

## **The Healing We Want or the Healing We Need**

**Mark 5:21-43**

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**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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I love these two stories, actually a story within a story, and in a few minutes I'll tell you why, but first I should acknowledge what's obviously problematic. Why did all the people in gospels who went to Jesus for healing always get what they wanted while others go to Jesus for the same but go away still sick or soon dead?

You've asked this, haven't you? Why are some prayers answered, and others not? Why does the patient down the hall go home, but your loved one gets worse?

Sharper minds than mine wrestle with this and inevitably come up empty. That's why I can say with complete confidence there is no satisfactory answer, and yet several things can be said that can give at least some degree of insight and comfort.

First: Whether or not you receive the healing you pray for isn't dependant on the quality of your faith. It's my opinion the misguided friend who says, "Too bad despite all her prayers she got sicker and died, obviously her faith wasn't strong enough," is either spiritually clueless or arrogant or both. Christians who really know themselves are the first to admit their faith is weak and can only be compensated by grace.

Second: Jesus' teaching, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find," shouldn't be interpreted to mean even your decent, most heartfelt prayers will always be answered affirmatively. What Jesus is saying is if you ask for something within God's will, your prayers will be answered. For instance, if you pray for wisdom to see God's plan, patience to wait for the plan to unfold and the obedience to cooperate with God's plan, it will be given you. Nothing more, nothing less.

Third: If you ask specifically for a physical healing, and it doesn't happen, be open to the probability God is healing you either mentally or emotionally. Throughout our lives we will all endure multiple crucifixions, losses and disappointments along with seasons of sorrow and grief, but someday in this life or the next, we will finally realize God has healed us in ways that at the time went unnoticed and unappreciated.

Fourth: We can never know why God spares one child while the other dies. It sounds cliché, but it's true, God moves in mysterious ways and sometimes, try as we might, we'll never understand why one gets well and the other doesn't. All we can do is trust God, who sees the big picture, knows what he's doing, and ultimately, by his power and grace, all things will work together for good.

Having acknowledged these obvious problems, I'll now tell you why these two stories have been helpful to me.

Mark wrote, “When Jesus had crossed again in the boat...a great crowd gathered around him... Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and when he saw him fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her so she may be made well and live.” So Jesus went with him. (Mark 5:21-24)

In three short verses Mark artfully sets the scene. When Jesus hits the beach there’s a crowd already waiting for him when suddenly Jairus begs Jesus for his daughter’s life. Obviously the religious establishment isn’t entirely in lockstep against Jesus, which is important for us to know. It’s a mistake to paint all the scribes and Pharisees with the same broad brush. We don’t know whether or not Jairus met Jesus previously and endorsed his ministry, or if Jairus was skeptical but desperate enough to ask for help. We do know Jairus like any parent in his situation was willing to publicly humble himself for his daughter’s life.

On their way to Jairus’ house Mark informs us, “Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.” (Mark 5:25)

Mark’s Jewish contemporaries could read between the lines. This woman, because of her internal bleeding was, according to the Law of Moses, considered ritually unclean and therefore a social outcast. Anyone who touched her was also automatically ritually unclean and had to go through the arduous rites of purification.

So this woman, for twelve years, led a lonely existence. What’s more she spent all her money on doctors who couldn’t cure her. Here’s an excellent example of how following the letter of the law can be dehumanizing and explains why Jesus always elevated human need over the law every time.

Mark then reports the crowds were pressing up against Jesus when this nameless woman just touched the hem of his robe and was immediately healed.

Here’s where the story gets interesting. Immediately Jesus asked, “Who touched my clothes?” His disciples were incredulous. “Who touched your clothes? The crowds are pressing in on you, how can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

But the second the woman touched the hem of his robe, Jesus became immediately aware he was being drained of God’s power.

This is enormously significant. Jesus was spent every time he performed a healing. What did Paul tell us about Jesus in his letter to the Philippians?

“though he was in the form of God  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited  
but emptied himself...” (Philippians 2:6)

Certainly Jesus emptied himself on the cross, but it didn't start there. Throughout his ministry Jesus sacrificed and gave himself away. Every healing and miracle drained him of physical and spiritual energy. That explains why he often went off by himself to pray, to be replenished for the next day.

Something else: This healing in particular reveals the convergence of God's power and human faith. Healing doesn't happen in a vacuum. Remember, we are created to be connected to God's life-giving presence and healing happens (be it physical, emotional or spiritual) whenever God's power encounters our need. Simply put, healing is the supernatural outcome of our relationship with God when God gives you, maybe not the healing you want but the healing God knows you need.

"Aha!" you say, "So healing does depend on the quality of your faith. If you're prayers aren't answered your faith isn't strong enough!"

Not necessarily. Let's continue with Mark's story. When Jesus and Jairus got to the house they were told the girl was dead. "Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.'" And then announced, "The child is not dead, but sleeping."

Jairus' neighbors "laughed at him." What they really did was snicker. But let's take a closer look at Jesus' declaration, "Do not fear, only believe."

Jesus wasn't demanding super human faith he was simply inviting Jairus to keep the faith he always had. "Don't throw in the towel yet Jairus, you've come too far. You've trusted God before, so ignore your neighbors and trust your instincts."

There's no implication of 'prove yourself worthy,' Jesus is simply encouraging Jairus. "Be open to the Eternal, be aware of God's healing presence all around you and let God be God."

Now, what if the outcome was different and the girl died. Most of us have known Jairus. We waited with him in emergency rooms, we prayed for his family in church, we awkwardly ministered to him in Christ's name maybe by simply being present and silent. Sometimes our Jairus' loved one recovers, sometimes not. But whatever the outcome Jesus still speaks to him saying, "Do not be afraid, only believe," so that even through his tears Jairus can see Christ suffers with him through his time of crucifixion, but ultimately Christ will be raised up with him on his day of resurrection.

These two healing stories are not guarantees our prayers will always be answered on our terms, but a demonstration of God's power and grace encountering our broken bodies and souls in order to grow us closer to the Truth that sets us free. So, Jesus wasn't a magician buying our allegiance with deeds of power. Instead Jesus is our suffering Messiah who came to empty himself into our empty selves so we may know and enjoy the fullness of God.

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So continue doing what you've been doing, pray for healing, thank God for sustaining you even when your prayers seem unanswered, and always trust God's love and grace will empower you, not only during the best of times but especially during the worst of times, from this moment in time, until there is no time.