

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 5:21-43

Topic

Jesus describes Jairus' daughter as sleeping,
then raises her from the dead

Title

"Don't Lose Sleep Over Death"

Introduction

Several years ago, Christian author and apologist, Lee Strobel, commissioned a national survey and asked people what question they'd ask if they could only ask God one thing.

The number one response was: "Why is there suffering in the world?"

This week's tragic mass shooting in my hometown of San Bernardino immediately sparked a mini-debate over calls for prayer in its aftermath. Atheists and other angry people lashed out against the spiritual sentiment.

GOD ISN'T FIXING THIS was Thursday's cover headline on the New York Daily News.

Another article declared that praying in the aftermath of mass shootings “seems to have been an ineffective strategy so far.”

The criticism even has a name. It's being called prayer-shaming.

The problem of suffering is central to our verses in Mark chapter five. We encounter two people with incurable diseases, one of whom dies.

I should say, Jesus encounters them and, as He does, to borrow a popular phrase from Facebook, "you won't believe what happens next."

One is healed; the other is raised from the dead.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Will Do Something With Your Disease, and #2 Jesus Has Done Something About Your Death.

#1 Jesus Will Do Something With Your Disease

(v21-34)

We love and universally respect first responders. While others are running away from danger, they are heading into it, to save lives.

Have you ever realized that God was the very first, first responder?

When Adam and Eve threw the world into its current chaos by choosing to disobey God in the Garden of Eden, the Lord immediately came to them, seeking them.

More than that: He promised to eventually come as a man, through one of their offspring, to respond to the problem of sin and death they had created.

Jesus came, as promised, and responded to our greatest need by dying on the Cross to provide for all of Adam's offspring the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

He rushed in and saved us all as we were perishing - especially those who believe in Him by grace through faith.

Any criticism of God's response to disease and death are rendered moot when I see Jesus nailed to the Cross to save us.

In the remarkable passage before us, the Lord is up to His neck in disease and death.

Mar 5:21 Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea.

Mar 5:22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet

Mar 5:23 and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."

Before the year 586BC, virtually all Jews lived within one hundred miles of the Temple at Jerusalem, so they all worshipped there. In 586BC the Temple was destroyed and many Jews were carried away into Babylon and held captive for seventy years. No longer able to worship in the Temple, they established synagogues in every neighborhood that had ten Jewish men or more.

The synagogue became the place of assembly, where they would worship and study the Scriptures. Each synagogue had ten leaders who were called elders.

Of those ten, one was elected to be the ruler. He wasn't a priest, but he was a tremendously important man, not only in their ceremonies, but in all civic matters.

Jairus had a preteen daughter who was most definitely going to die. There was no hope outside of a miracle.

Mar 5:24 So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.

"Thronged" is a word used only by Mark, and only here. It's a strong word, indicating that the crowd was close to suffocating Jesus.

We've pointed out before how much danger Jesus was in from mobs of people. He sometimes employed counter-measures, like preaching to the crowds from a boat in the water. Nothing He could do here, if He wanted to go with Jairus. He'd have to trust His Father to protect Him.

Mar 5:25 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years,

Mar 5:26 and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.

She was constantly bleeding from her womb, probably as a result of what we today would diagnose as fibroid tumors of the uterus.

I'm not a doctor; but I did stay at a Holiday Inn, so let me describe the condition. Fibroid tumors are benign. They can bulge into the uterus, causing bleeding. By bleeding I mean hemorrhaging and passing of clots. The larger the tumor or tumors grow, the heavier the bleeding. They can be painful, and cause *endometriosis* – a condition my stay at the Holiday Inn did not cover.

Because there is loss of blood, she would suffer from anemia and weakness.

This was a pretty severe and chronic physical suffering. But it involved much more than just the physical:

1. There was financial suffering. You're told she visited many physicians. While I'm sure she visited many quacks, the indication is that she received the finest medical care money could buy, but that no procedure could help her. She was beyond any human help.
2. There was emotional suffering. Anyone with chronic pain will tell you it wears upon your emotions. It's all you think about, day and night; and it affects everything you do.
3. There was social suffering. It's not explained for you, but her flow of blood rendered the woman a social outcast from Jewish society. She was considered unclean and could not be touched, or touch, others without rendering them contaminated. Her theme song was *Hey There Lonely Girl*.
4. Finally, she was suffering spiritually. Her unclean status prohibited her from attending synagogue services. She was cut-off from corporate worship.

You don't have to suffer from the same condition in order to understand someone else's suffering.

Learn to think outside the physical pain, and consider how they are affected financially... emotionally... socially... and (especially) spiritually.

She pressed through the crowd to touch Jesus. Perhaps there are crowds in your life that hinder you from reaching the Lord: The crowd of unbelief, or of busyness, or of entertainments, or of activities. Press through the crowds of your life, through all the things that are blocking you from Him.

Mar 5:27 When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment.

Mar 5:28 For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."

Jesus dressed as a rabbi, and that meant there were blue tassles along the hem of His outer garment. Why it is she thought touching Jesus in secret would help her is unknown.

Commentators speculate she was superstitious. I say, it's really all she could do – given that she was not supposed to be in the crowd. And it was the least thing she could do, but it still required faith to do it - her belief that Jesus could heal her. ***And He did.***

Mar 5:29 Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.

Since this healing wasn't witnessed, Mark let's us know it happened by telling us she immediately knew she was made whole. He words it in such a way that we can identify with her, feeling her joy.

Mar 5:30 And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

Mar 5:31 But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

Everyone was touching the Lord, but they all denied it when He asked them. They must have been afraid He was somehow upset. How sad that we often jump to the wrong conclusion about Jesus' attitude when He speaks. We read things into His words and into God's Word that are not there: anger, disgust, frustration, irritation, etc.

The disciples' question is appropriate. They wanted Jesus to explain Himself. What kind of touch did He mean?

It seems that God the Father gave Jesus a Word of Knowledge that a healing had just taken place as someone in the crowd touched the Lord. Remember, Jesus was fully God, but when He was on the earth, He voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of His deity and lived as a Spirit-filled man.

Mar 5:32 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing.

People with the Word of Knowledge are scary. I never wanted to be around Chuck Smith. He told lots of stories about the Lord giving him Words of Knowledge about people. It was always about sin in their lives. I always thought he knew something about me.

Mar 5:33 But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

To touch her, or be touched by her, would render Jesus ceremonially unclean. *Or would it?* When she touched Jesus, she was immediately healed... So Jesus was not violating any law.

However, any person in the crowd she had brushed against *before* her healing would have been rendered unclean. Bummer!

Mar 5:34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

"Be healed" is in the tense of having been healed. It was important for Jesus to expose her, and declare her healed, for at least two reasons:

1. It would allow her to immediately rejoin society. While it seems she may not have been local, since no one recognized her pressing through the crowd, she needed some validation her condition was healed.
2. It established that it was faith in Him that healed her – *not* superstition, or technique, or tassles, or anything else.

Jesus will do something with disease in general, and with your disease in particular.

He **can** heal you. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We learn from the prayers in our Bible's that it is good to seek the Lord for healing.

The apostle Paul had a serious infirmity. More than one, actually; but this one he called "the messenger of Satan." He said that he sought the Lord three times to remove it from him.

The fact Paul prayed three times establishes that prayer should be persistent. He prayed more than once, and kept praying until he received an answer.

It also establishes that God doesn't always answer prayer immediately.

But most importantly, the fact Paul prayed three times is reminiscent of Jesus praying three times in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking His Father if the cup of His impending suffering on the Cross might be avoided.

To which the Father must say "No."

And He also must say "No" to Paul, because, as Paul explained it, he needed the suffering to both keep him humble for the great revelations given to him, and to reveal God's strength through his weakness as he depended upon grace.

Jesus will do something about your disease. He can heal it, but more often than not, in the church age in which we live, He wants to bring His strength from your weakness.

A few weeks ago I quoted C.S. Lewis, who said that pain was God's megaphone. He meant it was God's way of getting our attention.

You know what? If someone isn't paying attention to God, and is headed to eternal conscious suffering in Hell, I'm OK with God doing just about anything to get their attention.

I remember a time, I was maybe 11 years old, racing on bikes with my older brother, Richard. I didn't see that I was about to pull in front of an oncoming car. Richard purposely crashed his bike into mine. We both got hurt; our bikes were unrideable. It was a serious crash. But not as serious as being struck by the car.

Having said that, I think that pain is mostly meant as a megaphone God hands to us, to amplify His strength in our weakness, to give us a powerful testimony of Who He is, and what He can do. We can all cite some believer we know, or knew, who was filled with grace during a terrible illness - who amplified the grace and greatness of God in their weakest moments. Jesus *will* eradicate disease, soon enough, just after the seven-year Tribulation, when He comes again to establish His kingdom. Then, in eternity, no more disease; not even tears.

Are you suffering today? Jesus will do something about it. Pray for healing, and if Jesus says nothing, go on praying. Press forward; follow hard after Him; don't be deterred by any crowd.

If He says "No," you're in great company. And you're set up with a mega megaphone to proclaim His amazing grace.

#2 Jesus Has Done Something About Your Death

(v35-43)

I've sort of touched upon how God deals with your suffering, working it together for the good; but I haven't answered Why? suffering exists in the first place.

The answer, in a word or two, is free-will. God created mankind with free-will because love cannot be forced and remain love.

God could have created a universe in which disobedience was impossible. But then love would be impossible, and we could not be made in the image of God.

Adam and Eve are responsible for the mess we're in. Satan is culpable as well.

God, for His part, responded immediately. He announced His plan and has worked through history, providentially, to see that His plan was and is being accomplished.

Let me say this as well. If you blame God for suffering, and thereby turn your back on Him, where does that leave you? What hope do **you** have to alleviate suffering?

More importantly, what hope do you have beyond the grave?

Jesus takes us beyond the grave as He continues on to Jairus' house.

Mar 5:35 While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

I don't want to get off on a tangent, but this was a textbook death notification. "Your daughter is dead." No room for misunderstanding.

Mar 5:36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe."

Jesus offered immediate hope. He does that, every time, if we will only listen for Him.

Mar 5:37 And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James.

In this mission against death, the Lord handpicked an elite force to accompany Him. Seriously, this was spiritual warfare, and this was, for whatever reason, a strategy.

We must remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must commit to doing God's work, God's way.

Mar 5:38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly.

Funeral customs are weird. In Israel, when someone died, you hired as many professional mourners as you could afford. They came with instruments and were adept at wailing.

Being so important to the Jewish community, Jairus would have had a ton of mourners who were in full wailing-mode as Jesus approached.

Mar 5:39 When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping."

Critics try to say that "sleeping" meant she was not really dead, but in a coma.

While there are cases of people being thought dead who were yet alive, for the most part it's not that hard to determine death.

She was dead. Although dead, she was only "sleeping," as far as Jesus was concerned.

The writers of the New Testament would elaborate on this, showing us that by using the word "sleeping" for death, you are reminded that death has been conquered. If you are a believer, you might die, but you are immediately absent from your body and present with the Lord.

Mar 5:40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying.

Nonbelievers still love to ridicule Jesus. Whenever some tragedy strikes, they blame God, rather than seek Him.

I'll tell you this: If any of the victims of the shooting in San Bernardino were believers, their families have hope, and the peace of God that passes all human understanding.

What can the ridiculers offer?

Jesus brought in the three disciples, probably because Jews required three witnesses to an event in order to believe it had happened. Of course, mom and dad were there.

Mar 5:41 Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

His words were like those her parents might use to wake her up in the morning. He didn't need to shout, or to act excited. Jesus didn't get all worked-up, and get the others worked-up.

I think the Holy Spirit is more a whisperer than a shouter. I'm not saying we can't be excited or exuberant; we probably need more of that.

But wild, loud shouting, and ecstatic movements, are not the Jesus-style of doing things.

Mar 5:42 Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.

Mark tells us she was twelve, and that gets us thinking, because we have encountered twelve years already in this story.

1. Jairus' daughter was twelve years of age. The woman with the issue of blood had been suffering exactly that same amount of time.
2. Jesus addressed the woman with the word daughter. It's the only time He ever called anyone daughter, and it's the same word used to describe Jairus' little girl.

3. Jairus, as a ruler of a synagogue, was personally involved in declaring women like her unclean and unfit for attendance and in putting them out of the synagogue.
4. Jairus was now risking his own place in the synagogue by coming to Jesus for help – against the wishes of the Pharisees and scribes who were against the Lord. **Now he might be put out.**

It's a metaphor within a miracle. Jairus could not help but see the parallels, and meditate upon them.

He would realize that the whole time he was enjoying his little girl, hugging her and kissing her, God's dear adult daughter was being shunned and denied all human contact.

Sure, it was all according to the Law. But maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't have been all that bad to try to minister to her. So what it made you ceremonially unclean? Wasn't it a greater exercise of the love of God to touch her?

There's a lot here to reflect upon in terms of our own response to those in need.

[Mar 5:43](#) But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat.

We might call this aftercare, or follow-up. We can't always follow-up with folks we minister to, but we ought to at least try, in order to see that they get the spiritual nourishment they need.

People who criticize God for allowing suffering for some reason nevertheless understand that we are all going to die. They

criticize God for some deaths, e.g., when children die. But they accept that death is the way of all men.

Why? Why accept death?

I'm serious. If suffering bothers you, death ought to really set you off.

Jesus has done something about death, and about your death. He's conquered it. You might still die, if the rapture of the church doesn't happen first.

But death has no sting, because the grave cannot hold you. You are immediately in Heaven (if you are a believer), and you will receive a brand spanking new resurrection body when the Lord's trumpet is blown ending the church age.

When Jesus used the word "sleep," He captured all of this victory over sin and death.

While we await either the rapture or our death, we are to think of ourselves as first responders in a world filled with suffering and death.

While critics ridicule Jesus, they have nothing to offer - no hope whatsoever.

We, on the other hand, have everything to offer in the Person and work of Jesus.

Let's rush in and share His love.