

A dead girl and a sick woman

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[0 : 00] Can I encourage you, if you've closed your Bibles, to open them again to Matthew chapter 9?! It's always a good practice to have the Bible open, to check the what I'm saying tracks of what God's Word actually says.

It's a joy to be back with you, so thank you very much for having me back. So, Lewis Winthrop III was a Harvard-educated banker.

On his way up the ladder at a prestigious financial firm. He had a beautiful fiancé, a settled place, and in one of those exclusive American social clubs, the world was at his feet.

Then, two of his bosses who ran the firm, the Duke Brothers, they tried to ruin his life on a bet. They set him up for fraud and drug dealing. He was cast out of his house, out of his job.

He was arrested. And the Duke Brothers, well, they decided to replace him in their company with a swindler off the street called Billy Ray Valentine. Lewis's life is ruined.

[1 : 12] He's left destitute. He can't get a job. If any of you have seen this film, I'm describing a film called Trading Places. In his desperation, Lewis cries out to anyone who could possibly help him.

In the end, the people who can help him are the swindler Billy Ray Valentine and a prostitute called Ophelia. But his helpless desperation leads him to seek help from anyone who would possibly listen to him.

The synagogue ruler and the bleeding woman in our passage today, these are people who are helpless. These are people who are desperate.

They're helpless before illness. They're helpless before the reality of death. The problem is, when you're faced with a reality you can't overcome, something you can't scheme yourself past, the universal experiences that drag each of us down eventually, something we can't overcome on our own, who do you turn to?

Or better question, who can you turn to? Here today we've got people who are physically, emotionally, religiously, spiritually cut off.

[2 : 31] One of them is cut off in the most profound way possible. She is cut off from life. Who do you turn to? Well, their helplessness, it drives them to the Lord Jesus.

They have nowhere else to go. They go to Jesus. Jesus, can you help us? And what we see is that Jesus, or Jesus, he willingly reaches out to the outsider.

And with a touch, he restores them. In the middle of their helplessness, Jesus restores a bleeding woman to health and a dead girl to life.

And my hope is that as we go through this story, as we see something of the beauty and the power of the Lord Jesus, it's going to drive us as believers to faith, to deeper faith, to a faith that longs more for the Lord Jesus.

I guess my hope is if you would not call yourself a Christian, hopefully you see something in this Jesus that you find very, very appealing. So our first point, faith in Jesus during helpless desperation.

[3 : 42] Look down again at verse 18. While Jesus was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, my daughter has just died, but come and put your hand on her and she will live.

Jesus got up and went with him and so did his disciples. This is real helplessness. This man's daughter has just died. And when everything else falls away, this man comes to Jesus.

It's quite amazing, his faith. He has no other options. All sense of propriety is dropped. This synagogue ruler falls at Jesus' feet.

What's particularly shocking here, a synagogue ruler comes to a Jewish rabbi and says, if you will touch the dead body of my daughter, well, she will be restored.

An act which for any Jew who followed God's law would lead to ceremonial uncleanness. This gives us an insight into the mind of this man.

[4 : 47] He is broken. In the darkness, he comes to Jesus. Can you offer me any hope? He's undoubtedly heard of the stories and the miracles that Jesus, the stories of Jesus' miracles that he's been accomplishing throughout his ministry.

But even so, if you touch my daughter, she will live. Yesterday, I went down to a wedding in Barnstable, which if you don't know where that is, that's in northwest Devon.

I didn't know where it was on Monday, so I didn't realize how far away it was. I had to leave early from the wedding in order to get the train back to Hayward Sea before I live. When I reached Exeter, I was feeling pretty confident until the announcement came at Exeter that my train was running 30 minutes late.

Being late is not a habit of my life, I want to promise you. One of the carriages had developed a mechanical failure and so it had to be switched. Now, this didn't particularly bother me until I realized that I was going to miss my connecting train at Reading and I was going to be stranded there overnight.

The next two and a half hours was spent ringing anyone I could. Do you have a bed I could stay in? Could you come pick me up?

[6 : 07] I was worried about getting stranded, frantically trying to sort out train timetables, different combinations. All it took was for a train to be off by 30 minutes for me to realize how helpless I actually am.

Half an hour shattered all of my confidence and all of my planning. That's all it took. The length of a good TV episode, let alone a member of the, it's nowhere near a member of the family passing away.

The length of a TV episode showed me just how helpless I am. Human beings are dependent upon the Lord and dependent, realizing our helplessness, that is the root of faith.

Faith's a curious thing. Now, I don't know if you've ever had someone who is a seeker saying to you, oh, I just wish I had your faith. I wish I could believe like you.

Faith is treated a bit like some kind of mystical quality. Well, what is it that drives this man to Jesus? It's the black and white, stark realization that there are no other options.

[7 : 31] Isn't it often true that we turn to Jesus, turn to God, turn to prayer when we realize that all other options have failed? When illness or family death comes along and we're helpless?

The synagogue ruler is an example of someone who's realized that he is at nature dependent. Spiritually, that's everyone's state. Coming to Jesus, I have nothing else.

I have no other options. Christians are people who realize that they're needy. The dark moments show us exactly how needy we are. It's when Johnny is struggling to pay rent that he panics and stresses because his plans are falling apart.

And neediness drives us to the person who can help. Johnny remembers that his heavenly father feeds the sparrows in the sky and he is more valuable than the sparrows and so the object of his faith is greater than his problem.

The Christian realizes that we come to Jesus always needy. We come to Jesus always dependent. Really, this is a mindset to cultivate in all of life.

[8 : 50] All that we have is from the Lord. Psalm 16, verse 2, you are my Lord. Apart from you I have no good thing. We cultivate that mindset.

Really, the synagogue ruler shows us in big picture the state that all of us are in. Without the Lord we have nothing. No food, no hope, no family. And when Johnny is offered extra shifts at work and when the church help him out or the landlord cuts him a break or the mindset that we come to God dependent or we praise him for his goodness and his kindness.

Our second point, faith in Jesus brings healing to the outsiders. Faith in Jesus brings healing to the outsiders. Look down with me at verse 20.

as Jesus goes on his way. Just then, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.

She said to herself, if I only touch his cloak, I will be healed. Everything about this woman screams outsider. She's weak, anemic, probably poor from 12 years of having to pay the doctors.

[10 : 14] Luke tells us that she didn't get very far. This illness has broken her and left her on the outskirts of her society. She was a religious and a spiritual outsider.

Leviticus 15, anyone who has a discharge of blood is unclean. This woman is unclean in the people of God.

No invites to any weddings, no invites to birthdays, the outside of the social circle, ceremonially, ceremonially outside.

Like our synagogue leader, she has nowhere else to go. Medicine has failed her, her friends have failed her. And so she comes in faith. I wonder if you noticed, it's not a particularly impressive faith, is it?

She comes to Jesus almost thinking it's a little bit like magic. If I touch his faith, well, maybe I'll be healed. Maybe it kind of works as a mechanical process.

[11:15] God bless. But it's not what her faith looks like. It's not that she's a model of faith because she's a world beater. This should encourage us.

This woman is a model of faith for us because of who she puts her faith in. Because look down at verse 22, and these are beautiful words. Jesus turned and saw her.

take heart, daughter, he said. Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment. She's been an outcast for 12 years.

She grabs the cloak of a Jewish rabbi and any other Jewish rabbi would have snatched his cloak away and sneered and dismissed her. Jesus had every right to act with outrage and disgust casting her away into further shame.

But he speaks to her, take heart, daughter. He dignifies her. He speaks kindly to her.

[12:24] He brings her into the family. And as he speaks, she is healed. She really is made better, all restored.

All her physical pain is gone. Her illness has left her and with it, all her religious and social isolation. You see, that's what happens when you meet the God who in himself has life and health and goodness and pureness.

As it were, it rubs off. The outsidersness is cast away into the outside and this woman is restored. God's love.

For those who come in helpless faith, see Jesus offers healing, hope a way back. Now I don't know many of us here, I don't know what your faith looks like.

It might be that this is a church of William Wilberforce's or it might be that this is a church full of people who have very weak, fairly helpless looking faith.

[13:28] But just look at what helpless faith receives. A faith that comes weak and broken to Jesus, longing just to grab hold of him, whatever bit of his cloak I can get.

Well that sort of faith receives and it's so easy for Jesus. It's him, not her, who heals. All she has to do is cling to him saying, this man can fix me, this man can heal me, and he does.

This woman's story is our story if we're a Christian. We were outsiders and yet Jesus has brought us in. And this story is something to be enjoyed by people of faith.

Because Jesus accepts us. Jesus turns and speaks to us and dignifies us in all of our weakness and faith. faith. If faith is dependence upon an object, then you want a pretty strong object to trust in, don't you?

Well enjoy this picture. Jesus will not turn away any who come to him in faith, no matter what they are like, no matter how much of an outsider. Even if in your weakness it's the thousandth time you come to him with the same old struggle.

[14:50] often we feel a sort of reluctance coming to Jesus like this. Often we feel like we should have to earn something or we shouldn't be coming with the same struggle.

Life should be easier for us before we can come and accept from Jesus. But the problem is there's this kind of reverse pride here. I need to have some kind of level of righteousness before I come to the one who heals.

I need to have some kind of dignity. I need to have some kind of uprightness in myself. You see this woman she's a challenge for us.

It's not her it's Jesus. She's utterly helpless and so she comes to him and that's where her healing is found. When we realise that it is Jesus and not ourselves well ironically that's where faith gets stronger.

because faith is dependent upon the object of which is trusted not in the strength of the faith itself. In our church we have a number of people who unfortunately have long term physical and mental struggles.

[16:05] God seems to be bringing a number of them to us which is wonderful and hard and a joy and testing impatience things.

But what I'm particularly struck by is that it is those who have come to Jesus again and again and again who have been fully broken physically or mentally realising they have very little by the world's standards to commend them.

These are the people who have faith which amazes me because as they come to Jesus again and again and again and again they realise that he is faithful and he does not turn them away. I don't know maybe some of us as we try and live for Christ we've been in the doldrums a little bit.

We're feeling beaten at work we're feeling like the outsiders. Well if that is you just enjoy this enjoy that as you come to this saviour he does not turn away the outsider.

It doesn't matter how little of his cloak you manage to catch come to Jesus. And thirdly and finally faith in Jesus brings life to the dead.

[17:14] I think Jesus is pretty good at crashing funerals. I don't think there's a single one he went to that he didn't ruin. He enters this leader's house having healed the woman along the way and the funeral is already in full flow.

The mourners are there. The people used to hire professional mourners. These people knew if someone was dead or if she wasn't. They're there playing pipes, pipes of mourning and Jesus walks in and says, go away.

The girl's not dead but asleep. They laugh at him. These people are professional funeral directors. They know what a dead body looks like.

But they don't understand Jesus' words really. You see, to Jesus, death, real death, the kind of which we are all helpless before.

Well, to Jesus, death is just like sleep. Bringing the dead back to life is just as easy for Jesus as waking a child from a nap. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand and she got up.

[18:31] News of this spread through all that region. Jesus touches her and she's awake. Again, this is another big no under the Old Testament law. Numbers 19, the one who touches a corpse is unclean.

Death is just as terrible then as it is now. But with a touch, the uncleanness of death and the terrifying end it brings are cast aside like they are nothing.

The little girl is restored to her family. As Jesus touches her, the God who has life in himself, well, he gives life to others. He brings joy and he brings life.

For truly deep faith, we need to know that Jesus deals with the biggest of our problems. We're dependent because of our everyday needs. God causes the rain to fall and the sun to shine, that our cupboards!

might be full of food. But we also need to feel our great need when we're facing an enemy that's under no circumstances could we ever defeat. Physical death mirrors spiritual death.

[19:44] The spiritually dead are like the physically dead, an enemy that is too big for us. And so when Jesus brings healing, it's no wonder that this news spreads throughout all the region.

Then, as today, death leaves people speechless. death is still a taboo in our society is that no one's found a cure for it yet. Sex, money, and politics have entered more public parlance because we've managed to change those.

Sex is now more public. The poor can become more easily rich in our society. We have more autonomy apart from government. We all have more of a public voice.

death remains the one thing we haven't yet quite managed to overcome. We've pushed it back. Life expectancy in this country is higher than ever, but it still remains.

And apart from Jesus, there's no good news. Reincarnation, paradise, they're blind leaps in the dark. How do we know? The thing that sets Jesus apart from any other belief, the one who gives us utter confidence that he deals with our biggest problem is that every time he came across death, he did something about it.

[21:07] I wonder how many people in Brighton, as they live their lives, carefree and easy, actually live in fear with that spectre of death just over their shoulders.

Of course, if we have an answer, if we know the one who brings life, who overcame it even in his own body, then things are different, aren't they?

We worship a saviour for whom raising the dead, raising the spiritually dead, is just as easy as waking a child from sleep. The great enemy, the fear of death, is gone.

Though we die physically, we will live forever. What Jesus demonstrates in the life of this one individual will be writ large across all of his people, his new humanity.

Assurance of eternal life is the unique privilege of the Christian because we know Jesus. And just think about how this lights our path.

[22 : 10] To anyone who clings to Jesus by faith, there is life eternal and everything now therefore matters. Everything we do now prepares us for the eternal life that Jesus has guaranteed for us.

I wonder if emails at work sometimes feel like that. They have eternal significance as we prepare ourselves for work in God's new creation. I wonder if standing up for Christ before seekers in the workplace or friends has a new light because we are guaranteed eternal life that lasts forever.

I wonder if we realise that our church gatherings are just little tastes as what Jesus has guaranteed for us by his resurrection. Eternal life together as his people.

As Christians who have the assurance of life, life eternal, well all of life now has a new light on it. Proper perspective on where we're going.

Life lived in the light of eternity. As we finish, let me just share with you the inspiring story of Polycarp. Polycarp was a notable bishop in the church in the second century.

[23 : 26] Polycarp was martyred for his faith and his account's been preserved for us. He was arrested and then he was brought before the Roman tribunal. Let me read these words that Polycarp is recorded to have said.

He's told, swear the oath and I will release you. Revile Christ. Polycarp replied, for 86 years I have been his servant and he has done me no wrong.

How can I blaspheme my king who saved me? The proconsul said, I have wild beasts. I will throw you to them unless you change your mind. But Polycarp said, call for them.

For the repentance from better to worse is a change impossible for Christians. It is a notable thing to change from that which is evil to righteousness. You threatened with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished.

Polycarp was killed, burned alive, stabbed, but he never recanted. He prayed until the moment he passed to be with his Lord. Why?

[24 : 39] Because Polycarp knew the Saviour who had been depended upon for 86 years. It's because he had grasped hold by faith of the one who never turned him away.

And because he knew that whatever he faced now, whether it be his life as a bishop, with all the trials of ministry, or the pain of his death, it was as nothing because Christ has won for him eternal life.

I don't know what life holds for people here. It might be just a very long, normal plod in the same direction trying to live faithfully for Jesus day after day.

It might be a painful life overseas in the missions field soon. But whatever it is, it is only a brief time before we have the assurance that we will see our Saviour who has come through death.

Jesus brings outsiders in. And this week, let's continue to trust in him. Let me pray.