

"Why Are You Weeping?"

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ 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. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ 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." ²⁴ And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." (ESV)

Early in chapter three of the gospel of Mark, the religious leaders had decided that they were to destroy Jesus. They were going to put Him to death. Jesus then switches His teaching from doctrinal teaching to teaching in parables. Then Mark, sort of like playing bumper cars, seems to shift all of a sudden to another topic or area, and we see Jesus exercising authority over lots of different areas of life. We saw Him exercising His authority over nature when they were in the great storm on the Sea of Galilee and He said, "Peace, be still." Remember The Dog Whisperer [on the National Geographic channel]? "Psssst. Just stop it." Then we saw Him exercising His authority over the demonic realm when He exorcised an army of demons from a man. Remember we called him Legion? When you look at those kinds of stories, whether you are a Christian or not, they seem that they're so far from what we see to be normal it's hard to really grasp them.

Yesterday someone in the Discovery class was asking me about HALO school, parachuting school in the Army. There's a huge difference between jumping out of an airplane from 25,000 feet and jumping out of an airplane from 800 feet. When you jump from 25,000 feet it's actually a lot easier because everything doesn't seem real. The ground is so far away it seems like you could fall forever. But when you jump from 800 feet you can see people's faces on the ground and you realize that if things don't go well death is imminent so you're much more fearful. We've looked at two of these four stories – the calming of the storm and the exorcism of the Legion. They're sort of like 25,000-foot stories. They're so far away from our experience it doesn't make a big deal. When you read the story of Jairus and the woman (who, by the way, has called Bernice by church tradition, for whatever reason), it becomes an 800-foot story because you might not be able to identify with someone "Dog Whispering" a storm, but you can identify with the loss of a loved one. You can identify with struggling with a disease, and that's where you really have to ask your question, "What do I really think about this guy, Jesus?" It's sort of a Sunday School answer. "Can Jesus calm the storm?" "Yes, He can." "Can He exorcise demons?" "Yes, He can." But can Jesus answer the despair in your own life? Can Jesus heal the things that you are going through? Can He calm you down? We all experience it, so the question is how are you going to experience it?

When I went to Ethiopia, on the flight home, there was a terrorist event on my airplane. Seriously. It was amazing to me because with the security going into the airplane, I was down to two items of clothing. So when this happened I thought, "How in the world did this crazy guy get through here? I was naked." About 2:00 in the morning we flew from Addis Ababa; the first stop would be Rome, then from Rome to the U. S. As soon as we passed out of African airspace someone stood up in the plane and started running toward the back screaming, "You are all going to heaven! You are all going to heaven!" So there we were all on the plane and everyone experienced, some kind of despair. Everyone dealt with it differently. Some people screamed. I looked over at my seatmate and sighed, "Nothing's easy. I can't get on a plane and just fly home." What happened ultimately is that some male flight attendants went and tackled him and brought him back up to the front and de-planed him in Rome. But the fact is that those kinds of things happen to everybody. How are you going to respond to it? When you look at the story of Jairus and the woman what you're going to see is people at two completely different ends of the socio-economic spectrum and yet they both have the same problem: despair. The big question that this text answers, I think, is, "Is Jesus big enough and does He have authority not just over disease and death but even over your despair, even over the things in which you think are hopeless?"

We're going to look at three things today. We're going to look at the context of despair in this passage. We're going to look at the drama of the despair. And finally we're going to look at the death of despair. Let's look first at the context. Let me read to you again the first few verses.

²¹ 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. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ 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." ²⁴ And he went with him. . . (ESV)

So the first person you meet in this story is given a name. That's important. Not only that, but he's a man. To be a man in the Ancient Near East, generally speaking, was a much better position to be in than to be a woman, frankly. I hate to say that, but it was true. In this story you have a man with a name and who was a ruler in the synagogue. In other words, he is extremely prominent. What's a ruler in the synagogue? Basically you had elders in the synagogue and rulers in the synagogue in Jesus' day. They would have been roughly equivalent to what we call trustees. They would have been responsible for the care of the synagogue and the providing of the scrolls and the care of the scrolls and all of the sacred items. They would have been the ones in charge. They would have been well known, and here is Jairus who is one of the rulers of the synagogue. You get a clue to his desperation in the very fact that he's coming to Jesus because remember, especially in the book of Mark, chapter 3, the verdict is out among the religious leaders, at least generally speaking. They think Jesus needs to be gotten rid of. You know Jairus must despair if most of the religious leaders have a low opinion of Jesus and yet he's thinking, "I'm willing to do anything to see my daughter get better, even go see the one that everyone else wants to destroy." Jairus, by throwing his lot in with Jesus, by asking Jesus for help, would have been probably ostracized as well, yet he is in such desperate straits he's willing to do that. What's interesting is that up to this point in his life, as far as we know it, was pretty charmed. In fact, we hear that his only daughter, who is twelve years old, and Bernice, this unnamed woman up to this point, also has been ill for twelve years. That's what they have in common. Twelve years, but up to this point Jairus is basically a relatively wealthy man. He's socially connected, he's connected with the synagogue, and in fact, he helps to run the synagogue. His daughter, as far as we know, has been healthy. She's been his only daughter so she would have been the apple of his eye, I'm guessing, daddy's girl. Now she is sick. Matthew and Luke imply almost that she's already dead. So in the twinkling of an eye this man who had everything, who was on top of the world now has lost the only thing that's important to him, and he's desperate. Do you imagine that could happen to anyone in this room, that you feel like you're sailing on top of the world and then all of a sudden the rug is pulled out from under you? You have a great house, you have a great family, you have everything—then someone you love dearly dies. Has that ever happened? I know it has because I've done the memorials. People lose children, people lose babies, people lose parents. At those times, no matter how good things are going for you, you despair.

Jairus is at one end of the continuum. At the other end of the continuum is the woman. If Jairus is a man and well-connected, and socially acceptable and runs the synagogue, the woman is at the exact opposite end of the continuum. Mark could not communicate in more grim ways the way he has communicated this woman's status. Let me read it to you again. When I read it to you I'm actually going to read it to you the way it is in Greek. I'm going to read it in English, but Mark basically piles on participles here so you become almost uncomfortable with how badly this woman has it. It's all in the present tense.

"There is a woman, who having a discharge of blood for twelve years, and having suffered much under many physicians, and having spent all she had and having gotten no better grew worse."

So she had this ailment for twelve years, she suffered much under many physicians and having spent all she had, having failed to get better she only got worse. Now that's pretty bad, we think. Here's a woman who has a discharge of blood for twelve years. In the wise providence of God I was with a team of doctors for the past two weeks, and, of course, knowing me I looked at them and asked, "What's the story with her?" It was an

interesting connection with Ethiopia because one of the primary ways women in Ethiopia, historically, up until a few decades ago, had been made socially outcast is because of this problem right here that this woman has. Maybe not the exact one, but a similar problem. A hospital was started in Addis Ababa in order to take care of this problem, and our doctors got to meet the 89-year-old founder of this hospital. The hospital was started for women who had an obstetric fistula. I don't know any nice way to explain that other than when a baby is being born and it won't come out, and it takes such a long time for labor that the woman's tissue is cut off from blood and it begins to die, and so basically her bottom side is torn out or it has to be taken out so she's an outcast for the rest of her life. A hospital was started there decades ago in order to actually do surgery on these women and restore them, and it changes everything for them. Even today people are outcasts in society because of this. So this woman had some issue that was causing her to be constantly bleeding. Another thing she might have had is a brain tumor pushing on her pituitary gland. But either way, the problem is bigger than a health issue because in the Ancient Near East and Jewish society when a woman would go through her menstrual cycle she was unclean or unapproachable, untouchable for seven days. If anyone did touch her they would be unclean until the evening. Now, how bad do you think it is if a woman is like that perpetually? She is constantly unclean. So here this woman is not just broke and suffering much under many physicians, but her whole life is ruined. She would have been excommunicated from the synagogue, her husband would have left her, she may have lost a baby in the context of all this, and no one would have come around her. It's bigger than just being broke. She has nothing. She has no friends, she has no place to go, and no one will approach her or touch her because she is constantly and consistently unclean. Interestingly enough, Jairus' daughter is unclean as well. What can be done about it? Is there hope for either one? You see, Jairus is on one end of the continuum and the woman is on the other end of the continuum but they're both in great need, and that's how everyone in this room is. Everyone in this room is either on top of the world or on the very bottom of the world or somewhere in between, but here's one thing I can guarantee you: there will come a point in your life where your faith will be tested and you will be taken to the edge of despair. For some of you that's yet to be in the future. For some of you, you feel like that's how it's been for the past, I don't know, twelve years. Is it ever going to get better?

The next thing we see in the text is the drama of despair. Jairus comes up to Jesus and humbles himself and basically throws himself before Jesus and says, "Please come that you may lay hands on my daughter that she may live." Did you notice what it says? "And Jesus went with him." What makes Jesus different than most of us? The religious authorities in Jesus' day were seeking to put Him to death. If Jesus was like me (fortunately He's not) and this guy came to me, the first thing I would have said is, "Let me get this right. You guys are over there whispering about how to put Me to death and now you're going to come to Me and ask for My help? You've got a lot of hutzpah, pal." Did you notice that Jesus didn't say that? A lot of people I've met over the years, refuse to come to Jesus in times of crises because they never came to Jesus when they were doing well, and at the end of the day it's just pride. "I'm not going to come to Jesus now. I haven't even followed Him my whole life. Why do I go now? He's just going to think I'm insincere." My question is, "Do you need Jesus now?" The beautiful thing about Jesus is that He doesn't act like you and I do. Jesus doesn't say, "Pssst. Come talk to me later when your attitude gets straightened out." Jesus welcomes this man and not only does He welcome him, it says that Jesus went. Jesus is more than willing to help, even the most ardent Pharisee that comes to Him and says, "I need help." Where the drama begins is as Jesus is taking off to save this little girl another person comes into the picture: the woman. We'll talk about Jairus again in a minute, but let's look at how Jesus treats the woman as we unfold this drama.

²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ 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.³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (ESV)

So the woman seeks Jesus. Notice how when Jairus approached Jesus approached from the front and addressed Him and said, "Can you come and help?" The woman is such an outcast she doesn't even think about going and approaching Jesus and asking Him for anything, but she has this inkling that if anyone can help her He can. So she works her way through the crowd, and she approaches Him from behind in order to just touch Him. In the Greek there's the word "clutch." She must have grabbed onto Him. As she seeks out and touches Jesus, power goes out of Him, the Bible says. He feels it. Immediately she's made well. Now, the disciples asked a good question. You have to love the disciples here when Jesus asked, "Who touched Me?" The disciples say, "There's a crowd thronging around You and You're asking us who touched you? Maybe your family was right about the whole crazy thing." It says that Jesus knew. It says he looked around to see who had done it. The Greek there says He kept looking. Jesus wasn't going to stop until He found out who had touched Him. What you see here, among other things, is that the woman had some kind of real faith, not perfect as we'll see in a minute, but some kind of real faith and some kind of desire on the part of God to actually heal her. And it's His sovereignty because there were certainly lots of people that were touching Jesus in hopes of getting something. In the Ancient Near East you read stories about people doing the same thing to Alexander the Great. When a great king would ride though, people thought, "If I can just touch his robe, if I can just touch part of him I will absorb some of his greatness or I will be healed of my disease." But there was something about this woman that actually was effective. She didn't know what it was, but Jesus did. Power goes out, so Jesus keeps looking and apparently the woman felt like people were looking at her, or Jesus was looking at her because she came to Jesus in order to 'fess up. Notice the woman was seeking healing; she was looking for something and Jesus was looking for someone. He was looking for this woman. She'd already been healed, but He wanted to make sure she knew why and how she was healed and that she could go forth not just being healed but with His benediction. So notice what it says in verse 33.

³³ 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. (ESV)

Now it's always interesting there, and I've told you before that what the Bible doesn't say is just as important as what the Bible does say. First of all, Jesus is looking, she comes up and it says she told Him the whole truth. Now that would have included not only the fact that she had been ill for twelve years, but the fact that she is unclean and He is a rabbi and she touched Him. In other words, she has defiled Him. She told Him that. Did you notice how Jesus responded? "You did what? How dare you touch me! How dare you defile me! Look, I'm perfect and you're just going to sneak up from behind me in a crowd? What if I hadn't known you'd done it. I would have been walking around all day unclean and not even known it." Does Jesus say that to her? He doesn't say that. He says the same thing to her, the same word that Jairus used earlier. He says, "Daughter." "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your disease." Think about how gracious He is.

As I was studying this week I couldn't help but think about a woman named Marta that I met. If you read the blog I posted when I was in Ethiopia, I wrote about her. Usually I was out teaching during the week. Normally the pastors attend the medical clinics and if anyone has a spiritual problem or wants counseling they'll call one of the pastors. I only had to do that one day, and the one day I did it they brought a woman over to me with a translator and said, "One of the doctors wants you to talk to her." I said, "Sure, what's the problem?" They said, "Well, she's pregnant and she wants to have an abortion and she wants to talk to someone about it." I said, "Okay." I'm thinking to myself, "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say to her, frankly." So we go with the translator and I asked her why she wanted to abort her baby and she said, "Because I have no hope, I have no one to help me." That struck me as odd because the project she is in provides them with money for rent, food, basically any physical need they have. I said, "How can you not have any hope?" I decided to take another tack. "Ask her if she's a Christian or Muslim." He asked her and she replied back, "Oh, I'm a Christian. I gave my

heart to Jesus last year." I said, "Now, we're getting some place." I don't know how he translated that. I said, "Where's your church? Can't your church help you?" She said, "Oh no, no, I'm not allowed to go to church." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, my landlords are Christians, too, and they won't let me go to church with them." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because I'm HIV positive, and now because I'm pregnant I can't even think about telling them I'm pregnant." The Ethiopians have to think I'm the weirdest person in the world because I started crying. "You mean to tell me you can't go to church because you're a sinner?" That's backwards. It's upside-down. It's just not right. By the end of the day we had her, in a different church, in a support group. But as I was thinking about it I wondered to myself, "How would a woman who is HIV positive, single, and pregnant with no means of support feel if she came into our midst?" I don't know, it depends on who she meets. But it really challenged me to think about what we are as far as outreach. Are we like Jesus? Would we be willing to receive anybody? If your answer is, "No" then you don't understand the Gospel because at the end of the day guess who you are? You're that woman who is unclean and without any hope whatsoever outside of yourself. Fortunately for you and for me Jesus doesn't say, "Get away from me because you're unclean." Jesus says, "Because you're unclean, come unto me. All you who are weary and heavy laden, come to me." Jesus wants you to come to Him. He says to the woman, "Your faith has made you well." It's not just general faith, it's the object of her faith which of course is Jesus Himself, and He sends her away with a classic Hebrew benediction, "Go in peace." "Shalom." Remember, Shalom in the Old Testament is the way things are supposed to be. Bernice (let's give her a name now). "Bernice, for the past twelve years, your life has been completely and utterly desperate. You've been outcast, lonely, friendless, and afraid. Now you're well. Go in peace. Be healed." It's pretty amazing, isn't it? Unless you're Jairus.

You get so caught up in the story of the woman it's easy to forget about Jairus. If you were Jairus, what are you thinking right now? You're not getting all misty-eyed. You're not excited that this woman who has been despairing for twelve years is now healed. What you're thinking to yourself is, "Come on." Remember Jesus was on the way to heal his daughter and here this woman that no one will talk to interrupts him and Jesus stops. Don't you hate that? I do. You go to a party and you're talking to a friend and they say, "Let's go from point A to point B" and between point A and point B they have to stop and talk to a hundred people. That drives me crazy. Now imagine if your little daughter, your only daughter, was dying. In fact, dead. And Jesus was on His way to save her and this outcast woman stops Him. If you're like me you'd be saying, "Come on, Jesus. She's been pretty miserable for twelve years. Don't you think she can wait another day? Tell her to call your office on Tuesday, talk to your assistant, you'll get an appointment by Thursday, we hope, and she'll be good. But right now we have bigger fish to fry; that is, you need to make my daughter well." What Jairus doesn't get and what you and I don't get most of the time is that the stop was made not only for the woman's sake but it was made for his sake, as well. Jesus stopped not just to heal that woman, Jesus stopped because Jairus needed Jesus to stop because Jesus knew the men were already on the way to tell him his daughter was dead. That was a done deal. And Jairus needed to know that this Jesus could fix anything. He didn't need to just know it, he needed to see it. Now he's seen this woman who everyone probably knew was outcast and unclean and afraid. Jesus had just made her well, and only after that does he hear, "Your daughter is dead." I think if he had heard, "Your daughter is dead" before he had seen any of that he would have thrown up his hands and said, "Jesus, you shafted me. I was hoping you could do all this stuff and you didn't do anything." Yet now he can think to himself, "Jesus fixed her, maybe still there's hope for my daughter." There's a great lesson there. There are several great lessons there. One is about God's timing. Oftentimes we expect Jesus to move now. We expect Him to get on it now. "I've got problems. They need to be fixed now." Sometimes Jesus takes His time because you need to see some other stuff before. But also there's a lesson here in that we need each other because only as we see God working in other people's lives does that boost our faith to know He can do the same for us. Are you in a relationship with other people or do you just sort of pull up to your house and use the garage opener and pull into your garage and do your thing and come out and you never talk to anyone else? You're going to be weaker spiritually for that.

The last thing in this text, after you get all this drama, is, basically, the death of despair. Let's look at what happens.

³⁵ 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?"³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." (ESV)

What I think is great about this passage is that Jesus doesn't give Jairus a chance to doubt. They come and say, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher?" It says, "overhearing them." Another good translation of that would be, "ignoring them." "Ignoring them Jesus intervenes." In other words, before Jairus can despair, Jesus intervenes, ignoring them, and says, "Don't fear, only believe." Jairus must have done that because he goes with Jesus. It says that Jesus took Peter, James, and John and the parents. As they approached the house they saw a great commotion, mourning and weeping. We know these mourners were professional mourners, because in the Ancient Near East that's what they would have done. Even a poor person was expected to hire at least two mourners and a flute player if someone in their family died, and the wealthier you were the more that would be expected. So we know the union put out a call, "Jairus' daughter died. We need 50 of you guys over there." They're weeping and mourning, and we know that they're just professionals and they don't really care because of their response. Remember, Jesus shows up and says, "Why are you mourning? Why are you weeping? The girl's only asleep." Immediately they change gears and they start laughing at Jesus. Their mourning is only a façade; it's only a show. They don't really care about this little girl. We know that because as soon as Jesus says, "She's only asleep," they laugh at Him. Notice whenever Jesus does things like this He's often mocked. The faithless often mock the faithful. The question is, "Are you going to believe?" Don't fear, only believe. What does Jesus do? It says,

⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, (another translation is "Little lamb") I say to you, arise."⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (ESV)

Verse 43 is one of the most interesting verses because Jesus has just raised this little girl from the dead and everyone is shocked in utter amazement. Their jaws are on the ground and you almost get the picture that Jesus said, "Hey, psst. You might want to give her something to eat. She's been dead for awhile, probably hungry." You can imagine snapping out of it. "Oh, hey. You're right." She was dead but now she's alive. In this we see the death of despair. Why? Because Jesus raises this little girl from the dead. But even bigger than that in this story we see the death of despair because ultimately here's how the story ends: Jesus doesn't just heal diseases. He doesn't just heal death. Jesus bears our diseases. He bears our death. The big problem, the reason that the woman was bleeding for twelve years at the end of the day and ultimately was that this thing called sin had violated all of shalom and had violated all of creation and had violated her. Jesus came to bear that sin. Jesus came to bear that disease. Everyone deserves death. Jesus came to bear that death. He takes it onto Himself.

Did you see the movie, "The Green Mile?" I watched it yesterday. It's a pretty amazing movie. Tom Hanks is a prison guard and this guy comes into the prison. He's the biggest guy I've ever seen in my life. He's a huge black man. He's about seven feet tall and his biceps were bigger than my head. His name is John Coffey. They find out over the course of the movie that John has the power to heal people. But the way that John heals people is that he has to touch them and absorb their disease. He's covered with scars. As he absorbs their disease and takes it onto himself the other person is made well. That's exactly what Jesus does. Jesus doesn't sit back from afar with a scepter and say, "I'm going to heal his disease and I'm going to heal her death." Jesus comes and lays His hands on each and every one of us and He absorbs our sin. He takes it upon Himself. Remember II Corinthians says, "He who knew no sin became sin so that you and I might become the righteousness of God." If that doesn't make you hopeful, nothing will. Jesus comes and has authority over despair but that's because He bore our despair. And now Peter says to us in his letter in chapter five, "Cast all your anxieties upon him because . . ." Why? ". . . He cares for you."