

“Take Heart”

Introduction: Matthew has been painting a picture for us of what it begins to look like when God’s future begins to break into the present. The declaration of Jesus is that with his arrival, the kingdom of God has begun to dawn, and what we see him say and do – his sermon on the mount, his healing of illness and disease, his authority over wind and waves and demons, his pronouncement of forgiveness – all testify to the redemptive presence of God’s kingdom.

This morning we’ll see Matthew go on to extend the authority of Jesus to include even death. As he cares for a troubled woman and the daughter of a synagogue ruler, we will see the inclusive heart of Jesus as well as his maddening patience. Along the way we’ll get glimpses of the nature of faith.

I. The inclusive heart of Jesus

A. As our text opens, Jesus has been talking about the newness of the Kingdom of God using the illustrations of a wedding banquet, a new garment, and a new flask of wine. In the midst of this, a man bursts on the scene, drops to his knees before Jesus, and cries out for Jesus to come and bring new life to his daughter, who has died. Matthew often condenses his accounts so in Mark and Luke’s recounting of these events we read that this man’s daughter is dying. Either way, the fact that this man bowed down to Jesus, and that Jesus stopped to hear him out, is fairly surprising.

B. Let’s start with the man. From Mark we learn that his name is Jairus. Jairus, we read, is a synagogue ruler. That means he is a lay leader who is responsible for the administrative and financial running of this Jewish house of worship. But he is also part of the religious establishment that had begun to become uncomfortable with Jesus and almost daily was becoming more and more hostile toward him. Probably, word had filtered down to the various local synagogues to be on the alert for this troublemaker Jesus. So, at the very least, it’s probable to assume that Jairus had kept his distance from Jesus up to this point, not wanting to get himself into trouble with his bosses.

But everything had now changed. It’s a father’s worst nightmare – his twelve-year-old daughter (Mk. 5:42) is at the point of death. Desperate, Jairus swallows his pride, assumes a position that acknowledges Jesus’ authority, and begs Jesus to come home with him.

C. What does Jesus do? I love this simple, yet significant response: “Jesus got up and went with him.” He didn’t first say, “Your people are against me; where do you stand? What are your politics?” Nor did he say, “Where were you when I was teaching in your synagogue last week? Why have you been avoiding me?” No, without argument, without scolding, without scorn, Jesus simply goes with his man. Jesus has a wonderfully inclusive heart. He is willing to bring within his care a man who, if not openly against him, had not stood for him.

D. On the way they run into a woman. Actually, she comes up *behind* them and reaches out and touches the edge of Jesus’ cloak. This woman, it turns out, has been suffering from a bleeding disorder for as many years as Jairus’ daughter had been alive. As well as making her physically weak, it has also rendered her ceremonially unclean, unable to go to the synagogue to worship. Further, she had likely never married and certainly had been unable to conceive a child, since anyone coming into contact with her would also be considered unclean. Mark tells us that she had been under the care of many doctors,

had spent all of her savings, yet was only getting worse. Desperate like Jairus, she reached out to Jesus for help, thinking she only needed to touch his garment and not seeming to care that she might be making him unclean in the process. But, also like with Jairus, Jesus didn't scold her or send her away. He actually called out to her and explained that she hadn't infected him; he had infected her with his healing power. Jesus, we see, instead of being horrified that he has been touched, stops to care for this woman, explaining that her faith had made her well.

A possible enemy, and a socially and religiously unacceptable woman – these are some of the people who Jesus includes within the embrace of his love. It highlights the reality that when heaven began to break into earth in the person of Jesus, that he moved all of the old fences and sought to break down all of the old walls, subverting a worldview that sought to limit and exclude many from his divine embrace. His kingdom would have no social, political, cultural, or geographical barriers. No matter what our past attitude toward Jesus, no matter what current attitude our culture may have toward us, we are never outside the reach of God's desire to sit at our table and heal our brokenness. We need not fear that somehow, we will not qualify. The heart of Jesus is wonderfully inclusive.

II. The maddening patience of Jesus

A. Now, if his heart is wonderfully inclusive, the patience of Jesus can often be absolutely maddening! You have to wonder what was going through the mind of Jairus as Jesus stopped to speak to the woman. This dad's gut had to be churning! Here was a woman, though she was ill, who had a chronic condition. But the little girl needed immediate attention. Had Jesus been an ER doc, ignoring a girl who was dying in order to treat a woman who could've easily waited a few more hours might have gotten this Great Physician fired for malpractice! It's like Jairus finally has an ambulance heading to his house, only to have the driver stop to help another motorist fix a flat! Why on earth would Jesus have put Jairus through such anguish?

B. Well, I can't be totally sure, but I do know that Jesus will not be hurried, and I do know that God's grace never seems to operate according to our sense of timing. I also have a pretty good idea that when God doesn't act as fast as we think he should it's often because he's seeking to do something in us, as or before he does something for us. In both cases, it seems, Jesus was seeking to do something in the woman, and in Jairus, something that would invite them into a deeper relationship of trust with him, something that went beyond a physical healing, something that was outside their sense of timing, something that enabled them to take the next step of faith.

1. Regarding the woman, Jesus wanted to make sure that this faith that had reached out to him in fear and trepidation, a faith that was close to being superstition: "If I only touch his cloak I will be healed," was a faith that was anchored in him and it was he, not her superstition, that had brought about her healing and had led her into shalom, into peace (Mk. 5:34). Jesus wanted to give her something that would last for an eternity, not just for as long as she lived in this world.

2. Regarding Jairus, Jesus also wanted him to know that his "this is my last resort I may as well give it shot" kind of faith was a worthy expression of trust because it was anchored in the one who could make the dead live again. "Don't be afraid; just believe," Mark records Jesus as saying to Jairus. Believe what? Believe that no matter how maddening his patience may be, that it is an invitation to bank our hope on the one who is worthy of our trust. Believe that his grace is sufficient no matter what the facts seem to be. Believe that God is holding us in the palm of his hand.

Although their faith was imperfect, and both needed to grow, we see that Jesus still honored what was ultimately located in him. They didn't doubt his ability to act, even though they couldn't know how or when or even if he would act.

3. But we need to notice that there were other people present, people who received nothing from Jesus because they did not believe even though they were right there. Sometimes you hear people say, and you might have even said it yourself, "if only I had lived then, when Jesus was around, I would have believed." Well, there were plenty who were there, with Jesus, who did not.

In this case, I'm thinking of the "noisy crowd" and "the people playing pipes," the professional mourners. This was a group of musicians that would come to a home where someone had died and play so loudly that the family could grieve – weep and wail – without embarrassment. But Jesus doesn't want them anywhere around, for as he sees it, the young girl is not dead but asleep. That is, she might be dead as far as the crowd is concerned but not as far as Jesus is concerned. However, they refused to believe this, even laughed at him, and when Jesus took her by the hand and raised her up, they missed the glory of God that had come into their midst.

To deepen our faith, Matthew invites us to see that for Jesus, death is as impermanent as sleep. He doesn't prevent it; we will all die. But on the cross, through his own death, and resurrection, he has defeated it. He is the only religious figure in the history of the world who has done so. He became weak – power flowed out of him – and then he was raised, becoming strong, so that we might live.

The resurrection is key here. If you've ever gone to a large department or "box" store you know that you can purchase a product at a cashier's station deep inside the store. And sometimes when you go to exit the store you can be stopped by a store employee who questions you about the merchandise you are carrying. When that happens, you can whip out your receipt and say, "This proves that the price has been paid in full." And with that you are free to go. In the resurrection of Jesus, God stamped "Paid in Full" across your life. It is an assurance that the debt of your sin has been paid by Jesus and you need not fear death anymore.

Jesus is the only Son who can say: "If you're walking with me, even death itself will be nothing but a good night's sleep." This Jesus, this Lord, is king, over sickness, over storms, over demons, and even over death. Let us pray as we sing that we might come to know even more about this amazing Jesus who loves us so.