

IMPERFECT FAITH
Mark 5:21-43

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Amarillo, Texas
August 10, 2025

Everybody needs saved from something. Everybody is in danger; everybody is broken; everybody is lonely and looking for community. Yes, everybody needs saved from something. Even the people who seem to have it most together -- they are much more like you than you would ever believe. What happens: you compare your inside which is broken and fallen, to someone else's outside which seems picture perfect. Yes, we're all on the path of destruction unless... unless Jesus walks by and saves us.

Mark often intertwines two stories to communicate one message. Remember, we describe this as a "Markan sandwich." He tells one story - the top piece of bread. Then he switches to the second story - the meat in the middle. And then he comes back to the first story for the bottom piece of bread. And just like eating a sandwich, when you take a bite you don't taste just the bread or just the meat in the middle - you taste the savory combination of the two. In the same fashion, Mark serves two stories, one within the other, in order to deliver his message.

Turn to Mark 5:21 for a serving of a Markan sandwich. In verse 21, the reader is introduced to Jesus as He crosses back over to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. We are introduced in verse 22 to

a man with a name - the name Jairus. Notice verse 22, "One of the synagogue officials named Jairus...."

Why am I making so much of his name? Because most of the Markan characters are nameless. Except for the twelve disciples, very few are designated by a name.

Mark wants you to know his name - "named Jairus" - so Jairus' name must mean something. And, indeed, it does. His name means "he awakens." And as we'll see on the bottom piece of bread, the end of this story, Jesus awakens Jairus' daughter from the sleep of death.

The other characters in the sandwich are nameless. The woman with the issue of blood, the daughter of Jairus - both nameless, as usual in Mark. But not Jairus. Mark wants us to know God awakens even the dead.

I find it interesting how he is introduced. "One of the synagogue officials...." A synagogue official would mean the president of the synagogue or a leader of the worship services. "One of" is a clear indication that there is more than one official in each synagogue. In chapter 12, he will introduce us to someone who is "one of the scribes," because there are many scribes.

And just like the scribe seems to be sincere in Mark 12, Jairus does as well.

Interestingly enough, he also describes Judas as “one of the Twelve.”

We have “one of the synagogue officials” who is a man of faith. We have “one of the scribes” who is not far from the kingdom of God, for he asks a sincere question. And, yet, we have “one of the Twelve” who has the betrayer’s heart.

Thus, not all disciples are good. Not all synagogue officials are bad, nor are all scribes. In fact, Jairus throws himself at the feet of this Jewish rabbi in a deed of desperation. The man entreats Jesus, for his daughter “is at the point of death.” Translated literally, he says, “My daughter ‘has it terminally.’ Lay your hands on her, that she may get well and live.”

Actually, the translation is “Lay your hands on her, that she may be saved.” The Greek word is *sōzō*. To be saved is to be delivered from danger or suffering.

In verse 24, Jesus marches off with the man, the synagogue official, to save his daughter from death. And as they are going, the multitude begins to press, trying to get close to the Christ.

That’s the top piece of bread – Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus and begs the rabbi to come to his house to save his dying daughter.

Since you know that we have a Markan sandwich, you know what’s next. This story is going to be interrupted by another story. And the two stories are to be understood, interpreted in stereo. Together, the two stories have one message.

Look at the interruption (v, 25). “And a woman....” That’s starting the second story, the meat in the middle. “And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse....”

Now, it is interesting when you compare Mark’s account of the story with Luke’s version. The message is a little bit different. Luke, himself being a physician, isn’t nearly as down on the docs. Luke does not mention the financial disaster inflicted upon this lady by the medical profession. He simply states, “She could not be healed by anyone.”

This lady had heard that Jesus had great healing power. She was ritually unclean because of her ailment, but was hoping that Jesus might make her clean again. She pushes her way in the crowd, reaching to touch the tassel of His garment. She says (v. 28), “If I just touch His garments, I will be saved.”

Now, you ought to recognize that language from Jairus’ story. “Come and lay hands on my daughter, so she will be saved,” and the woman says, likewise, “If I can but touch His garments, I shall be saved.” Immediately upon touching the garment of God, “her bleeding was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction” (v. 29).

Sometimes you just know when your body is better. It's not unusual after a surgery for someone to say the next day, "Pastor, I can tell the pressure is gone. It is totally different. I am well."

Not only did she know the healing transaction had transpired, so did the Savior. "Who touched Me?" He said. He felt the power going out from him (v. 30).

The disciples respond. "Lord, we're in a crowd. Everybody is trying to touch you. All the pushing and shoving – and You're asking who touched Your garment?" "But Jesus looked around to see the woman who had done this" (v. 32).

Verse 33: "But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him..." – ah, even as Jairus had fallen down before Jesus – "...and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well;' – or literally that same verb, "your faith has saved you." – '...go in peace and be healed of your affliction.'"

To finish this Markan sandwich, we need the bottom piece of bread. Even as Jesus is talking to the woman healed from the issue of blood, word comes that Jairus' daughter has already died. "Why trouble the teacher any more? It's too late."

Jesus overhears the conversation with the synagogue president, and He says, "Don't be afraid, only believe" (v. 36). It is best translated "keep on believing." The same belief that you brought when you asked Me to lay hands on your dying daughter – keep up the faith."

The professional mourners were there (v. 38), weeping loudly. Jesus said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but is asleep." They know dead when they see it – they laugh at the ridiculous words from the rabbi.

He clears out the crowd and enters the room with the child's father, mother, and His own companions (meaning Peter, James, and John). This is one of the few places in the New Testament where the Aramaic is retained – "'*Talitha kum*' he commands the little girl, meaning 'Little girl, I say to you, arise!' And immediately the girl arose and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded."

Twelve years. Sounds familiar, doesn't it, in this Markan message, this Markan sandwich. The woman had had an issue of blood for twelve years, and the little girl was twelve years old.

Jesus tells them to give the girl something to eat, as if it's a sign that this is real. She's not a ghost. Much the same happens to Jesus after His resurrection when He Himself eats a meal of fish.

Let's look at this Markan sandwich. There are a lot of similarities in these two stories. In both, the petitioner seeks salvation (5:23, 38, 34). And in both cases, the person seeking help falls at Jesus' feet (5:22, 33). And both the persons healed are called "daughter" (5:24, 34, 35). In one case the "daughter" has been ill for twelve years, and, in the other case, she is twelve years old (5:25, 42).

Also, both of the female sufferers are ritually unclean, one by the bleeding disorder and the other by death. And yet, in both of these cases, uncleanness is boldly ignored – in one case by the woman who touches the garment of Jesus, and in the other case by Jesus who touches the girl's corpse.

Fear is mentioned in both healings (5:33, 36). And sufficient faith is the factor (5:34, 36). I want us to notice a few things about these two stories.

I. No anonymous disciples.

The woman thinks she can sneak away with a healing – simply touch the hem of His garment and walk away well in silence, hoping she can slink back into the anonymity of the large crowd.

Why does Jesus call attention to what she has done? Has she not suffered enough public embarrassment? Could He not let her go in peace with a silent wink – “You’re healed. I know, I felt it”? But the singling her out signifies His individual care for her. He will not allow her to slip away and remain anonymous. He forces the issue so that when she leaves healed, she will leave knowing that the one who healed her knows her and cares for her. She is to Him, by His own words, a daughter. She is worth taking time with.

Sometimes we’d like to remain anonymous. The woman would have liked that. Even the disciples – “Why are You asking who touched You? There are too many people. Let it go.” But Jesus allows no anonymous disciples.

Sometimes when something big – I mean really big – happens to us, we’d just as soon no one know it. Now, I’m not advocating you play the lottery, but if you win, do you want your name announced?

A South Carolina man who won the Powerball lottery chose to collect his winnings anonymously. The man, according to NBC, simply danced in his kitchen and initially only told his dog. His ticket, at the time, was the fourth largest jackpot in Powerball history, being worth up to \$399.4 million. He bought ten \$2 tickets from a gas station near Columbia, South Carolina. As news outlets waited for the winner to come forward, he stayed nameless and faceless. (Fabien Tepper, “Powerball winner: Should lottery winners remain anonymous?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 9/23/13)

But only a few states will allow the winners to remain anonymous. Lotteries object – basically they want the publicity stunt of handing a huge check to a person, not to a lawyer or an accountant for a trust or a LLC.

The Washington Post reported a similar incident when a nameless 82-year-old widower from Southeast Washington won a Powerball jackpot worth \$144 million. Lottery officials were openly disappointed being unable to present a winner for the cameras beside a mock check. (Nikita Stewart and Hamil R. Harris, “As the Powerball Jackpot Is Claimed, Mystery Remains: The Winner’s Name,” *The Washington Post*, 5/5/2009)

More and more winners are hiding behind trusts and limited liability companies. Can you blame them? The lawyer for the anonymous man said he himself received 82 phone calls on the first day from people wanting this or needing that.

While lottery winners might have found a way to remain behind the scenes, you can't hide from the Lord. "Who touched Me?" he said.

Have you ever noticed this little subtle clue about the powers of Jesus in Mark? Look at verse 32, "He looked around and saw the woman who had done this." The one who touched Jesus was anonymous, but He immediately was looking for a woman. He knew. There was no way to hide, no way to be anonymous.

Christianity is something that is meant to be seen and heard. As someone has well said, there can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship or the discipleship destroys the secrecy. One's Christianity should be perfectly visible to all. (FBC Amarillo, it's hard to hide here.)

Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, described what he thought to be the greatest threat to church. He said it's not Communism, atheism, or materialism. The greatest threat to the church is Christians trying to sneak into heaven incognito, without ever sharing their faith.

Not only are there no anonymous disciples, but

II. No limits to His power.

Jesus has just exercised a demon from a man that no one can control. Now He heals a woman that no physician can cure. And then He restores life to a girl when all hope is gone. "Why bother the Teacher anymore?" they said. "She's already dead."

Faith in Jesus can endure even in the face of death.

There are no limits to the power of our Lord.

III. No commonality to His followers except the need of a Savior.

We have two main characters – Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood. Could they be any different from one another?

Jairus has a name. She is nameless.

Jairus is at the top of the social, economic, and religious spectrum. She's at the bottom of the food chain.

He is a male. She is a female.

He is a synagogue official. She is ritually unclean and excluded from the religious community.

He has a family and a large household. She, presumably, lives in isolation because of her condition.

He is rich. She's impoverished from the payment of doctors' fees.

The only thing that these two have in common is that they both need a Savior.

I'm all for inclusion. When you're gathering around Jesus, it doesn't matter who you are. You don't have to promote diversity. Diversity just is – for every man and every woman, from every race and every rank, needs a Savior. Follow Jesus and you'll find yourself, automatically, in a diverse crowd.

It's not artificial in church. It's authentic. It's who we are. The only thing we have in common is that we've all said Jesus is Lord. We're all sinners in need of a Savior.

Notice again verse 23. "Lay your hands on my daughter that she may be saved." Or verse 28, "If I just touch His garments, I shall be saved." Or verse 34, where Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith has saved you."

Both have run out of options – one with a dying daughter and one at the end of her rope with disease.

In fact, the saying "Your faith has saved you," is thought by some scholars to be a baptismal formula. Thinking forward to passages by Paul, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9). It's the same language. You shall be cured. You shall be made well. You shall be saved.

IV. No perfect faith.

Faith can be imperfect. It can be bold. It can be halting. It can be brave. It can be laced with fear and trepidation. What counts for it to be effective is for it to be directed rightly to Jesus and to God. What saved this father's daughter and this woman was that their faith was directed toward Jesus.

This sort of sufficient faith is persistent in overcoming all obstacles. The woman has to work her way through the crowd. The man has to believe, in spite of his daughter's death. A sufficient faith is embodied in action. Faith is something that can be seen, like men digging through a roof in Mark to bring their paralytic friend to Jesus. It kneels. It begs. It reaches out to touch.

Neither the man nor the woman identify Jesus as a Messiah, or even a prophet. They are unclear as to precisely who He is. But they believe He has the power to heal and are willing to put their faith to the test.

When you said "yes" to Jesus, I bet your faith was imperfect. I know mine was. But it was sufficient.

There is a final thing I want you to see.

V. No death when God commands.

Jesus declares the girl's death to be merely sleep. It's not a cagey medical diagnosis. It's not a comforting euphemism. Rather, He calls it sleep because He wills, in this particular case, to make death as impermanent as sleep by the raising of the girl to life. Ultimately, for everyone here, we are like Jairus. Our faith is in God's power to conquer death. And ultimately, in His own resurrection, we see He is indeed the Lord of the living, and at His very command the dead in Christ shall rise first.

A Markan sandwich. Two stories – one message. When we're desperate and have sufficient faith, we will be saved.

Let us pray.