



Part 16: Death Defeated

Matthew 9:18-26

We can live with hope because Christ has defeated death.

“While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, ‘My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.’ Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed at that moment. When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, ‘Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep. But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region.” Matthew 9:18-26 (For greater context, read 9-17 as well)

I. Two Interruptions, One Desperate Need for Jesus

Extra context: These two individuals who “interrupt” Jesus’ teaching represent two examples of the exact point he is trying to make. Jesus is answering a question by the disciples at Matthew’s house. Jesus is working in a way that is outside of the categories they are comfortable with (he and his disciples are eating and drinking, not fasting). Jesus responds with a metaphor about wineskins. If you put fresh wine in a wineskin that has already been stretched and used, then as it ferments it will burst the skins and the wine will be wasted. Jesus is alluding to the fact that he is bringing about a new covenant: the old covenant was marked with the cup of the Passover wine; the new covenant would be a covenant in his blood. The new covenant will fulfill the old, but will also break the boundaries and expectations of what they thought. This serves as important context for these stories.

A. The first interruption: The Synagogue Leader (Jairus)

Matthew is very concise in his telling of this story. However, for more details you can read the accounts in both Mark and Luke. ([Mark 5:22-Mark 5:43](#), [Luke 8:41-Luke 8:56](#)). From these accounts, we learn that this synagogue leader's name is Jairus, and that his daughter is 12 (this will become important later). Remember from last week's sermon that Jesus has already had conflict with religious leaders (Matthew 9:3-5). The symbolism of a synagogue ruler kneeling at Jesus's feet embodies the way that the old covenant is making way for the new. This man would have been powerful, wealthy, influential and well respected. Yet none of this matters when his daughter falls deathly ill. He needs the one thing he doesn't have: authority over death. It is also significant that Jairus would specifically ask Jesus to "put (his) hand on her." As a synagogue ruler, he would know touching a dead body would make Jesus ritually unclean.

B. The second interruption: The Bleeding Woman

A woman, who remains unnamed, has been "subject to bleeding" for 12 years. Scholars agree that this refers to menstrual bleeding, which would mean that the purity laws of Leviticus 15:19-31 would come to bear on her. In the Old Covenant, blood represented life, therefore the loss of blood represented death and was considered unholy. The underlying logic of these rules is Leviticus 15:31: "You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them." In the Old covenant, death contaminates and spreads and the law limits this spread of death. On a practical level, it also posed risk of spreading disease. According to these laws, anything this woman touched would be considered unclean, so she was to be separated from others and was not allowed to take part in religious rituals. For this woman, her life would have been made unbearable for the last 12 years by these laws. Again, we read more details in Mark's account, learning that she suffered under the care of many doctors who only made things worse.

C. Different stories, the same need

Synagogue Leader (Jairus)	Bleeding Woman
Influential in community	Ostracized
Wealthy and thriving	Poor and suffering
Center of religious life	Ritually unclean

What they have in common: both on their knees before Jesus, desperate and humbled by their human frailty.

II. Jesus' Response: Transforming Death to Life

These parallels between these two women are striking. While the nature of their healings are different (healing from bleeding versus resurrection), the fact that their stories are placed one inside the other, and the similarities (the number 12, being called daughter, ritual uncleanness, etc.) communicates that Christ is doing something similar for both of them. The number 12 is often symbolic in scripture of perfection, completion, and the authority of God's kingdom. The repetition of this number may refer both to the "completeness" of their brokenness and suffering (both were completely without hope without Christ), but also that Christ's authority over sickness was so complete that he could raise the dead.

We also see here a reversal of the logic of the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant, death spreads and must be contained. But when Jesus touches people who are unclean, he does not become unclean. Instead, he makes people clean and whole. The nature of things is reversed: in the New Covenant, life spreads (Romans 5:15-21). In fact, death itself is made into the doorway to life.

Jairus' Daughter	Bleeding Woman
12 years old	12 years bleeding
Ritually unclean (death)	Ritually unclean (blood, associated with death)
Daughter of ruler	Called "daughter" by Jesus
Beyond human help	Beyond human help
Jesus touches her, making himself unclean	Jesus allows her to make him unclean, then publicly affirms her for it

In our desperation, Jesus:

- has compassion on us in our vulnerability
- takes it on himself
- transforms it into life

III. Hope that Cannot be Taken Away by Anything, Even Death

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'" John 11:25.

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stood out to you from today's sermon? Did anything comfort, disturb, or confuse you?
2. How do you respond to the call of Lent to remember "from dust you came and to dust you will return"?
3. Read through Matthew 9:18-26 again. How are these two people (Jairus and the bleeding woman) different? How are they the same?
4. Who, if anyone, do you relate to in the story? Jairus, the woman, the disciples, the onlookers?
5. Read Hebrews 2:14-15. How do you see the people around you enslaved by the fear of death? If you're willing to be vulnerable, how have you seen it in yourself?
6. What element of Jesus' response do you need most today? (His compassion, his identification with you, the hope that death is defeated). How would it change things for you if you experienced that?