

Justified Faith  
Matthew 9:18-26

Should we try to study these two miracle stories together? Well, we don't really have a choice. They happened almost at the same time. In fact, the story of the woman with the issue of blood is nested within the story of the synagogue official and his daughter. So, what can we learn from comparing these two miracles?

First, let's take a look at the two people who came to Jesus for help. One was a ruler of the synagogue – Mark and Luke tell us that his name was Jairus. He was an elder, one of the most respected men in the community. We don't know how much money he had, but he certainly had a comfortable home, one capable of hosting all his family and friends who had come to mourn his terrible loss.

And what about this woman? Far from being a prominent person, none of the gospel writers record her name. Moreover, Mark tells us that whatever she once possessed she had lost, paying doctors in a vain attempt to get well. And to make matters worse, we know she was a social outcast. For Leviticus chapter 15 says this: "If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her customary impurity, or if it runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean."

But the law goes on. "Whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening." In other words, according to the Law of Moses, she was an untouchable. She was someone who was supposed to be shunned by polite society. She was someone who was alone even in the midst of the great crowds that always thronged around Jesus.

And so, I suppose the first thing we can learn from this story is that Jesus is an equal opportunity Savior. For He didn't just come to save the rich and comfortable and popular. And He didn't just come to save the poor and lonely and miserable. He came to bless all kinds of people, regardless of our worldly circumstances.

But Jairus and this woman didn't just come from different strata of society. They also had very different kinds of problems. Verse 20 tells us that the woman had been suffering from her issue of blood for twelve years. So, isn't it striking that Luke tells us that Jairus' daughter was about 12 years old when she died? Jairus' problem was thus an interruption of 12 joyful years of knowing and loving his daughter. The woman's problem was 12 years of increasing poverty and loneliness and misery.

So, maybe you can more easily sympathize with Jairus today. Maybe your life has been running along smoothly, but all of a sudden something has gone terribly wrong. Maybe your world has been rocked, and you stand stunned, disoriented by your new reality.

Or maybe this poor woman's experience is more familiar to you. Maybe you have been facing the same intractable problems for years. Maybe you've been wrestling with a chronic illness in yourself or a loved one. Perhaps you've been facing a crushing grief or a stubborn temptation or a besetting sin for longer than you care to remember. Maybe you are not so much stunned as numb, feeling that you have no one who cares, that you have no one to help you.

But no matter what problems may face us, these two stories make it plain that Jesus has the answer. He alone has the power we need, and He loves us enough to help us and our loved ones, no matter how desperate our problems may be. No matter who we are, and no matter what is going on in our lives, all of us just need to trust Jesus.

But that's easier said than done, isn't it? For if Jairus and the woman were very different people with very different problems, they also had very different reasons why they might have been reluctant to come to Jesus.

For think again about Jairus' reputation. He was, after all, an elder, a ruler of the synagogue. Because he knew the Law of God so well, he was the one that other people looked up to and respected, the one that other people came to with their own problems. And so, as verse 18 says, for him to worship Jesus, for him to bow down to Jesus, for him to ask Jesus for help – well, that would require him to swallow a lot of his pride. That couldn't have been easy for him.

For what did Jairus really know about Jesus? Sure, He had done some pretty miraculous things, casting out demons and healing all sorts of sick people. He had even cleansed a man of leprosy, an incurable illness. And earlier in this chapter Jesus had healed a man of his paralysis with just a word. No, there could be no doubt that Jesus was a healer of tremendous power.

But up to this point in his gospel, Matthew hasn't mentioned Jesus bringing anyone back from the dead. So in coming to Jesus, Jairus was actually running a big risk. For what if he, a respected pillar of the community, had humbled himself before this wandering, itinerant rabbi, publicly stating his confidence in Jesus' ability to raise his daughter from the dead – and what if Jesus hadn't been able to do it? Wouldn't that mean Jairus would lose the respect of the members of his synagogue, not to mention the whole community? Oh, yes, bowing down before Jesus was a big risk for Jairus.

And humbling ourselves before Jesus can be a big risk for us too. Sure, it's easy to say that we depend on Jesus to save us from our sins. That's still socially acceptable, at least here in Mississippi – perhaps it's even expected. But what about trusting Him to tell us what to do? What about trusting Him to direct the course of our lives, regardless of what we want? What about allowing His Word alone to determine for us what's right and wrong, regardless of what makes sense to us? Sure, it's easy to trust Jesus to be our Savior. But isn't it a risk to trust Him to be our Lord?

For if we truly fall down at the feet of Jesus as Jairus did, if we surrender ourselves fully to His authority, what changes in our lives might He call us to make? Might we have to settle for fewer possessions in order to give more money or more time to the work of the kingdom and the spread of the gospel? Might we have to abandon some of our activities if those things don't give glory to God? Might we have to take a stand on certain issues that would make us unpopular with the culture at large? Truly trusting Jesus, trusting Him with all we are and all we have – that can still be a big risk.

Well, what about this sick woman? What might have made her hesitant to trust Jesus? No, she wasn't worried about losing her pride, or her money or her social position – she didn't have any of those things. No, her challenge went much deeper. Her challenge cut right to her heart. Her challenge was to hope again after 12 years of dashed hopes. Her challenge was to trust Jesus when all the treatments of all the doctors and all the prayers of all the rabbis had been unable to help her. Her challenge was to have faith in spite of the despair that had mastered her for so long.

For what if she couldn't get to Jesus through the crowd? Or what if she touched Him and nothing happened? Or what if He rejected her because of her uncleanness? It would have been much safer just to keep on feeling sorry for herself than to open herself up to another crushing disappointment. Oh, yes, trusting Jesus was a big risk for her.

And we can face the same sort of risk, can't we? For how easy is it to keep on praying for release from that habit or that besetting sin when it has had us by the throat for so many years? How easy is it to let go of all those sins that comfort us with their familiarity even as they slowly drain us of joy and peace and even of life itself?

And how can we possibly trust God in the midst of our grief or despair? How can we muster up the courage to pray one more time for our most painful situations when our prayers have gone unanswered for so long? Wouldn't it be safer just to plaster on our smiles and say everything's fine and play church than it would be for us really to open up our hearts and submit ourselves completely to the will of God? Oh yes, truly trusting Jesus, completely abandoning ourselves to His will – that can still be a very big risk.

But remember, the real story here is not that these two people put aside their pride or their fear in order to reach out to Jesus. The real story isn't about the faith that they placed in Jesus. The real story is how Jesus justified their faith in Him. The real story is about how God's power and love came through for each of them.

For look again at this poor woman, straining through the crowd to get close enough to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, just close enough to touch one of the tassels that the Law of Moses commanded the Jews to sew on all their clothes, tassels that reminded them to keep all the commandments of God, and thus to be holy. For at

the slightest contact between her uncleanness and Jesus' holiness, her prayer was answered, and her flow of blood immediately stopped.

And although she probably would have been content to disappear into the crowd, Jesus gave her yet another blessing. For remember, according to the Law of Moses, this woman had not only been sick for 12 years – she had been unclean for all that time. For 12 years, she had not been accepted in polite society. And so, as Jesus announced to the crowd that she had been healed, He was not just making her physically whole. He was also publicly removing her shame. Far from continuing to be a social outcast, now Jesus calls her “Daughter.” Instead of her touch making Jesus unclean, He declares that her trust in Him has made her clean. She asked for what she thought was a big miracle, and God came through for her.

And isn't the same thing true of Jairus? Yes, he had asked Jesus to do something that was quite frankly impossible. And no, none of the mourners who had gathered to comfort him and his family thought there was a chance that Jesus could help Jairus' daughter – after all, they knew good and well that she was dead, and not just sleeping. The idea that Jesus could raise the dead was, for them, laughable.

But what is impossible for man is possible with God. Remember, when Jesus' holiness came into contact with the woman's uncleanness, he cleansed her of her chronic hemorrhage. Just so, when Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord, the Giver of Life reached out His hand to touch death, the result is life. The girl who slept the sleep of death was made alive.

And the same power and love of the same God is available for all of us today. Are you worn down by despair or discouragement? Are you sick or grieving? Are you tired from struggling against the sin in your life and in the world around you? Do you just want your problems and your pain to go away?

Then hear the good news: nothing is impossible for Jesus. For He doesn't just come to mitigate the effects of sin in our lives – the despair, the disappointment, the discouragement. No, He comes to wash us clean of it once and for all. He doesn't just come to make our bodies well. No, He comes to give us new life, abundant life, everlasting life. He doesn't just come to reunite us with human society. He comes to make us sons and daughters of God Almighty. Jesus has come to give us far more than we could ever ask for or imagine.

And how do we know this? Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. There, he didn't just make himself ceremonially unclean by touching an impure woman or by touching a corpse. There, the Holy One of God became unclean by taking on Himself all the sins of all His people. There, the Son of God endured all the wrath of the Father and all the pains of Hell that we might be spared such punishment, such anguish. He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. He became a curse for us that we might receive the blessing of God. And Jesus was willing to go through all of that, Jesus was willing to suffer all that pain and all that shame because He loves us so much. So, could we have any need that He isn't willing to satisfy?

Moreover, when we gaze into the empty tomb, can any of our prayers possibly be too difficult for Him? When we remember the unshakable reality of His Resurrection power, can any of our problems be too hard for Him to solve?

So as this woman did, let us reach through the crowds toward our loving Lord. As Jairus did, let us fall down before our Almighty King. Let us lift up our needs, our desires, and our hurting hearts to Him. And as we pray and as we trust Him, let's be prepared to receive amazing blessings from the One Who loves us so much, the One for Whom nothing is impossible.