

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Little Maid - He brings comfort

This morning we begin a series on Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life. In John 11:25 Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." Jesus went on to demonstrate this in His own resurrection and the life He has given to all who trust in Him. Christ's resurrection is fundamental to the Christian Gospel. Paul, in his exposition of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, argues, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (verse 17) but then, in verse 20, declares, "But now Christ is risen from the dead". This was the message of the angels to the disciples on the resurrection morning, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee" (Luke 24:5-6).

But the Lord Jesus also showed His power to overcome death and give physical life during His brief public ministry. This was also true in a spiritual sense as He took people out of spiritual death into spiritual life, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). But it was also true when He actually raised people from the dead. We have three specific examples of this in the Gospels: the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain in Luke 7, the story of the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11, and the story of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter.

This morning we are going to look at the resurrection of Jairus' daughter in Mark chapter 5. The events culminating in Jairus' young daughter being raised from the dead begin in the previous chapter. They give us an insight into the ministry of Jesus as the resurrection and the life and His power to deliver from both spiritual and physical death.

In Mark chapter 4 Jesus, after a long day ministering to a large crowd, prepares to cross over the Lake of Galilee. It was the beginning of a journey during which Jesus would demonstrate His astonishing power as the Son of God. And it was a journey which changed the lives of several people.

Mark tells us that after the Lord Jesus had sent away the multitude, the disciples took Jesus "along in the boat as He was" (verse 36). The implication of the text is that they literally carried Him into the waiting boat where He fell fast asleep. It has always impressed me that the Son of God, who was about to display His enormous power, is first described as a man who had worked Himself to the point of exhaustion and had to be helped by the disciples into their boat. Philippians 2 teaches us about the humanity of Christ: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." In that "likeness" Jesus knew what it was to experience true humanity. In this case physical exhaustion, at other times it was tiredness at Sychar's well in John 4, tears at the grave of Lazarus in John 11, pain at the cross and eventually death itself (Matthew 27). The love of God has been revealed to us through the lowliness and humanity of Jesus. His power has been demonstrated through weakness.

Let's return to the boat. As Jesus sleeps a storm engulfs the lake and high waves endanger the ship. Some commentators have suggested that the storm was caused by Satan attempting to prevent Jesus from arriving at Gadara to set Legion, a demon possessed man, free. We know from the beginning of the book of Job that Satan is described as having power over some aspects of nature, so the suggestion is not without foundation. What we do know is that the storm was powerful enough to disturb the disciples, many of whom were seasoned fishermen. In their fear, they wake Jesus from His sleep. In Psalm 121:4-5 we are reminded that "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper". The disciples had the opportunity to learn by faith that whilst the Saviour was with them they were safe, but in their fear they wanted Him to take away the danger. We are inclined, when we pass through difficulties, immediately to ask for our circumstances to be changed. This was the reaction of the disciples. They wanted the Lord to save them from the storm and what they believed was a sinking ship. More than this, they wake Jesus with the words "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

In this first incident the reality of death emerges: the danger of perishing. Jesus, the resurrection and life, immediately intervenes. He raises the disciples out of the storm in one supreme act of power. "And He (Jesus) arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still'. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." The exhausted lowly Nazarene awakes and as Son of God rebukes the storm and calms the sea. There is no more frightening power than a raging sea. Yet the Creator is able to restore peace instantaneously. But having done so,

He questions the hearts and minds of His followers. "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" The God of creation is also the God who requires our faith, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). In this first story Jesus demonstrates His power over disaster and brings peace to His creation but His disciples are still troubled, "And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, 'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'" This is a very challenging incident. What was Jesus saying? He was saying, "Whatever your circumstances are, if I am with you, you are safe." There are times when Jesus takes away the danger. But equally, we discover, there are times when we have to go through very painful circumstances but Christ is with us in them. In the words of David in Psalm 23, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me;" (verse 4).

In the second part of His journey, Jesus arrives at Gadara. And when He gets out of the boat He is met by Legion: "Immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones." There are few more pitiful pictures in Scripture of a person so totally dominated by demonic powers - yet Legion runs to the Saviour and worshipped Him. Legion expresses on the one hand his awful condition and, on the other, his desperate need to come to Jesus. All of the four incidents in this morning's talk are about people coming to Jesus and Jesus exerting His power to deal with all the need that disaster, demons, disease and even death bring and also to impart unbroken peace.

Legion was experiencing a living death. But he comes to Christ, in the words of the old Gospel hymn, "Just as I am." Legion came in all his need to Jesus. Legion had been living amongst the dead but he comes to Jesus, the resurrection and the life. There is a struggle involved in the healing of Legion; the miracle takes a little time and is an unusual story involving the herd of swine. But ultimately it is Christ's command which sets Legion free. Ephesians 2 perhaps best expresses Legion's experience, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (verses 1-5). Paul goes on to write in verses 12 and 14, "You were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace".

When the people who remembered Legion as an untamed, unclothed mad man living amongst the tombs, came to see what Jesus had done they find a new creation. Legion was "sitting and clothed and in his right mind. They were afraid." The Bible teaches us about transformation. Here we have one of the greatest illustrations of what it meant. On the lake Jesus had stilled a raging storm. On the shores of the Gadara He stilled a greater storm which raged in the heart of one poor lost man. Jesus, the resurrection and the life, had raised Legion out of his living death to give him a new life - a heart filled with peace and a mind at rest. Christ gives us peace but also a renewed mind. Paul writes, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). It is difficult to imagine the utter sense of tranquility that Legion enjoyed - it came from the Saviour!

In contrast to the peace Legion experienced, the people of the Gadara, pleaded with Jesus to leave their region because they were disturbed by the way His grace had turned their world upside down. Today people are still disturbed by the life changing effect the Gospel has. Like the Athenians, they mock it or ignore it but some believe. As Jesus returned to the boat Legion followed Jesus. He wanted simply to be with Saviour. "However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.' And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marvelled."

If Jesus, the resurrection and the life, had shown His power over disaster and demons, He was about to be faced by the effects of disease. "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. And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet 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.'"

The disciples had come to Jesus in the boat. Legion had come to Jesus on the shore. Now Jairus appears. There were not too many rulers of synagogues who came to Jesus - fewer still who had faith in him. Having religion is not the same as having a personal faith in Christ. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked His own disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Jairus, a religious man, came by faith to Jesus. He believed Jesus had the power to heal his only child. And so

begins the final part of the journey we are exploring - not across a lake, not to meet an uncontrollable man but into a home in crisis.

But this final part of the journey is interrupted. "So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him. Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, 'If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.' Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My clothes?'"

Jesus, the resurrection and the life, whose power had overcome disaster and overwhelming numbers of demons was now confronted by disease. In the first story He was awakened by the cries of His disciples whose lives were endangered. On the shores of the Gadara Jesus was confronted by the cries of Legion, a man enduring a living death. But now a timid, frightened, crippled lady stopped Him in His tracks. She was enduring an illness which was leading to her death. She did not cry out in her need. She quietly stretched out her hand to touch the Saviour. It was a touch of faith and she was healed instantaneously!

When I was a young boy I often visited my grandmother's house. She had a spare room where I used play to escape my younger sisters. One day I was a bit bored and looked around the room for something to do. I noticed the light switch. It was in days when you could unscrew the cover of the light switch to expose the wires. And that's what I did! Then in a moment of unequalled stupidity I poked my finger into the switch. The next thing I remember was being thrown to the floor with the force of the electric shock. Ever since I have had a healthy respect for all things electrical. But it also taught me about the power of faith. It only needed a touch for the power of the electricity to surge through my body and it only needs that simple step of faith to know all the fullness of God's love towards us. When the prodigal son returned to the Father's house in Luke 15, the Father was waiting and as soon as he saw his returning son, he ran towards him showering him with compassion and love.

Jesus stopped because He knew who had touched Him. The disciples complained that many people in the crowd had bumped into the Saviour. It is the same today; many people come into contact with Jesus. But Jesus describes Himself as coming "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). In the journey we have followed this morning, the disciples, Legion, Jairus and the woman came to the Saviour out of need. If we are not convinced of our need to be saved, we will never come by faith to trust in Christ as our Saviour. He will always be a distant figure of history or religion - a picture on a wall or a glass icon in a church. The living risen Christ of the Bible is only known by faith.

In our story the woman identifies herself, "But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.'"

It must have cost the woman something to stand forward and acknowledge her faith publicly. Even in today's publicity seeking world and endless reality TV, most people want privacy, not the glare of attention. Jesus invited her forward to encourage her faith, not to embarrass her. We all need to be helped to witness to our faith in Christ. Christians have a story to tell and Jesus wants us to communicate it. Our personal experience of the Lord is valid and valuable and we need to be encouraged to share it.

I am sure Jairus must have shared in the joy of the woman's blessing and been encouraged by the Lord's power to heal. There was no doubt now that Jesus could heal completely. There was no doubt He would heal Jairus' sick child. But as the good news of the woman's healing spread, so terrible news arrived. "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?'"

To heal is one thing; to raise from the dead is another. Jairus must have been heartbroken. Why did Jesus wait so long? He had healed a Roman centurion's servant by just speaking. He did not even need to come Jairus' house. He could have just spoken. Now it was too late. "As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only believe.'" It was not too late!

This morning's journey was a journey about power but also of about faith, peace and comfort. The disciples were comforted when the storm was calmed. Legion was comforted when the demons were destroyed. The woman was comforted by the removal of her pain. Jairus was about to experience not only one the greatest of miracles Jesus did but something he would also remember for the rest of his life. As Jairus walked those painful steps to his home, struggling to have the faith Jesus had spoken of, so the Saviour walked with Him.

Jesus permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. These were special witnesses to Christ's power in the house of Jairus, to His glory on the mount of transfiguration, and to His pain in the garden of Gethsemane. The Lord exposes the shallowness of the crowd around the house who at one moment weep, then ridicule Jesus when He declares the girl was sleeping. The Lord knew where the true sorrow lay in the hearts of the parents and uses sleep as an expression of comfort in the sense of her shortly to be raised out of death. He soon dismisses the crowd with an authority which could not be resisted and enters the family home.

"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. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, 'Talitha, cumi,' which is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.' Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat."

Jesus had confronted disaster, demons and disease. In this final miracle Jesus, the resurrection and the life, confronts death itself. This time it is not a simple command which stilled the storms or directed demons. Nor could the little girl stretch out to touch the Saviour. The Saviour reaches down to take the girl's hand and with the gentlest of words dismisses the greatest enemy of all - death. The exhausted Man who entered the boat awoke as Son of God to bring life and comfort in a world of enormous need. The same Son of God now awakens a child from death and fills a home with joy and comfort and, I suspect, worship. And after performing the greatest of miracles says, "Give her something to eat." New life needs feeding and on a practical note when the Saviour delivers to us a young believer, He gives us the responsibility to protect and feed that new life. We are responsible as natural or spiritual parents for the spiritual welfare of our young people in a world that often dismisses their Christian faith.

I remember reading the story of a woman who vehemently denied the Christian faith and belief in the resurrection. So strong was this denial that she left instructions for her coffin to be encased in concrete to ensure resurrection would be impossible. Some years after her burial, the shoot of a new tree emerged from her grave. In her desire to disprove resurrection, she had provided the conditions for a new life to emerge. The tiny shoot grew into a strong tree witnessing life amidst death. This morning we have begun to wonder at the Person who is the resurrection and the life and who still has the power to break through our disbelief and take us with Him on a journey of faith. He says to us, "Do not be afraid; only believe."

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