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Mark 5:21-43

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LIFE BEFORE YOU DIE— “*Talitha Koum*”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

But the question I have for you is, What difference does it make? For most Christians, the resurrection declares that our sins are forgiven and gives us hope that we will go to heaven when we die. And so we sing, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through.” That’s partially true, but if you had said that to a first century Jew, he would have responded, “That’s it? What a letdown!” That message would not have ignited Israel’s prophetic hopes, taken the first century world by storm, or empowered Jesus’ disciples to fearlessly proclaim the good news in a hostile world and joyfully go to their martyrdom. Resurrection meant much more to the Jews of the first century. Their hope was not found in going to heaven upon death, but the return of Israel’s God to Zion and the establishment of his heavenly rule on earth. If we were to sum up Israel’s prophetic hope, it would look something like this:

Israel’s Prophetic Hope

- The end of Israel’s exile (Isa 40:1-2; Jer 33:8)
- A new age of forgiveness and grace (Isa 54:7-8)
- God’s people restored as if “*raised from the dead*” (Ezek 37:1-14)
- A New Covenant with the law written on the heart (Ezek 36:26-27)
- Israel vindicated over her enemies, overthrowing pagan empires
- A new temple built on a new foundation stone (Isa 54:11; Psa 118:22)

Then...

- All nations will come to worship in Zion (Micah 4:1-3)
- The establishment of the God’s justice for the cosmos and the renewal of the world = New Creation (Isa 55:13, 65:17-19)

Tom Wright sums it up so well in his book, *Surprised By Hope*:

Faced with his beautiful and powerful creation in rebellion, God longed to set it right, to rescue it from continuing corruption and impending chaos and to bring it back into order and fruitfulness. God longed, in other words, to reestablish His wise sovereignty over the whole creation, which would mean a great act of healing and rescue. He did not want to rescue humans *from* creation any more than that he wanted to rescue Israel *from* the Gentiles. He wanted to rescue Israel *in order that Israel might be a light to the Gentiles*, and he wanted thereby to rescue humans *in order that humans might be his*

rescuing stewards over creation. That is the inner dynamic of the kingdom of God.¹

From Israel’s point of view, when God returned to Zion to set up his worldwide kingdom, that would usher in the end of history, and with it, the resurrection that would open the door to a new age in which heaven and earth would be fully integrated. God’s people are not raised to be disembodied souls playing harps in the sky, but to inhabit real bodies that work and sing and play.

Now the great surprise of the first century was that with Jesus, God did in the middle of history what the Jews were expecting to occur at the end of history. Not only was Jesus raised from the dead, he has been exalted in the presence of God, seated at his right hand, and is currently ruling the world as God’s King—“as a human being, fulfilling the destiny marked out for the human race from the sixth day of creation.”² So to say “Christ is risen,” means the work of redemption is finished and the new age has arrived. This is why the early Christians changed their day of worship from the Sabbath, or seventh day, to Sunday, the eighth day—the very first day of God’s New Creation.³ From the New Testament viewpoint, the present age and the age to come overlap. And those who give their allegiance to the risen King receive not just the gift of forgiveness but also the Holy Spirit, who imparts the life of the age to come in their bodies now.

So you may be asking, How do we enter that new age? In Mark’s gospel we get a wonderful illustration of what this “new creation” looks like, and how we enter into it, in the story of a synagogue ruler named Jairus, who came to Jesus when his daughter was at the point of death.

I. A Desperate Father Mark 5:21-24a

And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” And he went with him. (Mark 5:21-24a ESV)

In the previous text, Jesus had gone to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, where he drove out a legion of demons from a demoniac. The demons went into a herd of 2,000 pigs, which went headlong down the cliff to be drowned in the sea, never to rise again. Jesus had done to the demons what the Jews had wanted to do to the Romans. This was a new and greater Exodus!

When Jesus returns to the northwest side of the lake, a large crowd awaits him and presses in on him. From the midst of that

large crowd a man emerges, a leader in this Jewish community, a synagogue official. His Hebrew name, Jairus, means *“he will arouse”* or *“awaken”*—a subtle preview of what is to come. Jairus is filled with anxiety for his daughter, and at first sight of Jesus, he casts all dignity aside and falls at Jesus’ feet. With grief-stricken urgency he pleads with him for the life of his precious little girl, who is at death’s door. There had been enough evidence around Galilee to convince this Jew that if Jesus would but come and lay his hands on her, she would be saved from her affliction. The condition of Jairus’s daughter is so critical that Mark records no verbal response from Jesus, only decisive, immediate action: “And he went away with him.” Jesus and Jairus take off in tandem, as if in an ambulance fixed on a rescue mission.

Such a scene grips any parent who has been in similar circumstances. When the life of a child is threatened, your world instantly collapses, your insides cave, and your resolve is fortified to risk anything for the child. What an amazing sight this must have been to the crowd, to see the ruler of the synagogue falling at the feet of this carpenter and entreating him for things a Jew would only entreat Israel’s God at the temple. Who is this carpenter?

II. An Unclean Woman Mark 5:24b-34

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.” (5:24b-28)

As Jesus heads off to Jairus’s home, the multitude throngs in on him from every side. In the midst of the crowd is another victim of circumstance, an unnamed woman. Mark’s lengthy description of the woman interrupts our journey and causes us linger long over her condition. Here in that surging crowd is a woman who had been crippled by a bleeding hemorrhage for twelve years. In the process she had spent all her wealth, searching for a cure, but her condition only grew worse, not to mention her agonizing humiliation at the hands of physicians. Not only was she physically hampered and psychologically humiliated, but far worse, the cleanliness laws in Israel (Lev 15:25-30) rendered her unclean as long her condition lasted. Her bed became unclean, her garments unclean, anything she sat on became unclean, and anyone with whom she had contact became unclean. Being unclean she was cut off from all community and worship: twelve years of pain, humiliation and isolation. Thinking in our terms, we wouldn’t have seen her in church since 1998.

I never understood the power of uncleanness until I became attentive to the stories of women who had suffered sexual abuse. As I listened to them, I discovered it wasn’t the life-threatening danger that lived on to haunt them, but the shame of uncleanness that the violation left in its wake—a shame that seemed to wall them up in silence and seclusion, and then re-enter the privacy of their locked souls unannounced, with no invitation, and relentlessly torment them day and night in the reenactment of the horror.

Mark’s graphic description draws us into this woman’s story, evoking empathy for her condition. But suddenly her life becomes a mirror to all Israel (and by implication, us), for her condition had been going on for twelve years. The adjectives Mark uses to describe her condition are similar to the ones Isaiah used to describe Israel’s uncleanness that brought on her exile:

**“For all of us have become like one who is *unclean*,
And all our righteous deeds are like a *bloody garment*;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
And there is no one who calls on your name,
Who *arouses himself to take hold of you.*” (Isa 64:6-7)**

Is this Mark’s way of saying that the woman’s uncleanness is in reality the condition of all Israel? Perhaps, for the last two verbs, “arouse” and “to take hold of,” prefigure our story of Jairus, who will *arouse* himself to find Jesus, and the woman, who “*will take hold of*” his garment.

What is so intriguing about this woman is her faith. She so believes in the holiness residing in Jesus that just one touch of his garment will make her clean. This is new theology for Israel. Rather than Jesus being made unclean by the touch of her uncleanness, his holiness is so powerful it will make her clean. With the coming of Jesus as our High Priest, a new age has been inaugurated in which holiness is so intensified that just one touch of the Holy makes the foulest clean. This has tremendous implications for how we live as Christians. We should not live in fear that the world might infiltrate the church and defile us; rather, the world should fear the invasion of believers making everything we touch holy.

And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” (5:29-31)

As the woman touched his garment she was immediately healed of her affliction. At that moment Jesus became aware that the power residing in him had gone out of him. Now he seeks her out, not to make the miracle known but to perfect the imperfect faith of the one who had touched him. Jesus does not want to heal or help someone without sealing the relationship with the one in question. And he is never too busy or in too great a hurry to deal with us, for our relationship to him is more important than his solving the problems we bring.

Jesus abruptly stops his mission and asks, “Who touched my garments?” The disciples are dumbfounded: “You see the whole crowd pressing in on you, and you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” Yes, many were touching him, but only one touch had faith. How often has Jesus been in our midst but we failed reached out to take hold of him in faith? May God give us the faith of this woman.

And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling 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 disease.” (5:32-34)

Now that her cover is gone and her deed discovered, the woman is overcome with anxiety and fear. But a look of love and acceptance in Jesus’ eyes overcomes her fear and frees her to cast herself at his feet and tell all. She holds nothing back, nothing of her affliction, abuse or uncleanness. Twelve years of pain is now exposed, and with that confession she becomes a member of the new family. Jesus grants her the title, “Daughter, your faith has saved you, go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” The shame that once secluded and silenced her now vanishes like dew in the heat of the day. Her one touch of faith has granted her salvation, *shalom*, and all the privileges that membership in God’s family affords.

But while Jesus’ sensitive, attentive response to her touch brings her immeasurable blessing, it leaves Jairus with no little anxiety. Imagine riding in an ambulance as it speeds to the hospital carrying your dying daughter, and suddenly the driver stops to give aid to another accident victim. Every minute would seem like an eternity.

III. A Dead Daughter Mark 5:35-43

While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler’s house some who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. (5:35-37)

Jesus had just finished conversing with the woman when messengers arrived with news for the anxious Jairus. This is a parent’s worst nightmare: “Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher anymore?” Overhearing the question, Jesus encourages this synagogue official to be like the woman, to stop fearing and *continue to believe* (that is the sense of a present imperative). For just as the severity of her condition and the loss of hope in man to help is what thrust her faith upon Jesus, so now Jairus’s destitute condition is what ought to encourage him to continue to believe and overcome his fears. Jesus then separates from the crowd, taking only Jairus and three disciples, Peter, James and John, to follow.

A Sea of Commotion

They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. (5:38-40a)

They find Jairus’s home in an uproar, overrun with grief, emotion and loud wailing. Jesus enters and calms the sea of emotion with just a word: “Why make a commotion, the little child has not died [she is alive], but is sleeping [and will wake up].” But he hasn’t even seen the girl. How can he make a diagnosis? They laugh at him.

But he put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, “*Talitha*

kouim,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (5:40b-43)

In the face of their mocking laugh, Jesus immediately takes command of the situation. He clears the house of all but her parents, enters the room of the little girl and takes her by the hand. With a mere two words, “*Talitha kouim*,” he raises her from the dead. Her cure is as immediate as that of the hemorrhaging woman. *Talitha kouim*, two Aramaic words the disciples never forgot, mean, “little girl arise.” The word *Talitha* is a very affectionate term that means “little lamb” or “child.” It is found in a poetic description of Israel’s future shepherd who “gathers the *lambs* with his arm and in his bosom he will carry them” (Isa 40:11):

**He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the *lambs* in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young. (Isa 40:11)**

Mark is saying that the future shepherd for whom Israel had so longed to lead her out of her exile has now arrived. At this point we learn the girl’s age: she is twelve, awake now and walking in newness of life. The home that was overcome with grief is now awash with awe. Jesus commands the witnesses to secrecy, and tells them to feed her before those outside discover that she is alive (today she would be inundated with reporters).

IV. The New Creation and Us

1. How do we enter the New Creation?

The answer is, we enter in by faith. And this faith is born in Jairus and the woman through the agonizing means of delay and death. For the woman, the delay consisted of twelve years of waiting and spending all she had. For Jairus, the delay was but a few moments, but those few moments seemed like an eternity to a waiting father whose daughter was just a breath away from death.

Delay caused both the woman and Jairus to abandon hope in the world and cast themselves at the feet of Jesus as their high priest for a new creation. For Jairus, there was no hope left in the synagogue or the temple; and for the woman, there wasn’t any money left, or a physician who had not abused her. The woman came to Jesus trusting in his holiness, that one touch would make her clean, and the laws that once excluded her would now be obsolete. Jairus would need even more faith to follow Jesus into the grave and out the other side, if there was any hope of his daughter to arise and walk in newness of life.

This is how we enter in to this new creation: it is when we lose hope in the world to restore our lives, repair our despair, or cleanse our shame. At that critical moment when there is no earthly hope left, the gift of faith to trust Jesus for a new creation is mysteriously born. As Paul affirms, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17 TNIV)

2. What happens as result of this New Creation?

Delay not only develops faith, it integrates into a family people once painfully isolated. For our story ends not with three isolated individuals, but a father, woman, and daughter, all inescapably joined into God's new family, symbolized by the number twelve (the number of tribes in Israel). Jairus came to Jesus seeking life for his daughter, but a desperate woman interrupts the mission and takes precious time to tell Jesus "the whole truth" regarding her uncleanness. Jesus patiently listens and, seeing her faith, grants her the title "daughter." There could be no sweeter word for the woman, yet none more painful to Jairus. And yet, what first appears to be to be an ill-timed interruption actually turns out to be the life-saving key to Jairus's painful predicament. Her speech is the turning point in the story. For he doesn't know it at the time, but this woman is a mirror to him of the faith he is going to need ("continue to believe") if he is to see his daughter "arise" from the grave.

**"For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.
No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days."** (Isa 65:17, 20a)

God uses the shame and suffering that once isolated us, shutting us out from community and worship, as a tool for connecting with others and creating holy communities. Once we come out into the open and tell the "whole truth," like this woman, our suffering becomes the doorway that integrates us into God's new humanity, in which individuals are bound into families and families into nations. This is the reconstituted Israel of God, where the future has come forward to meet us and transform us in the present.

**Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.** (Isa 65:24)

3. Invitation to tell your story

This woman's courage prompts us to share our stories with one another to give praise to God for the time(s) when we, having lost all earthly hope, were brought to our knees and cast ourselves at the feet of Jesus for a new creation. Twelve years ago, James Garcia composed a song for such an occasion.

Talitha Koum

Tell me your story, Talitha koum
I will not turn my face from you.
Sing me your pain, Talitha koum,
I want to hear your tender voice.

*Let me touch your tears
for the long lost mother years,
the silent father fears,
and the lonely road where no one hears.*

Take up my hand, Talitha koum,
and look deep into a father's eyes.
Here is my hand, Talitha koum,
For you I will not despise.

*Let me touch your tears
for the long lost mother years,
the silent father fears,
and the lonely road where no one hears.*

I am now leaving, Talitha koum,
I must step down from this holy place.
But I turn and watch you, Talitha koum,
Lost in your Savior's sweet embrace.

*He will touch your tears
for the long lost mother years,
the silent father fears,
and the lonely road where no one hears.*

He will be there for you, Talitha koum,
Talitha koum, Talitha koum.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope, Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 202.

² N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Easter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 24.

³ Given the supreme significance of the Sabbath to the Jews, it is remarkable that when the early church changed their day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday, we find no controversy about it in the Book of Acts or the epistles. This demonstrates what an impact the resurrection had on that generation.