

Triumphing Over Tragedy Matthew 9:18-26

Yesterday my son took me to see “The “Avengers” as a Father’s Day gift, the fantasy movie about all the Marvel comic book characters teaming up to save the world from evil and destruction. In this three hour movie there is one action filled scene after another featuring different superheroes exercising their unique powers to perform superhuman feats that defy the laws of nature.

Believe it or not, as I was watching the movie I was reminded quite a bit of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which describes the events and activities of a superhero named Jesus who exercised His unique powers to perform superhuman feats that defied logic and the laws of nature.

Only this Jesus is not a figment of someone’s imagination. He is real and what He did really happened. And what we are going to see Him do today might be the most spectacular thing He’s done so far in our study of Matthew. We read in chapter 9, **verses 18-19.** ¹⁸ *While [Jesus] was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”* ¹⁹ *And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.*

We are told in both Mark’s and Luke’s accounts that this man’s name was Jairus, and that he was the ruler of the local synagogue. This was an important position, and the one who held it was usually well-educated and highly esteemed, for the synagogue was the hub of the community and served as both the civic and religious center of town. In addition to being a scholar and a teacher of the law, Jairus was likely the local magistrate, whose judgments and opinions were influential.

Though Jesus’ popularity among the general population was at its peak, many of the religious leaders in Galilee were coming to regard Him as a dangerous heretic. But on this occasion, a religious leader comes forward and actually kneels before Jesus, a posture that no Jew, much less a Jewish ruler, would assume unless he considered the One before whom he knelt to have some kind of divine quality or connection.

Obviously, Jairus had heard, if not seen for himself, what Jesus had been doing throughout Galilee on behalf of those who were in dire straits. Jesus had healed the sick, cured diseases, cast out demons, calmed the storm, and forgiven sin. And now he himself was in crisis. His own daughter had become ill to the point of death.

We don’t know whether Jairus had been favorably disposed toward Jesus prior to his daughter’s illness, but sometimes it takes a crisis to get us to truly consider who Jesus is. For all too often you’ll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you’ve got. It is desperation that drives many people to the Savior. Desperation is the fertile soil where seeds of faith can germinate.

And notice the faith of Jairus, the girl’s father. He says to Jesus, *“My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”* There is no record of Jesus raising anyone from the dead prior to this in His ministry. He had done many things that proved He is sovereign over sickness, disease, Satan, sin, and creation. But ultimate proof of his absolute sovereignty is whether He has power and authority over death. Because death is our ultimate enemy! Death is irreversible!

But Jairus seems to have no doubt that if only Jesus could lay His hand on His daughter, she would be raised from the dead. And that is extraordinary faith. Because He believed Jesus to do something that had never been done before. He believed Jesus to do

the impossible!

I'm pretty sure that Jesus was delighted and impressed by that faith, because we are told in **verse 19** that He, "*rose and followed him, with his disciples.*"

Jesus' immediate response to Jairus' plea for help is evidence that He was, in fact, going to raise his daughter from the dead. He wasn't going there to make a diagnosis of the girl's condition, or to see if the circumstances were favorable for this kind of healing. Jesus got up and followed Jairus to his house because He was determined to grant Jairus' request and raise her from the dead. And the reason He was granting this request was not because Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue and, therefore, was entitled to special privileges. He went because of Jairus' extraordinary faith. Jairus believed Him to do the impossible, and Jesus was going to oblige him.

Here's the principle: Jesus is delighted to respond to the *faith* of those who *believe* Him to do the *impossible*. I'm not sure there is anything that pleases Jesus more than radical faith. What I mean by *radical faith* is confidence in Jesus to do what *only* He can do. Confidence in Jesus to defy logic and the laws of nature, to shatter conventional wisdom, and to reverse the irreversible.

I'm not saying that Jesus will *always* respond to radical faith by doing exactly what we ask Him to do. I'm not saying we don't ever need to go to the doctor or we shouldn't use medicine when it is prescribed to us by a physician. I'm simply saying that Jesus delights in extreme faith, radical faith—faith to believe Him to do the impossible. And I would submit to you that we often forfeit opportunities to be the recipients of His power and blessing because we too quickly rely on conventional methods or lean on our own understanding.

After Jesus and His disciples got up and began following Jairus to his home, we are told in Mark's Gospel that "*a great crowd followed him...*" (5:24), and Luke tells us there were so many people that they "*pressed around him*" (8:42). This is an important piece of information in light of what happened next.

Verses 20-21. *²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well."*

It might be a tendency for a casual student of the Bible to read this and interpret it as an "interruption" to the main plot of the story about Jairus and his daughter—to view it as a subplot or a parenthesis. I assure you, however, that it was not a parenthesis for this woman, nor, as we will find out in a moment, was it a parenthesis for Jesus. This event is every bit as significant as what was happening in Jairus' family.

In the throng of people that surrounded Jesus on His way to Jairus' home, a woman who had suffered with a chronic health problem made a calculated decision, because she, too, was desperate. What is described by Matthew as "a discharge of blood," was most likely a condition known today as *menorrhagia*, a disease in which the menstrual flow is abnormally prolonged, caused by a hormonal imbalance or abnormalities of the uterus. It's a condition that produces a lot of discomfort and fatigue.

But the condition was all the more difficult for a Jewish woman since the bleeding would have made her ceremonially unclean, and would have excluded her from normal social and religious activities, since others making contact with her would also become unclean (Lev. 15:25-30). And we are told that she suffered with this condition for twelve years, and that during those twelve years she spent all her money seeking medical help, to no avail. In fact, Mark tells us that she had gone from bad to worse.

So here is a woman who suffers from chronic fatigue, who is completely broke, who has an embarrassing disease that has made her unmarriageable and therefore unable to have children, and who has been stigmatized and marginalized in her community because, literally, no one can touch her. She's desperate.

Matthew tells us that she deliberately came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of His garment. As I said, this was a calculated decision. Mark tells us that she had heard reports about Jesus (5:27), implying that she had probably never seen Him before. Whether Jesus was now in her hometown, or whether she travelled to this place to see Him, we do not know. What we do know is that she believed that if she could only touch His garment—even the fringe of His garment—she would be healed.

Which is an indication that her faith is just as extraordinary as Jairus' faith. Because she believed she didn't even need to ask Jesus or touch Jesus to be healed. She didn't even need to get His attention! She just needed to touch the fringe of His robe.

The "fringe" is likely one of the four tassels that were attached with blue cords to the corners of the typical garment worn by Jewish men. According to Numbers and Deuteronomy (15:37-42 and 22:12), those tassels served as reminders to obey God's commands and be holy to the Lord (Wilkins, 371).

We are told in Mark's Gospel that as soon as she touched this tassel, *"immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease"* (5:29). Mark also includes some other information that Matthew does not. He says, 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.*

What I love about Mark's account is that the disciples were incredulous when Jesus asked, "Who touched my garments?" Because of the jostling crowd, many people had touched His garments. It's likely that His elbows and shoulders and thighs and calves had brushed against several people in that crowd. But none of *them* were healed. Only when this bleeding woman touched the tassel of His robe did He perceive that power had gone out of Him.

Which can only mean one thing: It was the faith of this woman that activated the power of Jesus to heal her disease. That's what made *her* touch different than anyone else's. She had deliberately touched His garment with the intent of being healed by Him. And I think we can assume from what is said in the text that she never planned on asking Him to heal her; that she never intended to touch Him in a way that would arouse His attention. It is apparent that all along she was only planning to touch His garment precisely so He *wouldn't* notice. So she could remain anonymous.

And yet when Jesus felt the power go out from Him He insisted on finding out who touched Him and making it public. Why? I want to suggest three reasons: Jesus notices the faith of people who prefer to remain anonymous. I think there is encouragement in this story for people who are by nature timid and reticent. Those who don't want to be noticed, those who prefer to be behind the scenes or remain in the shadows, have exactly the same access to Jesus' power and blessing as do those who make their presence known. Because Jesus notices them, too. And their faith is every bit as efficacious.

I think it is very likely that when we get to heaven we will discover that more work was

done for the kingdom, more people were saved, and more miracles were performed because of the faith of quiet, unassuming people, than by those who served Jesus in the spotlight.

Second, I believe Jesus knew the nature of her affliction when He healed her and all the problems and challenges it had caused her, and by making her healing public He removed the stigma of her physical condition which had kept her on the fringes of her community. By making this public Jesus removed her disgrace and facilitated her reentry into normal social and religious life. She is now able to go to the synagogue, to the Jewish festivals, to public events and activities and be a full-fledged participant, without any restrictions or limitations.

And third, Jesus wanted the crowd to know—He wants us to know—that He is never too *busy* or too *preoccupied* to respond to the needs of desperate people who put their *trust* in Him. Here He was, going to the house of a man whose daughter had just died. He was on His way to a crisis, and there was a sense of urgency about getting there quickly. But the encounter with this woman along the way was every bit as important to Him, because she was every bit as important as the synagogue ruler. Like I said earlier, her story is not a parenthesis in the main plot of Jairus' family crisis. Her story is just as significant and just as remarkable, because her faith is just as extraordinary.

Look what Jesus says to her in **verse 22**. *²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.*

By the way, though Matthew's purpose in writing His Gospel to prove that Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah, the sovereign ruler of God's kingdom, His record of Jesus' words to this woman are revealing. In saying, "take heart," and then calling her "daughter," a term of endearment, Jesus demonstrates His compassion and kindness. He acknowledges her pain and her shame, and wants her to know that not only does He understand her, He is pleased with her.

Moving on to **verses 23-26**. *²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.*

In our culture, when someone dies, it is customary for family and friends to visit the grieving loved ones in their home, but to be solemn. Tears are often shed, but visitors usually do so quietly, and they use hushed tones when they speak. It is not unusual to sit in silence for extended periods of time, and emotional outbursts are frowned upon, lest they upset the immediate family.

That was not so in the Jewish community of Jesus' day, nor most Middle Eastern cultures even today. It was normal and perfectly appropriate for guests of the grief-stricken to weep loudly and to wail for prolonged periods of time. In fact, the volume by the mourners was considered to be an indication of the prominence of the deceased. The more loved the louder the mourning. So there were actually professional mourners in the day who could be hired to perform—with flutes and vocal cords—so neighbors and community members would know that the departed was truly loved and truly important.

It is this kind of scenario that Matthew is describing by using the word "commotion." When Jesus encountered these mourners at Jairus' house they were mourning loudly, and Jesus tells them to go away. Then He tells them that she is not dead, but sleeping.

When He said this the mourners laughed at Jesus, because, according to Luke's account, they knew she was dead (8:53). They laughed because they were offended that

Jesus, who had just arrived and had not even examined the girl yet, could be so dismissive of their diagnosis.

But Jesus' statement that she is only sleeping wasn't meant to be taken literally. Sleep is a euphemism for death, and Jesus used it because He knew what He intended to do. Her death was temporary. Her death was like a long nap.

Verses 25-26. ²⁵ *But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.* ²⁶ *And the report of this went through all that district.*

In Mark's account more detail is given. ⁴¹ *Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, 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.*

By calling her "little girl," another term of endearment, and by taking her hand Jesus once again displayed His compassion, kindness, and gentleness. In commanding her to rise, Jesus displayed His absolute sovereignty. Notice, He did not say, "In the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, arise!" That was how Elijah and Elisha raised the widow's sons. Jesus simply said, "I say to you, arise!" This was His power and His authority that produced this resurrection.

As I said earlier, Jesus had healed the sick, cured diseases, cast out demons, calmed the storm, and forgiven sin. Those were all astounding accomplishments that proved His sovereignty over the problems of mankind. But death is mankind's greatest problem, because death has been, up until this point, irreversible. It is the one thing from which mankind has never been able to recover. Until now. This story proves that Jesus the Messiah is sovereign over death, and, therefore, can reverse the irreversible. And if He can do this, He can do anything!

I want to remind you what precipitated these mighty acts from the Lord Jesus. Jesus wasn't just going around Galilee randomly healing people. He was responding to desperate people who believed that He could and would heal them or their loved ones. It was their desperation that drove them to the Savior and compelled them to boldly ask Him to do the impossible, or to reach out and touch a tassel on His robe to do what no one else could do.

Desperation is the fertile soil where seeds of faith can germinate. So, brothers and sisters, if you are desperate you are in a good place in your life. I'm not saying it's a pleasant or comfortable place. I'm not saying it's not painful or heartbreaking. I'm saying it's a good place because it can drive you to the Savior and compel you to put all your hope and confidence in Him alone. Because you'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got, and when Jesus is all you've got then you know that He's all you need.

If this is true, then it's a good idea to pray that those loved ones of ours who have yet to discover Jesus and be touched by His grace and power, become desperate. Even if it means they have to experience a lot of pain or go through a really hard time. Because the best thing that could ever happen to them—the only thing that can really cure them and save them—is an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I told you at the beginning that as I was watching the Avengers yesterday I was reminded of our real superhero named Jesus who exercised His unique powers to perform superhuman feats that defied logic and the laws of nature. Ray Scheller sometimes wears a T-shirt that makes me smile. Jesus is sitting on a bench surrounded by all the Who's who in the superhero world, and they are listening intently to Him. And the caption reads, "And that's how I saved the world."

“Triumphing Over Tragedy”
Matthew 9:18-26

Main Idea: Jesus is able to heal anyone who has faith in him, no matter what their social status or how dire their condition

Tragedy in the Ruler’s Home (18-19)

The ruler’s desperate request (18)

The ruler’s enormous faith (18)

Jesus’ immediate response (19)

Principle: Jesus is delighted to respond to the **faith** of those **believe** Him to do the **impossible**

A Necessary Interruption (20-22)

The woman’s illness (20a)

The woman’s bold faith (20b-21)

Jesus’ compassionate response (22)

Principle: Jesus is never too **busy** or too **preoccupied** to **notice** you and **respond** to your needs

Triumph in the Ruler’s Home (23-26)

Hope encounters hopelessness (23-24)

Jesus confronts the mourners (23-24a)

The mourners scoff at Jesus’ presumption (24b)

The girl is raised from the dead (25)

Word spreads

Principle: Jesus the Messiah is **sovereign** over **death**, and therefore can **reverse** the **irreversible**