

0308

Holy interruption

Matthew 9:18-26

November 20, 2022

Lord willing, the plan is to start our advent series next week. As I've done before, I sometimes like to switch things up when we're between series.

Lord willing, the plan is to resume back in Galatians in January.

As we interrupt our regularly scheduled preaching, Matthew 9 is really a perfect passage as it deals with Jesus facing an interruption of his own.

Text

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Prayer

Introduction

This passage is pretty straightforward.

The climax of the story is Jesus raising a young girl from the dead.

Jesus raises three people from the dead in the gospels. Lazarus in the gospel of John. A young man in Luke 7. And a young girl here in Matthew 8. This same story is also told in the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

In this passage, a man approaches Jesus saying that his daughter has just died. While Jesus is on his way to her, he's interrupted by a woman who's been hemorrhaging blood. He heals her, finishes his travels, and then raises the girl from the dead.

That's the short version. And in one way, it's pretty straightforward.

But it's also just the tip of the iceberg.

Introduction

Roughly 90% of the surface area of an iceberg is actually underwater. As big as they can appear, there's so much more that's below the surface.

And I think that's a helpful metaphor for our passage today.

Just from reading it, there's so much that we see to this story. And it's a wonderful passage in God's word.

But when we look below the surface, we see that there's more than meets the eye, more than what we thought.

Because a story like this one is so straightforward that I think it can be easy to read it in your Bible, think "well that's good. It's good we see Jesus raise people from the dead in the gospels."

And it is.

But it's my hope that as we go below the surface of this passage, we can have an even greater appreciation for what's going on in this story, and ideally that it would point us to a deeper love and appreciation for Christ and the gospel.

Bridge

And we'll be looking at this passage in three scenes.

I. Jairus comes to Jesus

Verse 18:

While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Matthew doesn't tell us this man's name but Mark and Luke say he was Jairus and that he was a synagogue roller.

So he was a prominent figure in the Jewish community. Someone who was respected.

And he approaches Jesus and tells him that his daughter has died. Jairus asks Jesus to come put his hands on her so she may live.

In Matthew's account, he makes no mention of any discussion between Jesus and Jairus.

Verse 19 simply says that Jesus arose and began to follow him with the disciples.

So he's off to intervene on behalf of the daughter of Jairus...

Until....

And we quickly come to our second scene.

II. The interruption

Verse 20:

²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

Historical context

In all three of the gospel mentions of this event, the woman's name is never given.

We're told that she had had a discharge of blood.

In other words, between her regular menstrual cycles, the woman was having some sort of hemorrhage.

And as the passage tells us, it had lasted for twelve years. There are numerous things that can cause this condition. Hormone imbalances, infections, uterine fibroids, various forms of cancer.

Whatever it was, considering it had lasted for 12 years, it doesn't seem that it would have been life threatening.

But that doesn't mean that the significance of her health issue should be diminished.

Because in this culture in this time, this women's issue would have had devastating consequences.

I'm going to take just a moment and give some Old Testament background for this situation...

Mark and Luke's accounts of this story tells us that she had tried several different interventions with different doctors and she had basically spent all that she had in trying to stop the bleeding, but nothing had worked.

Based on Leviticus 15, the woman would have been considered ceremonially unclean.

There is an emphasis in Leviticus on clean vs unclean.

And this dealt with someone's preparation to worship.

Everyone would have been unclean at certain times in life. Again, unclean did not necessarily mean you had sinned.

The aforementioned Leviticus 15 deals with various bodily discharges of both men and women. Some of these are really common. Things like intercourse and menstrual cycles. Others were less prevalent, such as the woman who had been suffering hemorrhages.

But these various discharges made people ceremonially unclean for a time period ranging from a day to a week, depending on the situation.

An added benefit of these laws is that people who were going through various discharges of bodily fluids could have potentially put other people at risk of contracting diseases. And in a culture that didn't know what we know about germs and the transmission of disease, this was helpful. Although it should be understood that THAT was not the purpose for the laws of clean and unclean. If it were, it makes no sense that such Old Testament laws no longer carried weight after the time of Christ.

The desire for being clean isn't primarily concerned with tidiness or even hygiene. It's concerned with pointing us to the holiness of God. That God is set apart, he is righteous. And that there is cleansing to be done before approaching him. The physical purification was meant to point to the true purity of heart that God desires from us.

We don't just casually approach a holy God in any way we want. He is to be approached with reverence.

As I've already said, being unclean for these things was not a matter of sin.

So we return to the woman in Matthew 9. She had suffered from this discharge for 12 years. Which means she had been considered unclean for 12 years.

And as I said, that would have major repercussions. If an unclean person touched someone else, the person they touched became unclean.

You couldn't sit where someone unclean sat or you would be unclean.

So you would have to ritually wash, you would have had to wait for a period of time before you were considered clean again. But the fact that this woman has consistently had this discharge would have meant that she was constantly unclean.

I think it's important to have this background for this woman's situation because when we begin to understand that, we realize that what she was going through was no small thing.

This issue was ruining her life. And in her desperation, she comes to Jesus.

She would not have been allowed to attend public worship.

She would have been isolated and essentially an outcast.

It is very possible that this woman had never been married. If she had been, given her status as being unclean, it would have been in violation of the Old Testament Law for her and a husband to have consummated the marriage. If she hadn't been able to consummate the marriage, and therefore provide an heir, that was grounds for divorce in this culture.

Without a husband or male offspring, life would have been extremely difficult for a Jewish woman. She would have had no support. And little opportunity to support herself.

It wasn't 2022. It's not like she just would have gone and gotten a job or gone to school. It was a patriarchal society.

I go into all of this detail because I think it's easy to read those few verses real quickly without truly appreciating the tremendous ramifications this woman would have endured.

As she approached Jesus, she was discrete. Verse 20 says she came up behind him. It's because she likely felt that she couldn't make herself known.

The passage tells us that she had touched the fringe of Jesus' garment.

Verse 20 into 21:

a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well."

Now what does it mean the "fringe of his garment?"

I used to think that this story was saying that she thought she could touch any part of his outfit and she would be made well.

But again there's more below the surface.

In the Old Testament Law, men wore special tassels on their clothing. These are called Tzitzit. They're stringed tassels that will hang off of clothing. Orthodox Jews still wear them.

(picture)

The purpose of the tassels is to have a reminder God's commands and they had symbolic meaning.

Illustration

You know how sometimes you're trying to remember something and so you'll tie a piece of string around your finger, or put a rubber band on your wrist, or maybe you set an alarm on your cell phone, anything you can do to make sure you remember something that you know you really need to remember.

And so when the woman touches the fringes of Jesus' garment, these tassels are almost certainly what the story is referring to. And so that's what she touches.

Application

What she did was a bit superstitious.

Thinking that just touching his clothing would have some sort of power in it.

Verse 22:

²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

So Jesus is on the way to do one miracle and he's interrupted by another woman in a time of need and he does another miracle.

He heals her.

There's a lesson in that. If you look at a dead girl and a woman who has discharges of blood...those two crises are not created equally.

The dead girl is obviously a bigger deal.

But Jesus isn't too busy to be interrupted.

We come to our third scene.

III. Jesus raises a girl from the dead.

We see the situation described.

²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion,

In this time period, it was a custom that you would hire professional mourners to go to funerals.

The funeral would have been done very shortly after death as this was a point in history when they would not have done embalming.

But during all of the antics of this very public funeral, Jesus interjects in verse 24:

"Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping."

But they're at a funeral.

And funerals are for dead people.

And so to these people, what they're hearing is absurd.

And the text tells us

And they laughed at him.

But the crowd is sent away.

Verse 25:

But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.

The text tells us nothing of what she said, or how Jairus, her father, responded.

Mark and Luke both elaborate a little bit more, but in Matthew's gospel, the story just ends.

And the report of this went through all that district.

To this point in Matthew, Jesus has been growing in reputation throughout the region. And, not surprisingly, him raising a girl from the dead would catch people's attention.

Review

So that's the story.

I think it's easy to look at this passage and to think it's a story about Jesus raising someone from the dead.

And it is that.

But it's not just about that.

Because it's one story but there are two miracles.

And I think we miss the point if we just make it about this second one.

These are two situations that could hardly be more different

We have a man who goes to Jesus and a woman who goes to Jesus. Women were treated as second class citizens in this culture. But Jesus has interactions with women throughout the gospels.

One of the people who approached Jesus was in a position of authority, the other was on the fringes of society.

One was respected, the other was an outcast. One was a man of some means, the other would have almost definitely been poor.

One was a person who would have been clean according to the Law of the Old Testament the other was perpetually unclean.

One comes to Jesus and shows reverence for Him. Mark and Luke's accounts both tell us that Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus. The other person sneaks up to Jesus.

But what do they have in common? What's the connection?

The two stories are together in this passage for a reason.

One thing they have in common, and this is something we've talked about a lot.

When you look at this story in light of the Old Testament's laws on clean and unclean, Jesus comes into contact with two women who are both unclean.

Being dead makes you unclean, by the way.

The first one touches Jesus.

The second one, the passage tells us, Jesus took her by the hand.

And those two facts are important to the story.

Because so much of your life in Judaism revolved around the Law. Being clean, following the commands.

It wasn't a casual thing the way how we make church today. It was an all-encompassing way of life.

And as I said earlier, touching someone who was unclean made you unclean. And if you were unclean, as we've said, that impacted your ability to gather together with God's people and worship, and participate in religious activities as well as other social interactions.

Touching someone who was ritually unclean made you unclean. And Jesus touched both of these women.

He did it because he's pointing to a greater cleanliness.

He's replacing the Old Testament law, the old covenant with something better. And in this passage, we get a picture of that.

He's replacing the law of the Old Testament. The ceremonial laws were meant to point us to the holiness of God and with Jesus on earth, we have the Holy God in the world.

He comes into contact with these two women who are unclean.

He didn't have to.

Jesus does other miracles where he doesn't touch the person.

Validation

In John 4, a man comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his son who's very sick. Jesus doesn't even go to the boy, but simply tells the father that his son will live (John 4:46-54).

It's a long distances healing.

In John 5, a person who's paralyzed comes to Jesus and Jesus commands him to "get up, take up your bed, and walk." (John 5:8).

And yet that's not what Jesus does with these people who are unclean.

Why didn't he just read the first woman's mind and know she would come towards him and heal her from a distance? Why not just raise the girl from the dead?

He didn't touch them because he needed to touch them to heal them. It's that he chose to.

Conclusion

In this passage, we see faith. The faith of the woman who's been having the discharges. The faith of the father. It is faith that has them turn to Jesus and to KNOW that Jesus is the answer, that Jesus is the hope.

And so Jesus comes into contact with people in their time of need.

He brings restoration. He gives them life.

Because when the Lord Jesus comes into your life, even though you're a sinner, even though you don't deserve his grace, that we are unclean. We are not holy. We cannot be holy. We can never truly purify ourselves, purify our hearts. We can never cleanse ourselves by good deeds, by church involvement, by any sort of rules, we can never purify ourselves enough to enter the presence of a Holy God.

But even though we are unclean, that when Jesus touches us, when the gospel touches our hearts, we become clean.

Observant Jews hated the thought of being unclean.

Jesus coming into contact with the unclean didn't make Him unclean. It made the unclean, clean.

Really that's the main idea of this whole passage.

Jesus coming into contact with the unclean didn't make Him unclean. It made the unclean, clean.

And when you trust in that by faith, even though you yourself are not clean, that you yourself are not ready to enter the presence of God, he makes you clean. Because he is that awesomely Holy.

And he'll do that for anyone who comes to him in faith. He'll make you clean. Because he is clean. He'll make you worthy to be in the presence of God. By His Holy Spirit, he will make your heart clean. Because of his death and resurrection, he'll make your soul clean.

And he will do that for anyone who comes to him in faith.

Jesus makes the unclean, clean. Trust in him. Place your faith in Him. That we do not live up to the standards of a Holy God.

Our world likes to water down the gospel and play games with the gospel. That if God is loving, it doesn't matter what I believe.

You can't be clean if you don't want to be. Jesus cleanses those who trust in Him by faith.

He makes the unclean, clean. He forgives you of your sins. He washes them away. But you have to have faith in Him. You can't be made clean unless you know you're dirty.

He does these two miracles for these two women. And those are wonderful works of grace in their lives. They should point us to the healing power of Christ. They should point us to the glory and power of God. That when things look bleak and hopeless, we have a God in whom we can hope. Jesus gives life to the dead!

But maybe it's tempting to get cynical. That he is doing these miracles left and right for these people but people need help today.

For this young girl and for the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood, and for everyone else Jesus ever healed, all to them still eventually died. Because it's a fallen world. They got to experience this wonderful work of Christ and they lived maybe another 20 or 30 or 40 or however many years.

But still they died. But in doing these miracles, Jesus is displaying his power which is the basis for our hope.

Even though the gospel makes us right with God, it doesn't insulate us from the fact that the world is fallen. But Jesus has promised eternal life to all who trust in Him.

Each of the gospels has stories of Jesus raising people from the dead. This points us to his own death and resurrection. And that points us to our own hope because of the gospel. That Jesus is powerful over all things. He has power over people's health, power over nature, even power over life and death.

We should read this story knowing that this is a real event that really happened. That this little girl really was dead. This isn't some made up story, this isn't some fable. It's worthless to us if that's the case.

But it is a real event in time and history. He raised her from the dead.

That's the power that he has. That's the dominion he has over life. That's the promise he makes to all who trust in him.

And because this girl literally died and was raised. And because Jesus literally died and rose, and promises to cleans us of our sins, all who trust in Him and in His gospel

should live each day in the confidence and knowledge that we have an eternal future in the presence of the Holy God who makes the unclean, clean.