

Luke 8:40-56

Introduction

Luke began chapter 8 of his Gospel with the Parable of the Sower. If you were here, you will remember that Jesus likened his ministry to a farmer sowing his seed. That seed is the word of God, the gospel message. And Jesus described four different ways in which people might respond to his message, only one of which is the response that he's looking for. It's the response of those who hear, retain and persevere in it.

This passage, that we're looking at today, is the third of a trilogy of stories which follow immediately after the Parable of the Sower. Taken together, they serve to illustrate what the right response to Jesus' message looks like.

The first happened on the lake known as the Sea of Galilee, as Jesus crossed to the region of the Gerasenes with his disciples. A huge storm descended on their boat and threatened to sink it. The disciples were in fear for their lives. Yet Jesus calmed the storm with a word. 'Where is your faith?' he asked. And the disciples were amazed and asked themselves, 'Who is this man?' Even *they* were not yet displaying the faith that Jesus was looking for.

The second story happened when Jesus had reached his destination. Immediately he was confronted by a man possessed by an army of demons. For a long time, the local people had feared this man and had tried, unsuccessfully, to chain him. Yet, with a command, Jesus had cast out the demons. They went, instead, into a herd of pigs, which rushed into the lake and drowned. And when the local people heard what had happened and saw the evidence with their own eyes, they were overcome with fear and asked Jesus to leave, which he did.

Both of those stories present fear as an obstacle to faith. So, we might ask, what does saving faith look like? That's what this third story shows us.

It's the story of two people whose lives intersect as they encounter Jesus. In both cases, their faith overcomes their fear. And in both cases, their faith is vindicated. As Jesus proclaims the message of salvation, this is the response he's looking for. This is saving faith. It's faith that overcomes fear. And it is, therefore, faith that is proved in testing. I've put that as our one heading for this morning: saving faith is proved in testing.

Saving faith is proved in testing

The story takes place when Jesus returns from the region of the Gerasenes, where he had cast out the demons from the possessed man. Let's read it again.

Verse 40.

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

Here's the first person we're introduced to. We're told his name. It's Jairus. And we're told that he's a synagogue leader. This man is a respected member of the community. He has an important place at the heart of community life. But tragedy has struck his family. He's terrified of losing his only daughter, who's just twelve years old and dying. It's possibly the most terrifying scenario that a father can face. And he turns to Jesus for help. He comes to Jesus, and laying all his dignity aside, he falls to the ground at Jesus' feet. He pleads with Jesus to come to his house and help the daughter he loves.

It's at this point that we're introduced to a very different person.

Verse 42.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

This woman couldn't be more different to Jairus. Unlike him, she doesn't get named. It's a subtle technique by which Luke is drawing our attention to her lowly status. And he explains why. This poor woman has been subject to bleeding for as long as Jairus' daughter has been alive. And that would have made her ceremonially unclean. According to the Jewish purity laws, someone who was unclean could not mix with other people because any contact would transfer their ceremonial uncleanliness to them. So, for the last twelve years, this woman would have been an outcast. She would have been forced to live in isolation with the disgrace of social banishment.

So, here we have two people who couldn't be more different. Yet they both have one thing in common. They are both desperate. And they both end up in the same place at the same time, coming to Jesus for help.

Perhaps we can imagine this woman, looking on and seeing all the people packed around Jesus as he goes with Jairus. Luke tells us that the crowd was so dense that it almost crushed Jesus. The word translated 'crushed' literally means 'choked'. And Luke uses that word in only one other place. It's in the Parable of the Sower, where he describes the seed that falls among thistles, and is choked as it grows. He wants us to make the link. But it's not Jesus' faith that this crowd threatens, it's the woman's. The crowd is so big and intimidating that it threatens to choke her faith from her. The last thing she should be doing is pressing through a crowd of people. If they discover what she's up to, they will be furious. Yet Jesus is her only hope. And she's undeterred. She refuses to let fear stop her. She's prepared to incur the wrath of the crowd, if only she can get to Jesus. And so, as he

accompanies Jairus to his house, this woman sneaks up through the crowd and touches the edge of his cloak. Immediately she is healed. And Jesus stops in his tracks.

Verse 45.

‘Who touched me?’ Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, ‘Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.’

But Jesus said, ‘Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.’

Can you imagine how that woman must have felt! She shouldn’t be there. By the social customs of her day this was unacceptable behaviour. The crowd would be livid. No wonder that she had been hoping to slip away, unseen. Yet it was futile. So, we’re told in verse 47: **Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at [Jesus’] feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.**

This poor woman is terrified. She’s trembling with fear. And when Jesus refuses to let her slip away unnoticed and forces her to admit what she has done in front of everyone, no doubt she fears his rebuke too. But it doesn’t come. Instead, she’s met with gentleness and compassion.

Verse 48.

Then he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.’

Her faith had overcome her fear.

This is the response that Jesus is looking for as he sows the seed, the word of God. It’s faith that refuses to be stopped by the barriers that are in its way. The social and religious rules of this woman’s day were such barriers. But she had refused to be stopped by them. She had refused to be intimidated by her fear of the crowd, and she had come to Jesus in faith. And in front of everyone, Jesus announces that her faith has healed her. Or more literally, her faith has saved her. She could go in peace having been healed and fully restored to her place in the community. How happy she must have been as she made her way home.

It’s another extraordinary display of the power of Jesus. But it’s also a display of saving faith. If this woman had slipped away unnoticed, she might have gone away thinking that she had been healed by some kind of magic. But now, everyone would know that it was not magic but faith that saved her. Saving faith is faith that overcomes fear. It is proved in testing. And that same faith is what Jesus now calls for in Jairus.

Please look down again at verse 49.

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ he said. ‘Don’t bother the teacher anymore.’

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.’

Jesus wants Jairus to learn from what has just happened. This unnamed woman of low status is to be an example to highly respected Jairus, the synagogue leader. He’s to have the same faith that she displayed... even in the face of death. **‘Don’t be afraid;’** Jesus says, **‘just believe...’**

What an extraordinary thing to say to a grieving father who’s just received news of his daughter’s death. And the environment in which Jairus is to show such faith is no less intimidating.

Verse 51.

When [Jesus] arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, the child’s father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. ‘Stop wailing,’ Jesus said. ‘She is not dead but asleep...’ meaning that her death was temporary. She would soon wake up. But we’re told: **They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.**

The woman with bleeding faced anger and condemnation for her faith in Jesus. Jairus, the highly respected synagogue leader, faces ridicule and mockery. What’s at stake if he goes with Jesus is his dignity and his reputation. He, too, is surrounded by thistles, which threaten to choke his faith. But despite the fear of becoming a laughing-stock, he trusts Jesus, goes with him, and his faith is vindicated.

Verse 54.

But [Jesus] took her by the hand and said, ‘My child, get up!’ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Twice now in this story, Jesus has come into physical contact with ritual impurity.

First, he was touched by a woman with bleeding. Then he takes a corpse by the hand. Yet in neither case was their impurity transferred to *him*. Rather, his life-giving power is transferred to *them*. He isn’t defiled. They are both healed and restored instead.

Both stories reveal the power of Jesus to bring life out of death. Jairus’ daughter, who moments earlier had been dead, stands up. And eats. And there’s a detail here which we shouldn’t miss. The word Luke uses to describe the girl standing up is closely related to the word that means ‘resurrection’. Again, Luke wants us to make the link. This is resurrection power.

Here is one who has power not only to lift a 12-year-old girl from death but each one of us too. Here is the person who, with the same authority, will one day call the dead to get up and live. Just as Jairus trusted Jesus with his daughter's death, so, too, we can trust Jesus with our own deaths... if we will believe in him.

Both Jairus and the woman with bleeding exemplify the faith that Jesus is looking for. It's faith that overcomes fear and is proved in testing. So, as we read this story of Jairus and the woman with bleeding, the first question we *must* ask ourselves is whether this is what *our* faith looks like.

Like the woman with bleeding, it may be that coming to Jesus will mean risking people's contempt. And that might even be by people we're close to. Friends and family who hold very different beliefs.

Like Jairus, following Jesus might mean being laughed at. It almost certainly will. You might have school friends who think the Christian faith is something to make fun of. Or work colleagues who are incredulous that you could even consider following Jesus. It might mean losing the respect of someone you love.

We live in a world that views followers of Jesus with scorn and derision and always has done. But saving faith will not let fear keep us away from him. It's faith like that of Jairus and the woman with bleeding; faith that overcomes fear and refuses to be stopped by the obstacles in its way. Is that what your faith looks like, and mine?

And, secondly, be confident that this *is* saving faith.

In each of these three stories, Jesus has demonstrated his power to bring life out of death.

That's what the disciples faced on the lake in the storm, as the waves crashed down on top of them. Yet Jesus calmed them with a word.

It's what the man possessed by demons faced in his pitiful existence, confined to life in the tombs and stripped of his right mind. Yet Jesus restored him with a command.

It's what the woman with bleeding faced, as she lived in the disgrace and isolation of social banishment. Yet Jesus healed her, and she went away in peace.

And it's what Jairus faced, as he watched the health of his 12-year-old daughter deteriorate further and further. Yet Jesus raised her, and he was reconciled to the daughter he thought was lost to him forever.

Jesus brings life out of death. That's why he came into this broken world. And it's a message we can't ignore. One day we will all face death. Not merely physical death but eternal death, because of sin. But in Luke's Gospel we're meeting the one person who can save us from it. Surely it would be crazy to turn your back on the one person who can

guarantee your eternal happiness because you're afraid of what others might think of you. Jesus alone has power to bring you through death and raise you up to eternal life. Faith in him is saving faith. And you are safe in his hands.

So, thirdly and finally, this story should encourage us not to despise times of testing, because Jesus uses them to prove our faith genuine.

Don't let your faith be choked in times of testing. Instead, like Jairus, and like the woman with bleeding, let those be times when your faith grows and flourishes. And be confident that the day is coming when your faith, proved in testing, will be fully and finally vindicated. That day may come in your own lifetime, if Jesus returns. If not, then be assured that the day will come when you, too, will hear his voice calling you from the grave, and he will raise you up in glory.

The one who has faith like that is the good soil, who hears God's word, retains it and perseveres in it.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the good news of Jesus, who brings life out of death and saves his people. Please would no barrier keep us from trusting him. Please give us faith that overcomes fear, especially the fear of scorn and derision. And please help us to persevere in faith until the day when we are with Jesus in glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.