

Mark – The First Gospel

011 – Power to Restore Relationships – Mark 5:21-43

All outlines, audio recording of discussions, and works referenced may be accessed and viewed at <http://markthefirstgospel.blogspot.com/> .

First Thoughts

“... What Mark has joined together the preacher should not put asunder.”¹

As per above, this lengthy section must be handled together. Both stories involve women, both involve disease and impurity, and the use of “twelve years” and “daughter” bring both together. This is another prime example of Mark’s “sandwich” rhetoric where the starting narrative is interrupted with a second one, and then the first resumes after the second reaches completion. Mark’s primary intentions are thus found in the connections between the two stories.

Both stories are also, of course, stories of women, and belong to Mark’s focus on Jesus’ regard for and attention to women.²

Jairus: His Sick Little Girl

^{5:21} *And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” ²⁴ And he went with him. (ESV)*

Commentaries

Having crossed geographical boundaries to release a gentile from bondage to the Destroyer, Jesus returns to Jewish territory where his healing power crosses traditional impurity boundaries to restore life to two suffering women.³

Unlike most characters in the Gospel, he is important enough to have a name the reader might recognize. He is a man in a man’s world, holds a respected position that

¹ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5621.

² *Feasting: Mark*, location 5473.

³ *Reading Mark*, 4:1-5:43.

implies both wealth and religious enfranchisement, and owns an unusually large house, with a separate room in which his daughter may convalesce. This is a person accustomed to getting what he wants... The request is both eloquent and detailed in its expectations: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live" (v. 23). Jesus cooperates and for a brief moment it looks like things may go Jairus's way, as always.⁴

Discussion

1. How might geography inform our reading and interpretation?
2. This might have occurred in Capernaum, where earlier chronologically in Luke 7, Jesus heals a Centurion's servant by merely speaking. This Centurion was known to have been a supporter of the Jews, providing funds for building of their synagogue. How might this experience have affected Jairus?
3. On the other hand, by this time the religious leaders have openly stated and shown their opposition to Jesus (c.f., Mark 3:1-6, 22-30). What did Jairus risk by coming to Jesus? What would prompt Jairus to risk coming to Jesus?
4. What does Jairus' approach and request tell us about him?
5. What is Jesus' response?

Woman: Twelve Years an Outcast

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years,²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?"³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'"³² And he looked around to see who had done it.³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (ESV)

Commentaries

The desire to touch Jesus' clothing probably reflects the popular belief that the dignity and power of a person are transferred to what he wears. On this understanding, her touch combined faith with quasi- magical notions which were widespread in that day.⁵

⁴ Feasting: Mark, locations 5626, 5635.

⁵ NICNT: Mark, 5:25-27.

Jesus wants to know who touched him because he has relational business with her, which is even more pressing than her disease, or even the little girl's deathly illness. He claims the woman as "daughter" and clarifies the cause of her healing: it is her faith in him, not magic, that has made this happen.⁶

By an act of sovereign will God determined to honor the woman's faith in spite of the fact that it was tinged with ideas which bordered on magic.⁷

In Mark's telling, the power gets away from Jesus and into the woman without so much as a nod of consent on his part.⁸

In her own strange way, she has been in complete control up to now; but this is more than she bargained for.⁹

Discussion

6. Mark frequently mentions crowds. What role do they play in the present narratives?
7. This woman had probably spent most of her adulthood with this debilitating condition. She could never become ritually clean and thus barred from religious services. Her ritual impurity could be transmitted to others, thus rendering her a social outcast. In a society that placed prime importance on community and for women, childbearing, she was a non-person. In her desperation, she sought out every possible remedy.¹⁰ Think about having to wear a menstrual cloth (not just modern sanitary items) every single day for twelve years!
8. Why does the woman seek secrecy in her approach to Jesus?
9. What does her actions tell us about her?
10. How could Jesus "not know" about the woman, that he would be surprised at power going out from him without his knowledge? Was he just pretending? Or did he really not know?
11. What does the juxtaposition of the crowds pressing and touching Jesus vs. the woman touching Jesus reveal?
12. Why did Jesus cause a scene?
13. Why did Jesus take time to pause in his urgent errand to heal Jairus' daughter?
14. What does Jesus' response to the woman tell us about true healing? "Your faith has made you well [*sozo*, also used for salvation]... peace... be healed [*hygeis*, to be whole]..."
15. The sandwich narratives began with a daughter, now Jesus calls the woman "Daughter", and Jairus' daughter closes the section. What significance is there to "daughter"?

⁶ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5652.

⁷ *NICNT: Mark*, 5:30-32.

⁸ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5850.

⁹ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5858.

¹⁰ *NICNT: Mark*, 5:25-27, note 46. "One remedy consisted of drinking a goblet of wine containing a powder compounded from rubber, alum and garden crocuses. Another treatment consisted of a dose of Persian onions cooked in wine administered with the summons, 'Arise out of your flow of blood!' Other physicians prescribed sudden shock, or the carrying of the ash of an ostrich's egg in a certain cloth."

Jairus: His Twelve-Year Old Daughter Restored

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (ESV)

Commentaries

Perhaps the disturbance caused by the woman was not a distraction from Jesus' main business with Jairus after all. What Jairus needs is not Jesus' immediate and undivided attention. What Jairus needs is the faith in Jesus this woman has just modeled.¹¹

His response, "fear not, only believe," was a call for intense faith. Jairus had exercised faith when he came to Jesus in the confidence that he could save his daughter. He had witnessed the healing of the woman which demonstrated the relationship between faith and divine help. But he was now asked to believe that his child would live even as he stood in the presence of death. Such faith is radical trust in the ability of Jesus to confront a crisis situation with the power of God.¹²

The "little girl" was twelve, the age Jewish girls become marriageable, the age they begin to menstruate. The good future Jesus made present in these miracles restored the woman to good health, to regular periods, and restored the little girl to life —and to embodied life as a woman.¹³

Discussion

16. A resurrection of the dead had not been witnessed in Israel since the time of Elisha. This is the first instance in Mark's gospel of Jesus raising a person back to life.
17. What does the statement, "do not fear, only believe" tell us about faith?
18. Note that in this account, the crowd and all the disciples except three are left where the woman was healed. Only Jairus, Jesus, and Peter, James, and John continue to Jairus' home.¹⁴

¹¹ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5657.

¹² *NICNT: Mark*, 5:35-37.

¹³ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5479.

¹⁴ In Luke's account, they all go to the house but just a few are allowed to enter.

19. Note that there was enough time to assemble a chorus of mourners.¹⁵ They are hired hands, since they laugh at Jesus' statement that the girls is "sleeping".
20. Jesus sends everyone out of the room. Why does Jesus do this? Was it necessary that they all leave?
21. Notice that there is no elaborate ritual or incantation, but a simple command. How might this relate to the woman's story?
22. Notice that in the latter part of this account, the language referring to the daughter changes from "daughter" [*thygater*, someone's female child] to "child" [*paidion*, half-grown] to "girl" [*korasion*, a maiden]. What significance is there to this transformation?
23. This narrative ends with one of the stranger statements supposedly made by Jesus. Why does Jesus tell those present at the resurrection that they tell no one when it is only a matter of time before the mourners who were sent out, as well as the rest of the town, learn of what happened? Did Jesus really say this or is it more likely Markan commentary.

Summary

- a. What do these stories tell us about faith?
- b. How do we explain and deal with non-healings in our experiences?
- c. How do these stories illustrate the three parables in chapter 4?
- d. How might these stories help in the lives of Mark's audience, the Roman Christians?
- e. What relevance do these stories have in our modern lives?
- f. Is there any particular aspect of these stories, or particular verses, phrases, or words that stand out to you?
- g. How do we try to control our lives? God? What do these stories say about that?
- h. What do these stories tell us about who and what God cares about? Is this different from who and what we care about?
- i. What does this story say about those "outside" accepted community? About people who we might classify as having wrong beliefs and behaviors?
- j. What about "magical thinking"? What is God's response to it?
- k. What is Mark's proposition about what is most important about the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Commentaries

Impurity is not transmitted to Jesus; rather, both physical health and ritual purity are transmitted to the women.¹⁶

She refuses to let her life be defined by what appear to be hopeless circumstances.¹⁷

¹⁵ NICNT: *Mark*, 5:38-39. "The wailing consisted of choral or antiphonal song accompanied by handclapping. Since even the poorest man was required by common custom to hire a minimum of two fluteplayers and one professional mourner in the event of his wife's death, it is probable that one who held the rank of synagogue-ruler would be expected to hire a large number of professional mourners."

¹⁶ *Reading Mark*, 4:1-5:43.

¹⁷ *Reading Mark*, 4:1-5:43.

... Both events here emphasize faith, and this seems to be one of Mark's concerns in narrating them. Note that the woman thinks, somewhat superstitiously, that merely touching the clothes of such a holy man and healer as Jesus will cure her illness... but Jesus emphasizes faith (v. 36) as the key to her rescue... [Mark's] presentation of Jesus' wondrous power is tied to his emphasis on the person of Jesus and does not promote an interest in magical powers and practices.¹⁸

*The translation clarifies that this is no incantation or solemn formula but a simple order tinged with affection, Little girl, I say to you, get up!*¹⁹

*The menstruating woman, in contrast, has no advocate; she seems to be nobody's daughter. But on the way to Jairus's house, her anguished touch takes precedence over Jairus's desperate pleading. Jesus heals first the one who does not count for much; he makes the last first; he enacts God's preferential option for the poor.*²⁰

... Note that, though the faith of those drawn to Jesus is important, the faith of Jesus is more crucial. What Jesus believes about Jairus and his daughter outweighs what Jairus believes about Jesus or his daughter.²¹

*Jesus' ministry is marked by connections created as he encounters and accepts people whose lives are hemorrhaging blood or guilt, hemorrhaging self-righteousness or blindness, hemorrhaging paralysis or greed. Sometimes he touches them; sometimes they first touch him. Sometimes the touch is with the hand; at other times the touch is through words—words that rest upon the heart and heal the soul. However the touch occurs, a connection is made.*²²

*Jesus as a healer who integrates people more fully into community... The woman is one of several figures in Mark whose healing by Jesus enables them to be (re)integrated into various dimensions of society... The primary effect of Jesus' healing is thus not personal but social... The salvation or wholeness that the bleeding woman experiences ("Your faith has saved [sōzō] you") is social and communal (v. 34; cf. v. 28). Jesus' healings are one of three strategies he employs to (re)integrate social outcasts into community.*²³

Faith is the main thing, according to Jesus. The good news in this for Jairus (and maybe for us) is that faith is not a finite resource. Relationship is not a zero-sum

¹⁸ UBC: Mark, 5:21-43.

¹⁹ UBC: Mark, 5:21-43.

²⁰ Feasting: Mark, location 5494.

²¹ Feasting: Mark, location 5543.

²² Feasting: Mark, location 5744.

²³ Feasting: Mark, locations 5775, 5790, 5805, 5807.

game. It turns out that desperation is not a contest after all, with winners and losers.²⁴

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The fact that Jairus was a synagogue leader who had faith in Jesus must have been of special interest Mark's first readers in Rome, who lived in the world some decades after the crucifixion of Jesus, years that had witnessed the growing gulf between Jews and Christians. Their own contacts with the Jews may not have always have been pleasant. That such an important person in the Jewish community could come to faith and cross over to Jesus would especially encourage them in their own difficult situation.²⁶

But it wasn't a mature faith – yet. It was what we might call a timid touch of the edge of the garment sort of faith, one not yet strong enough to bring her openly to Jesus. Also it was a superstitious faith in the sense that she believed that some kind of magical power resided in Jesus' garments.²⁷

"Fear not, only believe..." The present tense of the Greek imperative means to keep believing, to hold onto faith rather than give into despair. With respect to his daughter's circumstances, Jairus' future is closed; but with respect to Jesus it is still open. Faith is not something Jairus has but something that has Jairus, carrying him from despair to hope.²⁸

²⁴ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5863.

²⁵ *Feasting: Mark*, location 5744.

²⁶ *Exploring Mark*, page 120-121.

²⁷ *Exploring Mark*, page 123.

²⁸ *Exploring Mark*, page 125.