

Stories of Faith and Unbelief
Mark 5:21-6:13

If you were like me, when I was a kid, I thought my dad could do anything... (If not your dad, perhaps your uncle, or a teacher, a coach, etc.).

- “My dad drives in the snow ... really fast! He’s from Michigan!”
- “My dad crosses railroad tracks even after crossing gates come down”
- “My dad can fix anything”
- “My dad can answer questions on jeopardy”
- “My dad can bowl strikes all night long!”
- “My dad shaves – and smells like Brut”
- “My dad has his name on his work shirt”

I would even defend my dad, sometimes with ridiculous logic. The Atlanta Braves once had a second baseman named Glen Hubbard. My dad told me that he and Hubbard were the same height. I took that to mean, if you didn’t like Glen Hubbard, then you didn’t like my dad! And that’s what I would tell guys at school.

- This idealized view of your dad eventually gives way to reality, as you get older.
- You begin to see that your dad can’t do everything perfectly.
- You may still rightly respect him, but a sign of maturity is to see that your dad has flaws – and many of those flaws are present in you!
- As we get older, we see that coaches aren’t flawless, uncles/aunts have problems, and pastors are imperfect.

But when it comes to Jesus, we should see the opposite.

Childlike faith in Jesus should not decrease as you get older; it should increase.

As Aslan told Lucy, “**Every year you grow, you will find me bigger.**”

A sign of maturity for the believer is an ever-growing faith in the power and grace of Jesus. But this view of Jesus is often obstructed because of our own **cynicism and doubt**. That’s why we need these stories in Mark 4-6.

These stories teach us much about real, childlike faith and hard-hearted, cynical unbelief (6:5-6). I have **six** lessons on faith and **four** lessons on unbelief to point out!

Lessons on Faith (5:21-43)

Mark uses a “sandwich technique” in order invite a comparison of these two stories.

He intends to invite comparison between the two.

The “bread” involves a story about a man’s dying daughter.

It appears at the beginning and end of the passage. In between, we find a story about a woman with chronic disease.

Both are in desperate situations and in need of Jesus, and so they plead for Jesus’ help.

As you recall, last week, we found Jesus as Lord over the fear of **nature and the demonic**, and from that we said we should trust him and marvel at him. The same is true here. We find Jesus as Lord over **sickness and death**.

V. 21 – Jesus returns to the Western shore, perhaps to Capernaum, and the crowd pressed into him again.

V. 22-23 – Jairus, a synagogue ruler makes an earnest appeal to Jesus for help.

- Formal names were important as eyewitness testimony
- The synagogue ruler probably knew Jesus, especially since this is likely in Capernaum where Jesus had been teaching and ministering and living. A synagogue ruler was responsible for the supervision of the building and overseeing the services.
- His request to “lay hands” on his dying daughter is not surprising for this was a popular practice of the day. What’s surprising is that **he asks Jesus!** He’s a synagogue ruler, approaching Jesus!
- Jarius has confidence in Jesus, even though it may have been weak faith.

V. 24 – Jesus in his grace, went with this man. Jesus wasn’t obligated to go, but He went. This leads us to the first point about faith that we learn from these two stories...

#1: Real faith is directed toward Jesus (5:21-24a)

- As we pointed out last week, **faith is useless if it is directed at the wrong object.**
- You don’t need more “**faith in yourself**” as culture says.
- You need faith in **Jesus**.
- Both of these stories show us **various degrees of faith**.
 - The ruler’s faith is somewhat mysterious.
 - The sick woman’s faith seems mingled with superstition initially (though Mark doesn’t comment on the orthodoxy of it; it seems that Jesus clarifies things for her at the end of the story).
- At any rate, we are saved by **the object of our faith – Jesus**. Notice verse 23 – He implored **him**. “Lay **your** hands on her.”
- Today it’s popular to talk about “faith” apart from Jesus. **We don’t need faith in faith** but faith in Christ.
- Prince of Egypt Movie lyrics. You tell me what kind of faith this is:

**There can be miracles
When you believe
Though hope is frail
It's hard to kill (It's hard to kill)
Who knows what miracles
You can achieve (you can achieve)
When you believe
Somehow you will
Now you will
You will when you believe...
You will when you believe**

- “You can achieve miracles when you believe ... in what? In whom? This song is very **politically correct but it’s not biblically correct**.
- When you put faith in something other than Jesus, you have a false hope. Learn from Jairus and this next lady, and direct your faith toward Jesus.

#2: Real faith believes Jesus can transform hopeless situations (5:23, 25-26)

- Not only does Jairus and this lady have faith in Jesus, but they believe Jesus can transform hopeless situations.
- **Jesus specializes in lost causes.**

V 23 - For Jarius, what is more awful than to hear a doctor say, **“Your daughter is going to die.”**

V. 25-26 - For this lady, **consider her hopeless condition:**

- **Suffered** from a disease, not sure what it was, perhaps bleeding from the womb.
 - Some of you can identify with a **chronic disease**. Perhaps something like headaches, or like cancer. But it’s just **always there**. Imagine the toll that takes on a person.
- **Impoverished**. She spent all she had. **But Jesus loves to minister most to those who have the least.**
- **Worse, not better**
- **Unclean** – She was **“walking pollution”** (Garland)– like the leper
 - She can’t gather for worship,
 - She’s shunned by people
 - She has received no physical touch for twelve years!

V. 27 – Yet, “she heard reports about Jesus” – this was her hope. That Jesus, the Great Physician could transform her situation.

App: We all have hopeless situations, and we all have the same ultimate hopeless situation – our sin. Faith believes Jesus can save anyone from eternal judgment, or temporal pain.

#3: Real faith involves Christ-centered action (5:22b-23, 27-34)

- Both Jarius and this lady **do something**. They act on their faith.
- **They go public.**
- **Faith digs through the roof, reaches out to touch Jesus, kneels, begs...**

V. 22b-23 - Jarius teaches us about **desperate prayer:**

- He **“falls at his feet,”** and **“implores Jesus earnestly”**
- In prayer, we should **pray boldly** and we should **surrender completely** (DeYoung).
 - But perhaps you lean more toward the, “God is sovereign, I’m not going to implore God earnestly approach.” You get the “surrender completely” but you aren’t really asking boldly. Learn from Jarius. Have a big view of King Jesus and appeal to him!
- **Jesus does a lot of crazy good things. Believe it!**
- **Jesus didn’t simply do good things in the past, He still does!**

V. 27-28 - The lady teaches us about **desperation and vulnerability.**

- **She’s taking a risk going in public. This is a big crowd. Others could be labeled unclean. She could face more humiliation and possible retribution.**
- Yet she “touches his garment.”
- **She doesn’t care what people will say or do, she is desperate for Jesus’ help.**

V. 29-34 – **Her faith goes more public and gets more clarified as Jesus demands that she identifies herself.**

- **29** – **Immediately, the bleeding stops!**
 - Touching the garment of Jesus smacks of superstition. If that’s the case, her theology will soon be corrected. Nevertheless she’s acting on what she knows. God condescends in grace and heals her, much like God would do miracles in the book of Acts in superstitious places and eventually clarify things.
- **30** – Jesus senses that something has happened and asks about the identity of this person. **Perhaps it took spiritual energy out of Jesus when he healed people.** I don’t know. He often wanted to depart

from a region after much ministry... It certainly takes spiritual energy for us to do ministry... Lots of people were touching him, but this lady touched him **in faith**.

- **31** – The disciples think locating the person is a hopeless exercise in such a crowd
- **32-33** – the woman identifies herself in fear and trembling before Jesus. Perhaps because she fears being in trouble, or that she has somehow made Jesus unclean.
- **34** – “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”
 - **Jesus will not allow her simply know him as a miracle worker.** This is not just a “Touch me and be healed and go home” sort of minister. Jesus calls her “Daughter.” There’s intimacy and relationship here. Jesus is calling her to a faith relationship with him.
 - **Jesus tells her that it was her *faith in Him* not any magic in his garment that produced dramatic effect.**
 - **Jesus tells her to go in “peace” – that is, “shalom,” total wholeness. Jesus reverses the curse. Just like he will do for all who trust in him.**
 - **Jesus calling her out in public also validates her situation and restores her dignity in the community.**

Know this about Jesus:

- **He wants a relationship with you.** He’s not some Genie in a bottle. Not all your problems will be solved in this life. But if you are a son or daughter of the King, then eventually you will experience total shalom!
- **Jesus replaces shame with dignity – all by His grace.**
 - You have shame from a bad decision in this life?
 - You committed some sin that has ostracized you? Well you may not be able to change people’s minds, but unbeliever, when you come to Jesus in repentance and faith, you can be settled in your mind, that you are a new creation in Christ. **“His blood can make the foulest clean.”**
- **Jesus specializes in lost causes. Go to him desperately and boldly!**

#4: Real faith trusts in Jesus’ perfect timing (5:35-36)

Meanwhile, this episode with the diseased woman, now healed woman, has **delayed Jesus’** visit to Jarius’ house!

35-37 – By now, the little girl has died! Everyone thinks it’s a lost cause. But Jesus says, “Don’t fear, only believe.”

- Jesus knows what he’s doing.
- But it’s hard for us to be **patient**.
- He’s never late. He’s never early. He’s always right on time. **Ask the disciples out in the midst of the storm; ask Jarius.**

\$5: Real faith believes Jesus is smarter than everyone (5:37-40a)

You may have thought this about your dad only to discover otherwise later in life, but the older you get the more you should believe this about Jesus!

V. 37 – Jesus gives the disciples the privilege of witnessing a miracle. Slowly, Jesus is revealing his identity and mission to them with greater and greater clarity.

V. 38 – Commotion and weeping.

- It was customary to have professional mourners during such occasions. They were like **Funeral DJ’s**.
- Even the poorest of people were to hire a minimum of two flute players and professional mourner.

V. 39 – Jesus tells the guys that they’re at the wrong place.

- “She’s sleeping.” Obviously, she’s dead. Not almost dead, but completely dead. **Professional mourners aren’t showing up when people are taking or nap or simply unconscious.**
- Jesus probably says this because **this is how he wants Jarius to view her death.** Like sleeping.
- The early church viewed it the same – 1 Thess 4:13

V. 40a – These mourners are like **modern day skeptics and cynics, “the laughed at him.”**

- Notice how quickly they go from mourning to laughing. These are phonies. They are religious hucksters.

Application:

- **Your friends and colleagues may think your nuts for believing this Jesus stuff.** That’s fine. That’s not new. When you’re forced to believe Jesus or a professor, trust Jesus.
- **Like Sarah, who was told she would have a child at old age, you too may be tempted to “laugh.” Be careful.** Jesus is smarter than anyone.
- **Why do we do this?** Why do others and we want to scoff at what God can do? Part of it has to do with our defense against disappointment. We don’t want to be disappointed. We hate getting our hopes dashed. Fight against this cynicism.
- **We should always be pessimists because of sin, but we should always be optimists because of Jesus. Sin is worse than we think, but Jesus’ grace and power are greater than we think.**

#6: Real faith believes that when Jesus has your hand, even death is like sleeping (5:40b-43)

Like a greater Elijah (1 Kings 17:17ff) Elijah, Jesus enters the room of a dead child (see 2 Kings 4:18ff), in order to perform a miracle.

Unlike Elijah and Elisha, Jesus doesn’t offer a prayer. He simply says, “Talitha Cumi.” Mark translates this Aramic phrase for us, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”

Jesus speaks to her like a parent speaks to a child when waking her up. Something like, “Honey, it’s time to get up.”

And immediately this 12-year-old girl got up.

My friends, **when Jesus has your hand, even death is like sleeping.** You will wake up. The early church spoke of death like sleeping – 1 Thess 4:14

Jesus has power over death. Marvel at this.

The Christian faith is about resurrection. It’s not about getting a moral makeover, but about rising from the dead through faith in Jesus – and that’s what Jesus gives us a sneak preview of here.

Everyone is filled with astonishment as a result and Jesus urges them to keep the matter quiet (as he will slowly reveal his Messianic, death-defeating identity, and as he tries to avoid being known merely as a miracle worker), and to give her something to eat. Eating proves she has been raised bodily.

Mark doesn't always explain the reasons for Jesus' change of locations. He moves off the Galilean shores to Nazareth (about 20 miles from Capernaum). Perhaps Mark wants to contrast faith with unbelief.

The Nazareth story definitely prepares the disciples for the next story, in which they are commissioned to places that will include both belief and unbelief. Perhaps Jesus wanted to take them to Nazareth for this very purpose, to prepare them for reality, to prepare them for disappointment.

**Up to this point, everything has looked easy in ministry to the disciples.
Jesus has been doing miracles like Steph Curry shoots three pointers.
But Jesus wants them to be prepared for rejection and disappointment.**

So where can he take them to show them that his ministry will not amaze everyone? **Home.**
If you ever want to show someone that you're not very impressive, just bring them home.

#1: Often unbelief is found in surprising places (6:1-4)

Jesus' own town of Nazareth (of 300-500 people), and his family didn't even believe.

I suppose on the one hand you can sympathize with people who know Jesus that they will have a hard time believing. But on the other, as they are hearing this, and seeing these things, why don't they believe?

"Light has shown in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it." (1 Jn 1:5)

V. 2-3 – As customary, Jesus begins teaching in the synagogue. You can visit the site today. Jesus would have been in this synagogue many times before. The people are astonished, and ask a series of questions.

They ask the right questions, but were coming to the wrong conclusions!

2b: His education – Where did he get these things, where did he get this wisdom? Jesus didn't have the classical rabbinic training. He had been trained as a carpenter.

2C: His power – How is he doing these things? Some even thought he was possessed by a demon.

3a: His family –

- **Jesus the Son of Mary** – Jesus was a common name. Like "Mike" today. Mike might be a swell guy, but Messiah? Come on.
- **Son of Mary may be an insult, son of the mother instead of the father (or could mean Joseph was dead).** Rumors were probably circulating as well about the illegitimacy of his birth
- **Carpenters' son. No respect. They're saying, "We've known little Jesus since he was building popsicle houses in kindergarten."**
 - **As a carpenter, Garland says, "He could have the skill to do almost anything – from crafting plows and yokes, to making pieces of furniture, cupboards, stools, benches, to erecting small buildings, particularly making the beams, window lattices, doors, and bolts. Jesus must have been technically skilled and physically strong."**
 - **In other words, he isn't this little weakling presented in many pictures and films.**
 - **But Messiah? I guy making doors is the Messiah?**
 - **Nothing wrong with being worker of wood, stone or metal, but the Messiah? Can you imagine Larry on aisle 3 of Lowes being heralded as the Messiah?**
- **His brothers.**
 - Only James – this is the James from the book of James, who headed the church in Jerusalem – and Jude are mentioned again in Scripture (This is the Jude from the book of Jude).
 - 1 Corinthians 15 – James believed after the resurrection

3b: They took offense at him. “Offense” is the word from which we get the word “scandal.” Jesus as the Messiah? This was a scandal.

- “This is just Mary’s son.” He’s a local boy, what’s he doing claiming to be the Messiah.

App: Familiarity to can breed “contempt” or you could say, “unbelief.”

- Be careful that you get so close and familiar with the gospel that it no longer moves you.
- Be careful that your faith is just casual and passive.
- Do you have any exclamation points in your faith?
 - It’s not uncommon for pastors’ kids to not believe; for missionary kids to become hardened to the gospel
 - It’s possible to be raised in the Bible Belt but not know the Jesus of the Bible.
 - A familiarity can sometimes lead to a lack of faith and excitement
 - **Preaching in Reno** – the most basic truths generated emotion

4: Jesus makes this famous statement about a prophet without honor. Just like they rejected the prophets, they rejected him (Matt 5:10-ff). Jesus was rejected by those who should have loved him.

#2: Much of unbelief stems from a failure to embrace Jesus’ deity (6:5-6a)

Remember Mark 3:20-21, 31-35? Some in his family believed he was insane. They were left with the options of inanity or deity, and many chose insanity. They saw the mighty works – displays of deity – and yet rejected him.

5: In this mist of gross unbelief, Jesus restricted his activity to a few sick people.

6a: The unbelief of the town seems to have surprised Jesus. He marvels at their unbelief.

App: Today, many people can accept Jesus’ humanity, even be inspired by his way of life. But calming storms? Healing diseases? Raising the dead? Come on.

#3: Unbelief is worse than you think (6:6a)

Jesus “**marvels**” at unbelief

- This is the only time Jesus Mark uses this verb to describe an action of Jesus.
- He doesn’t marvel at sin. He isn’t struck by that. Yes, he hates sin. Yes, he grieves over it. Yes, he died to atone for it. But unbelief causes him to *marvel*.
- Why? Because unbelief is worse than you think. We don’t marvel at it. Jesus does.

If someone were to ask you, “**What’s the worst thing you’ve ever done?**” What would you say?

Would you say “Unbelief?”

- **Many don’t even feel guilty for unbelief.**
- Many believe, “Well, I haven’t committed murder, or stolen, etc. so I’m a pretty good person.”
- All sin stems from your unbelief. It’s the root.
- Further, Jesus says in Matthew 11 that judgment is worse for those who heard/saw his ministry and do not believe.

The only other place where this verb “marvel” is used of Jesus again is in the story of the Centurion, when Jesus saw his “faith” he “marveled.” (Matt 8:5-13)

The worst thing you can do is disbelieve; the best thing is believe.

Application: Don't merely hang around Jesus. Don't merely hang around the church. Trust Jesus!

#4: We will encounter both belief and unbelief in gospel ministry (6:6b-13)

6b: Transition – Jesus goes about preaching. He essentially shakes the dust off his feet in Nazareth and keeps preaching, and that's what he commissions the disciples to do.

7: The disciples had received private instruction and had witnessed the words and deeds of Jesus. Now, Jesus is sending them out on this special ministry assignment to act as his *representatives* ("he gave them authority")

"Two by two," not just a wise plan (Eccl 4:9-12), but a reflection of the Mosaic law – the truthfulness of a testimony is to be established by two or three witnesses (Deut 17:6).

8: The specific terms of this commission forced the disciples to totally depend on God for provision, through the hospitality of others.

This is not a binding commandment for mission today.

Lane notes, "They are relevant to this particular commission. The insistence that the disciples take neither food nor money, but depend wholly on hospitality, is a matter of special authorization within limits which were both local and temporary."

- Some try to make this a law for missions today. That's wrongheaded.
- That's bad hermeneutics.
- Read the whole Bible for your missiology not an isolated text that appears before the resurrection of Jesus.

The application is clear: Depend on Jesus as you do mission.

9: a staff and sandals were permitted but they were to take nothing else.

10-11: If people don't listen, then leave. Jesus assumes some people will not believe. Like the coming of Jesus himself, the mission of the disciples had the character of both "sifting and gathering the true people of God" (Lane).

12-13: Word and deed ministry. Some apparently believed the proclamation of the good news while others did not. These miracles were visible functions of the kingdom of God. Salvation had come into the world, through Jesus Christ, and the disciples were proclaiming it – some believed, some did not. So it remains.

Jesus

- He calms a storm no one can calm, changes a man no one can tame, heals a lady no one can heal and raises a girl no one can awake
- You can believe or disbelieve. You can see him as the Great Physician or merely as the Carpenter's Son.
- May God grant you childlike faith in Jesus that grows and expands as the years go by.
- Trust this Jesus, who will one day reverse the curse once and for all.
- Oh for grace to trust him more!

Let me leave you with this from **David Garland**'s reflections on this section:

Evil, sickness, and death of little children continue to exist in our world. Not every touch heals, and those with faith still hear the dreaded word from the doctor, "Your little girl is dead." This passage does not offer any explanation of why a loving God allows evil to continue to exist or why the inexplicable occurs. It does affirm that God is on the side of those who suffer and are stricken with grief. A miracle does not occur in every disastrous situation, but it does not lessen God's power to save.... If God intervened in every situation, we would never have to exercise faith.... The little girl is spared death for now but has not been given total reprieve. The woman has been healed for now, but she will face new ailments, as she grows older. Faith, however, is able to hold on in the face of death, knowing that God has conquered death in the resurrection of Christ. Timothy George recalls one of the lowest points in Martin Luther's life: His beloved daughter Magdalena, barely fourteen years of age, was stricken with the plague:

"Brokenhearted he knelt beside her bed and begged God to release her from the pain. When she had died and the carpenters were nailing down the lid of her coffin, Luther screamed out, 'Hammer away! On doomsday she'll rise again!'"

Amen. Hammer away. We will rise again because with Jesus, even death is like sleeping.