

# Do Not Fear, Only Believe

Mark 5:21-43 (ESV)

October 6, 2002

“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?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’” “Do not fear, only believe.”

There are always messengers of death. There are always doomsayers. There are always those overly impressed with the reality of death. There are always those eager to believe the worst. There are even those who delight in evil. But overhearing what they say, Jesus says to us, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’” “Do not fear, only believe.”

Here is the gospel, that Jesus has power over evil. Here is the gospel, that Jesus has power over fear. Here is the gospel, that Jesus commands us to believe and gives us what he commands. “Do not fear, only believe.”

In order for these words to mean anything, in order for these words to be more than noise in the air, in order for these words not to be empty, Jesus has to show us that he can back them up. He has to show us how and why not to fear. He has to show us what and why to believe. He has to show us who he is. And that is what he does.

There are two stories here. One is about a twelve year old girl who had been sick and who died. The other is about a woman who had been sick for twelve years. It is not clear how the two are related, other than both needed, and both received, the help of Jesus Christ. Both were restored to life, to health, to family, and to community, and both were brought into a relationship with Christ.

Let us take up the inner story first. The poor woman had suffered much for twelve years. She had exhausted her financial resources. She had gone beyond the ability of the physicians to help her. From the human perspective, there was nothing left to do. No one could help her. But she had heard of Jesus Christ. Jesus had changed fishermen and a tax collector into disciples, cast out unclean spirits and demons, healed many who were sick with various diseases, cleansed a leper, made a paralyzed man walk, restored a man’s withered hand, and calmed wind and sea. Maybe he could help her. With a faith bordering on superstition, with a desire for what to us seems like magic (though perhaps it was the secret prompting of the Holy Spirit), she convinced herself that touching his garment would make her well, so she did, and it did, and she was well.

What happened next is even more interesting. Jesus perceived that power had gone out from him. Jesus demanded to know who had touched his garment. He looked for the woman in the jostling crowd. He sought her out, and she came to Jesus. He looked for her, and her twelve years of being lost were over. She wanted healing, and she was granted an audience with the Lord. She wanted a little magic, and she was given a blessing by and from God. She wanted to feel good again, even for a day, and Jesus spoke to her, encountered her, engaged her in conversation, communicated with her, drew her beyond magic into relationship, and gave her a blessing, health, healing, peace, and salvation. There is the miracle. There is the wonder to behold. There is the gospel. Jesus conquers disease. Jesus overcomes alienation. Jesus restores broken community Jesus creates new community. Jesus opens the doors of heaven. There is the miracle. “Do not fear, only believe.”

Jairus had to have seen all of this. Jesus was going with him to his home when this happened. So it is that we turn our attention back to the outer story. No sooner had Jesus said to the once poor, then blessed, woman, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease,” than the messengers of death arrived. “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?’” That sounds like the end of a story, but Jesus refused to allow it to be the end of the story. Death tried to have the last word about the little girl’s life, but Jesus refused to allow it to have the last word. “Overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’” “Do not fear, only believe.” What would he do now? Stopping blood was one thing. Restoring breath was another. Many had been healed. But who had been raised from the dead? How could Jairus not fear? How could he believe? How could he not weep?

And yet, that is what Jesus said. “Do not fear, only believe.” Do not be afraid of evil. Do not be afraid of death. Do not be afraid of disease. Do not be afraid of the doomsayers. Do not be afraid of those eager to believe the worst. Do not be afraid of those who delight in evil. Do not be afraid of the messengers of death. Do not fear. Somehow, this command from one who had just healed and blessed the poor woman on the way not only offered but actually gave the very peace and calm it commanded. Jesus taught with authority. If he said not to fear, there was good reason not to fear. So it is that Jairus was calmed.

But what about the second half? It was one thing not to fear, it was another to believe. Or was it? Maybe that was the positive restatement of the opposite of fear. We might contrast faith with faithlessness, with a lack of faith, with doubt. But Jesus contrasts it with fear: fear of failure, fear of punishment, fear of the unknown, fear of disease, fear of loss, fear of decay, fear of decline, fear of alienation, fear of

separation, and fear of death. We realize how much fear shapes and misshapes human life.

How was Jairus to believe? In what was he to believe? In whom was he to believe? He was to believe in the same one who took away his fear. The one who blessed the woman would do even more for his daughter. Though the mourners had already gathered, though they laughed at him, Jesus raised the little girl from the dead. This was even more than the previous miracle. Jesus not only healed the little girl from a deadly disease, he raised her from the dead. He told her to get up, and she did. She walked, and she ate, which is to say that she was not a ghost or an apparition. She was brought back to this life, in this world. The power of death was overruled. Jesus not only restored the little girl to life, but also he restored her to her family and he restored her family to fulness and the community to fulness. Jesus not only gave Jairus fearlessness, but also he gave him faith. And this was not done by the little girl's faith. It was not done by the little girl's power. It was not done at the little girl's initiative. She had no faith, power, or initiative. She was dead. All of this was done by the faith, power, and initiative of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus talks, even the dead hear, listen, and obey. There is the miracle. "Do not fear, only believe."

So it is that God wills life, not death; God wills health, not disease, wholeness, not brokenness, community, not estrangement, assurance, not anxiety. The word of Jesus Christ, preserved for us down through the centuries as the word of the living God to us today, is this: "Do not fear, only believe." These are words of good hope, strength, and encouragement.

How do they apply to us? Some, though not nearly all, of our diseases are healed. Finally, though, we all die, everyone. And yet, disease and death do not have the final word about us, or about our loved ones, or about who we are. God has purposes for us beyond this life. There is life beyond death. There is community beyond brokenness. "Do not fear, only believe."

To believe in God and in his Christ, to reject fear, is to live today with confidence, assurance, dignity, poise, grace, serenity, and hope. This is what Jesus is calling us to do. To believe in the life to come is not to ignore or deny this life, but instead gives us the vision and perspective to live this life the right way. Without hope, all is fear, dread, loss, and darkness. With hope, we can face all the challenges of this life, even the final challenge of death, with confidence.

Good examples of such courage can be found in our history. We remember that the French Huguenots used to sing Psalm 118:24, the words with which we begin our worship, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." They sang it as they rode into battle, many to die. As they were arrested and led to the gallows, to be hung, they sang it. As they lay on their death beds

facing the final enemy, they sang it, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, pp. 176-177). In life and in death, they exuded supreme confidence in the goodness of God. And if they could sing it then, we can sing it now.

Reinhold Niebuhr, at a time in his life when he had suffered a stroke and was limited in what he could do, wrote that while we were very successful in America at making life comfortable and at extending life, it was all the more obvious that we cannot ourselves overcome the brokenness of life and the inevitability of death. Therefore, the final wisdom of life requires, not the overcoming of the fragmentary character of human existence, but the achievement of serenity within it and above it. He continued:

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness” (Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, p. 63).

When we are young, we think we have all the time in the world to do anything. When we are older, time slips away and we realize that we live this life only once. Certain choices rule out other choices. Finally, we live only by the grace of God. Life is not simply our accomplishment. And we realize that God’s grace is sufficient for this life and the next. That is our hope and assurance.

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*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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