

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 7: Faith in the Middle of Desperation -- Mark 5:21–43

Picture the scene at the lakeshore. Jesus has just returned from the Gerasene region, and the crowd that had been waiting for Him on the western side of the sea presses in the moment His boat touches the beach. The crowd is thick. The day has barely begun. And before Jesus can do anything else, a man pushes through the press of people, falls down at Jesus' feet, and starts pleading. "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" (5:23).

His name is Jairus. He is one of the rulers of the synagogue. He is the sort of man who would normally be at the front of every gathering, the keeper of the keys, the chairman of the elders, the public figure. He is also a father whose twelve-year-old girl is dying. And in this moment all of his status, all of his religious capital, all of his standing in the community has been put aside. He is just a father at the feet of Jesus, asking for the only thing that matters.

On the way to Jairus' house, the story is suddenly interrupted. A woman who has been suffering for twelve years (the same number of years as Jairus' daughter has been alive) creeps through the back of the crowd. She has spent everything she had on doctors who could not help her. She is ceremonially unclean by Levitical law, exhausted, ashamed, isolated, almost certainly poor, and absolutely desperate. She does not feel worthy to ask Jesus face to face. She just wants to touch the hem of His robe and slip back into the anonymity of the crowd. The moment she touches Him, the bleeding stops. And Jesus stops too.

Mark 5:21–43 is a chapter about faith in the middle of desperation. Two people, separated by everything that society notices (gender, status, wealth, religious standing) and yet united by the only thing that ultimately matters. Both of them are out of options. Both of them have come to Jesus. Both of them will find that He is not in a hurry to brush past them. Mark wants us to recognize ourselves somewhere in their company. Most of us know what it is to be Jairus. Most of us know what it is to be the woman in the crowd. And all of us, sooner or later, need to hear what Jesus says to both of them. "Do not fear, only believe."

Group Discussion: Jairus and the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years are about as different from each other as two people could be in their world: a respected male ruler of the synagogue and a poor, ceremonially unclean woman cut off from the community. Yet they come to Jesus with the same posture of desperation and faith. What does it tell us about Jesus and about His kingdom that He gives both of them His full attention in the same passage, and what does it suggest about how we should think about the people around us today?

Personal Reflection: The woman in the crowd had spent twelve years and all her resources looking for help in places that had not been able to heal her. Where in your own life have you been spending years and energy on solutions that have not actually addressed the deeper need, and what would it look like, this week, to reach for Jesus instead, even if all you can manage is the edge of His robe?

Read Mark 5:21–43

Study Questions

1. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, comes to Jesus, falls at His feet, and begs Him to come heal his daughter (5:22–23). Considering Jairus' social and religious standing, what does this posture teach about what genuine faith does to our pride, and how is this the same posture in which any person must come to Christ for salvation (compare Romans 10:9–10; Philippians 2:9–11)?
2. Most of us have something in our lives we still try to handle on our own before we will fall at Jesus' feet about it. What specific situation are you carrying right now that you have been trying to fix without bringing it openly and fully to Christ, and what would actually putting that situation in His hands look like this week?
3. The woman believed that if she could just touch Jesus' clothes she would be healed (5:27–28). The healing happened the moment she touched Him, but Jesus refused to let her slip back into the crowd. He stopped, He searched the crowd, He drew her out into public testimony, and only then did He say to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (5:34). What is the difference between superstitious touching and saving faith, and why does Jesus insist on a personal encounter rather than an anonymous one?
4. Many of us prefer an anonymous relationship with Jesus to a public, confessional one. We will pray privately, read Scripture privately, struggle privately, but we resist actually being known by Christ in front of others. Where in your own walk are you tempted to reach for Jesus on the sly when He is calling you to a fuller, more openly confessing relationship with Him in His church?
5. Jesus calls this woman "Daughter" (5:34). It is the only time in the Gospels He calls a woman by that name. After twelve years of being seen as unclean, unwelcome, and unwanted, she is welcomed into His family with one word. What does this teach about the relational nature of saving faith and about the new identity Christ gives to those who come to Him in faith and obedience (compare John 1:12–13; Galatians 3:26–27; 1 John 3:1)?
6. Christ gives every disciple a new name and a new identity in Him: child, beloved, forgiven, holy one, brother or sister of Christ. Which of those identities is hardest for you to actually receive at the heart level, and what old name are you still allowing to define you in its place?
7. While Jesus is still speaking with the woman, messengers arrive with the worst possible news. "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" Jesus overhears them and says to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe" (5:35–36). What is Jesus teaching about the

relationship between fear, faith, and bad news, and how does this command shape the way a Christian faces moments when the news has just gotten worse?

8. Where in your life has bad news threatened to outweigh the word of Christ in your heart, and what does it look like, practically, to “not fear, only believe” in that specific situation, without pretending the news is not real?
9. When Jesus reaches Jairus’ house, the mourners are already wailing. Jesus says, “The child is not dead but sleeping” (5:39), takes her by the hand, and says, “Talitha cumi” (5:41), and she rises. Connecting this scene with John 11:25–26, 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, what does Mark teach us about the authority of Christ over death, the Christian view of physical death, and the believer’s hope of resurrection through Christ?
10. Jesus took the dead girl by the hand and spoke a personal, intimate word that brought her back to life. As you finish this passage, what “dead thing” in you (a dead hope, a dead relationship, a dead area of faith, a dead obedience) most needs Jesus to take it by the hand and speak life into it, and what is one step of faith you could take this week to put yourself in front of Him to receive it?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 34:17–18, the Lord’s nearness to the broken-hearted; Isaiah 53:3–5, the suffering Servant who carries our griefs and sorrows; John 11:17–44, the raising of Lazarus and Jesus as the resurrection and the life; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, Christ as the firstfruits of resurrection and the defeat of death; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, the hope of the Lord’s return and the resurrection of the saints.