

What is Faith?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Amen. Okay, let's see how we get on this evening. How do you tell a story? Let's begin there.! So we had a fun community group chat where we were asking ourselves that question because we were! recognizing that some people and some cultures tell stories quite differently to other people and other cultures. For some, when they tell a story, you need to give yourself a whole day because they're going to tell you the whole story at great length, and that story could go anywhere, and it grows arms and legs with the telling. Others, when we tell stories, it's with brevity. There's highlights.

Often there's no context. We might jump into the middle of the story. It's interesting, isn't it? And sometimes when you think about patterns of storytelling, we think, well, it reveals something about a person's temperament, perhaps. Maybe it says something about the culture that they're from, and it also will probably tell us something about the emphasis that they want to draw out.

And I would suggest that when we come to read the accounts of Jesus in the gospel writers, we see something of those same principles at work. So we've just read a very short, abbreviated account of these two encounters. You might be familiar with it in Mark's gospel or in Luke's gospel, and you get lots of extra details. You get the extended version. With Mark, you get the name.

We're talking about Jairus. We get the age of his daughter. She was 12. We learn that when he first came to Jesus, she wasn't dead. She was dying. We learn about the crush of the crowds. We learn that this woman has spent everything from Luke to try and find a cure, and nobody could help. We learn from Mark that Jesus spoke words to the little girl in Aramaic, Talitha cum. But we don't get any of that with Matthew. And so some people have looked at that and said, well, that gives us a bit of a reliability problem. Here's the same account, but they sound very different. But just to mention that we would expect this, wouldn't we, from eyewitness testimony. If we were in a law court, if two people stood up and gave exactly the same account of events, we would be suspicious. But what we certainly see in our gospel writers, that each of them has their own emphasis. So how does Matthew tell his story,

Jesus' story, and what does it tell us about his emphasis? Well, I would suggest that Matthew's condensed version has a clear focus. So we've been following for the last couple of chapters.

[2:39] Here is Jesus, God's Messiah King. He's been bringing in his kingdom with power. And now, at this point, Matthew uses these two stories to highlight the appropriate response to God's Messiah King, and that response is faith. So that's what we're going to think about this evening. And to help us, I was thinking about the New City Catechism. Question number 30, I think it's got a really helpful, I find it a helpful definition of faith anyway. So the question is, what is faith in Jesus Christ? And the answer, and we'll come back to this in 21 weeks on Sunday morning, faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he has offered to us in the gospel.

So we're going to try and keep that in our mind as Matthew shows us in these few short verses, two people exercising faith as they are confronted by suffering on the one hand and death itself on the other. We see in these two different stories, interrelated stories, two people who recognize Jesus is the Lord, who come to him to receive his salvation, and who rest in him alone for that salvation, and they go away with good news and lives transformed. So we're going to ask ourselves the question,

what is faith? And our first way to answer that is that faith recognizes Jesus is Lord. So just picture the scene with me for a moment. We'll borrow a little bit from the other gospel writers. We know that there is a huge crowd following Jesus at this moment. We think of that seething mass of humanity. Any group of people, however large or small, will have different hopes and fears. When it comes to crowds around Jesus, we know that there was excitement, but also lots of questions, and no doubt lots of different needs and burdens that people took with them to that time with Jesus that day. But for Matthew, his camera lens zooms in and focuses on just these two. First of all, in verse 18, the synagogue leader, and we learn of his story, he comes and kneels before Jesus, my daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her and she will live. So in this situation of unbelievable fear that is now given way to grief. He falls on his knees before the Lord, his only hope, but he makes, doesn't he, a remarkable statement of faith. It is only to Jesus that you can say, make my dead daughter alive again.

And then this second figure, this woman in verse 20, she's been subject to bleeding for 12 years, and she comes up behind him to touch the edge of his cloak. So she's coming in a different situation for her. It's very personal. It's personal weakness. This weakness that has made her unclean has cut her off from much of society. Her approach is very different. It's private. It's secretive. This time she uses no words.

It's the touch of faith. So much separating these two figures, and yet they are bound by this shared response as they recognize Jesus is Lord, that he is the only one who can help and save them. They come in faith. Matthew has already told us that there were many religious leaders at the time who took a very different view to Jesus than Jairus did. There were many who were skeptical, many who are questioning Jesus or outright opposing him. Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy by claiming he can forgive sins? Who is this man who eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners? And many of those religious leaders would eventually conspire together with Rome to arrest and to hand him over. But this one is different, because God has given him the gift of faith. And so he comes to understand that everything God's Word says about

[7:03] God's King is true, and it comes true in Jesus. It's revealed in Jesus. He really does have the authority he claims. He really is the Son of God come on a rescue mission, and on that basis he comes for help, even as his daughter has died. And likewise, no doubt there were many suffering women and many suffering men that day as people were crowding in on Jesus, but only one makes this move towards Jesus in faith.

Now some people look at the story and say, well, it sounds a bit like weak faith. She doesn't want to be seen by anyone. She comes up from behind. Some have even suggested that she, ascribing some kind of magical power to the cloak of Jesus, what counts is that she reached out to Jesus in faith.

Whether her faith is strong or weak is not the point. The point is the object of her faith, and he is a strong Savior, and she knew deliverance. Yesterday, by way of illustration, we watched a TV show where a father and a son both shared in a skydive from a plane, and their responses could not have been more different.

The son was loving it, having the time of his life, and you could see him coming down in the camera, and he was so full of excitement, and the dad was in blind panic in the plane, and even as he was hurtling towards the ground, you could see stark terror on his face. But do you know what? At the end of the day, it didn't matter in terms of how they ended up safely on the ground. Because the key for both wasn't whether they felt really joyful or really panicking. The key for both was that they were strapped into a qualified instructor, and they had a parachute strapped onto their back. And the wonderful thing about faith is that faith straps us to Jesus, and when we are with him, whether our faith is weak or strong, he will make sure we are safely home and that we are saved. And so, we're being presented by Matthew again with Jesus on the mission of the Messiah, the promised Savior King, and he comes doing remarkable things. He comes to show mercy and to call sinners. He comes to bring the forgiveness of sin. He comes to drive out evil.

He comes to give a window into his coming kingdom. Every miracle, every healing is a signpost that says, in my future kingdom, it will be free of sickness, disease, suffering, and death.

[9:46] And faith recognizes Jesus is who the Bible says he is, and acts accordingly. That penny dropped for me 35 years ago. I was quite surprised when I did the maths. It's been that long.

I grew up knowing the stories of Jesus. I love the stories of Jesus. I was always really happy to go to church and to go to Bible clubs and those kind of things. But one day in particular, that realization struck me in a way that it hadn't before, that as much as I'd grown up going to church and loving the stories, that I was sinful. And that because of my sin, I was by nature separated from God. And because of that separation, I was heading for eternal judgment, and I needed to be rescued. And at that point, the same realization came to me that Jesus came and He died for me, that Jesus came to demonstrate His love for me. And God, in that day, gave me the gift of faith to repent and to believe in Jesus as Lord.

Faith is a gift that enables us to recognize Jesus as Lord. And if that's your story, if you received that gift, let's never stop giving God thanks for that. And if you're here today and you're not yet a Christian, let me encourage you to keep reading God's Word, to keep asking God's people questions, keep praying that you too might recognize Jesus is Lord and Savior. So what is faith? Faith, first of all, recognizes Jesus as Lord. Secondly, faith receives Jesus as Savior. I wonder if you have ever fallen victim to one of those identity theft scams. They are becoming increasingly elaborate. I suspect with AI, we will have to be ever more vigilant. There are so many ways now for an individual to suggest they're a real company, a real bank, a real person in need. And if we have fallen prey to that, when we trust the other person, we become a victim and we experience loss. And so from that negative point of view, we come to understand that credentials matter. Being able to trust someone's Word matters. It's why when people come to check your gas, they will have their lanyard to show,

I come from this company, you can trust me. As Matthew sets out to tell these faith stories, as we see the faith of Jairus, as we see the faith of this woman, we're also being shown, aren't we, Jesus' credentials. That Matthew, because remember Matthew's been called to be a follower of Jesus, so Matthew is standing for us as an eyewitness. He could say, I was with Jesus for those three years. I was there when these miracles happened. And he writes his gospel to say to us, Jesus is someone that you and I can trust. And when we trust Jesus, we experience not loss, but gain.

[13:02] And so Matthew's done a really helpful thing for us in chapters eight and nine, in that he's pulled together lots of stories in a really short space of time to help us to see exactly who Jesus is, and to see exactly why Jesus came, and to help us to see exactly what difference faith makes here in the lives of these two people. So again, just to think about our requests, think about how bold a request is from Jairus. My daughter has just died, but come and put your hand on her and she will live.

For anyone to say that is, of course, faith. And we see Jesus' willingness in that he goes, verse 19, he got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. And as we come to the end of the passage, as we see him enter the synagogue leader's house, he clears out the crowd of mourners. He announces that it's going to be as easy for him to wake her from death as it would be to wake her from sleep. And the story ends with her restored to life again. The second request is also a great statement of faith. In this woman's mind, she is saying to herself, if I only touch his cloak, I'll be healed. I'll be healed of this illness that's lasted for 12 years, this illness that nobody else has been able to do anything about. And again, Jesus responds, verse 22, take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment. She is restored to wholeness. Both of them have received salvation, in that physical healings provide, again, a window into spiritual reality. And so further evidence is being added to the case for Jesus being the Christ. Because Matthew has shown us Jesus is the one who can heal the lepers. Jesus is the one who can make the paralyzed to walk. Jesus is the one who can deal with all kinds of disease, who can stop a storm, who can drive out a demon, who can forgive sin, and who can even raise the dead. If Jesus were a doorstep visitor, saying to us, I have come as God's Son and God's Savior, here's my card, here's my credentials, we recognize here is someone we can trust.

[15:45] And going further, he is someone we need to trust. That just as the only hope for Jairus, just as the only hope for Jairus' daughter, just as the only hope for the bleeding woman was Jesus, we need to recognize ourselves in that same position.

Spiritually, the Bible would say we are all like that bleeding woman in that by nature, we are unclean. We are unfit for the presence of the Holy God. And we cannot undo by ourselves what is

wrong with us. Sin and its effects run too deep. And so we are rendered unclean. And spiritually, we are all like Jairus' little daughter, in that by nature, we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and our sins, that we are cut off from God, the source of spiritual life. And so faith recognizes Jesus as Lord, and faith recognizes I need Him as Lord and Savior, that only Jesus can ransom and heal and restore and forgive. And that's why He came into this world. He came into this world to die our death, to become unclean by bearing our sin and the curse of sin before being raised to new life in victory.

When Jesus comes to our door as Messiah, what is it that He offers to us? The Bible says that Jesus offers to be our substitute, to take our death and to give us His life, to take our sin and our guilty record, and to give us His perfect record of righteousness, to take our guilty verdict and give us the great verdict of being justified in God's sight.

[17:58] He offers to be our Savior. Whether we've made a total mess of our lives, whether circumstances have caused us trouble, whether we're desperately trying to be good enough for God, no matter whether we know a lot or whether we know a little, Jesus would be a Savior for each one of us. His invitation comes to us to trust Him, to welcome Him in, because Jesus has come that we might have life and have life to the full.

Thirdly, as we're trying to answer the question, what is faith? So, faith recognizes Jesus as Lord, faith receives Him as Savior, but thirdly, faith rests in Jesus for salvation. This week, I watched an interview with the chap on the screen with Ben Sasse, a former senator of Nebraska, the head of a university in the States. He was diagnosed recently with stage four pancreatic cancer, and he sat down with Michael Horton, if you know the theologian Michael Horton. He sat down for an extended conversation with Michael Horton, and talked at length about how faith and theology is helping him to face his death. I would encourage you to find that. If you want to know where it is, I can maybe send the link out. It's a really powerful discussion. And he says things that his first reaction on hearing his diagnosis, he said, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace. That expression of Paul's, that for me to live is Christ and to die is gain, was the first feeling that he had. He was asked the question, why is the gospel an anchor as people face death? He said some really interesting things. He said, when I'm facing my own death, it becomes much easier to say that any idea of my own producing righteous deeds seems absolutely nonsense in light of my approaching death and meeting with God.

But what's become increasingly precious to him is the knowledge that Jesus did everything to fulfill the law and Jesus did everything to forgive his sin. He spoke about God for us in Jesus Christ as a truth to rest in.

And there was throughout that video just powerful evidence of here is what it looks like when a person of faith runs to and rests in Jesus for salvation. We run to Jesus and we go to the cross and we receive forgiveness. We come to Jesus day by day to receive sustaining grace, but we also look ahead to future final salvation and glory. So again, I would commend that in that video.

[21:05] And watching that video and reading Matthew 9 and thinking about this, I was saying to the elders, it's one of those moments where I feel a fatherly sermon coming on. There are those moments where you think, do you know what? There are some truths that are just so important. And especially because what we have here is people of faith showing us how to respond when we face the reality of suffering and we face the reality of death. We are called to rest in Christ, to know him, to trust him, to rest in him. And maybe especially knowing that a bunch of us who are younger, maybe we haven't had much experience or suffering or death. Let me encourage you towards a particular kind of wisdom or some wisdoms.

First of all, the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. If you've ever come across David Gibson's book, Live Backwards, Living Backwards is a wonderful book. The book of Ecclesiastes encourages us all the way through to recognize our mortality, to live life today in light of eternity. Know your creator and your savior today. Enjoy life today, but hold on to it lightly as gift and live in light of eternity.

Think about the wisdom of Jesus towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that call that he made as he closed that great sermon, build your life upon the rock. And what rock was he talking about? He was talking about building upon Jesus himself and his words. And he spoke about storms that would come. And so before the storms come, it is so important to lay that kind of

foundation before the storms of trials and death and judgment. Make Jesus your priority. Get to know how glorious and good he is. Don't imagine that you can lay a foundation at some future time. Do it today so that you know who to run to and where to rest when those trials come. Consider the wisdom of Paul. Paul faced unimaginable amounts of suffering for Christ Jesus. You know, he would talk about shipwreck and beating and being stoned and all of those things. [23:31] But he was able to say, compared to the glory of Christ, compared to glory that's coming, all of those things, looking back on them will seem like a light, momentary affliction.

Live in light of eternity. Live in light of Jesus. Think about the wisdom of these two characters Jesus met. When they were faced with suffering, when they were faced with death, where did they go? They went to Jesus. I know I can trust Jesus. I've received him. I will rest in him as Savior. When the woman rested her faith in Jesus, weakness became strength. Exclusion became embrace. When the synagogue leader rested his faith in Jesus. Mourning became rejoicing. Separation gave way to reunion. Matthew records these stories, and indeed this whole section, to say to us, remember, faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith is not an emotional crutch for weak people. We are weak.

But faith is a reasonable response in light of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to rescue us, to sweep us up into the arms of God. What a wonderful image.

[25:05] As we were walking through the meadows today, there was a group of people, we weren't quite sure whether they were practicing being cheerleaders or whether they were practicing, you know, those trust falls, where you have someone standing behind you and you have to lean back, lean all your weight into the person behind you. What is faith? Faith is falling into the arms of the loving God who sent his son to redeem you. Faith is resting in God's embrace. That's where we find our ultimate security.

unity. Let's us rest in Jesus for our salvation. And we know that he is our hope in life and in death.