

SUFFERING MANY THINGS

The differing ways in which Jesus responded to Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood speak volumes on how we should respond to suffering.

Ellen Dipenaar, a dedicated Christian South African, contracted leprosy and was sent to a leprosarium. While she was receiving treatment, her only son died of polio, her husband succumbed to cancer, and her sister died in a car accident. As if this weren't enough, she discovered that growths on her legs were gangrenous, a condition that led to amputation. Then, when her doctor prescribed eye-drops, the nurse who administered the medication made a serious mistake: instead of eye-drops, she administered acid, which led to Ellen's blindness!

Many faithful Christians around the world are suffering many things on account of their faith. Why is it

that sometimes when people make a commitment to be faithful to Christ, their lives go from bad to worse?

There are Adventists who are in prison or who have lost their jobs because they would not compromise their biblical convictions through Sabbath work, lying, or fighting in their tribes' or nations' wars. Adventist refugees are starving to death in troubled regions of the world because they will not eat unclean foods, sometimes the only available provision to keep themselves alive. Adventists have been disowned by

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their families, divorced by their spouses, and killed by their neighbors because of their religious convictions.

Where is God when His children suffer many things? What should Christians do when, after taking a stand for God, things go from bad to worse? A partial answer to these perplexing questions may be found in Mark 5. This chapter in the Gospel of Mark may well be described as a chapter of sorrows.

A Chapter of Sorrows

Mark 5 begins with the painful account of a man living in a tomb, possessed by evil spirits. Another man emerges from his house brokenhearted because his only daughter is seriously ill. Then we are told of a woman who, for 12 years, has been suffering from a bleeding disorder. Finally, we are taken into a

home where a young girl lies dead.

This chapter describes individuals who are suffering many things: demon possession; sudden, acute illness; chronic, incurable illness; poverty; ridicule and scorn; and death.

In verses 21-34 is the account of the woman with an issue of blood. The account of her condition is intricately woven together with Jairus's experience.

The passage divides into three distinct parts:

Part 1 (vss. 21-24) begins on a note of urgency, with an emergency in the house of Jairus, who comes to Jesus, asking Him to heal his dying daughter—his *only* daughter (Luke 8:42). Jesus responds immediately. As He heads toward the home of Jairus, a large crowd goes with Him.

Part 2 (vss. 25-34) opens abruptly with a shift from the emergency situ-

ation of Jairus to an anonymous woman with an issue of blood. Her arrival on the scene causes a delay in the journey to the home of Jairus. For 12 years this woman has unsuccessfully tried everything. Finally, she decides to go to Jesus by pressing through the crowd and touching the hem of His garment. Just then, Jesus asks what seems to the disciples to be a rather ridiculous question: “Who touched My clothes?” (vs. 30, NKJV). At Christ's persistence, the woman confesses what has happened, and Jesus encourages her to go home in peace.

In Part 3 (vss. 35-43) the narrative shifts back to Jairus. Messengers from his house arrive with the bad news of the child's death. Jesus ignores the news, urges Jairus to have faith, and goes to his home with Peter, James, and John. Despite the scorn and ridicule of professional mourners, Jesus raises the dead child back to life and charges the parents not to publicize the miracle.

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valuable lessons on what to do when, after taking a stand for Jesus, situations go from bad to worse.

A Closer Look

A casual reading of Mark 5:21-43 reveals some general parallels between the two stories of Jairus and the woman: both have desperate needs; both go to Jesus for help; and both are helped by Jesus. When the two accounts more closely, however, some interesting contrasts emerge:

1. *Names.* Whereas Jairus is identified by name, the woman's name is not given; she is simply identified as “a certain woman” (vs. 25, KJV). These are a prominent, well-known person and an anonymous, unknown individual.

2. *Condition.* The woman's condition may be described as chronic. She has battled an incurable illness for 12 years. On the other hand, Jairus's daughter's situation is acute, a sudden, terminal illness.

3. *Time/duration.* The woman has suffered in her condition for 12 years. This is also the age of Jairus's daughter (vs. 42). In other words, the year in which the child is born is the exact year in which the woman begins bleeding! Thus, while Jairus's daughter experiences 12 years of vitality and health, the woman suffers 12 years of continuous ill health. Jairus experiences 12 years of joy and hope; the woman suffers 12 years of deterioration and despair.

4. *Religious status.* Jairus is a ruler of the synagogue. But the woman, because of her issue of blood, would be an outcast from the synagogue, for according to Leviticus 15:25-33, the woman's condition made her unclean, and any contact with others made them unclean as well.

5. *Social/economic status.* The woman is economically handicapped, having spent all that she has on many physicians. But Jairus is a man of means, with servants and social respectability.

6. *Options.* For the woman, Jesus is the last resort. She has unsuccessfully tried other remedies and options. But apparently, for Jairus, Jesus is His first choice; he goes straight to Jesus when his child takes ill.

7. *Advocate.* The woman has no one to plead her case with Jesus, so she has to go herself. Jairus serves as a mouthpiece to plead the case for his daughter.

8. *Manner of coming.* The woman comes to Jesus secretly, anonymously. Jairus comes to Jesus publicly and openly.

9. *Direction of approach.* The woman approaches Jesus from behind (vs. 27), falling later at His feet at the end of her encounter with Him. On the other hand, Jairus comes to Jesus face to face, falling at Jesus' feet at the beginning of his encounter.

10. *Result of delay.* Because of

Jesus' delay in going to Jairus's home, the woman is healed. But because of the delay, Jairus's daughter dies.

11. *Word from Jesus.* Jesus speaks to the woman only after the good news of her healing. But He speaks to Jairus in the text only after the bad news of the child's death.

12. *Testimonies.* Though the woman comes to Jesus secretly, her healing is made public. On the other hand, though Jairus comes publicly to Jesus, the healing of his child is to be kept secret (vs. 43).

The differences and similarities in the two stories help in understanding why Mark sandwiches the story of the woman within that of Jairus.

The Trial of Jairus's Faith

Jairus exercises great faith when he comes publicly to Jesus, an unpopular decision that could cost him his job as a ruler of the synagogue. He could have come to Jesus secretly like the woman or like Nicodemus, another ruler of the synagogue (John 3). But Jairus takes a stand for the Man of Galilee. He recognizes that the Man who associates with sinners and tax collectors is none other than the Messiah.

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Jairus has come to a point in his life at which nothing, not even his social standing, job, or wealth, matters to him more than one simple fact: His child is dying. And only a Savior can save her. Every other earthly consideration pales into insignificance. Thus, he makes a costly decision for Christ. He does right because it is right and leaves the consequences to God. And God always honors those who take a stand with Him, regardless of circumstances.

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Christ rewards this faith by immediately setting out to Jairus's house. But since every true faith requires public testing, Jairus's faith is also tried. Notice how Jesus allows Jairus's faith to be tested.

- Delay by the crowd. Jesus is on a life-and-death errand—an emergency situation in Jairus's home—and the crowd impedes His movement. Jesus could drive away the throng that surrounds him, but He chooses not to do so. Later, after the child has died, Christ sends away the crowd (vs. 37). But when Jesus might be expected to do something about

the crowd, which is jostling and obstructing His movement, He does nothing.

Imagine the driver of an ambulance caught in traffic yet refusing to sound his sirens? Imagine how Jairus feels when the crowd delays the movement of Jesus to his home.

Why does the Lord often delay when we trust Him with our urgent cases?

- Silence of Jesus. Jairus experiences another trial. Notice that besides not asking the crowd to give way, Jesus also does not speak a word of encouragement to Jairus, assuring him that all will be well. Instead, Jesus allows His movement to be interrupted by the woman.

Why does the Lord often allow our cherished plans to be interrupted? Why does the Lord speak to others, but not to Jairus? Why does He sometimes seem to care about others, while appearing indifferent

Someone has said that whenever God says, “Don’t be afraid,” it is time to start worrying, because He is about to ask you to do the impossible. (Consider Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Mary.) But whenever Jesus says, “Be not afraid,” that command is also a promise.

to our plight? And, worse still, why does Jesus stop and ask a seemingly pointless question: “Who touched my clothes?” (vs. 30, NKJV).

To the disciples this is not logical, since Jesus has been jostled and touched by a host of individuals. The fact remains, however, that what Jesus says may not always be logical to the rational mind. It is illogical to insist that one should never lie, steal, kill, or break any of God’s Ten Commandments to save life. The Christian does not always operate on human logic, but on faith in God and His Word. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV).

But the question still remains: Why is it that when one puts one’s trust in the Lord He sometimes allows plans to be interrupted? Why does the Lord seem silent when, at the same time, He appears to pay attention to others? Why does He call on others while He appears to

pass us by?

To Jairus, the delay by the crowd, the interruption by the woman and Christ’s silence and seeming hesitation is a trial of his faith. Imagine Jairus saying to himself: *Master, if we continue to delay, my child will die! The immediate mission is to assist a dying girl. Why are you concerned about the insignificance of someone touching your clothes? Further delay will be catastrophic.*

But Jesus still delays.

- Further delay by the woman. Jesus looks in the direction of the woman, and speaks to her (vss. 32, 34), but not a word to Jairus. Imagine what is going through Jairus’s mind: *Lord, this woman’s situation is chronic, not an emergency like mine!*

- “Trembling with fear” the woman falls at Christ feet and tells all (vs. 33, NIV). She is afraid because she has broken the rules of the Torah (God’s law) regarding ritual uncleanness. By touching Jesus, she fears, she has made Him ritually unclean (Num. 5:1-4; Lev. 15:25). Even worse, she is asked to acknowledge her unclean-

ness in the presence of a leader of her local synagogue. Besides the courage such a step would involve, Jesus is asking her to do something humiliating: talk about her problem in front of men. It is one thing for a woman to discuss this kind of problem with other women; it is another to declare the uncleanness before a large crowd, including the disciples of Christ and the ruler of the synagogue.

Meanwhile, as the woman tells “the whole truth” (vs. 33, NKJV), Jairus waits impatiently. Imagine what telling the whole truth entailed!

The Bible simply says that the woman “came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth” (vs. 33, KJV). While she is telling her entire story to Jesus and all within hearing, Jairus is seemingly ignored by Christ. Jesus patiently listens and gives encouragement to the woman: ““Daughter, your faith [not your superstitious touch of My garment] has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction”” (vs. 34, NKJV). But not a word to Jairus.

- From bad to worse. Just then messengers from Jairus’s home arrive with bad news: ““Your daughter is dead”” (vs. 35, NKJV). It is easy to imagine Jairus saying to himself: *With all these delays, I knew it would come to this.*

Christians sometimes hear these dreadful words: “Your loved one is

dead!” “Your job is ended!” “Your career is over!” “Your future is hopeless!” “Your marriage is over!” “Your cancer is terminal!”

Often, these cruel words come when they’ve just committed or rededicated their life to Christ. The verdict is announced when they’re trying to do what is right, such as getting out of an immoral relationship or returning a faithful tithe.

Why do things go from bad to worse at the very time someone is trying to do the right thing? They are doing their best to honor God’s Sabbath, only to lose their job. They try to do God’s will and their spouse threatens divorce. They try to tell the truth under dire circumstances and are fired from their job.

And then they are told, “Yours is a hopeless case. Don’t waste Christ’s time.” Jairus experiences this: ““Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?”” (vs. 35, NKJV).

- More trials. But Christ’s words and actions after the bad news may test the faith of Jairus even more. When the situation becomes hopeless, Jesus speaks some strange words to Jairus: ““Do not be afraid; only believe”” (vs. 36, NKJV). To us this may sound hopeful because we know how the story ends. Think of how it sounds to Jairus to be told, “Be not afraid.” *Afraid?* What is there to fear now? The worst has occurred. And believe? What is there to

believe? The girl is dead!

Someone has said that whenever God says, “Don’t be afraid,” it is time to start worrying, because He is about to ask you to do the impossible. (Consider Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Mary.) But whenever Jesus says, “Be not afraid,” that command is also a promise.

Therefore, when someone says, “It is finished,” Jesus says, “Fear not. It is the beginning.” When someone says, “I’m sorry, that’s the end,” Jesus says “Fear not. It’s not the end; it is to be continued.”

The real question is: Do we trust God enough to believe in His word? Do we believe that He knows what is best? Do we believe He has power to save—even in difficult situations?

Those words of Jesus, “Do not be afraid; only believe” are calculated to encourage Jairus so he does not give up. For just then, Jesus does another strange thing: He drives away the crowd, save Peter, James, and John. Why does He *now* send away the crowd? Why does He choose to do so now that all is lost? Why hasn’t He sent away the crowd earlier, when there was hope for the child’s healing?

Perhaps Jesus is teaching Jairus that God’s ways are not our ways. His timing is always the best. All we have to do at all times is to trust Him.

• Trials at home. Jairus’s trial is not over when he nears home. He is

greeted by the weeping of mourners, confirming that indeed, the child is dead. What will Jesus do now that the situation has gone from bad to worse?

Speaking to Jairus, whose faith is then wavering, Jesus declares that the child is not dead but only sleeping. Though death is the most hopeless condition in this life, Jesus calls it “sleep.” And if death is simply sleep, then there is hope for the most hopeless situation. That’s why the Christian is exhorted to be “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10, KJV). And this is why we must not attempt to save our jobs, positions, or even our lives at the cost of our obedience to the One who calls death merely sleep.

But Jairus’s faith is to be tried one last time. At the words of Jesus that the child is not dead but asleep, the mourners stop their weeping and laugh Him to scorn. Their ridicule is not so much directed at Christ as it is at Jairus. The funeral professionals seemed to say: “What does this man think? Doesn’t he know the difference between death and sleep? And, you, Jairus, is this the kind of person on whom you are willing to stake your career and child’s life?”

At this point perhaps Jairus wonders: *Why does the Lord delay in times of emergency? Why does He keep silent when His children need to hear from Him? Why does He allow other people to interrupt the plans of*

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His children? Why does the Lord allow things to go from bad to worse? And why does He permit enemies to subject His children to scorn and ridicule?

The Reward of Faith

The Good News is that in all such trials, Jesus is always very near. If we remain faithful, He will honor our faith—even as He does for Jairus. The One who once stood at Lazarus’ tomb and said “Come forth” now goes to Jairus’s daughter’s room, takes the child by the hand and commands: “Talitha, cumi” which is translated, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (vs. 41, NKJV).

“Talitha, cumi.” Jesus speaks in Aramaic. Mark translates His words into Greek, and that Greek is emphatic. He literally says: “Little girl, it is I who say to you, arise.”

“Some may say that you are dead, but I say to you, arise.”

The same Jesus who brings life

out of death can transform hopeless situations today. Our responsibility is to remain faithful, no matter what.

Perhaps we may be asking what Jesus is seeking to teach by the delay, silence, bad news, and scorn? Consider four possible lessons:

1. *Divine timing.* One reason is to teach something about the mystery of divine timing. Despite what may appear as a delay or interruption in our plans and expectations, God’s timing is never late.

Never talk about delay without knowing God’s arrival time. It is inappropriate to speak of delay as it pertains to the second coming of Christ. Jesus has not given His arrival time. How can we speak of delay with regard to God’s plan for our lives unless we fully know what He is seeking to do in our lives? Since God’s time never knows a delay, we must always trust Him, no

We must dare to take a stand for Christ and His truth, no matter what. If teachers can't take a stand for unpopular theological truth, how will their students do so? If pastors and church leaders are unwilling to take unpopular stands, how can they expect their members and churches to do so? If parents are unprepared to honor the Lord, how can their children be expected to make decisions of faith for the Lord?

matter how long it may seem.

“To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest.”¹

“When in faith we take hold of His strength, he will change, wonderfully change, the most hopeless, discouraging outlook. He will do this for the glory of His name.”²

2. *The nature of true faith.* Another lesson Jesus was teaching was that true faith steps forward regardless of humiliation, intimidation, scorn, or even loss. It is the nature of true faith to take a stand—even in the face of obstacles. One cannot *secretly* hold to faith. Faith requires public testing. It calls for a public stand regardless of consequences.

The woman with an issue of blood takes a courageous and humiliating step of faith when she steps forward publicly to talk about her uncleanness. Jairus takes a coura-

geous step of faith when he decides to come to Jesus publicly—even amidst derision.

We must also dare to take a stand for Christ and His truth, no matter what. If teachers can't take a stand for unpopular theological truth, how will their students do so? If pastors and church leaders are unwilling to take unpopular stands, how can they expect their members and churches to do so? If parents are unprepared to honor the Lord, how can their children be expected to make decisions of faith for the Lord?

“In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God.”³

“True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences. It does not ask, What will people think of me if I do this? or, How will it affect my worldly prospects if I do that?”⁴

3. *The reward for faithfulness.*

Jesus was also teaching that divine blessing will always attend those who are faithful to the Lord. He will never fail anyone who puts trust in Him.

“Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence.”⁵

4. *Comfort in suffering.* Perhaps the most important reason that Jesus allows the faith of Jairus to be tried is to instruct him through the experience of the woman. Though Jairus's ordeal is bitter, he was not alone in his pain. Another person is also suffering—and has been, for 12 years. Sometimes our trials are designed to help us appreciate others. Pain makes us more sympathetic; disappointment makes us more humble; and hardship keeps us dependent on God.

Jesus is teaching Jairus from the experience of the woman. It is here that the contrasting characteristics identified earlier between the woman and Jairus become most helpful. If Jesus is able to help the woman's hopeless case, what about Jairus?

Jesus does not needlessly delay, keep silent, or utter ridiculous or strange words. It is His design to instruct Jairus. This is, perhaps, the most important message contained

in the story-within-the-story: If Jesus did it for the woman, how much more would He not do for Jairus?

Lessons for Today

All of us have felt pain. Ours may be similar to Jairus's. Perhaps it is a loved one who is in serious difficulty. Or it may be that our situation is similar to the woman. We are the one actually bleeding to death. Perhaps it is our health, finances, or family situation that is slowly but hopelessly bleeding.

Whatever the situation, we must go to Jesus with our burdens. We may choose to go to Him like the woman—secretly in the closets of our homes, or silently and anonymously in church (as did Hannah, the mother of Samuel). Or we may choose to go to Jesus like Jairus—openly in church or prayer meeting, during the time for prayer requests.

Another lesson is that we must not fear taking a stand for Jesus. The times in which we live call for men and women who dare to risk all for Jesus' sake. If we do not stand up for something, we shall fall for anything. Fear of censure from our critics and fear of losing our jobs should not prevent us from doing the right thing. Neither should we wait until retirement before declaring where we stand on issues. Both the woman and Jairus take risks. And so must we.

“Often the follower of Christ is brought where he cannot serve God and carry forward his worldly enterprises. Perhaps it appears that obedience to some plain requirement of God will cut off his means of support. Satan would make him believe that he must sacrifice his conscientious convictions. But the only thing in our world upon which we can rely is the word of God. . . Matt. 6:33. Even in this life it is not for our good to depart from the will of our Father in heaven. When we learn the power of His word, we shall not follow the suggestions of Satan in order to obtain food or to save our lives. Our only questions will be, What is God’s command? and what is His promise? Knowing these, we shall obey the one, and trust the other.”⁶

Finally, when we take a stand for the Lord and He seems to delay, and our prospects grow darker and darker, we are still to trust Him. Each of us should say with Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15, NKJV). With the three Hebrew young men, we must be able to say: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods,

nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Dan. 3:17, 18, NKJV).

“The season of distress before God’s people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart, the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death.”⁷

The story-within-the-story tells us that when you take a stand for Jesus and things go from bad to worse, you are still to trust Him, even if He delays, and even if your plans are interrupted.

When you are told that because of your faith, “your daughter is dead,” tell them she is only asleep; she will rise again. □

REFERENCES

- ¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.
- ² *Prophets and Kings*, p. 260.
- ³ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 634.
- ⁴ *The Sanctified Life*, p. 39.
- ⁵ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 331.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- ⁷ *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 512, 513.

