

THE WEAKNESS OF THE WORLD

by Ray C. Stedman

Today we want to look at three incidents in the life of the Servant of God, as Mark records his ministry -- the intermingled incidents of the raising from the death of the daughter of Jairus and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, as recorded in the latter half of Chapter 5, and then the second visit of our Lord to his hometown of Nazareth, in the opening words of Chapter 6.

These incidents close a section in the gospel of Mark that we have been looking at for some time now. The theme of this section is the effects of popularity. This was the season of our Lord's greatest popularity, when people came to him from all over the land -- east, west, south, and north, from within the borders of Israel and outside those borders. They thronged to him and pressed upon him and pursued him everywhere he went. To many today it seems to be a mark of success that a person has a great popular following. But Mark is careful to detail these incidents for us so we might see that this was not a help to the ministry of Jesus, but a hindrance. We have seen some of the effects of the popularity of our Lord: the opposition it awakens; the dimming of light which necessarily follows -- our Lord had to begin to speak in parables instead of speaking directly as before; the physical exhaustion it produces -- worn-out and weary, he boarded a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee, as we saw in our last study together; the fickleness of response represented by the crowd on the other side of the sea, who asked him to leave their neighborhood because he healed the man with the demons.

Today we come to these incidents which illustrate the impotence of nature, the weakness of the world, the inability of natural life to supply the needs of suffering hearts. We have two sufferers in this account: Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, whose problem was fear and sorrow at the death of his daughter; and the woman who for twelve years endured the pain and shame and heartache of an issue of blood. We look first at the coming of Jairus, beginning with Verse 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. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, 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." And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. {Mark 5:21-24 RSV}

It must have been very difficult for Jairus to come to Jesus, as Mark indicates. He tells us that Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue. Therefore certain forces must have hindered him from coming. At this time the synagogues were practically closed to the ministry of Jesus. He had healed so many people on the Sabbath day, and had offended the Pharisees so much that they had cut him off from this ministry within the synagogue. Now he was out in the open countryside, preaching on the hillsides. Yet here is one of the rulers, the chief man of the most prominent synagogue of Capernaum -- what would correspond to the "Chairman of the Board of Elders" of that synagogue -- who comes to Jesus and beseeches him to heal his daughter. I am sure he had to overcome problems of pride, prejudice, and even of shame and embarrassment, before he could come to this itinerant teacher who had been rejected by the leading scholars and teachers of that day, this "tub-thumping rabble-rouser" who went around from village to village teaching things which were upsetting the people and, in the eyes of the Pharisees at least, often contrary to the Law of Moses. Now Jairus had to leave his privileged position and come and fall at Jesus' feet and beseech him for help.

So there were certain forces which hindered his coming, but there was an overriding fear which drove him to Jesus -- the fact that his twelve-year-old little girl lay sick, almost ready to die, and he knew it. Here was a desperate father. Those of us who are parents know that there is no agony like that you feel when your little one is threatened with death. If you have ever stood by a crib, as I have, watching a little head tossing in a high fever, you know something of the terrible clutch of fear which comes to your heart in those moments.

I will never forget the time a number of years ago when my wife and I were driving through Oregon with our little daughter, Susan. She had developed a fever the night before, when we were staying in a motel, but it didn't seem serious. As we drove along, all of a sudden, as she lay in her mother's arms, she went into convulsions. Her eyes turned up, her body began to jerk, and she obviously was in great danger. I remember how my heart clutched. I stopped the car, grabbed her, stumbled across the road to a farmhouse which happened to be there. It was about six o'clock in the morning, but I thundered on the door. A lady came to the door, and I said, "My daughter is very sick -- she's in convulsions. Do you have a bathtub where we can put her in warm water?" The lady was so taken aback she hardly knew what to say. She motioned down the hall, and without waiting for any word I pushed the door open, went down the hall, and started running water in the tub. We found out later that this family had the only bathtub and also the only phone in that area for miles around. We called a doctor and arranged to take the baby to him. It all turned out all right, but I have never forgotten that moment when it looked as though she were going to die.

This is what drove Jairus, this agonized father, to Jesus -- the fear that this little one, who had blessed their home and filled it with sunshine for twelve years, was to be taken from them.

But there is also evidence of the faith which drew him. Mark is careful to tell us that when he came, he fell down at Jesus' feet and said, "My daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." This man, prominent though he was, nevertheless knew that there was power in Jesus, and it was that which drew him. He forgot his pride and his prejudice, and he came and asked for help.

At this point Mark leaves this story and turns to the interruption which came as Jesus and Jairus were on their way to the house together. Our Lord responded instantly to this man's agony and went with him. On the way, Mark tells us, they met a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years. There is an interesting emphasis on the number, twelve, here. The little girl was twelve years old; the woman had a flow of blood for twelve years.

And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. {Mark 5:25-26 RSV}

Mark is careful to tell us three things about this woman: her condition, her cure, and her confession before Jesus. Look at her condition. She was suffering from what doctors would call a vaginal hemorrhage, a continual flow of blood which not only gave her great distress and pain, but also rendered her ceremonially unclean so that she was ostracized from society. She had to keep her distance from everyone, could not mingle with people. She was almost like a leper. People were forbidden to touch her while she was in this condition. She was forbidden to attend services in the temple or in the synagogue. So for twelve years she had been denied all the comfort and solace of the services of the people of God. She was ostracized, separated, isolated, and in pain and distress from this unending flow of blood.

To make matters even worse, she had spent all her money on doctors, and had not been helped a bit. Some of us can sympathize. Many doctors are dedicated, marvelous men who have done great work. But there are times when doctors fail, and this was such a time. Mark seems to imply that none of them had the grace to tell her they could not help her; they simply took her money, but left her unchanged.

When she came to Jesus, something wonderful happened:

She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. {Mark 5:27-29 RSV}

We do not know how she had heard of Jesus, but the reports had come to her and her hopes had been awakened. Here was One who, after these long years, might be able to do something about her tragic condition. And when her hopes were awakened, her faith was aroused, and she became convinced that Jesus

could indeed help her. Now, she had a problem, because she could not come like anyone else and talk to him. She was unclean, and it was forbidden for her to get close to anyone or to talk to them. She knew she could not come the usual route. But her faith was aroused to the point that she said, "If I can just touch him -- just touch him -- I'll be made well." So, when she saw the crowd pressing all around him, she was determined to get through. In desperation she pushed her way through the crowd, ignoring the fact that she was rendering others unclean by that action. Finally she had wormed her way through until she could touch the hem of his garment. The moment she laid hold of it, she felt the issue of blood stop, and she knew that she was healed.

There is a wonderful picture here, in that this woman, with a touch of faith, draws power from Jesus, whereas all the rest of the crowd, pressing around him on every side, touching him many times in the course of the journey, were not receiving anything from him. In fact, the disciples commented on this, as Mark goes on to tell us:

And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, "Who touched my garments?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." {Mark 5:30-34 RSV}

The fact that the Lord knew something had happened to him when she touched him is, in some measure, indicative of the cost of his ministry. He felt power go forth from him; he felt weaker. He was noticeably exhausted by this occurrence -- to some degree, at least. This is the first clue we have had so far in the Gospels as to what it cost Jesus to heal people and to minister to them as he so frequently did. No wonder he was so physically exhausted at the end of the day! It cost him something. Power was going from him; it was a demanding ministry.

I would not want to compare this directly with the ministry of preaching, but I know there is some similarity. An hour of preaching is very demanding. I used to know a dear old Bible teacher, Dr. Walter Wilson, of Kansas City. He was a medical doctor, and then he became an outstanding Bible teacher. He died just a couple of years ago, in his nineties. The last time I saw him, Dr. Wilson told me how he had witnessed to Buffalo Bill, and had led Buffalo Bill's wife to the Lord. I do not know how he arrived at his figures, but as a medical doctor he had calculated that an hour of preaching is equal in stress and demand to working hard at physical labor for half a day, or working as an executive in an office for a full day. Something of that demand is what Jesus felt here. He felt power go out from him, he felt weaker, indicating something of the cost of his ministry.

This incident indicates, too, that the healing was really not done by Jesus; it was done by the Father. Our Lord did not even know it was happening. It was not his willful choice that this woman be healed. She touched him, and the touch of faith drew from him the power to heal. But he did not even know it until it happened. This is confirmation of what Jesus himself tells us -- that it was not he who did the healing or the speaking; it was the Father who dwelt in him. An all-seeing God watched this woman push her way through the crowd, saw the faith in her heart. And when, in the midst of that crowd pressing all around Jesus and touching him in a dozen different ways, he saw this woman reach out and touch his garment, instantly the power of God flowed through the life of Jesus and healed her. This is what Jesus said: "It is not I who do the works, but the Father who dwells in me," {cf, John 14:10}.

Yet, having said that, it is clear that our Lord did have some part in this, because when the woman, knowing that he was looking for her, fell down and told the whole truth, he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go [literally] *into* peace, and be healed of your disease." Why would he tell her to be healed when she had already been healed? The idea expressed by the verb tense he used is, "Be continually healed." That is, this was continuance in health that he was granting her.

This is the only time recorded in the Scriptures that he ever used this term "daughter." He was very tender with this woman because, despite her shame and embarrassment, she blurted out the whole truth in front of the

crowd. I think that is the ground upon which Jesus continued this healing, made it permanent. She told him the truth. When he looked around for someone, she fell down before him and told him what her problem was, how long she had had it, how unclean she was, how difficult it was to find access to him, how determined she was. She simply put the problem right back into his hands. And immediately his response was to make permanent her healed condition. I believe that if she had not responded in that way, if she had tried to lose herself in the crowd and seek anonymity, she would have had that disease back within hours. This may explain why there are failures of some modern purported "healings."

At this point we return to the story of Jairus and his daughter. Mark tells us,

While he was still speaking [while Jesus was speaking to the woman], there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. {Mark 5:35-40a RSV}

This whole account, to this point, is designed by Mark to stress the finality of death. Here you see that awful moment when death takes over and human efforts end. Perhaps you, like I have been involved when someone has been seized with a heart attack, or has almost drowned, and emergency efforts are being made to revive him. The paramedic squad is there. Somebody is attempting resuscitation. Everybody gathers around, tense and excited. Everyone is concentrating on the effort to revive and restore this person. Then the moment arrives when the doctor says, "He's gone." And everybody stops, efforts to revive the person cease. They give up, because death has set in. Many of you have felt that sense of finality when you have had to close the coffin on a loved one, walk away, and begin a new life. This is what Jairus felt at this moment.

Can you imagine his impatience, as he is waiting through this encounter with the woman? He stands first on one leg and then the other, waiting for Jesus to get on with it, to get to the house where his daughter is waiting. Yet he is fearful to interrupt Jesus in this obviously needy situation. Finally, just as they are ready to move on, the word comes, "Your daughter is dead," and his heart sinks.

As they come to the house the mourners have already begun their wailing cry. It was customary in those days to hire mourners to bemoan the death of an individual. There was a terrible frenzy about it. They would actually rip their garments apart, tear out their hair, and cry out with loud shrieks and howls. But even though there was some degree of professionalism about this, it represents the terrible sense of despair which people -- even in Israel -- had come to in the face of death. There is none of the stoic's resignation here, such as you would have seen among the Greeks, but this awful, horrible, crying out, this frenzy of despair, this sense of hopelessness at the finality of death's cold grip.

But in contrast to that, look at the conduct of Jesus as he meets their cynical laughter, and as he acts throughout this account. First, he reassures Jairus at the moment the message reaches him. "Don't be afraid," he says, "only believe." Once again we see that fear is to be met by faith. Faith is the answer to fear -- believing that God knows what he is doing. This is always the answer to fear. "Only believe." Then he carefully selects Peter and James and John, and orders them to come with him, because he wants them to see something they will never forget.

And from this moment on, as we will see, Peter's account of this episode is woven through Mark's record. Even the very language Jesus used at the bedside of the little girl is repeated, for Peter never forgot it. Mark does not even put it in Greek, but leaves it in the Aramaic -- the very words Jesus spoke, as Peter related them to him. He records the incident which comes after her resurrection. Jesus said to the people, "Give her something to eat." Peter was amazed at this -- that the Lord Jesus would think so tenderly of her as to remember her need for food after such an ordeal.

As they come to the house, Jesus says to the people, in their crying, frenzied activity, "Why are you carrying

on like this? She's not dead, she's asleep." We almost feel like joining them as they laugh at him. They thought he was crazy, that he should talk that way. And yet, who has the truer view of death, Jesus or man? Remember that he said the same thing when he was told of Lazarus: "He is sleeping." Again and again he refers to death as a sleep, when it involves a believer. Death is not what it appears to us, when belief and faith are present. It is merely temporary. It is nothing more serious, as far as the believer is concerned, than going to sleep. What a comfort those words have been to so many who have come themselves to the edge of death and have realized that all they were doing was really going to sleep, as Jesus has said. Mark continues the account:

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. Taking her by the hand he said to her, Talitha cumi; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and walked; for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were overcome with amazement. {Mark 5:40b-42 RSV}

Jesus puts out all the people except the father and mother, and Peter and James and John, and together they go in to the quiet and still corpse. This father and mother are brokenhearted, but Jesus walks to the side of the little girl and, taking her by the hand, says in Aramaic, Talitha cumi, i.e., "Little lamb, arise." And somewhere, wherever that spirit had gone, it heard those words of Jesus, and came back into that body, which began to flush with health and strength and life again. He raised her up, and she walked around the room, to the amazement of all who were there.

Now, why did Jesus do that? Well, it was not for the little girl's sake. He called her back to pain, heartache, worry weariness, and ultimate death once again. He did it for the sake of the father and mother, to assuage their agony of heart. He responded to their sorrow and restored this little girl.

"Well," you say, "that's fine. I read this story of how he healed the woman and raised the little girl. But he didn't do that for me. I'm sick, and he hasn't healed me. My loved ones are in the grave, though I wanted them back, too. Why doesn't he respond like that today?" What is the answer to that?

The answer is: it is evident from this account that Jesus did not heal the woman and he did not raise the child in order to encourage us to expect the same thing today. This is why he strictly charged that no one should know this, as Mark tells us:

And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. {Mark 5:43 RSV}

He did not want this broadcast all around, so that he would get an invitation to every funeral held in Palestine for the next five years! No, he wanted us to learn something else from this. He healed this woman, and he raised this child, in order that we might have a new view of sickness and death, a view that the world will never share, a view that will keep us steady in the midst of this kind of weakness and pressure, will hold us peaceful and calm in the midst of these kinds of hours.

I want to illustrate this with a quote from Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the great English expositor of Scripture. Perhaps you have read some of his work. His ministry has meant a great deal to me and has taught me much about expounding the Scriptures, though I never met him. There was a time when his first-born daughter lay at the point of death. Years later speaking on this incident of the raising of Jairus' daughter, he said these words:

I can hardly speak of this matter without becoming personal and reminiscent, remembering a time forty years ago when my own first lassie lay at the point of death, dying. I called for Him then, and He came, and surely said to our troubled hearts, "Fear not, believe only." He did not say, "She shall be made whole." She was not made whole, on the earthly plane; she passed away into the life beyond. But He did say to her, "Talitha cumi", i.e., "Little lamb, arise." But in her case that did not mean, "Stay on the earth level"; it meant that He needed her, and He took her to be with Himself She has been with Him for all these years, as we measure time here, and I have missed her every day. But His word, "Believe only," has been the strength of all the passing years.

This is what Jesus intends for us to learn from this account -- that He is able to meet the suffering of the heart, whatever its cause, when the world's resources are brought to an end. All this is highlighted for us in the brief

account we have next, in the opening words of Chapter 6:

He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. {Mark 6:1-6 RSV}

We can gather up the meaning of this whole account in just a few words: limited views mean limited lives. That is, if your view of life is so narrow and crabbed, so withered and shrunken as to include nothing but what you can see and feel and taste and smell and hear and reason, then your life is going to be horribly deprived and poverty-stricken. This is how it was in Nazareth. Jesus had been in Nazareth the year before. They tried to kill him on that occasion, because he would not do what they wanted. Now he comes back again and teaches in the synagogue, and they are astonished. They ask the right questions: "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands!" For reports had come to them.

But their answers to their own questions are horribly limited. "Who is this? Is this not the carpenter? Why, he made the table in our house. I remember when we used to feed him tea and sandwiches for lunch when he came to help us build the house where I live! He was just a carpenter! And his brothers and sisters live here -- we know the whole family! Why, he couldn't be this powerful a man!" And they did the incredible -- they took refuge in that final resort of all weak and small minds -- they ridiculed him. They took offense at him, and began to discount all he had done and said: "He can't be anything, because we know him. We know his beginnings, his family, where he came from."

Therefore Jesus pointed out to them that this is so characteristic of fallen human nature. There was no recognition of his worth, no honor accorded him in his own home town. And as a result, there was no mighty work done there. He responded to the few who had faith, but there was nothing the town could boast of. And is it not amazing that through all these centuries, though Nazareth has never been forgotten as the town in which Jesus grew up, yet to this very day it is regarded in Palestine with some sense of embarrassment. Nothing honorable has ever been associated with Nazareth, other than the fact that Jesus grew up there. They missed their great opportunity.

What is this all saying -- this entire account of the healing of the woman, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the reception given him by the people of Nazareth? It is saying to us today "Lift up your eyes and look beyond the visible to the realities of God. Live in the full dimensions of life, as God intended life to be." Life can never be explained entirely in terms of the natural. Its resources come to an end. Its ability to help us soon disappears. We are left impoverished and despairing if all we have to depend on are natural resources, natural power. But God is rich in grace, rich in power, rich in inward strength and sympathy, and his cry to us is, "No longer be unbelieving, but believe and have faith that I am at work, and I will enrich your life beyond your wildest dreams." As time goes on, in his own way, according to his own schedule, and through the processes of pain and toil and trouble, God will bring a depth of enrichment to you that you cannot possibly measure.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this beautiful reminder of this lowly One of Galilee and Nazareth, whom now we know to be Lord of all the earth, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the One who controls all the events of our day, who brings them about to accomplish his purposes, who is in control of each event of our individual lives and who is able to touch us. Teach us, Lord, to respond with the touch of faith -- not the thronging of admiration, but the touch of faith -- to this Blessed One who, now in our midst, is ready to meet our need. Though in any

crowd many are thronging, let there be some, Lord, who reach out and, with that individual hand of faith, lay hold of Jesus, that all the healing of his life and the glory of his heart may come into that life and heart, and bring sunshine in the midst of darkness, healing in the midst of death. We ask in his name, Amen.

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