

Big Gospel Words: Faith
Luke 8:40-56
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Introduction

I feel quite fortunate to preach on the word 'faith' in our series Big Gospel Words. Unlike salvation or repentance, faith is a far more common term in everyday life. "I have faith in you" or "I have faith that Liverpool can win a trophy this year." (Though that may be blind faith!) We all have first-hand experience of faith. I don't tie weights to my feet every night because I have faith that gravity will still be working when I wake up. And I'm sure you do the same.

Faith is also much easier to define. We might even define faith as the Bible does in Hebrews 11:1 – *'Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'* We say we have faith in people because we confidently hope they will succeed, not because we have a guarantee of it. I have no certainty that gravity will work tomorrow, but I confidently hope it will because it always has, and the science says that it will.

However, I don't think the author of Hebrews is writing about faith in people or science. So, what does faith refer to in the Bible? What is Christian faith? To help us answer this question, I want to tell you a story from the Bible about two desperate people whose lives were transformed by Christian faith. If you have a Bible on you, it would be good to keep it open to Luke chapter 8.

The story

Let's dive into our story. Our first desperate person is a man called Jairus. Despite his high social standing as a synagogue leader, Jairus falls at Jesus' feet, *'pleading with him to come to his house'* (Verse 41). Why? Verse 42 tells us, *'his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.'* Jesus graciously accepts this request but *'as Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.'* (Verse 42). Jesus starts on his way towards Jairus' house and the crowd follows like penguins trying to keep warm. This is a claustrophobe's nightmare. Jesus is almost crushed!

While it may have been uncomfortable for many people, it was the perfect scenario for our second desperate person. Verse 43 says *'a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.'* We don't know this woman's name, but we know that she is at the end of her tether. She has suffered from a disease for twelve years that has impacted every area of her life. Not only has it left her constantly unwell, but she is also emotionally drained, hopeless at the lack of a cure. She is also a social outcast. Jewish law states that *'When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period... she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge. Anyone who touches them will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.'* These verses are talking about ceremonial cleanliness, not personal hygiene. She, and anyone who came into contact with her, would not be able to

participate in religious life which was a big thing for the Jewish community. You can see why this woman would be avoided.

But she has not completely given up hope. She has heard about Jesus, she knows he can heal people, and so she has faith that touching just the edge of Jesus' cloak will bring her healing. We assume she used the mass of bodies to secretly approach Jesus. Verse 44 then says, *'She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and **immediately** her bleeding stopped.'* Can you imagine her relief? Years and years of pain are finally over and over in an instant!

At this point, she likely thought she had got away with her plan, but Jesus knows. He calls out, *"Who touched me?"* (Verse 45). Peter has an understandable response. *"The people are crowding and pressing against you."* (Verse 45). *"Of course, someone touched you Jesus."* But that is not the subtext behind Jesus' question. In verse 46 he reveals, *"I know that power has gone out from me."* And then in verse 48, he says, *"Your faith has healed you."* Jesus' cloak is not a magical artefact like the holy grail from Indiana Jones. Jesus honoured this poor woman's faith by allowing his healing power to flow from him and accomplish her goal. His question is not an accusation nor is he displaying ignorance, he is seeking to draw this woman out.

For what reason? For the exact outcome that followed. Verse 47 says, *'The woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.'* Through this woman's confession and testimony, Jesus has enlightened the crowd and doubly blessed the woman herself. The crowd becomes aware of this extraordinary miracle and the woman's suitability to reintegrate into society.

Jesus caps off this interaction by saying, *"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."* (Verse 48). He is amazingly gentle. Jesus confirms and commends her faith in him, comforts her fears, and dismisses her in peace. Where she was once a desperate and broken woman, she is now at peace in body and mind.

If you were watching a TV adaptation of this miracle, you would be overjoyed for the woman, but you could not escape the background tension as you spot Jairus nervously biting his nails. His daughter is dying. The last thing he needs is for Jesus to be held up. But then, bad news arrives. Verse 49, *'someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."'* It's a reasonable response from this messenger. Jesus may cure incurable diseases, but can Jesus reverse death?

I imagine this is one of many thoughts running around Jairus' head as he receives this news so Jesus offers him this comforting but incredibly challenging word. *"Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."* (Verse 50). One commentator described this moment as a trial of faith. Jairus had faith to come to Jesus in the first place and he has just witnessed the miraculous but now that the emotions are swelling and the reality of his daughter's death has hit him, can he just believe?

By God's grace, Jairus does put his faith in Jesus and is rewarded for it. Jesus arrives at his house, takes Jairus' daughter by the hand, and says, *"My child, get up!"* (Verse 54). *'Her spirit returned, and **at once** she stood up.'* (Verse 55). Mourners had been called, that's how sure they were that she had died. But, just as certainly as she had died, she now could stand and eat.

Christian faith is based on Jesus.

These intertwined miracles weave an amazing and beautiful story of courageous faith and Jesus' mighty power over nature and death. But they also help to explain and illustrate three answers to our question from the beginning.

What is Christian faith? The first answer is this: Christian faith is based on Jesus. Why do Jairus and this woman have faith in Jesus in the first place?

Simply, because Jesus is powerful. Jesus drew attention wherever he went. He was well-known for his impressive works of power such as casting out demons and miraculous healings. That's why a crowd welcomes him in verse 40. People wanted to be near him, they wanted to see what he'd do next, and they wanted him to work miracles for them. So far in the book of Luke, he has driven out demons, healed a woman with a fever, healed a man with leprosy, healed a paralysed man, and many others. He even brings a widow's son back to life. This is why Jairus and the woman have confidence he can bring the healing they need.

If it wasn't obvious already, this story stamps Jesus' power as supernatural. Jesus trumps all the natural methods the woman had tried. And then he brings someone else back to life! Jesus cannot be any ordinary man; he must also be God himself. Their faith is based on Jesus because he is divine: powerful and perfect.

But Jesus doesn't walk on earth anymore so how is Jesus' power relevant to us today? Well, I think the answer to that question is one of the purposes of this story. Look down at verse 56, *'[Jesus] ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.'* This is an odd instruction from Jesus. Jesus can't hide the fact that he brought someone back from the dead. So why does he tell the room to keep quiet?

The prevailing theory is that Jesus doesn't want that to draw focus from the primary purpose of his ministry. He doesn't want to be known as a necromancer or solely known as a miracle worker. Instead, in Luke 5, Jesus says, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (v31-32). And then, even more importantly, in Mark 10, Jesus says, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Whilst we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas with lots of joy, and we should, we sometimes forget the seriousness of that event. Jesus was born to die. The Son of God came down to earth in human form so that he could be killed. Because, on the cross, he died as a ransom for his people. That's you and me.

Our biggest problem has nothing to do with physical health. We are sinners. We are spiritually unwell. We get things wrong. We refuse to do good. We push God away. We reject his right way to live. So, we deserve justice for our behaviour. Ephesians 2:3 says, *'All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.'*

But Jesus let himself be crucified so that, on the cross, he could face God's anger against sin for us. Romans 5:8 says, *'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'* And 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'* I love these words from the hymn 'Before The Throne of God Above':

Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God, the just, is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me.

Then, three days after his death, Jesus himself came back to life. His resurrection proves and proclaims life beyond the grave. Jesus has won an eternal and death-defying victory over sin. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:10, *'[Grace] has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'* In summary, John 3:16 says, *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'*

We can trust Jesus' divine power because it defeated sin so that we can be free from its grasp forever. Christian faith is faith in Jesus' death and resurrection for our sake.

Christian faith is new life.

So, we know what Christian faith is, but what does Christian faith look like? Our second answer is that Christian faith is new life. These two miracles in Luke 8 helpfully illustrate this transformation.

Let's first consider the healed woman. Just as her illness affected all areas of her life, so did her healing. Her physical pain immediately vanished. Her hopelessness turned to peace. She was no longer forced to be an outcast. In a similar way, our new life of faith in Jesus transforms everything. Our lack of purpose is now fulfilled by sharing in Jesus' mission of glorifying God and reaching unbelievers with the gospel. Our sin is now forgiven. Our guilt is comforted by Jesus' sacrifice. Our loneliness is met by our loving Father in heaven and the community of his people which we call the church. Our uncertainty is answered by the truth of the Bible, the wisdom of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Like Jairus' daughter, the difference is life and death, day and night. Where we were spiritually lost, we are now fulfilled. Where we were powerless against sin, we now have victory over it. If you ask a Christian what their life was like before they put their faith in Jesus, they might use words like lost, dark or blind. Faith in Jesus produces a whole new satisfying life.

But God has an even greater, even newer life planned for us in heaven. Heaven is described in the book of Revelation like this: *'I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* He who was seated on the throne said, *"I am making everything new!"* (Rev 21:3-5).

This is the ultimate product of faith in Jesus and only Christian faith brings new life to this degree. In John 14:6, Jesus says, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Christian faith is active.

So, what is our response? Christian faith must be active.

One of the most striking aspects of this story is the initiative of Jairus and the woman. Jairus disregards his social status and falls at Jesus' feet. There is a critical incident in his life which takes the highest priority, so he passionately seeks help himself. We know that he has a household which includes those willing to send messages, but they won't plead as earnestly as he will, and it is suggested that they don't share his faith in Jesus' power. Jairus then leads Jesus to his house. It has the essence of a child dragging their parent to look at something. Jairus is not willing to sit back and hope for the best.

Then consider the woman's plan. It's incredibly opportunistic as she would be spotted and shunned in any smaller crowd. It's also incredibly bold and daring. She is ignoring the social stigma, ignoring good practice for the ceremonially unclean, and putting herself at great risk of being discovered. But she has had enough and her faith in Jesus' power is strong. She is so certain of being healed that she is willing to face the risks.

True faith is an action. An investor may say they have faith in a burgeoning company, but their faith is calculated by the amount of money they invest. If they truly believe in that venture, they will ignore the judgement of those around them, and their faith will be made known by their wallet.

It is this true active faith that the Bible calls us to. Hebrews 11:6 says, *'Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly **seek** him.'* Romans 10:13 says, *'Everyone who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* Matthew 7:7 says, *'**Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you.'* The good news and the confident hope we have is that our pursuit of faith will produce faith. *'He **rewards** those who earnestly seek him.'* *'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord **will** be saved.'* *'Everyone who asks **receives**; the one who seeks **finds**.'*

So, we are left with the choice that John puts to us in John 3:36. *'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on*

them. We can seek Jesus, put our faith in him, knowing confidently that we will be saved, and enjoy new life now and forever, or we can remain under God's wrath.

On the face of it, that decision may seem easy, but I know in our hearts it isn't. We are pulled by many different factors and our hearts are naturally rebellious. If you aren't 100% ready to make that leap, but an inkling of your heart says you should find out more, please keep coming to church, ask questions, and find answers.

I will close with these three questions to ponder and evaluate our journey of faith which I hope will challenge both Christians and non-Christians.

- Where do I put my trust when things go wrong? This will reveal where our faith is placed first.
- Have I experienced new life? This will reveal if we have gone through the transformation of true faith.
- Am I actively seeking Jesus like Jairus and the woman? This is our challenge. What can we take away from their example?

May God graciously work in all our hearts to increase our faith in the amazing sacrifice of his Son for our sake. Amen.

Prayer

Father God, we face many problems in our lives but none greater than the power of sin over us and its due penalty. The only way out is through faith in the amazing death and resurrection of your Son who won a complete victory over all evil and sets us free. Thank you for the new lives you graciously gift us that was made possible by Jesus' sacrifice. Wherever our faith is currently placed, may it always be placed first in him. Please work in our hearts to increase our faith, however much we have. May we earnestly seek him every day of our lives, for he is truly worthy of our trust. Amen.