

# TO WHOM DO WE TURN IN TIMES OF SICKNESS AND DEATH?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

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In late summer of 1964, I flew from Dallas to Philadelphia. A friend met me at the airport and we drove through a severe summer storm until we arrived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As we parked the car in front of the funeral home, the wind was driving the rain into the earth. We ran through the rain, up the wooden steps and onto the covered porch. I remember turning around and looking up at the dark storm clouds and the driving rain. A number of crows were flying over the swaying trees, seemingly protesting as they sought a safe refuge. I thought to myself, "What a great setting for an Alfred Hitchcock movie! All we need now is a body." That body was just on the other side of the front door. I entered, and as I was taking off my drenched raincoat I saw a group of people dressed in black mourning clothes on one side of the room. A group of young women dressed in ordinary clothes were standing around the open casket, talking to each other, as if the body of the middle-aged woman laid peacefully inside wasn't even there.

After I hung up my coat, my old Aunt Mary, a black scarf over her head, came up and kissed me and said, "Ronnie, can't you do something about those young women by the casket, talking and laughing together? They have no respect for the dead." I said quietly, "Aunt Mary, the casket contains only the body of my mother. These women know she is now alive and in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are rejoicing over the life my mother had on this earth and the fact that so many came to know Jesus as Lord under her ministry at Franklin Marshal College." My Aunt Mary, dressed in her black religious garb, did not understand the mystery of life and death. She lived life on a physical plane, and was never able to see into the spiritual realm. She looked at me with her empty eyes and went back and sat down with all the other shadowy figures draped in black.

For most people, life, sickness and death remain a mystery, and the mystery becomes even greater if we seek answers from within ourselves or even from others because we can be greatly disappointed with what we hear. It is only as we turn the eyes of our hearts towards God will we be able to see beyond the immediate painful circumstances to a new spiritual level. There we will find that God allows all of our sicknesses and threats of physical death to draw our hearts toward him for spiritual healing.

This truth is clearly seen in our study today taken from Luke 8:40-56. We want to ask ourselves the question, "To whom do we turn in times of sickness and death?"

## **I. A father turns to Jesus at a time of death, Luke 8:40-42**

And as Jesus returned, the multitude welcomed Him, for they had all been waiting for Him. And behold there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to entreat Him to come to his house; for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the multitudes were pressing against Him.

The Lord and his disciples had returned to their boats following the casting out of the evil spirits from the Gerasene demoniac. As they began to row away from the beaches of Gerasenes towards the northeastern shores of Capernaum they could see the crowd of frightened and superstitious Gentiles, standing along the water's edge, breathing a sigh of relief at their departure. At the same time they could also see the former demoniac once known as "Legion" standing alone on the beach, fully clothed and in his right mind, waving goodbye to his new Lord and Savior. His heart was now filled with the joy of being possessed with the Holy Spirit, and he had been given a commission to tell all in Decapolis of the great things God had done for him.

As our Lord and his disciples returned to the beaches of Capernaum, the people who now were the recipients of his message of hope and his ministry of healing welcomed him warmly. And many in the crowd who had heard of Jesus because their family and friends had already been healed of some sickness were hoping he would continue his healing and preaching ministry among them. In the final analysis the hot baths of Tiberius, just a few miles down the road, were of little help in healing the sick and dying. The Roman and Greek doctors were also limited in their medical knowledge, while the mystery religions offered few cures for the many illnesses prevalent in their society. Based on almost two years worth of evidence, these people were hoping that Jesus was the one to turn to in the midst of sickness and death. On this particular day our Lord would be confronted with a father who was living under the stress of his only daughter's impending death, and an unnamed Jewish woman who was a social outcast because of an incurable blood disease. These two stories are also recorded by Matthew (9:18-26) and Mark (5:21-43), so I will refer to their accounts whenever they give more details than Luke's gospel.

Jairus, a Jewish leader, was certainly no stranger to Jesus, for he was an elder in the local synagogue in Capernaum. He had heard of or witnessed the healing of the demoniac in his synagogue a year earlier. He had also witnessed or heard of the life Jesus had brought to the dying son of the royal official living in his home town (John 4: 46f). Jairus had also heard about the healing of a dying servant of the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10). I'm sure that as a Jewish ruler he had many discussions on the character and ministry of Jesus with his fellow elders. He must have struggled with the idea that this lawbreaker and accused blasphemer could be the Messiah, and yet at the same time there was evidence that certain people who were sick or dying turned to Jesus and were healed. I'm sure also that up and until the time his one and only 12-year-old daughter's sickness unto death, his discussions concerning Jesus were limited to a good evening of theological debate.

But now Jairus' daughter was sick unto death. He received word that Jesus had just landed on the beach of Capernaum, and that a large crowd had gathered around him to welcome him back home, so he joined the crowds now rushing toward the beach. At this point in his life, his official position as a spiritual leader, his rank, stature, and reputation were of little matter as he worked his way through the crowd until he came face to face with Jesus. Then, in front of all the people who knew him, he fell at the feet of Jesus and began to entreat him to come to his house, for his only daughter, who was about 12 years old, was dying.

There is no more helpless feeling as a father than to know that one of your children is sick unto death and you are powerless do anything about it. A few years ago, I got a late-night phone call from a Christian friend, a man whom people in the San Francisco community would describe as "having it made." He was very successful in his business and had a good deal of influence in the city. But on this evening he was calling to ask me for prayer on behalf of his 15-year-old daughter who had been diagnosed as having a severe brain tumor. The doctors were rushing her to the hospital that evening, hoping that they could operate early the following morning and save her life. He asked if I would join him and his wife at the hospital the next morning. As I arrived at the hospital around 6 a.m., I met them in the parking lot and we went into their daughter's room. The medical staff had already cut off all her beautiful hair, and she was semi-conscious, waiting for the drugs to take full control of her body. The three of us laid our hands on her and in a state of total humility and hope, asked the Lord Jesus if he would work through the medical team and restore this beautiful young woman back to health.

To whom do we turn in a time of physical sickness and impending death? A grieving father turned to Jesus on behalf of his dying daughter; and in the midst of the crowd traveling to Jairus' home, a very sick woman sought to get our Lord's attention.

## **II. A woman turns to Jesus in a time of sickness, 8:43,44**

And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak; and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.

For 12 years (the same number of years Jairus' daughter had been on earth), this woman had been suffering from a hemorrhage. This may have been a vaginal hemorrhage, which would have resulted in her suffering

social and religious pressure. (According to Leviticus 15:19-22, her problem made her ceremonially unclean.) She could not have any social contact and would not be allowed to attend synagogue or temple service for at least 12 years. Adding to the pressure of being a social outcast, she also had gone from one doctor to another only to find that they took her money and were of no help to her (Mark 5:26). As the years went by she grew weaker and the disease became worse. Once word got to her that Jesus had returned to Capernaum she joined the crowd with the hope that somehow he might heal her. I'm sure her heart must have dropped as she overheard the conversation between the synagogue official and Jesus, for the Lord immediately went with the official and she never had a chance to even ask him if he would heal her. So her second option was simply to reach out in faith, and hope that if perhaps she just had a chance to touch him or his robe as he walked by in the crowd, that would be enough to bring her healing.

On October 17, 1989, my wife, Anne Marie, and I drove to the city of Lourdes in France to visit an elderly nun who had been a former teacher of my wife in Rabat, Morocco. A few years earlier she had been transferred to the district around Lourdes to work in a Catholic resthome on the edge of town. Lourdes is located in the southwestern section of France, near the Pyrenees foothills. It is famous as a shrine for Roman Catholic pilgrims, for it is believed that here in 1858, the virgin Mary appeared to a peasant girl named Bernadette. Catholics built a church near the grotto called the Rosary, and they also erected a statue of the virgin at the grotto where the vision was said to have occurred. Since those early days, year in and year out, bus loads of sick, blind, crippled, deaf and dumb from all over the world pour through the gates of the grounds towards the grotto, hoping that the virgin Mary will heal them.

Year after year the same masses who came with hearts filled with hope that the virgin would heal them returned to their buses in the same physical condition in which they arrived. As we walked out the gates with them we felt our hearts filled with compassion for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Later that day we were having lunch with the nun and I asked her if in her seven years at Lourdes had she ever witnessed or heard of any physical healing? No! she answered. I asked her why did she think the millions still continued to come to the grotto each year. She replied, "The trip fills them with the hope of the Savior that their suffering has meaning in the plans of God." I don't believe that is why most of these people visit Lourdes, but the end result is the same truth the apostle Paul learned in the midst of his suffering. Here is what he said to the Corinthians when he realized why suffering was allowed to come upon him and his fellow workers: it was "in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope" (2 Cor. 1: 9-10)

To whom do you turn to in times of sickness and death? Jairus and this unknown Jewish women turned to Jesus, the only one on earth who could make them well or save them.

### **III. The woman's faith is rewarded with health, 8: 45-48**

And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the multitudes are crowding and pressing upon You." But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." And when the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

The woman touched his garment (Mark 5: 30), And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said "Who touched My garment?" (Luke 8:45) "Who is the one who touched Me? And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the multitudes are crowding and pressing upon You. But Jesus said "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." (Jesus was saying, "Who touched me with a meaningful touch, hoping for a cure?").

What did Jesus mean when he said, "For I was aware that power had gone out me"? Here we come face to face again with that great and wonderful mystery of Jesus as both God and man. God was willing to put aside

his powers of deity, as Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking a form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross" (Phil. 2: 5-8).

Earlier in his ministry Jesus had announced, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5: 31-32). But we need to keep in mind that our Lord ministered to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of these people only after he spoke to and was led by his heavenly Father. His disciples already knew that 1) Jesus did nothing without first checking in with his Father: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (John 6: 38; 14:3, 17:4); 2) Jesus said nothing without first checking in with his Father: "For I do not speak of my own initiative, but the Father himself who sent me has given me commandment, what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49-50; 7:14-24); and 3) Jesus went nowhere without first checking in with the Father: "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; and they found Him, and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.' And He said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for.' And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons" (Mark 1:35-39).

Our heavenly Father chose to heal this woman of faith through his Son without Jesus being aware of the healing until after it had happened. He knew healing had occurred only because he felt the power leave him, resulting in a sense of weakness. The apostle Paul explained this in another way when he came to a fuller understanding of his ministry: "We have this treasure [our risen Lord] in earthen vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4: 7). As our risen Lord takes control of our lives he can use them to express his power of healing physically, emotionally or spiritually at any time towards anyone without asking our permission. But we will become aware somewhere in the process that the power of God had flowed out from us towards those who are sick and dying. In this present situation the healing power of the Father flowed through the life of the Son to heal this sick woman.

"And He looked around to see the woman who had done this," says Mark 5:32. When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before him. She declared in the presence of all the reason why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. We can almost feel the tension in the crowd. Here our Lord is heading for Jairus' home to raise his daughter from the dead, and suddenly he stops and asks, "Who among all of you touched me in such a way that power came out of me towards you and you were healed?" In his humanity he did not know who it was, yet as he looked around the crowd his eyes caught the eyes of the woman who had been healed. Then he knew-and she knew that he knew-that it was her. The crowd pulled back a little so that she could come forward and "she fell down before him" and publicly confessed that she was the one, adding that she was healed.

Out of love and compassion with the heart of a Father, our Lord, I'm sure, reached down to help her up and said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well (has saved you), go in (into) peace." This woman had not placed her faith in the garment of Jesus, for that would have turned this story into one of superstition and the garment into a kind of magic robe. But she had placed her faith in the person of Jesus as the Messiah and promised Savior on the same evidence that Jairus had. Her faith in Jesus as the Father of God the Savior became the channel through which the cure had been accomplished.

To whom do we turn in times of sickness and death? A grieving father and a sickly women turned in faith to Jesus to save them physically and spiritually. What were the results?

#### **IV. The father's faith is rewarded with life, 8:49-56**

While he was still speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." but when Jesus heard this, He answered him, "Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she shall be made well." And when he had come to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. Now they were all weeping and lamenting

for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" And her spirit returned, and she rose immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

As the woman was being encouraged by our Lord and the crowd was looking on in amazement, someone from Jairus' home arrived and announced to him, "Your daughter has died, do not trouble the Teacher anymore." Despite the fact that Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit had raised the dead daughter of the royal official, and raised the dying servant of the centurion, and had just healed the woman, they still came with the bad news, "Your daughter has died." There's no hope, it's over, that's it, go home. As Jesus heard them say this, he looked at the eyes of the father. He saw the difference between the way they had been so filled with hope as he heard the woman confess her healing, a hope that if Jesus could heal this unknown woman with a 12-year disease, certainly he could raise his dying 12-year-old daughter from her death bed. But now comes this terrible news that his daughter who was dying when he left her to find Jesus was now dead. The professional mourners had already arrived and began their cry of despair.

Our text continues, "But when Jesus heard this He answered him, 'Do not be afraid any longer, only believe (keep believing) and she shall be made well (saved).'" Faith in Jesus is the answer to the fear of life and the fear of death. Together with Jairus and the four disciples, our Lord arrived at the home and asked the unbelieving mourners to leave them alone with the girl, saying, "Stop weeping for she has not died but, she is asleep." To the believer, death is like going to sleep. The critics would say that the girl was not really dead but had lapsed into a coma and about the time Jesus arrived she was coming out of it. But we must remember that the family who saw death all the time, knew she had stopped breathing and they had declared her dead; they sent for the professional mourners for they knew she was dead; and the Lord knew she was physically dead because after he raised her her spirit returned.

Then, based on the faith of Jairus, our Lord called out, "Child, arise!" Jesus would later say at Lazarus' grave, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). Her spirit returned, she arose immediately, and he gave orders for something to be given to her to eat. Her parents were amazed, but he instructed them to tell no one what had happened. It appears that the Lord had become aware that the antagonism of the Pharisees was building up more intensely and he wanted to continue ministering in Galilee as long as possible. But, human nature being what it is, it was almost impossible to keep this event a secret.

In his book *The Servant Who Rules*, Ray C. Stedman wrote,

Why did Jesus heal the woman and raise the child? He did so to give a new view of sickness and death, one different from the world's view. Believing this present life is all there is, the world wants it all now, but the Christian can stand at the crib of a dying child and ask God to heal him. Then, believing that God can heal him, if the child dies we still believe that our God did heal him totally by bringing him into the eternal presence of the Lord. This life isn't all there is.

At the hospital in San Francisco that morning, after we had prayed for the daughter of my friends, we watched the medical staff take the young woman into the operating room. We returned to the waiting room, our hearts filled with confidence that our risen Lord was present and had heard our prayer of faith. Now he wanted us to rest in him regardless of the outcome. In this case the Lord brought physical healing to his spiritual daughter, and we were notified several hours later that the operation was a success. I have visited that family many times since those difficult days. Each time I look at their daughter who is now 21, and in the full bloom of youth and beauty, and I remember the grace of God who gave her life back on earth that one cold day in a San Francisco hospital.

To whom do we turn in times of sickness and death? A grieving father turned in faith to Jesus and his daughter was raised from the dead. A sickly woman turned in faith to Jesus and was healed immediately by the Great

Physician. But in time, the daughter would die again, and in time the woman would die. So these physical healings were designed by God to give each and every one of us the hope that as Jesus was willing to reach out to those who placed their faith in him as Lord and Savior, bringing physical healing, so he is willing to reach out to all who place their faith in him as Lord and Savior and offer spiritual healing to a sin-sick world. Peter would later summarize our Lord's ministry before the Jewish Supreme Court when he said, by the Spirit,

"There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (made well)" Acts 4:12.

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