

Jesus' Power over Death, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 9:18–22

Code: 2265

INTRODUCTION

A. The Presence of Death

Jesus' power over death is an essential message, for we are living in a dying world where all of us face the inevitability of death-- we are deteriorating humans in a deteriorating world marked by tragedy and sorrow. Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, there has been a curse on the earth, and that curse has sent the earth and all of its inhabitants careening into the never ending-reality of sadness, disaster, pain, sickness, and death. In any given month, it is not unusual for me to interact with many families who are suffering because loved ones are in the process of dying from terminal illnesses. Or they have died because of tragic accidents. That's just a part of what sin has done to this world. Is it any wonder that Jesus reacted the way He did when He came to the grave of Lazarus? In John 11, we read, "When Jesus, therefore, saw her [i.e. Mary, the sister of Lazarus] weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (v. 33). Arriving at the funeral of Lazarus, Jesus witnessed and even experienced the sorrow over death. Lazarus's death wasn't the only thing that troubled Jesus; contemplating the consequences of sin and empathizing with the pain it brought to man caused Him to hurt deeply. Verses 35-38 say, "Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus, therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave...." Christ hurt deeply because He could see the power and pain of sin.

B. The Passing of Death

It never was God's plan for sin to mar His creation. All things in the world were created for the good of man, but man sinned, allowing sin to enter creation and run its course. However, the Old Testament prophets tell us that God will reverse the curse. And the great hope at the end of Revelation is that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" 21:4). John had an incredible vision of the day when the curse is over. But who can reverse the curse, and destroy disease, pain, sorrow and death? The prophets said there would come a Messiah who would have the power to bring back wholeness to life.

C. The Power over Death

When Jesus came into the world, He demonstrated that power. Although the fulfillment of those prophecies is yet future, the One who will fulfill them has sufficiently demonstrated His ability to do so by virtually banishing disease from Palestine, raising the dead, and forgiving sin. All of the things that will be true of the glorious coming Kingdom, Jesus demonstrated at His First Coming. The miracles of Jesus verified His power to reverse the curse and establish the Kingdom. If He claimed to be the Son of man who would execute judgment upon all and raise the dead (Jn. 5:25-29), then He would have to demonstrate that He had the power to do that.

1. The Statements of Matthew

Matthew shows that the healing power of Jesus is a tremendously important verification of His identity as the Messiah:

a. Matthew 4:23-24 -- "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and

preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with diverse diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with demons, and those who were epileptics, and those who had the palsy; and He healed them."

b. Matthew 8:16-17 -- "When the evening was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah, the prophet...." Jesus did not heal people because they had faith or because they were worthy--He healed them in order that He might show that there was no limit to His ability to heal disease.

c. Matthew 9:35 -- "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."

d. Matthew 11:5 -- "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

So it was, that Jesus demonstrated that He was God's Messiah, the King of creation.

2. The Setting of Matthew

Through chapter 8 and 9 of Matthew, we see three groups with three miracles each. The first group of miracles, in 8:2-15, deals with disease. The second group, from 8:23-9:17, deals with disorder in the physical, spiritual, and moral realms. The third group, in 9:18-34, deals with death and serves as a climax. The last group also includes the miracles of giving sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, which may seem less marvelous than resurrection, but nevertheless are related illustrations of Jesus' resurrection power: First He raises the whole person from the dead and then He shows that He can raise the whole by giving life to dead parts. He who gave sight to dead eyes and speech to a dead tongue can also raise the dead, for that is only the sum of the parts.

Can Jesus overcome death? G. B. Hardy, a Canadian scientist, was led to consider that question. In his examination of religion, he sought to find if anyone had ever conquered death, and if someone had, whether or not he had made a way for him to conquer it too. Upon examining the tombs of several religious leaders, he learned that they were still occupied. But when he came to the tomb of Jesus, he learned that it was empty. He also discovered that Jesus had said, "...Because I live, ye shall live also" (Jn. 14:19), Hardy concluded that there was One who could conquer death and open the way for him to follow. Clearly Jesus is the One who is able to reverse the curse of death, for He holds in His hands the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18). The same Jesus who stood at the grave of Lazarus and wept with Mary, was the same One who said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (Jn. 11:25-26).

Jesus' power over death is clearly demonstrated in Matthew 9 with the raising of a girl who had died. However, prior to that miracle, He healed a woman with an issue of blood. That healing is really part of the resurrection miracle, for it provided the delay that was necessary for the death to occur, making the resurrection as dramatic as possible. As we examine those miracles, I want you to see the power of Christ, but, at the same time, note how Jesus dealt with others. Nowhere is the tenderness and sensitivity of Jesus more wonderfully seen against the background of His power and majesty than here. This marvelous glimpse of how Jesus dealt with people even becomes a pattern for us in dealing with others too. For that reason, I am going to use an outline based upon how Jesus dealt with people to lead us through this tremendous account. First of all, in dealing with people, we see that...

I. JESUS WAS ACCESSIBLE (v. 18a)

"While He spoke these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler..."

What was Jesus speaking about and to whom? Do you remember what was going on here? Jesus

had cast the demons out of the demoniacs of Gadara and sent them into a herd of swine. He had calmed the sea and wind. When He came back to Capernaum, that little village on the northern most point of the Sea of Galilee, He returned to the house where Peter lived. And the disciples of John the Baptist came and said, "Why aren't your disciples fasting like we and the Pharisees are? (Mt. 9:14). Now, as Jesus was interacting with the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist, a certain ruler came to Him. That speaks to me of Jesus' accessibility. He was not some religious guru in an ivory tower with lilies all around Him. He didn't live in a monastery. People didn't have to work their way up a hierarchy before they could have an audience with Him. Rather, He moved among common people. As God came to earth, Jesus pitched His tent with men, according to the literal Greek rendering of John 1:14. He was in the streets of the villages; He walked the dusty roads; He was in the synagogues; He was in the homes of others.

One day a lot of parents came to Him and brought their little children. When the disciples said, "Send those kids away," Jesus said, "No, permit the little children to come unto Me for of such is the Kingdom," and He gathered the little ones to Himself (Mt. 19:13-15). Jesus was accessible to adults and to little children as well. Almost everywhere He went He moved in a crowd. On another occasion He said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with Me now three days..." (Mt. 15:32). And do you think people asked Him questions when they got next to Him? Wouldn't you? Don't you think they brought Him all their problems? He was One who had all the answers. He was counseling, healing, and teaching in the midst of the people for three solid days. He even had to retreat to the Mount of Olives on occasions to commune with the Father in solitude. There were times when it was necessary for Him to tell others not to spread the news about His miracles because of the increased pressure that would result.

There was Jesus--the Creator of the universe, King of kings and Lord of lords--walking around the rolling hills of Galilee, with little children running near Him, and people stopping Him and talking. Whether He was in the villages, in a boat on the water, or even in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, He was nearly always surrounded by people. That tells me that God is accessible, because Jesus was God displaying Himself.

At that particular time, two people were in the crowd--one was a ruler, the other, a sick lady. One was respected and well-off; the other was definitely down-and-out. Can you imagine the assortment of people that would have been in a crowd like that? There would have been Pharisees who were trying to condemn Him, people who were trying to analyze Him, and people who were sick, hurting, poor, and downcast, trying to have their needs met. It thrills me to see how accessible Jesus was to the crowds.

II. JESUS WAS AVAILABLE (vv. 18b-19)

Jesus was not only accessible in that you could get to Him; He was available in that He would come to you. It's a marvelous reality that Jesus would respond to a particular person by being available.

A. The Request of Jairus (v. 18b)

1. His Position (v. 18b-d)

"...behold, there came a certain ruler..."

The word "behold" tells us that this was a remarkable incident. According to Mark and Luke, Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue and possibly even the chief elder. If so, he was the number one representative of the religious establishment in Capernaum. Synagogues were ruled by elders who served as spiritual leaders. They were also responsible for the administration of the synagogue, and coordinating the public worship. As men of great influence, the elders would appoint from among themselves a presiding ruler, who in turn would appoint those who were to preach, pray, and read out of the law. This ruler was responsible for administering the entire operation of the synagogue. He was a member of the religious establishment that, for the most part, was set against Christ, fighting Him tooth and nail throughout His ministry. Consequently, Jairus would have had a lot of

peer pressure to be a faithful Jewish religionist. For that reason, as he came to Jesus, you might have expected him to say, "Sir, I am the chief elder of the synagogue; I'd like to speak to You. Could we please have a private conversation?" But that's not what he said. He was not concerned about protecting his reputation.

2. His Prostration (v. 18c)

"...and worshiped Him..."

The word "worship" in ancient Greek describes a person who prostrated himself before another, often kissing the other person's feet, the hem of his garment, or the ground in front of him as an expression of respect. It is amazing, therefore, that this word is used to describe the action of an official from the religious establishment, for such reverence was only offered to a deity, a supernatural being, something considered holy, or a king who was considered to be divine. Using the word thirteen times in his gospel, Matthew shows that it is a fitting response to King. But what would have made that ruler bow down before Jesus? The answer is plain when we examine...

3. His Pleading (v. 18d)

"...saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live."

The accounts of Mark and Luke fill in more details, telling us that when the ruler initially spoke to Jesus, his daughter was in the process of dying. But Matthew condenses it all, reporting that she had died. Do you know why Jairus came to Jesus? He didn't care about the social pressure of the religious establishment--his daughter was dead and there were no resources within his system to deal with that. I believe that God had already been working in his heart, because his faith expressed not a taint of doubt. He knew that when Jesus touched his daughter, she would live. He swallowed his pride, turned his back on social pressure, and said good-bye to the religious establishment, as he fell flat on his face before Jesus. Let me give you two reasons that he was willing to do this. First, his pleading came...

a. From a Deep Need That is why people come to Christ. If you don't recognize your need for Him, you are not going to come. I once had a man say to me, "I have no need of Christ." I replied, "If you don't have any need of Christ, then you're not going to come to Him. We should pray that you would know pain, desperation, or the loss of all your resources so that you would recognize your need of Christ and come to Him." It's apparent to me that the man probably believed in the power of Christ, but maybe until that point, he had been somewhat hesitant to express that belief. However, now that his daughter was dying, he came in desperation. Evidently, his motive wasn't totally pure--he didn't come just because of his love for Jesus; he came because he was hurting deeply from emotional pain. His heart was crushed with grief. It's the people with a need that come to Christ. That is why the gospel is so often received by the poor, the sick, the weak, and the prisoners. Second, his willingness to plead for his daughter's life came... b. From a Determined Faith Even though his faith was inadequate and his motive was a little bit selfish, Jesus was still available to him. He really did believe that Jesus had the power to heal her and even raise her from the dead. That is a marvelous expression of faith rarely surpassed in the gospels. 1) Compared to the Centurion's Faith In Matthew 8, a centurion whose servant was afflicted with paralysis, said, "...speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.... When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (vv. 8b, 10). That man had enough faith to believe that Jesus could heal his servant with a word. If that was the greatest example of faith He'd seen in Israel, then what kind of faith was that which believed Jesus could raise a dead person to life? The faith of the synagogue official may have even surpassed that of the centurion. 2)

Compared to Martha's Faith Martha said to Jesus, "If You had only been here when my brother was sick, You could have done something; now he's dead and it's too late" (Jn. 11:21). She had her doubts about the resurrection power of Jesus. I believe that the synagogue official had the faith to be redeemed. Before the day was over, he had entered into the Kingdom of God. How did Jesus respond to his need and his faith? Verse 19 tells us:

B. The Response of Jesus (v. 19)

"And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples."

Jesus didn't say, "Well, I've got this very important meeting here with the multitude and I don't know how I'm going to have a chance to slip away, because there's lots of sick people that need Me here." No. He rose up and followed him. There are times when there were tremendous needs in an individual's life, and Jesus was always sensitive to that. John 6:37 says, "...him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Jesus was accessible to the crowd, available to the individual, and...III. JESUS WAS TOUCHABLE (vv. 20-22)A. A Desperate Search (vv. 20-21)

After Jesus had left to go with Jairus, being followed by His disciples and the multitude, there came a woman desperately searching to be healed: "And, behold, a woman, who had been diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment."

1. The Interruption

In that culture, a woman wouldn't go around touching men, let alone grabbing them, as the word "touch" indicates in the Greek. The same word is used in John 20 when Mary was clinging to Jesus after finding that He had risen from the dead. In effect, He said, "You can't hang onto Me; I've got to go back to heaven and send the Holy Spirit--you can't keep Me here." Similarly, that woman reached out and grabbed on to Jesus garment in desperation, having been diseased with an issue of blood for twelve years.

2. The Illness

What type of illness was this issue of blood? For twelve years, the woman could not stop bleeding. Its cause was due, perhaps, to a fibroid tumor in the uterus, something that would be readily treated today by surgery. As a result of her condition, she was considered perpetually unclean. Luke said that she could not be cured (8:43) and Mark said that she had spent all her money on doctors and was even worse (5:26). (Luke wouldn't have said that, of course, because he was a doctor!)

From the Jewish point of view, you couldn't imagine anything worse than being a woman with an issue of blood. It was humiliating beyond anything else, with the possible exception of leprosy. The disease rendered the sufferer unclean, according to Leviticus 15:25-27: "And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation, all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean. Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation; and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation. And whosoever toucheth those things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening." Leviticus says that a woman with an issue of blood was ceremonially unclean. Every bed she laid upon and everything she sat on, anything she wore, and anyone who touched her also became unclean. Therefore, she was excommunicated from the synagogue, divorced by her husband, and ostracized from all human relationships.

Consequently, for twelve years that poor woman had lived in isolation.

Do you see why she so desperately sought to touch Jesus? She too, had a deep need and she believed in him. She had lost all sense of propriety in her desperation. Some people say, "I'd like to come to Christ, but I'm certainly not going to openly walk into the church's counseling room." They aren't desperate enough. But if they ever get to the point of true desperation, they would probably knock the door of the counseling room down if it weren't open.

3. The Intention

The woman touched the hem (Gk. *kraspedon* = "tassel"; Heb. *zizith* = "fringe") of Jesus' garment. In the Old Testament (Num. 15:37-41; Dt. 22:12), the Israelites were instructed to mark their garments with a fringe of four blue tassels symbolizing the law of God. They identified a Jewish person as a member of God's chosen people regardless of where he was in the world, and reminded him every time he took his clothes off or put them on that he belonged to God. We have similar reminders

today: some people wear a cross or fish symbol.

The tassels on Christ's clothing probably swung a little bit as He moved through the crowd. Reaching out for one of them, the woman kept saying to herself, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be well" (Mt. 9:21b). And as she struggled through the crowd and finally grabbed the tassel, there came...

B. A Double Solution (v. 22)

1. Physical Healing

Instantly she was healed. Mark says that when the Lord felt power involuntarily pass from Him, He said, "Who touched My clothes?" 5:30b). When the woman grabbed the tassel, Jesus suddenly stopped in the midst of the crowd; it was as if time itself stopped, and for the moment it seemed as if only the woman and her great need existed. The disciples didn't understand Jesus' sensitivity to a seeking heart. Mark 5:31 and Luke 8:45 record them as saying, in effect, "Are You kidding? How can You say, 'Who touched You?' People are crowding all around You."

When Jesus looked around, He found the woman who had faith that He could heal her. Granted, her faith was not a mature faith, for it was somewhat superstitious. But the Lord responded to it anyway. Even faith as small as a mustard seed will move a mountain. The Lord can take an inadequate faith like Jairus's, which was somewhat selfish, and a superstitious faith, like that woman's, and create saving faith.

2. Spiritual Healing

Jesus couldn't just let that lady go or maybe she would have concluded that superstition was effective. He pulled her into the fullness of a relationship with Him. I don't really believe she was healed by her faith; I think she was healed by the sovereignty of God--He choose to heal her. Faith wasn't always present in the people Jesus healed. When Jesus said, "...thy faith hath made thee well" (8:22), He didn't use the usual word for healing, *iaomai*, it uses *sozo*, which can mean to save in terms of redemption. Jesus did miracles of healing everywhere, even for those who had no faith, but He saved only those who had faith in Him. For that reason, I think there was a redemptive element in her faith. Rather than leaving her superstitious about His healing power, Jesus drew her out and saved her.

The ruler had an inadequate motive of selfishness; the woman had an inadequate faith involving superstition, and yet Jesus redeemed them both. Their faith was like that of the man who said "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mk. 9:24). In other words, "Take me where I am with my little faith and move me to saving faith." Jesus always knew the difference between the jostling of the fickle mob and the grasping of the faithful soul.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is accessible, available, and touchable. But there are two things that will bring you to Him: one is a deep need, a sense of desperation over your condition; and the second is great faith. Do you believe in Christ? Have you looked at your life and seen that it is less than what it ought to be? Do you want to reach out and see somebody transform it? Consider these prayerful words:

Like her, dear Lord I too would come:

Sick, sin stained, amid the crowd alone.

I dare not tell to all their ears

The longings which are to Thee known.

Help, help gracious Lord, no eye but Thine

Can graze the hills of bygone years,

All human aid is vain but Thou

Canst heal my wounds and dry my tears.

Oh God, if only I may touch

Thy saving virtue soul to soul,

Then come what may let all men know
That Jesus Christ has made me whole.

Jesus is touchable, available, and accessible. He is God, operating in the world of man through His Spirit, and He is able to transform your life.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is Jesus' power over death an essential message for us?
2. What two things troubled Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus?
3. Although the curse of sin has marred God's perfect creation, what hope does the Bible offer for the future?
4. What does Matthew show us as an important verification of Jesus' identity as the Messiah?
5. What is the primary reason that Jesus healed people? Were faith and worthiness required in an individual's life for him to do so?
6. How are the healings of the blind and the dumb in the third set of miracles, related illustrations of Jesus' resurrection power?
7. What two questions did G. B. Hardy ask in his examination of religion, and what two answers did he find?
8. Against the background of Jesus' power and majesty, what do we see about Christ's dealings with people in Matthew 9:18-22?
9. In what ways was Jesus accessible? Give an example.
10. How did Jesus demonstrate His availability to the individual?
11. Why is it remarkable that the ruler of Matthew 9:18 would come to Jesus for help?
12. What made that ruler come and bow down before Jesus?
13. How was Jesus interrupted as He went to help Jairus? What did the interruption become for Jesus?
14. Why was the woman's condition so desperate?
15. How did the Lord respond to the woman's somewhat superstitious faith?
16. As implied by the Greek verb, what other type of healing did the woman receive?
17. What are two elements that will bring a person to Christ?

Pondering the Principles

1. Think back to the two questions G. B. Hardy asked when examining religion. Do you think those are questions all men desire to know the answers to even though they may have never consciously asked them? Assuming that eternal life is something that all men seek, what truths could you relate to people that might lead them to consider Jesus? Memorize Jesus' claim to be "the resurrection and the life" in John 11:25-26, being ready to share it when the topics of death and life after death are being discussed.
2. Meditate on Philippians 2:5-8 and Hebrews 4:14-16. Thank God that He loved man enough to make Himself accessible by coming to earth in the person of Jesus, humbling Himself and dying on the cross for our sake, and offering mercy and grace to us in time of need as a sympathetic Savior.
3. Is there a sense of desperation in your life because of a physical, emotional, or spiritual problem? If you have recognized your deep need, do you believe that Jesus Christ can meet it? Are you willing to fall into the loving arms of Jesus in spite of the often skeptical and ridiculing eyes of the world? If so, your humble faith will be rewarded, according to 1 Peter 5:6-7.

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