

Reason for Hope
Matthew 9:18-26
Dr. Dan Doriani

We're looking at the life of Christ together this season.

We just finished a couple of weeks on the work of Christ throughout the Nations, which is a great blessing and we're going to look at the work of Christ with two unusual people today -- a woman who had been very sick for a long time and a ruler in Israel whose daughter had just died and he came to Jesus. Listen to God's word from Matthew 9: 18-26.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

¹⁸ While he (Jesus) was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly^a the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Let's pray together...Lord, it's good for us to read about people who are in desperate positions because life often seems desperate for us as individuals, as a community, as a nation. And so, Lord, we prayed that we would know that the way we find hope and the surest hope in our life is by trusting in you. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm guessing most of you have noticed that in the media we tend to get some promotion of something that seems like an intractable problem. I looked at some old notes and saw that 20 years ago what I identified was terrorism. There's no solution to the problem of terrorism. How can you defeat an enemy that's diffused throughout the nations that uses random murder as an instrument? It's hopeless. About four years ago we were wondering if COVID would be hopeless. And then we, for maybe 10, 15 or 20 years, have been wondering if global warming is beyond remedy. Are the ice caps going to melt? Are animals going to die and are islands going to sink into the sea? It's hopeless.

So, people say. Political divisions in our country are beyond healing. If we're talking about things that are beyond healing, what we often think personally is relational difficulties which could be in our family, friends, work, maybe even in the church, perhaps we might think it's hopeless to imagine that you'll ever get married or ever have children. There are many things that may cross our minds when we think about problems that are too big.

Now, in this passage, we have two people who could have been in despair. We have a man whose daughter died, and we have a woman who's been sick for 12 years. Over in Mark, It says she went to all the doctors, spent all of her money and was sicker than ever before after 12 years. And so certainly it would seem impossible. But the Bible says that whoever would draw near to God and believe that he exists will be rewarded by God. Whoever draws near to God and seeks him earnestly. So we have people who seek earnestly.

Now, this passage that I read to you begins with when he had finished saying some things. What he'd just finished was talking to a man named Matthew, the man Matthew, who wrote this book of the Bible that we're studying right now. Matthew was also the kind of person you might not think had much hope of finding salvation and direction from God because he was a trader to his own people. He was a tax collector. He was a man who worked for the Romans to take money from his own people. He was living for wealth, not for God, but somehow or other Matthew and Jesus came together -- Matthew was seeking and he found and he became not only a believer but a disciple -- he became one of the 12 chosen by the Lord himself to write one of the four gospels that we have today. It's truly astonishing the people around weren't so happy about this. The Pharisees questioned Jesus, You may know this. They said to Jesus, what are you doing spending time with sinners? Why are you spending time with tax collectors and sinners? You're supposed to be spending time with moral people, righteous people. That's what teachers do. They gather godly students and they make them more godly. We, righteous people spend our time with righteous people. Why are you with sinners? Jesus said, Well, a physician doesn't come to those who are well. A physician comes those who are sick and I'm a spiritual physician. That's why I spent time with spiritually sick people. That's what Matthew was. You're right. He's a sinner. But he came to me as his physician so I'm restoring him. Jesus said. I came to call sinners. He also says I desire mercy and not sacrifice. That is to say the life of discipleship is a life of mercy. The Pharisees thought that the life of discipleship -- being right with God is something you earn. So moral people get to spend time with the moral God. But Jesus says No, no. God favors those who come to Him without respect to the question, are they worthy or not? If you simply come, people are prone to think that God gives his favor to people who deserve his favor, and that's not true. God gives his favor to those who seek him. He gives favor to sinners who repent and want to come to him.

That's what the passage says about Matthew. And we also have a couple people coming to Jesus now that don't seem to have anything special offer to God. They didn't grow up in the same town. They don't know each other. They don't have a common occupation. Most rulers were

hostile to Jesus. We know that. It doesn't say this man was hostile, but we know that most of his friends were.

And this woman who comes to Jesus, she's clearly got some superstition in her mind. She thinks, I don't really want to talk to Jesus. I just want to touch the edge of his clothes as if there's some magic in his clothing. So these are not the best people we would ever encounter for a reason of hoping that God would be merciful to them.

But they have big problems and they bring their problems to the Lord. The man has a daughter who has died. The woman has been bleeding for 12 years now. We know by now that Jesus is a miracle worker. He's been doing the things the Messiah does. He gives sight to the blind. He gives the ability to hear, to the deaf and speech to the mute.

Yes, he's the Messiah. But this doesn't seem like those, dare I say, ordinary kinds of miracles. This is too big. I mean, what can you do with somebody who's died? Somebody who's been sick for 12 years? It's chronic. It's hopeless. This is there lot in life. The man doesn't seem to see it that way. He gives us this impossible line. My daughter has just died. Come and put your hand on her and she will live now, before Jesus gets to the child, this woman comes up. And when the woman is healed of a disease she's had for 12 years, it gives us hope. The two miracles go together. They go together in seeming desperate, in not being performed for particularly worthy people. You know, in the ancient world, they didn't think children were as valuable as adults, and they thought that boys are more valuable than girls. This is the way they thought. It's not true, but it's what they thought. So Jesus is coming for the most unlikely people, almost we can imagine. But the ruler bows down to Jesus in a sign of great respect. He's a ruler, but he bowed to Jesus. He's hopeful. We don't know exactly why he came. It doesn't say he believed in Jesus. In fact, it's curious to me that people come to Jesus. Sometimes we don't know what motivates them. Some people ask, What was the motive? We don't know because the truth of matter is the Bible isn't always interested in motives. Whether we have mixed motives are perfect motives and coming to Jesus. The point is he came. That's the point. And he says, will you come with me? And Jesus and the disciples come. They're just going to take a few minutes aside in the middle here and talk about illness and problems in life and when we can take them to Jesus and what they are today. Certainly there are a lot of people who are sick. We prayed for people who are sick in our church a few moments ago. And certainly it's right to go to a physician and it's also right to take your illness to God. The Bible makes it clear that there's nothing wrong with and much that's good about medical care. In fact, I hold the Bible up one more time. The Gospel of Luke was written by a physician Jesus called to himself. And we can take every ache and pain we have -- we can even take minor ones and we can take major ongoing illnesses to the Lord. I think it's important to recognize and we talk about things not going the way we would like and where people aren't as healthy as they would like today that mental struggles are a huge part of our culture. We live, people say, in an age of anxiety, an age of depression, an age of mountain, numbers of suicides tragically and ever mounting numbers of addictions. And those two are

problems that don't seem to have a ready cure. And those two can be taken to a counselor and yet also simultaneously to Lord. I think it's important to recognize that some of the problems we have of a spiritual nature are not problems we had exactly the same 20, 30, 40, 60 years ago. Because you see 60 years ago, 100 years ago, even people who didn't believe in God had this in their head from our culture that I am important, I'm valuable, God created me in his image and I have a place in this world. And as our culture strays farther from Christian principles, people are more and more unsure of who they are or their place in the world. And so we have a pressure put on us to we call it also the age of identity. And the reason why it's an age of identity is because people don't have the sense that God has given us all, every person, an identity in Christ. And so it to make our own identity and that's a burden.

People wonder sometimes if they're a boy or a girl, because my identity is up in the air, whether I'm attracted to men or attracted women because it's uncertain and people try to create an identity on Instagram and Tik Tok and various other venues to establish that they are an important person.

I read recently I had to buy a new car recently and I was reading about cars and it pointed out that people are buying nicer cars if they can because they want to establish their identity as someone who's doing better than Toyotas -- that people buy Audi's not because Audi's are better cars, but because they want to tell the world, I'm better than Toyota.

Now. I've driven Toyotas almost my entire life, so please don't take that as a negative comment about Toyota's. But it's just fascinating. I have to establish my identity by what I drive, and we think we have to establish our identity by, you know, what school we go to and where we take our vacations and how far we go during spring break and innumerable other questions Am I a Swifty or an anti - swifty? Which way will I find my identity today? Maybe I was anti Swifty then started hanging out with Kelsey's, and then everything's better suddenly. And, you know, in the 1970s, if you were a college student, it was cool to study philosophy. Now you're an idiot if you study philosophy and everything's up in the air and we can laugh at it but it's not always funny when a person doesn't know who they are, that you know that 500 years ago, if you wanted to proclaim to the world your church was awesome, what you wanted to do was have a fragment of a bone of some martyr, you know, right in front of the pulpit or maybe the hair or fingernails or toenails of one of the apostles or somebody who gave their life for God. That was the way you said were important. You could buy stuff like that. Today if we said, hey, you know, come to Briarwood, we've got the fingernails of Billy Graham, I don't think that would be a selling point to a lot of people. The way we establish our identity constantly changes if we're trying to establish our identity.

But if we say, I know who I am and in God's eyes -- I'm his son, his daughter, I'm created his image, even if someone doesn't believe in God. Yet, certainly if I belong to Christ, then we have something in common and it makes us healthier. It makes us healthier, and we know who we are.

Well, back to the story.

So Jesus and His disciples start going to the house of this man. Mark tells a lot more, a lot more details. His name is Jairus. And a crowd is going along because Jesus often had a crowd. And as he's walking toward the man's house, people are just thronging all around. They want to be near him. They're bumping into him. And the woman we talked about a minute ago sees her opportunity to sneak up behind Jesus in a crowd and touch his garment. Now, I say sneak up from behind because she's not supposed to be in a crowd because by the laws of Israel, if you were if you were sick, various diseases, if you had a flow of blood, you were not supposed to spend time out in public. You shouldn't bump up against people. And so she was not supposed to be there. And if people knew she was there, they might have said, What are you doing here? Get away. So she's secretive. She comes up from behind. She has an idea that I don't really need to know Jesus. I just need to get some of his power. And she had a superstitious idea that people had at that time, and that is that the power of a great man is in his hair and his saliva and his clothes and his shadow even. And she draws near.

So we have this picture of need, a dead girl and this woman, though, seems kind of hopeless. The woman's hopelessness is probably compounded by a sense of shame. What is she doing there? If she was married, she couldn't live with her family. If she was single, she couldn't get married, she couldn't get a job in a public place. And so she comes up from behind seeking this impersonal healing. She doesn't want people to know who she is, exactly what she's doing. And then she touches Jesus and it says over and Mark, that Jesus sensed that power came out of him. He said, who touched me? He looked around, and the disciples who could be pretty peevish with Jesus from time to time said, What are you talking about? Your people bumping you all the time. He said, yeah, I know that. But this bump was different. This bump was somebody who was seeking me, and they got what they. They got what they wanted. The power went out. She's healed. So he's looking around, seeking the woman, and she comes forward. She's trembling. Daughter, your faith has healed you. He says. Your faith has made you well, Daughter. Daughter. What a good word for a woman who's been separated from society for a number of years. What a good word for anybody who has doubt about who they are. Daughter, Daughter.

I have daughters. Maybe some of you have daughters. We have those rotating pictures. You know, a little device on a bookshelf by the kitchen table that shows pictures over and over. And we're sitting and we look at the pictures we're familiar with them, although there are hundreds of them by now. We see our favorites. And our favorites are very likely to involve a lot of physical contact like somebody sitting on a knee. But our favorite of all the favorites is what we call melting hugs. A melting hug is when two people are hugging and their bodies just completely relax into each other. When you know your loved one mother and daughter or father and son or grandchildren and grandparents are siblings are just so at peace. And nobody knows the pictures being taken. Their eyes are closed. They're just melting into each other because they know they're loved. And this woman knew she was loved. She wanted an

impersonal encounter. She just wanted to touch the edge of his robe. And Jesus says, No, I'm going to give you a personal encounter more than you wanted. Your situation seemed absolutely hopeless. And now I'm going to heal you. I'm going to say you belong. You belong to me. What a blessing.

Jesus wants relationships with us. He creates covenants with the people of Israel. He creates covenants with the church. If you're his, you're in a covenantal and familial relationship with him. And when the world is broken, we tend to drift away from relationships and away from God.

I picked up from somebody the phrase grump monster. I think it was a certain friend of mine. He said, Sometimes I'm a grump monster. And now we borrowed that phrase. If you've ever been around a grump monster, well, if you are around a grim monster, you tend to withdraw from the grump monster in due course. Right? Stay away from that person. If somebody is a gossip, you stop telling them things. I'm going to pull away because I can't trust them -- with somebody who makes promises and they never keep them. You pull away from that person's sin because it alienates us from God and from each other. This woman was brought back into the fold. My daughter. Now it's important, I think, invalid to consider how this woman felt. Her emotions, which are described again more fully in Mark, are significant. We do live in an age that people sometimes call the triumph of the therapeutic. That is to say we all need to go to counselors and pay attention to our feelings and so forth. And I believe that -- I believe we should pay attention to feelings. But I also believe that when we look at this woman, we have to pay attention to what she did because her feelings probably told her to come to Jesus. And they probably also told her to stay away from Jesus because she could be rejected. So feelings are important, but what counts is that she acted, she disciplined her feelings as she was full of fear and she came to Jesus and he healed her. She put her hope in him and she acted. And this, of course, is what we all need to do, and not just trust in Jesus in some abstract sense but believe that he is the one in whom we should hope.

Now, C.S. Lewis wrote about this in a story form in one of the Narnia books. I'm guessing most of you know about them. But in book four or five or six, I don't remember, to be honest, a character named Jill comes into Narnia more or less by accident, and she gets lost and separated from her friends and she's in a green and dreamy land. But she's thirsty and there's nobody there but her. And a stream over there and a lion guarding the stream. Now, if you know anything about Narnia, the Lion is Aslan, who is a Christ figure. Of course, Jill doesn't know that -- she's thirsty. There's a stream and there's the lion. And eventually the lion speaks to her and says, If you're thirsty, come and drink. And Jill hesitates. And the lion says to her, Are you not thirsty? Jill says, I'm dying of thirst. It wasn't that easy for Jill. Then drink the lion says, Will you promise not to do anything to me Jill said. I make no promise, said the lion. Do you eat girls? I have swallowed kings and emperors, cities and realms, says the King. Oh dear. Then I dare not come, says Jill. Then you will die of thirst, says the lion. Oh dear. Then I will have to look for another stream. The lion says there is no other stream. And that's a picture of Christ.

You know, we're still saying it's good to talk to physicians, it's good to talk to counselors. But in the end, in the final analysis, life and death, who's going to call you daughter? Say your life has meaning to me enough to give my life for you? The answer is it's Jesus. I mean, our culture, you know, our culture says things like humans are the destroyers of the planet. We're killing all the species. We're degrading the earth. We should stop having babies because we're destroyers. God does not say you're destroyers. He says, Daughter. Well, that's how it went for that woman.

And then, of course, we have part two. Jesus is still going with Jairus to the home of this girl and this little group of people arrives Jesus and the disciples. As the funeral events are underway already, there are professional mourners there playing flutes and wailing, and Jesus comes into the space and dismisses the mourners and says she is not dead. She's asleep. And the mourners, they are professionals, go quickly from crying to laughing. They laugh at Jesus derisively. Doesn't he know now? Of course, they probably know some things about Jesus. He was very famous at the time. They probably heard, many of them at least, had heard that this is the healer. But they you know, they think he heals a few things like, I don't know, blindness or leprosy. That's pretty important. But who can raise the dead? Nobody. Nobody can do that. But of course, it's what humans do. They underestimate Jesus, don't they? Today, the way we underestimate Jesus is by calling him a teacher, which he is, and a prophet, which he is. But he's more than a prophet. He's also priest. As we're going to study at the Easter season shortly, he is the great high priest who offered the sacrifice of himself to cover our sins. And he's also the king is king of life, is king of death, including physical death. They're all connected in the Bible. The Bible says in one place, the Apostle Paul says, you are dead and transgressions and sins. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive, spiritually alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions God raised this up in Christ, seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because God is master of life and death forever. He can give signs or tokens or proofs in this life, and he chooses to do so with this little child. He sends everybody out except Peter, James and John, the parents. He speaks to the girl. Just get up. She gets up, calls her by name over and Mark, it says her name is Talitha. She gets up and because she was really dead and she's really alive, she also hears Jesus say, by the way, give her something to eat because it's a real revival and people need to eat. So she should eat. Who expects these things? Well, the answer is the woman expected it. The father expected it. It's a high point still. I mean, it's one thing to cure leprosy. It's another thing to raise the dead. This is one of the great, great moments of kindness and generosity that I want to just make sure I say it again. Christianity is a religion. It has morals, but it's not a moralistic religion. You should have the best people, the most moral people Jesus ever encountered. There's no hint of that at all. In fact, if anything, this woman has, if I may say it again, signs of a somewhat defective faith. She has a magical idea. I just want to touch and get something for him. Jesus loves her, although she does not deserve it. As Christians, we live morally, but it's not a moralistic religion because God does not give his grace as a reward for moral people. He gives it to those who seek him. And these people sought him and they found -- they found Jesus. Well, better than story about Aslan, not ***Jesus by the life giving stream***. But ***Jesus is the life giving stream***.

And so I want you to pause and apply this to yourself in whatever way seems right. What could cause you to despair? What? What problem? Physical, perhaps something you've been living with for years could make you think that there's no hope. There's no hope at best, I can manage the pain. Or a relational problem where there seems to be no hope that it will be reconciled. You don't belong in this world. The sense that what I have to offer this world, is not enough or I'll never be loved enough, never be good enough, never be popular enough, never fit the mold enough to have anybody love me as I am.

What is it that would make you despair? Could you perhaps despair about your work and think my work is meaningless? Can I just remind you that Jesus worked with his hands most of his life? I mean, the Messiah is making chairs for most of his years, and so that ennobles all work, does it not? Or maybe there's a relationship at work, somebody who just doesn't like you and you don't know why they don't take you seriously and you're never going to get anywhere at work. And so you could despair about work wherever you would despair. I tell you, learn the lesson from these people. If you despair of the fear of death, learn from these people. Maybe not perfect people, in fact, certainly not perfect people. But they brought their concerns to the Lord and he gave them all that they sought and more healing and a relationship because he is the life giver, the life giving stream and the source of life itself.

Let's pray together. Heavenly father, I thank you so much for these two accounts of people who sought you, the people who found you because you were gracious, not because they were good. So, Lord, I do pray that each of us would contemplate our own life, our own desire to hear your words of love, son or daughter, or desire for you to come and intercede, intervene, change our lot in life. I pray, Lord, that we would not underestimate you as people did in that day, that we would see you in all of your greatness. Healer, teacher, prophet, priest, king, one by one as a church and as families. So, Lord, give us a right hope in you come what may and the blessing of having our prayers and desires heard and more a relationship with you.

We pray In Jesus name, Amen.