culture that at a funeral you would hire professional mourners. It wasn't just family members, but there would have been professional mourners in the home, whose job it was to actually moan the loss or grieve with a grieving family. And so very likely it was a part of this same crowd. But Jesus didn't respond to the crowd first. He looks at the ruler of the synagogue and he says, "Do not fear, only believe." Even though Jesus responds to him tenderly, he's still pulling him into the light of his grace, to do what may have been for that man very, very difficult to do: Wait. If you have means, you don't like to wait. If you have influence, you say

jump, other people say how high. Yet Jesus is drawing him further in faith into the light of his grace and he says, "Do not fear."

Look at the woman, what he does. Now imagine this, all right? So she knows that she's ceremonially unclean. She knows that she is considered wretched in her own culture. So it would seem that the best thing to do is not call her out into the public, yet Jesus does so. He says, "Who touched my garments?" asking her to come out into the light of grace, to do what would have been extremely difficult for her to do: To be exposed. And yet because of the tenderness and healing power of his grace, Jesus recognizes that even though he's calling her out into the light, out of hiding, he's doing something more than just healing her. He's restoring her, you see. He's setting her on a firm foundation of his grace. The same thing with the ruler. He's calling him out into the light of grace, not on the foundation of what he has, not on the validation of his influence, but on the foundation of Christ's powerful grace. So yes, Jesus is tender. Yes, Jesus is loving. Yes, he welcomes them in. Yet at the same time he doesn't leave them where they are; he calls them out into the light.

And that foundation that he calls them into, the foundation of Christ's grace, is more firm than all the money, than all the acceptance, than all the respect the world can ever offer. Jesus's response is here for us an invitation. How do you believe the Lord responds to you? Jesus's response to you is not well, where have you been? It's about time! Or: Again?!? No, Jesus's response is, as we've already heard, come unto to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. This is Jesus's invitation. But he also calls us, in faith, into the light, to rest not on ourselves, but on him alone.

What we see as the passage goes on, even though he tells him, "Do not fear," and then he goes into verse 38. It says, "They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly." Likely these were some of the professional mourners. And when he entered the house he said to them, "Why are you making such a commotion?" And notice how quickly they turn. They laughed at him. That's an indication that their grief was not personally felt; they're there as hired guns.

Now something odd happens, does it not? The passage tells us they say that she has died, and Jesus says, "The child is not dead but sleeping." What does that mean? Does that mean she was unconscious? How are we to understand this? Part of it is, we allow the other gospels to speak to it. It is very clear that Jesus saw her as dead. But there's something even more powerful here in this resurrection. It's this. That death in the power and the face and the light and grace of Christ—death is no more powerful than mere sleep. And he says to her, '*Talitha cumi*,'--little girl... That's like saying to your child—maybe some of you did this this morning---'Honey, get up.' Jesus brings real **Resurrection**. But he also brings metaphorical resurrection in the life of a woman who he healed. She's now been brought back to life, to the community. She's now told tell everybody. Can you imagine what it would have been like for her to go to worship not considered ceremonially unclean? Do you think that that felt like being brought back from death? You bet it did.

So in some ways, if you watch the flow of the narrative, Jairus comes to him—come, merely lay your hands on my daughter and she will be well and live. But then on their way Jesus heals this woman of her disease. And interestingly, the woman's healing becomes a foreshadowing of

what he's about to do in the life of the little girl and this family. It's a light. It's a pointing to. But in what way is it? It's this, as one writer says this. The resurrection of Jairus's daughter is both a deed of compassion and a pledge of the conquering power of Jesus over the combined forces of death and unbelief. And the kingdom of God was disclosed as the saving reality. It is precisely in deliverance from death that the salvation which Jesus brings finds its most pointed expression. Let me repeat. It is precisely in deliverance from death that the salvation which Jesus brings finds its most pointed expression. So as in this restoration, the resurrection, of this woman's life he brings healing to and the resurrection of the little girl is the most pointed picture of what the kingdom of God is about to do. And indeed, this healing and this resurrection are pointing to exactly what is getting ready to happen to Jesus.

You see, he heals this woman of her bleeding, because he knows that what's getting ready to happen to him is that he's getting ready to give of his life, of his blood, for our salvation. He brings back to life this little girl, recognizing that that is a foreshadowing—that his going to the cross will mean that he will go to the grave, but he, too, will be raised to life. These both are pointing to the work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. Another writer, Timothy Keller, says these words. Jesus Christ knew that the only way to the crown was through the cross. The only way to resurrection was through death. So his healing of the sick woman was another foreshadowing of the cross. He lost power so she could gain strength, but on the cross he would lose his very life, so we could live forever. The only way for Jesus to give us this power and life was to go through weakness and death. So it is a pointed example, written for us, to see this is the kingdom of God being borne out in the midst of desperation and faith.

And the invitation is where is your faith placed? Come to Jesus with your desperation. Come to him for salvation. But more than that, more than the invitation for you to know Jesus personally and the power of his cross and resurrection, it is also for us collectively and individually to ask the question: How do these stories cast the light of the grace and power of Christ into our life together and also your life individually? Where does, and where is Jesus calling you into the light, away from trusting in our means, our successes—calling us out of our desperation, by faith, to bring restoration, because we now worship on this side of the resurrection. Which means that the resurrection power of the Kingdom of God has already begun. Which means we do not wait just merely for Jesus's return for the light and power of the resurrection to be made known; it can be brought into today. Not completely as it will be in Christ's return, but it can begin today. Where do you need restoration? Where do you need healing? Where is the light of Christ calling you this morning? Because he is. He's calling me, he's calling you, out of our desperation, by faith, in his loving arms, to find healing and restoration. May you hear his voice. May the Holy Spirit comfort you. May his light, may this truth be to you joy.

Let's pray. Father, we ask, through the power of Christ, through the presence of your Spirit, I pray, breathe new life into our weakness. Bring hope in the midst of our desperation. Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, may your Spirit fall fresh upon those who are hurting, those who are sick, those who feel desperate. May you, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit, through this word, whisper in their ears and draw them to yourself. Bring healing, we ask, because you are on the throne. Bring healing, we pray, this morning to those who are sick. By faith, we implore you Lord, bring healing. And for all the desperation, no matter its circumstance, bring restoration. And we call out to you by faith. May you do this, O Lord. In our desperation have mercy upon us and fall upon us with your resurrection power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.