

June 7, 2025

JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER DEATH AND OUR NEED FOR FAITH

Mark 5:21-43

*(10 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)*

As we've followed Jesus' ministry through the gospel of Mark, it is clear that things are growing and expanding. The last time we were together, we saw that Jesus had expanded his ministry to Gentiles as he'd crossed over to the country of the Gerasenes and ministered there. But it's not just that Jesus' ministry is expanding in terms of the territory and those whom he is reaching. It's also expanding in terms of the intensity of power being displayed. In the early chapters, he'd healed and cast out demons, but in these last couple of scenes he's silenced the wind and waves and showed that thousands of demons were no match for him. But what he does in Mark 5:21-43 is the greatest feat of power we, as readers of Mark's gospel, have seen yet. And I think Mark tells the story in such a way that we are to recognize that.

But it's not just Jesus' power that we see in these verses but also the breadth of his mercy, the length of his reach, and the depth of his kindness and grace. In short, our text this morning gives us a picture of Jesus that we need not lose sight of as those who seek to honor Christ in all that we do. If, as we noted when we began our study of Mark's gospel, this gospel is about helping us see Christ more clearly—who he is and what he's done—then our text this morning represents the overall message of Mark quite well. Perhaps we might say it's a microcosm of the whole of Mark's message because we get to see who Jesus is, what he does, and what he demands of us as well. So, with that said, we'll walk through the text under four headings, and the first is perhaps the most obvious, namely, that Jesus has authority over disease and death.

**Jesus has authority over disease and death**

We see Jesus exercising his authority over disease in death in two stories that Mark combines in a way that we've seen before where he begins one story, interrupts that story with another, and then comes back and finishes the story he began at the start. So, the first story (that Mark will interrupt) begins when Jesus crosses back over the sea from the country of the Gerasenes, where he'd healed the demonized man.

As Jesus arrives back in Jewish territory, a great crowd is there to meet him, but one man is singled out in approaching Jesus. He's a prominent man, one of the rulers of the synagogue, named Jairus. Now, it is odd that we know this man's name because in Mark's gospel, almost no one is named. It may well have been that Jairus ended up becoming a well-known believer in the early church, and as Peter is telling this story to Mark, he notes that this story is about Jairus—someone that both of them would have known.

Well, anyway, as Jairus comes to Jesus, he is in a state of desperation. He falls at Jesus feet, begging him, 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” (v. 23). So, Jesus goes, and here’s where the story is interrupted.

As Jesus is going, the great crowd that had greeted him on his return, beside the sea, accompanies him, pressing against him. And at this moment, another character enters the scene. It’s a woman, we’re told, who had a discharge of blood for twelve years. This was probably a case of menstrual bleeding that simply wouldn’t stop. And not only was it continuous, but it had been like that for twelve years.

Now, of course, she’d done everything anyone would do in that situation. She’d gone to every doctor she could and spent every cent she had to try to get better, but not only had she not gotten even remotely better, she’d actually gotten worse—and she was broke. But she’d heard that Jesus was doing some amazing things, healing people who couldn’t be healed otherwise, casting out demons, and the like. And so she reasoned to herself that if she could just get to Jesus, she could be made well. In fact, she concluded that just touching his garment would be sufficient. Therefore, she worked her way through the crowd, touched some part of the clothing he was wearing, and, sure enough, instantly she was made well.

My guess is that she had hoped to work her way to Jesus, touch him, be healed, and then slip out with anyone knowing she had been there. After all, according to Jewish law, she was ceremonially unclean and shouldn’t have been in contact with anyone. In other words, she shouldn’t have been anywhere near that scene in the first place. And to work her way through a crowd would almost certainly require her to bump up against some, and then to touch Jesus—all of which was a violation of the law for one who was unclean.

But her plan didn’t work as she’d hoped because the second she touched Jesus and was healed, Jesus felt power go out from him, immediately stopped, and asked, “Who touched my garments?” (v. 30). Now, the obvious answer in the disciples’ minds is that nearly everyone nearby had touched him. He was surrounded by a crowd of people pushing against him with every step. But Jesus was asking something different, and he knew the person who’d touched him would know exactly what he was asking, even if the disciples felt like it was an odd question.

And sure enough, the woman knew Jesus was calling her out. And so Mark tells us that the woman, “knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth” (v. 33). Most likely at this moment, she was preparing for some rebuke. Perhaps she thought Jesus might say, “You knew you were unclean and shouldn’t touch anyone. You shouldn’t even be here.” But she received no rebuke. Instead, Jesus addressed her very gently and warmly, saying, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (v. 33).

And I actually think this public response is more than a gentle and warm statement. I think it’s Jesus showering her with grace. See, her uncleanness would have made her like a leper. She was an outcast. She was one to be avoided. Everyone probably would have known her that way. And by calling her out and publicly announcing what happened to her, Jesus is publicly declaring to

everyone that this woman no longer needed to be avoided. She no longer carried a stigma of being unclean. In other words, Jesus was showing his love and kindness to this one who had believed in him. He was caring for her and providing all that she needed. Thus, we see not only his power but his kindness and grace.

Now, as great as this moment is, you can be certain that one person wasn't enjoying this pause in the action—Jairus. His daughter was dying, and no doubt he felt that every second counted. Well, sure enough, as Jesus is addressing this woman, some people from his house come to him, saying, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (v. 35).

But Jesus, even while speaking to the woman, overheard what was being said and then turned to Jairus, saying, "Do not fear, only believe" (v. 36). And Jesus headed off to Jairus's house, taking only Peter, James, and John with him. There would be a very small crowd who would witness what would happen next.

As Jesus got there, there was much commotion. One reason for this is that it was a tradition in this setting to hire professional mourners if one was expected to die. At the point of death, these people would loudly weep and wail, and, as odd as it sounds to us, was their way of recognizing the tragedy and finality of death as something to grieve over. We hire professionals to bring bouquets of flowers; they hired professional mourners. Each culture deals with the reality of death in its own way. But Jesus, quite surprisingly, shows up, questioning the commotion, while declaring, "The child is not dead but sleeping" (v. 39).

Quite naturally they laugh at Jesus' naiveté. Of course the child is dead. As professional mourners, they knew the difference between someone falling asleep, passing out, going into a coma, or dying. They knew the girl was dead. And so did Jesus. But he was signaling with his language that just as sleeping lasts only a bit, so this girl's death would not signal the finality of her life. So, he instructed everyone to leave, took the girl by her hand, and said, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (v. 41), and she got up and began walking. And they gave her something to eat.

Now, both of these stories demonstrate Jesus' ability over disease and death, but I think Mark includes some elements just to note how amazing Jesus' demonstrations of power are. First, with the woman, Mark notes that several other physicians had tried their hand at helping her, only to end up making her worse. In other words, this wasn't a situation where others could have helped, but this woman refused to seek assistance. No one could help, but Jesus did, merely by this woman touching his garment. He did what no physician could come close to doing.

Then, as the people come to inform Jairus of his daughter's death, notice that they're telling him that there's no need to trouble Jesus anymore. In other words, their thoughts were that perhaps Jesus could have helped her when she was still alive. I mean, he heals disease, right? But death? No one can overcome death. But Jesus did. He has authority over disease and death.

Now, for us, this is encouraging as we pray for the Lord to heal us from illness, and he does so regularly. Often he does so through the means of doctors and medicine. On other occasions, he does so in a more miraculous variety. And each time, we're right to praise God—whatever means he uses to heal—for every good and perfect gift comes from him. But it's also encouraging to us to see Jesus' power here because death feels so final for us, doesn't it? And in one sense it is. When someone dies, we'll not see them again in this lifetime. But this story of Jesus raising this girl back to life is a reminder that nothing will stop him from bringing us to himself when we die and from raising our bodies to life at the resurrection. We who hope in the resurrection (i.e. all believers), do not hope in vain. Jesus has authority over disease and death. Death will not be the last word for God's children, just as it wasn't the last word for God's Son. But that's not all we can gather from this story. We also are reminded that Jesus saves people from every walk of life.

### **Jesus saves people from every walk of life**

If Jesus' authority over disease and death is what stands out most in this text, second is Jesus' willingness to save people from every sector of society. Many have noted that when Mark uses this sandwiching technique in his storytelling (where he starts one story, interrupts it with another story, and then finishes the first story), he's drawing a connection between the two stories he's interwoven. And my guess is that if that's right, the thread connecting the two is Jesus' authority to do what no man could do, both in healing this woman that no man could help and raising Jairus's daughter from the dead. However, it seems that Mark might also want us to see the contrasts in these two stories. After all, the two characters in this story could not be more different.

Jairus is well known. Even the reader knows his name. He is a man, a ruler of the synagogue, is looked up to in society, and is confident enough to approach Jesus face-to-face. The fact that Jairus has people in his household who would come to him to give the report about his daughter and have professional mourners suggests that he is a man of significant financial means.

The woman, on the other hand, is unnamed, is a woman, is an outcast of society since her issue of blood made her ceremonially unclean, and she is ashamed or self-doubting enough only to try to approach Jesus in a way that (she thought) would leave him unaware she even wants to be healed. Moreover, we're explicitly told that she "had spent all that she had" (v. 26) going to physician after physician to see if she might be made well. She'd suffered for as long as Jairus's daughter had been alive. And yet, in the end, Jesus delivers both of them, healing this woman and raising up Jairus's daughter. It is a reminder to us that Jesus saves people from every walk of life—men and women, rich and poor, famous and unknown, outgoing and shy, and on and on.

No one has an inside track on salvation because of their place in life, and no one is beyond his reach. Jesus has come to save all who will acknowledge their need for him and repent and believe. And all who do so will be received. None will be turned away because of their status or standing in society. None will be turned away because they don't quite measure up in society in some way. And the key for us in recognizing this is two-fold. First, we preach the gospel

indiscriminately. We do not see someone as outside of Christ's reach because of who they are or where they stand in life. Second, we should expect the church to be made up of people from every sector and segment of society. In other words, we're not like a country club or fraternity or sorority, where we only receive those whom we think measure up, make us look better, or seem respectable enough to enter. We receive all who will bow the knee to Jesus, and because there is no one outside of his reach, we should expect the church to be made up of rich and poor, different skin colors, those with more and less formal education, and on and on. And that's a beautiful thing. The family of Christ defies how the world works because what yokes us together is simply our union with Christ and desire to obey his Word. On that note, let me highlight another element here. Jesus takes unclean people and makes them clean.

### **Jesus takes unclean people and makes them clean**

Both the lady with the issue of blood who touches Jesus, and the little girl whom Jesus touches, should have made him ceremonially unclean according to the law. Leviticus 15:19 reads, "When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening." Similarly, Numbers 19:11 reads, "Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days." Therefore, again, both acts should have made Jesus unclean. So, did Jesus become unclean? No. Instead of Jesus becoming unclean, both individuals who were unclean became clean. The woman's issue of blood went away, and the little girl's life came back to her. Thus, Jesus takes unclean people and makes them clean.

And I just want to note briefly for us that the same thing is true in regards to our sin. Sometimes we think that Jesus could never save us or someone we know because we or they are so sinful. How could someone as holy as Jesus have anything to do with someone so sinful? But the reality is that when Jesus saves you, you become clean. Actually, it's better than that. Jesus has taken our sin upon himself, and he's bore the punishment that our sin deserves so that there's no penalty or punishment left over for us, and he credits us with his perfect righteousness. The glorious news of the gospel is that the unclean can become clean, the sinful can be credited with perfect righteousness. None of us is too dirty for Jesus to save and forgive. But this does lead to one final point. Jesus demands that we believe.

### **Jesus demands that we believe**

We see faith twice in these stories. First, we see it with regard to the woman. Right when Jesus forces her to come forward and identify herself, instead of rebuking her, he tells her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (v. 34). He credits her faith, showing her the necessity of faith. Then, right as the messengers show up to tell Jairus that his daughter is dead, Jesus turns and says to him, "Do not fear, only believe" (v. 36). That is, he again commands faith as a necessity in his response to Jesus.

As you continue through the New Testament, this demand for faith is no exception. When we share the gospel, we rightly declare what Jesus has done for us so that we might be saved. He

lived the perfect life that we could not live so that his righteousness might be credited to us. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose from the dead on the third day so that we might be justified. That's the good news. But this work of redemption isn't applied to everyone. It is only those who believe, who place their faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who will be saved. Jesus demands faith. We must trust who Jesus is and what he did as sufficient for us and trust in him alone for our salvation.

But faith doesn't stop there. It is the whole of the Christian life. Without it we can't live a life that is pleasing to God. All obedience requires faith. We have to trust that there's greater joy in obeying the Lord's commands than there is in sin. We obey, trusting that he'll give us what we need to do that. We seek his kingdom first, trusting that he knows what we need and will take care of our needs along the way. The Christian life is about trust.

And yet what we've seen today gives us every reason to trust our crucified and risen Lord, doesn't it? He has greater power than anything that threatens us in this life. He's willing to show his compassion and care for us no matter our standing in society. He is able to take all of our sin and make us clean, white as snow. And so we have no reason to think, "I don't know if Jesus will give me what I need in this life to walk in a way that is pleasing to him." Of course he will. And as a reminder that he'll give us all we need, let's remember that he gave his own life to save us as we come to the table this morning. Amen.