

June 20 Lesson 3 (NIV)

HEALED BY FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 3:1–8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56

MATTHEW 9:18–26

¹⁸ 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.” ¹⁹ Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

²⁰ Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹ She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

²² Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

²³ When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, ²⁴ he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. ²⁵ After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶ News of this spread through all that region.

KEY VERSE

Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment. —Matthew 9:22

CONFIDENT HOPE

Unit 1: Jesus Teaches About Faith

LESSONS 1–5

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HOW TO SAY IT

CapernaumKuh-*per*-nay-um.

ElijahEe-*lye*-juh.

GalileeGal-uh-lee.

Israellz-ray-el.

JairusJye-rus or Jay-ih-rus.

MosesMo-zes or Mo-zez.

SabbathSah-bawth.

synagoguesin-uh-gog.

Introduction

A. Go to the Specialist

Have you ever had to see a specialist? You went to see your regular physician, and, for whatever reason, he or she sent you on to a specialist—someone better trained or with more experience for your situation. When the need is critical, you want the very best help.

Jesus is the ultimate specialist! He specializes in the critical needs of the body and of the soul. As people need to have confidence in a physician’s knowledge and skills to treat our needs, so

our text challenges us to put our faith in Christ, even in (or especially in) the darkest hours. When others are not specialized enough to help, Jesus is!

B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson takes place late in the second year of Jesus' public ministry. He conducted much of the early part of his ministry around the Sea of Galilee. Specifically, much of the ministry was on the north end, in and around the village of Capernaum. Jesus' popularity was very high (example: Luke 8:4, 19). He taught about life and the kingdom of God in the rural areas and towns along the western side of the sea (example: Matthew 5–7). His teaching was pointed, his spirit magnetic. And having already healed so many people, his reputation had spread far and wide. (See Lesson Context: Sea of Galilee and Lesson Context: Miracles in lesson 2, pages 354–355.)

But public opinion had begun to polarize. People watched and listened to Jesus very closely, but for different reasons. Not everyone adored him. Today's text occurs in a section of Matthew that contrasts Jesus' authority and power, as demonstrated in miracles, with the objections of religious leaders. Jesus raised their ire by forgiving sins (Matthew 9:2–3), by associating with marginalized people (9:11), and by violating certain traditions (9:14).

Despite the objections of the powerful, Jesus brought God's grace to bear for the blessing of God's people. As Jesus dealt with the crowds, he never lost sight of the individual (example: Matthew 8:1–3). Our text today witnesses to two examples in this regard. Both circumstances involve tragically common instances of human suffering.

The events considered below occurred after Jesus ended his response to a controversy over fasting. He was doing something fundamentally new in God's plan, something that required people to lay aside the old (Matthew 9:16–17). This was no time for mourning and fasting but instead for rejoicing because God's promised redeemer had arrived (9:15). The deeds that followed provided a glimpse of that newness in the kingdom of God. (Mark 5:21–43 and Luke 8:40–56 offer parallel accounts.)

I. A Grieving Family (MATTHEW 9:18–19)

A. A Father's Request (v. 18)

18a. While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him

A certain interjection—not translated here, but translated *behold* in other versions—draws the reader's attention to what happens next (see Matthew 9:20, below). The *leader* who approached Jesus held a prominent position in the local Jewish community in that he oversaw the day-to-day operations of the *synagogue*. This man's title suggests that he was respected and mature in his faith in God. Though Matthew did not name the leader, Luke identified him as Jairus (Luke 8:41).

The leader honored Jesus by taking the posture of a supplicant approaching his king. This act indicates great respect for someone of honor or power (example: 2 Samuel 16:4, same word in the Greek version of the Old Testament). Either way, it is a humble posture. The leader might not have realized Jesus' divine identity. But, like many others, he did recognize Jesus as a man of

exceptional authority, and probably at least considered him to be a great prophet (compare: Luke 7:16; 9:19).

18b. and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.”

It must have wrenched the leader’s heart to announce that his *daughter* had *just died*. Again, Luke gives more detail: she was 12 years old (Luke 8:42). But the man did not ask Jesus to join him in mourning. Rather, this father made the statement of remarkable faith that we see here. He sought the reversal of his loss, the restoration of his daughter to life.

How did the man come to believe Jesus was capable of miracles, including raising the dead? Certainly he must have heard of Jesus’ healing miracles (Matthew 4:23; 8:16; etc.). Perhaps he had witnessed one. But to this point in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus had not raised someone from death. Still, the story of Elijah raising the widow’s son (1 Kings 17:17–24) serves as precedent for a prophet’s being able to raise the dead. The leader surely knew the account. The connection is strengthened by the fact that, when the crowds misidentified Christ, they sometimes believed him to be Elijah (Matthew 16:14). In any case, the father’s hope was that Jesus was able to bring the dead back to life.

B. Jesus’ Response (v. 19)

19. Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

Probably some of the leader’s friends were certain that *Jesus* would not go *with him*. But the great physician, Jesus, makes house calls. And, as usual, *his disciples* followed.

II. A Story Interrupted (MATTHEW 9:20–22)

A. A Woman’s Need (vv. 20–21)

20. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.

The transition *just then* alerts the reader that a new piece of narrative is interrupting. The second account, of an unnamed *woman*, begins here (see Lesson Context). This method of telling the two stories builds tension in the first, as we wait to see what will happen with the leader and his daughter. It also invites the reader to feel the exasperation that the leader and the disciples might feel at being stalled on their important errand. Will the girl live or not? We must read on to find out.

The woman’s *bleeding* was what we would call hemorrhaging. This was probably from constant menstruation, a debilitating physical condition. The woman’s body would have needed to replace lost blood constantly for *twelve years* (the same amount of time the leader’s daughter had been alive; see Luke 8:42). All her energy would go to that vital need, leaving her weak and vulnerable to other sickness. Furthermore, she “had spent all she had” going to physicians, who only made her condition worse (Mark 5:26). There had not been any specialist in 12 years who could treat her properly.

This illness also made her life intolerable in being a social outcast. According to the Law of Moses, any flow of blood made a woman ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 15:25). This law was meant to illustrate to the entire nation of Israel the need all people have for God's repeated cleansing. But in application, it meant that the unclean woman could have no social contact with anyone except another woman who was currently menstruating. The clean became unclean by contact with the unclean (examples: Leviticus 15:16–27). So for this woman, the Law of Moses was a curse (compare Galatians 3).

The edge of his cloak may refer to one of the tassels that the Law of Moses specified for the garments of the Israelites (Numbers 15:38; Deuteronomy 22:12). Being ritually unclean, the woman could not approach Jesus directly. Thus she attempted to slip in unnoticed. Even so, she risked putting many into unknowing states of being unclean when they brushed against her in the crowd.

21. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

The woman did not give in to the despair. Though contact with the unclean normally contaminated the clean person (see commentary above), the woman believed that the reverse would happen. She, like the girl's father, apparently believed that Jesus' power, demonstrated in other miracles, could meet her need as well. Just the slightest *touch* would be enough for a great healing.

The word translated *be healed* is translated "be saved" in other contexts (examples: Matthew 10:22; 19:25). Though we usually think of saving and salvation in spiritual terms, the word could indicate physical healing (as in this text), political release (a typical reason for Roman emperors to refer to themselves as saviors), and other forms of liberation, depending on context.

Understanding the many uses of this word points us to the ways that Jesus intends to save us. Though we will have everlasting life with him, we can also experience now the kinds of renewal that this woman desired. She wanted an end to her physical suffering; she wanted an end to her years of social ostracism. She needed help that wouldn't cost her money she didn't have.

We too can experience healing and community in Christ. Realizing that she had nowhere else to turn, the woman put her trust in the one whose power could make her well. In her weakness she reached out to Jesus, believing that a mere touch would be enough.

B. Jesus' Healing Answer (v. 22)

22. Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

Jesus possessed not only divine power to work miracles but divine knowledge as well. He recognized the touch, even though it was slight and he was in a crowd (compare Mark 5:24, 30; Luke 8:42, 45). He realized that this slight touch signified something of great significance.

This proves that the woman's healing was not some kind of psychosomatic reaction. There was something more here than a woman having believed so strongly that she was going to be well that she actually willed herself to be well. That possibility could not be true because Jesus felt the power go "out from him" (Mark 5:30). Her faith made the healing possible, but the healing power came from outside her.

Seeing the woman, Jesus addressed her with respect and kindness. *Daughter*, a term of endearment, also indicated her need for help and Jesus' acting on her behalf like a good father (another tie to the story of the leader, which has been paused). Jesus' encouragement *take heart* reassured the woman that she had done nothing wrong and had no reason to fear Jesus' reaction. The other Gospels make clear that the woman was indeed afraid (Mark 5:33; Luke 8:47).

The account comes to its climax as Jesus says *your faith has healed you*. This is precisely what the woman hoped for (see Matthew 9:21, above). The Law of Moses had separated the woman from society. But the one for whom that law prepared the faithful of Israel to expect had given her new life.

Some conclude from Jesus' words that if a person needs God's miraculous help and does not receive it, then that person does not have enough faith. This is not at all the meaning of Jesus' statement. Jesus commends and celebrates the faithful who seek what he alone can give. When he says words such as "Your faith has healed you," he also acts on their behalf. Effective faith believes that what God supplies will meet the real need regardless of whether or not a miracle is involved. Thus prayers are not necessarily answered on terms we expect. Even Jesus' own prayer to the Father in Luke 22:42 was not answered on the terms Jesus wanted. Yet he committed himself to the Father's will, confident that the Father would be faithful. As important as the greatness of our faith is, the greatness of the Lord's faithfulness is more so.

III. A Child Resurrected

(MATTHEW 9:23–26)

A. A Noisy House (vv. 23–24)

23a. When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house

Having successfully resolved the issue of the woman's bleeding, *Jesus* continued on his way to *the synagogue leader's house* (see Matthew 9:18, above). Jesus had not forgotten the need there.

23b. and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes,

Mourning in ancient Israel was not quiet. Minstrels, likely paid to mourn, played their instruments. Family and neighbors would gather to show support by joining in. The *crowd* expressed sorrow with loud wailing and songs of lament (compare Matthew 11:17; Luke 7:32). The result was much noise in order to demonstrate just how loved the deceased person was.

24a. he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep."

Jesus' telling the crowd of mourners to *go away* is a command to withdraw, as the word is also translated in Mark 3:7. But here Jesus was not asking merely for quiet in order to concentrate. Rather, the fact that *the girl is not dead but asleep* meant that there was (or shortly would be) no reason to continue mourning. By this statement Jesus was not implying that the girl was in a deep coma that had been mistaken for death. Nor did he mean that she actually was sleeping naturally. He meant that she would not remain dead. Later, Jesus would speak similarly at the death of Lazarus (John 11:1–11), a declaration that the disciples misunderstood (11:12–14; compare and contrast 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

24b. But they laughed at him.

Jesus' remark seemed absurd to the mourners. They knew death when they saw it. All their own life experiences told them that there was no logical reasoning behind Jesus' statement. Thus their laughter was one of derision (compare Psalm 44:13). Unlike the girl's father, these mourners held out no thought that Jesus could do anything to reverse the state of death.

B. Jesus' Power and Fame (vv. 25–26)

25. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

Matthew described the miracle in terms that match Jesus' declaration that the girl was asleep. Like a parent might take a sleeping child's *hand* to awaken her, so Jesus woke the girl from death. Her resurrection came as a simple touch from Jesus, like the healing of the sick woman. Though most of *the crowd* were not with Jesus in the room (compare Mark 5:40), they surely saw that the girl was alive again (see Matthew 9:26, below).

26. News of this spread through all that region.

This great miracle, the results of which were seen by many, could not be kept quiet. The spread of this news surely contributed to the crowds that followed Jesus or came out to meet him when he came near their areas.

Their numbers made it clear that the people needed more attention than Jesus alone could give them. So he sent his disciples out to declare the coming of the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 9:36–10:8). That initial missionary commission was a prelude to the commission Jesus gave to his followers after his resurrection, a commission that we share today to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20).

Conclusion

A. Abundance in the Midst of Suffering

Matthew introduced the interaction between Jesus and the synagogue but then interrupted it with a second encounter before returning to the first story to wrap it up; the parallel accounts in Mark 5:21–43 and Luke 8:40–56 do so as well. By this arrangement, we note related themes in the two accounts. The themes are that of (1) a 12-year-old girl who had not yet attained womanhood when she died and (2) a woman for whom womanhood has become the source of suffering for as many years as the girl had lived.

Perhaps you see in yourself characteristics of the people in these two accounts. Perhaps you are like a family member of the dead girl, mourning the loss of someone you love. Perhaps you are like the sick woman, suffering with a chronic condition that does not improve. Certainly we all know that grief and suffering will come for us, even if we presently enjoy a moment of calm.

The miraculous power of Jesus does not assure us that we will have no loss or pain. But our text tells us what we can do in the midst of suffering and loss: we can put our trust in the Lord. Our ultimate destiny is a life in which the Lord wipes away our tears (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17). Even if our pain lasts for years, the Lord will heal it when he raises us with all his people to live with him forever (21:4). Even when death separates us from those we love, even when we face

that separation in our own death, the Lord will reunite his people when he returns (1 Corinthians 15:51–57).

We sometimes refer to Jesus as “the great physician.” But he is more than a great medical doctor who knows how to treat and cure diseases. There is power and authority in Jesus, power that eradicates not only disease but also death. There is the power and authority in the resurrected life in Jesus—power and authority for life both now and in eternity.

B. Prayer

Almighty God, we cry out to you in our suffering and our grief. We long for the life that you have in store for us. As we do we recognize the abundance that we now possess through Jesus—even abundance unto eternal life. We thank you for this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus’ power and authority are greater than the worst of our circumstances.