

Kingdom Faith Matthew 9:18-26

Introduction

"It doesn't really matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere."

We've all heard that anonymous wisdom passed down to us somewhere along the way in our lives. As we enter into the holiday season, this proverb often finds its way to our lips and we allow it to make our hearts warm and cozy.

However, is it accurate? Is it good for us to think about faith in such a sentimental way? Doesn't it matter what we believe in too? Brian McClaren, noted thinker on the way our culture now relates to Christianity, rightly points out the shaky foundation in this sentimental logic. He questions the wisdom of making faith synonymous with sincerity when it leads to...

- Jonestown and Waco
- Totalitarian regimes which command allegiance to leaders who know only death
- Intolerance by certain expressions of Christianity, which then lead groups only to hate people and culture
- Permissive and nihilistic parents who refuse to give boundaries to children

The truth is it does matter what we believe. In fact, our lives and the lives of those we love often depend on what we believe. I suppose the worth of the phrase is found in that it reflects the value we place on authenticity and intellectual honesty. We value sincerity because we think it reveals honesty. However, that doesn't mean that we may not be sincerely wrong. To believe in something deeply in our heart of hearts does not mean that that something is true or dependable.

There are good choices and bad choices. For example, in the northern climates it is the job of parents to determine the thickness of the ice before their children begin to play hockey and skate. And no matter the sincere belief, if the ice is not yet 12" thick there is going to be a problem. Even with gobs of belief, if the ice is only 1" thick someone is going in for a swim. No amount of faith is going to change the thickness of the ice. Either it is ready to support the kids playing or it is not.

Problem identified: Hopefully, you can now see my point; faith doesn't make anything happen. It doesn't create anything. It has no power in itself. Faith is not about working up intellectual certainty. Nor does faith, all by itself, remove doubt from a clouded mind. Rather faith is simply the act of dependence. Faith is the instrument through which we stake our lives. It says nothing about the wisdom of that choice.

Main Idea: That is why the Gospels have been written. These books are books of the witnesses of Jesus Christ. They recommend to us not only faith in Jesus Christ, but the wisdom of that choice. It does matter what we believe in, according to the Gospels. In fact, according to these witnesses there is only one person upon whom we should stake our lives. **There is only one person on whom we should depend. There is only one person who commands faith. That person is Jesus Christ. Because he alone can address the real needs and issues of a fallen humanity.**

Wed to the Text: In our passage this morning we see two people, both of whom have a weak, even desperate faith. One you might say is even a little superstitious in her faith. Nevertheless, because they have come to Jesus they are not disappointed. In him they discover a...

- Compassion that cannot be exhausted
- Power that cannot be bested
- Salvation that cannot be lost

What we're going to see this morning is that it is not the quality or depth of our faith which saves us. Rather, it is the compassion, power and salvation that Jesus brings. Faith doesn't bring us Kingdom Life, rather Jesus brings it through our faith! It is Jesus who stirs within us the fountain of faith. **And, this is why without this faith we can never enter the Kingdom of Christ.**

Therefore, let's look at our passage and see what it is about Jesus that stirs faith to life in our lives!

1) Compassion that cannot be exhausted.

The first thing that stirs our faith is the compassion that Jesus demonstrates. Notice the approachability of Jesus Christ. After a period of busy ministry, Jesus remains available.

- **First, he demonstrates compassion to a ruler.** From Mark's Gospel, we know this man to be the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. Most likely he was a wealthy man and a man of influence in the community. Nevertheless, all of his power and influence cannot help him on this day. On this day his daughter has just died. **In desperation he comes to Jesus. And Jesus receives him.**
- **Second, he shows compassion to a diseased woman.** While leaving to attend to the ruler's daughter, Jesus and his disciples are interrupted. Again, we learn from Mark's Gospel that a large crowd surrounded Jesus so that he could not see everyone who surrounded him. However, one particular woman was desperate to touch Jesus. As one who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years and one who had seen numerous physicians, she now saw in Jesus her last hope. "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well," she said to herself.

According to commentators, such a comment demonstrates not only faith, but also a little superstition. However, her comment can be understood in light of the fact that she was not just sick. She was also unclean. Her problem not only rendered her near death, but also perpetually unclean in sight of the law. She was an outcast physically and spiritually.

All of this makes Jesus response a supreme demonstration of compassion.

- He sees her—the unclean and untouchable woman.
- He encourages her with the words, "Take heart" or "Take courage."
- He heals her.

Application:

It is important for us to realize that neither the woman nor the synagogue ruler had a perfect confidence in Jesus. Their faith was weak, and in the case of the woman even a little superstitious. Nevertheless, Jesus proved himself available and compassionate. Jesus does not turn us away. His compassion cannot be exhausted.

Interesting Fact: All of the great images of the mercy of God in the Gospels—the Father of the prodigal son, the Good Samaritan, the Merciful King, the gracious landowner, Jesus feeding the 5000—they all highlight the compassion of God.

We don't get Jesus until we begin to taste his compassion for us. That usually means that we, like the ruler and the woman, must have come to a place of need or of desperation. Have you come to the place where you are hungry for someone to show you compassion?

2) Power that cannot be bested.

Of course, the passage teaches us that Jesus healed both the woman from her illness and the daughter by raising her from the dead. Simply at his Word, Jesus demonstrates a supreme power over the power of death at work in these two people's lives.

However, what may be missed is that the story, when we take the added details from Mark's Gospel, actually highlights Jesus' power. From Mark's gospel we learn that the ruler when he first came to Jesus announced that his daughter was dying or near death. Then, we learn that Jesus is interrupted by the woman whom he heals. Later a servant from the man's house comes to announce that the little girl has already died. Therefore, there would be no need for Jesus to come. Interestingly though, Jesus says to the ruler, "Do not fear, only believe" (Mk. 5:36).

Just like he would later do with Lazarus, it is almost as if Jesus waits until death has shown its full power so that he can reveal his full power. He enters this house where the symbols of death are already at work. The flute players and mourners would have been hired to move the family through the process of grief. However, Jesus gets everybody out of the house and resurrects this girl to life again.

All of these actions serve the point that there is no power that Jesus cannot best. As we have seen in other events, Jesus Kingdom is one of authority over every other power—nature, the devil, sin, disease and death. His power cannot be bested.

3) Salvation cannot be lost.

Passages like this, though, often discourage us more than they help us. Why? Because we read them and wonder where Jesus is? Does he still heal like this? Does he still have compassion like this? After all, Jesus tells the woman, "Your faith has made you well." It seems that Jesus attributes amazing power to a faith that resides in him.

- Well, some people emphatically say that he does. They reason that if the account in this passage is not your own then it is a **failure of your faith**. If only you had more faith, then Jesus power could be unleashed.
- The **skeptic**, on the other hand, points to all of the times when people have prayed and seemingly nothing has happened. "**See,**" they say, "**you're Jesus is not powerful.**" From their standpoint it has nothing to do with faith. It is simply the fact that Jesus does not have the power.

How are we to make sense of this seeming discrepancy, either of our faith or of Jesus' promise? Our answer lies in the fact that Jesus is not simply promising the healing of our bodies. Rather, Jesus is saving our lives. Jesus is not promising us complete and final healing of our bodies in this life. More precisely, Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you." In other words, Jesus is offering salvation.

In addition, the tense of this verb speaks of a salvation that cannot be lost. Jesus has worked something in the past, which secures an abiding result.

This may seem insignificant, but it is an important distinction. Jesus' miraculous healings were never meant to be seen as the goal of our faith. They were merely signs to lead us to a living faith. Jesus was never meant to be seen as a magical healer or simply a means to acquire the demands of our own hearts. Rather, Jesus is to be seen as the giver of salvation.

In fact, it very may well be that we receive that salvation even as our outer bodies waste away.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of

Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. **2 Corinthians 4:7-18**

Biblical faith is never to be seen as a power unto the service of our selves. Rather, its healing power lays in the power of the object of faith—Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't promise life according to our design, but life according to his Kingdom design. In a word, that means Jesus promises salvation.

What does that include? His compassion, his power/victory over sin, death, disease, the devil, nature, etc. and salvation from guilt and condemnation and life eternal. Nevertheless, that does not mean that I get everything now or on my terms.

Conclusion

Therefore, the only failure of faith occurs when we want something from Jesus other than what he offers. In other words, if we think salvation is to be equated with material prosperity, or a miraculous healing or an amazing earthly deliverance then we are in most likely for disappointment.

However, if we are open to whatever Jesus might have for us—including healings, prosperity, but also hardships and discouragements—then we will never miss out on his compassion, power and salvation. For through all of this, Jesus is advancing the Kingdom in our lives. To you, Jesus says, "Do no fear, just believe." May today be a day where you leave here more confident in your faith that Jesus saves!