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FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Luke 8:49-56

By

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Luke Lesson 39

From Fear to Faith
Luke 8:49-56

"Your daughter has died. Do not trouble the Teacher anymore." I can't imagine hearing anything more fearful than those words! I admit that my greatest fear is that one of my children will die. Most parents probably share that fear with me. I would much rather die myself than to have any of my children die.

What parent has not sat up at 3 a.m. with a sick child, praying that the fever would break and that the child would recover? What parent has not driven anxiously to the emergency room with a wounded or severely sick child, praying all the way that God would spare the child's life? Our hopes for the future are bound up with our children and their children. If they die, hope dies. The future looks bleak without them.

Because of this strong parental love, all of us who are parents can identify with the distraught father, Jairus, who came to Jesus on behalf of his dying daughter. Luke tells us that she was his *only* daughter and that she was 12 years old. I have had the joy of having two 12-year-old daughters. A girl at 12 is like a rosebud, just beginning to open into a beautiful flower. She's still a little girl, yet she is beginning to develop into a young woman. Every father delights to watch the wonder of that flower unfold.

But Jairus and his wife watched in horror as their little rosebud began to wilt and die. We don't know what the illness was or how long it had gone on, but it was obvious that she was not getting better. She was at the point of death. For days now, Jairus' wife had been saying to him, "You know, honey, this new teacher, Jesus, has been healing many. Why don't you go and see if He would come heal our little girl."

"I know He has healed many," Jairus responded. "But you know how opposed our leaders are to Him. With my position as the leader of the synagogue, I just can't go to Jesus."

"I understand," his wife replied, "but you know how He healed the son of the nobleman from our city. Jesus was in Cana at the time and He just spoke the word and the boy was healed here

in Capernaum at that same hour [see John 4:46-54]. And He healed the centurion's servant here in the same way [Matt. 8:5-13]."

"I know," said Jairus, "but neither of them holds the position I do in the synagogue. I'm going to take a lot of heat from the rabbis if I go to Jesus. I could even lose my position!"

But finally, Jairus knew that he had no other choice. Either he went to Jesus with the hope that his daughter could be healed, or she would die. So off he went, leaving his wife at the girl's bedside. In desperation, he threw himself down before Jesus and begged Him to come and lay His hand on his daughter that she might get well and live.

Jesus started off with the anxious father, but then He stopped to deal with the woman who had touched His garment and had been healed of her hemorrhage. As the precious minutes ticked away, some friends arrived from Jairus' house who spoke those fearful words, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." Jairus' heart sank! His daughter was gone! But Jesus overheard them and told him, "Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she shall be made well." Jesus went to Jairus' home, put out the noisy scoffers, and took Jairus, his wife, and Peter, James, and John with Him into the girl's room. He took the dead girl's hand, said, "Child, arise," and to everyone's astonishment, she got up immediately! Clearly, it was a lesson in faith for Jairus and his wife, for the disciples, and for us:

In fearful situations we must overcome hindrances to faith
and put our trust in Jesus.

Sooner or later, we all face these fearful situations where we don't know what to do. The bottom suddenly drops out from under us and we are overwhelmed. Such situations are never fun, but Jairus' story shows us that ...

1. There are benefits for us in fearful situations.

There were at least three benefits to Jairus that apply to us:

- A. Fearful situations help us clarify our priorities.

It's easy to drift off course in life and to spend our time in things that aren't in line with our priorities, if we were to stop and think about it. But we don't stop and think about it until a crisis

like this brings us up short. As a synagogue ruler, Jairus was responsible for the maintenance of the building and for arranging the services. It was a position of status given only to those who had money and prestige. I can't say for sure, but Jairus may have been a man who was over-committed to outside interests. But all of his success and prestige in the community suddenly paled in significance when he was faced with the loss of his only daughter.

Worldly success doesn't insulate anyone from tragedy and death. It may afford a person access to the best medical treatment available. But doctors can only do so much. Every person must be ready to face death for himself and his loved ones. When it stares us in the face, we're reminded that love for God and for others is the only thing worth living for.

When our daughter, Joy, was nine, we narrowly missed losing her when she fell out of a tree and barely missed landing on a rock that would have killed her. As it was, she had to have dozens of stitches in her arm. I have always deeply valued each of our children, so my priorities were not out of line. But then and even now, when I see the scars on her arm, my priorities come into focus. Becoming a "successful" pastor in the eyes of the Christian world isn't my priority; being a faithful husband and father who imparts a love for God to my family is my priority.

B. Fearful situations strip away our pride and let the Lord prove Himself mighty on our behalf.

I don't know if the male ego was bent in the same direction in first century Israel as it is in our day. But in our culture, most men tend to be "macho." We don't like to admit that we're weak and needy. We like to think that we're tough, in command of every situation. You see it when it comes to stopping to ask directions. The wife says, "Let's pull into this service station and ask how to get there." He says, "I'll find it, dear. Just relax!" Sure enough, two hours later, they finally find it!

But this fearful situation stripped Jairus of any pride. He fell at Jesus' feet, totally helpless. It wasn't a dignified place for a synagogue ruler to be. He probably got his nice robe dirty. But he didn't care. He knew he needed Jesus. He was willing to admit his need and be humbled, even in public.

That's what gives the Lord the opportunity to prove Himself mighty on our behalf! If we protect our pride and come to Jesus and say, "Lord, I've almost got the situation under control, but I could use a little advice from You," He is robbed of His glory. But when we come and cast ourselves at Jesus' feet and say, "Lord, You must do it or there is no hope," He is glorified and others are drawn to put their trust in Him. Hudson Taylor, the great pioneer missionary, used to say that when God wanted to open inland China to the gospel, He looked around until He found a man *weak* enough for the task. Fearful situations strip away our pride and let the Lord prove Himself mighty.

- C. Fearful situations remind us of our mortality and drive us to trust in Christ.

Necessity is not only the mother of invention; it's also the mother of faith. We don't trust God as we should until we are *forced* to trust Him. There is nothing that drives us to desperation and fear like the threat of losing a child. But our fear can be God's opportunity if we trust in Him.

Someone has said that we hang the heaviest weights by the thinnest wires. We put our hopes on this life, which is so tentative. We live and plan our lives as if death is a far-distant thing, something we need not think about until we're in our eighties. But that which matters most to us can be taken quickly and without warning. When we stare death in the face, be it our own or the death of a loved one, we are suddenly reminded that life is a vapor and that we must be right with God.

Extreme necessity often drives a person to Jesus who wouldn't come under less dire circumstances. Jairus had a position of prominence. He needed to maintain good relations with the Jewish leaders. Jesus wasn't their most popular subject at the moment. In fact, they were plotting how they could kill Him (Mark 3:6). Chances are, Jairus wouldn't have risked their disfavor by coming to Jesus if he didn't have to. But his dying daughter forced him to come and trust in Jesus. This crisis proved to be of great benefit to him, not only in the healing of his daughter, but by giving birth to his faith in Christ, which meant eternal life.

Some of you face fearful situations today—a difficult marriage, a rebellious child, a personal health problem, the loss of a job or a financial setback. Whatever your fearful situation, it can be of great benefit if you let it clarify your priorities, strip away your pride, and drive you to trust in Jesus so that He can be glorified through it. But trusting Him isn't easy:

2. In fearful situations we must overcome hindrances to faith.

When Jairus came to Jesus, he believed that Jesus could heal his daughter. But there were several hindrances or hurdles that Jairus had to overcome. I've already mentioned the hindrance of *public opinion*. What would the rabbis and others think of this synagogue ruler bowing before Jesus? There was also the hindrance of his own *pride and reputation*, which he would have felt the need to protect.

He also had to overcome the hindrance of *interruptions*, as this woman interrupted Jesus on His way to Jairus' house. Jairus must have thought, "Why did this woman have to touch Jesus now, of all times? Let her touch Him tomorrow! My daughter is dying! Every second matters!"

Then his worst fears were realized as his friends came to tell him that his daughter had already died. That's another hindrance to faith: *Well-meaning, but misguided doomsayers* who discourage us from clinging to the only source of hope. What they say may be true—Jairus' daughter was dead. But they never add the mighty power of Jesus into their calculations. With Him there is hope even when human hope is lost!

With Jesus' help, Jairus managed to hang on past that hindrance. But when they arrived at his house, he faced another. The house was already filled with professional mourners. Jewish custom demanded that even the poorest man hire a minimum of two flute players and one mourner in the event of a wife's death. A man of Jairus' position would have more. These people would perform a dance of death in which they swayed rhythmically with their hair hanging down. They gradually increased their mournful lament and the wild movement of their bodies until they worked

themselves into a frenzy. That was the scene that greeted Jairus and Jesus as they came into the house.

Jesus quieted them and said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep" (8:52). The mourners began scoffing and laughing at Jesus because they knew that the girl had died. What did this man who just arrived on the scene and who hadn't yet seen the girl know? Jairus was faced with another hindrance to his faith: Did he believe Jesus or these *mockers who had the facts on their side?*

Jesus' words have led some to say that the girl wasn't really dead, but just in a coma. But Luke makes it clear that the girl was dead (8:53, 55, "her spirit returned"). Why, then, did Jesus say that she was asleep? His words were a parable with one meaning for those who believed in Him and another meaning for those who scoffed. For those who believed, there was the hope that she would be awakened. In Jesus' presence, death was only temporary, like sleep. But for those who scoffed, Jesus was a simpleton who didn't know what He was talking about. He didn't know as much as they did. They were confirmed in their unbelief. Jesus put them out and later gave strict orders to Jairus and his wife not to make known how He had raised their daughter back to life. To those who had, more was given; to those who did not have, even what little they had was taken away.

When we face fearful situations, believing in Jesus is not easy. We will face hindrances and setbacks which can shake our confidence in Him. The world will often laugh at us and say, "What a fool to trust in Jesus! We have the facts on our side." But we must overcome these hindrances and cling to our Savior. Just as He called Jairus to faith in the face of fear, so He calls us.

3. In fearful situations we must put our trust in Jesus.

I love the way that Jesus encouraged and nurtured Jairus' weak faith in this crisis. He does the same with us today. Note these four ways Jesus encourages us to trust Him in fearful times:

A. Jesus' willingness to accept us where we're at encourages us to trust Him.

Jairus believed in Jesus, but it wasn't an especially strong faith. The nobleman from Capernaum had believed that Jesus' word spoken in Cana would heal his son from that distance. The centu-

tion from Capernaum believed that Jesus could heal his servant by speaking the word without entering his house. But Jairus didn't go and plead, "Speak the word and my daughter will get well." He asked Jesus to come and lay His hands on her. It was a weak faith in comparison to the others, but Jesus accepted it and worked with Jairus from that point.

The Lord Jesus is so gracious! He doesn't refuse to work with you unless your faith is perfect. You may have to cry out, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Come to Jesus wherever you're at, cast yourself upon Him, doubts and all, and He will begin the process of perfecting His good work in you.

B. Jesus' power in working with others encourages us to trust Him.

Jesus started to go with Jairus, but then got interrupted by this woman with the hemorrhage. This was a hindrance to Jairus' faith, in that while Jesus was dealing with her, word came that Jairus' daughter had died. But it also served to strengthen his faith, as he saw Jesus' power heal this needy woman. She had been 12 years in her affliction, the same number of years that Jairus' daughter had lived. When Jesus called the woman "daughter," He may have said it partially for Jairus' benefit. In effect He was saying, "Jairus, this woman is My daughter who has been unclean for 12 years; I must heal her, too! What I do for her, I can do for your daughter."

Jairus was put on hold while Jesus answered the call of this woman. Sometimes God puts us on hold. Our prayers don't seem to be getting through. When that happens, it's easy to think, "What's going on? Why isn't God answering my prayers?" But then we hear of how He has answered someone else's prayers, and we're encouraged. He can do for me what He did for that person!

C. Jesus' tenderness encourages us to trust Him.

When word came that his daughter had died, Jairus' face must have reflected fear and panic. But Jesus quickly and tenderly calmed him: "Don't be afraid; just trust Me" (8:50, *Living Bible*).

Notice how tenderly Jesus dealt with the little girl. He took the dead girl's hand, a defiling act for a Jew. But Jesus could not be defiled by death. His touch communicated that He cared for her. Then He spoke tenderly to her, "Child, arise." Then Jesus told the

exuberant parents to give her something to eat! In all of the excitement, that practical matter could easily be overlooked. Jesus tenderly cares for the whole person.

Doesn't this glimpse of Jesus' tenderness make you want to trust Him! Like a father helping his youngster learn to ride a bike, Jesus comes alongside and cheers, "Attaway! Keep going! You're doing great!" If we fall and skin our knee, He tenderly cleans and bandages it and helps us get up and start over again.

D. Jesus' mighty power over death encourages us to trust Him.

For Jesus, raising the dead was as easy as raising a sleeping child would be for us. He merely spoke the word and the dead girl came to life. Each time Jesus raised the dead, He did it by speaking: To the widow of Nain's son, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Luke 7:14). To Lazarus, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43). Jesus said, "An hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear [My] voice and shall come forth," some to eternal life, others to judgment (John 5:28). What a claim! On that coming day, His voice will cause bodies decomposed for centuries to be resurrected! Even now He speaks to those who are spiritually dead and imparts new life to them by His grace (John 5:25-26)!

Because Jesus is powerful over death, we can trust Him! John Calvin said, tongue in cheek, "There is no room to fear that [your] faith will be more extensive than the boundless power of God.... Our faith, however large, will never embrace the hundredth part of the divine goodness" (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker reprint], Harmony of the Evangelists, 1:414). No matter how fearful the situation, Jesus wants us to trust Him. He may or may not deliver our loved ones or us from death. But even if He does not, we can trust His mighty power and know that one day He will speak the word and all we who have trusted in Him will be gathered with Him, triumphant over sin and death.

Conclusion

The great Bible teacher, G. Campbell Morgan, lost his first-born daughter. Forty years later, preaching on the story of Jairus, he said,

I can hardly speak of this matter without becoming personal and reminiscent, remembering a time forty years ago when my own first lassie lay at the point of death, dying. I called for Him then, and He came, and surely said to our troubled hearts, "Fear not, believe only." He did not say, "She shall be made whole." She was not made whole on the earthly plane. She passed away into the life beyond. He did say to her, "Talitha, cumi," "little lamb, arise"; but in her case, that did not mean, stay on the earth level. It meant that He needed her, and He took her to be with Himself. She has been with Him for all those years, as we measure time here, and I have missed her every day; but His word, "Believe only," has been the strength of the passing years. (Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word* [Baker], pp. 82-83.)

However fearful your situation, Jesus' word is for you: "Don't fear, just trust Me." He wants you to move from fear to faith in Him. Jesus is the only One who can calm our fears, because He alone has conquered death. On another occasion He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Discussion Questions

1. Does faith require that we believe that Jesus is going to answer our prayers affirmatively or is it enough to believe Him whatever the answer?
2. Why does God sometimes delay the answers to our prayers?
3. What would you say to a critic who taunted, "How can you trust a God who allows a child to die?"
4. Is fear sin? Is it ever okay? If so, when?

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