ONLY BELIEVE

Luke 8:40–56

Key Verse: 8:50

“But Jesus on hearing this answered him, ‘Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.’”

Has anyone ever asked you, “What do you believe?” It can be a casual question, or a really intense one. What *do* we really believe? Often it’s a mixture of our ideas, experiences, and even feelings. What we believe also might be related to our character, because some people tend to be trusting, whereas others are innately skeptical. Today’s passage is the third miracle event in this chapter. It actually has two people’s stories intertwined. But they both illustrate what it means to really believe in Jesus. The stories of these two people suggest that, for all of us, our faith in Jesus needs to grow. What does it mean to “only believe”? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

As we saw in the previous passage Jesus has been in an unclean place, where there are Gentiles, tombs, unclean spirits and pigs. Despite his power to heal an impossible man, in that place people ask Jesus to leave (8:37). Look at verse 40. In contrast, in this place people “welcome” Jesus. This word “welcome” is important. The Greek root literally means to reach out our hand to somebody, meaning to receive that person with genuine friendliness. If we do a careful word study in Luke’s Gospel and Acts, we find that Luke repeats this specific Greek root word 37 times; it’s translated as “welcome,” “accept” or “receive.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Sometimes Luke adds the words “joyfully” (Lk19:6), “gladly” (Ac21:17) or “with all gratitude” (Ac24:3). What a beautiful image! We can “welcome” God’s servants, “welcome” God’s word, and “welcome” God’s kingdom. Such a willing and wholehearted “welcome” is the only environment in which Jesus can work.

Look at verse 41a. Here, in stark contrast to the demoniac, we have a synagogue ruler. We’re told his name, Jairus, which heightens his importance. He’s not living on the bottom of society or outside it; he’s a man of standing in his community. He has a position of honor. Yet he comes to Jesus. Look at verse 41b. It says he “falls” at Jesus’ feet, and that he “implores” or begs him. He’s not self-important; he’s truly a humble man. And why has he come? Look at verse 42a. It’s hard to put into words how tragic this is. His daughter is dying. She’s only 12. And she’s his *only* daughter. He loves his little girl. He’s enjoyed watching her grow up into a lovely young lady. His coming to Jesus so humbly on her behalf shows that she’s more important to him than anything in the world, even more than his synagogue ruler position. All parents can learn a lot from him.

Look at verse 42b. The word “pressed” is literally “choked.” This crowd is no longer portrayed in a favorable light. They had welcomed him, but now their pressing in on Jesus as anxious spectators is actually a kind of hindrance. They’re not there with real faith; they just want to enjoy some excitement.

Look at verse 43. Luke once again mentions a woman. Her name isn’t given, but we notice several things in her description. First of all, because the Jews considered a discharge of blood as something unclean, this woman is a social outcast. And this didn’t happen recently; this bleeding has been chronic for the past 12 years, for as long as Jairus’ daughter has been alive. Secondly, because she spent all her living on physicians’ fees, now she’s broke. And finally, she remains unhealed. Outcast, broke and unhealed. Again, it’s hard even to begin to describe how she must have felt. Due to her illness, she’s most likely living all alone. She’s unacceptable and unwanted and in constant misery.

Look at verse 44. What a miracle! Somehow, though the crowd is pressing and she’s got to be physically weak, she gets close enough behind Jesus to touch the fringe of his garment. He doesn’t even see her, and she’s healed! All those years of striving, all those failures, but this cure is instantaneous. Luke the medical doctor is highlighting that Jesus is full of God’s power to heal (cf. 6:19). The Bible says he “is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think” (Eph3:20). Our problem is, we just don’t believe it.

Look at verses 45–46. To Peter, Jesus’ question “Who touched me?” seems a bit absurd—everybody is touching him. But not everyone is touching in faith. Why is Jesus asking “Who touched me?” Is this an illegal “steal” of his power? No. This isn’t just about a physical healing. Jesus wants to meet this person. No doubt he knows exactly who it is. And he wants to help this person deeper. He wants this person to be restored in every way. Most of all, he wants to have a personal relationship with this person. He stops everything for it. Jesus doesn’t want just to solve our human problems; he wants us to meet him, to know him, to be close to him. There’s nothing as important or as urgent as this.

Look at verse 47. The woman realizes she’s not hidden anymore. It says she comes “trembling” and “falls down before him.” It tells us how much she’s been living in shame due to her illness. But Jesus isn’t trying to embarrass or humiliate her; he sees how necessary this is for her inner healing, to tell her story. It says she “declares in the presence of all the people.” In their society women didn’t really speak in public, but this woman does. She tells everyone why she touched Jesus. It doesn’t say why here, but no doubt she’d heard about all the amazing healings of Jesus. He’d even touched a man full of leprosy, disfigured and incurable, and he was immediately healed (5:12–13). She probably thought, “Why not me?” She’d experienced so much disappointment, but she believed if she just touched Jesus, she could be healed. Immediately she was! As she shares about Jesus’ power in her life, her faith in him gets stronger.

Look at verse 48. Jesus wants her to know that it wasn’t some magical powers that healed her; it was her own faith. To society, she’s an outcast, labeled with a chronic problem, but to Jesus, she’s a woman of faith. He even calls her “Daughter.” He loves her. He accepts her like his own daughter. His affirming words help her experience his love personally. It’s how we too get to know Jesus, by letting his words speak to us and accepting his love. Finally he tells her, “Go in peace.” He gives her the best gift: inner peace. It’s peace with God through faith in Jesus (Ro5:1). This good news of peace through Jesus Christ our Lord is for everyone (Ac10:36). Jesus himself is our peace (Eph2:14a). The peace he gives is especially meaningful for all those who’ve been living “far off” from God (Eph2:17). No matter what we’ve been through, Jesus brings peace to our souls.

Look at verse 49. After waiting for Jesus to stop and this woman’s testimony to end, bad news comes from Jairus’ house: his daughter is now dead. It seems so unfair. In medical parlance, this twelve-year-old girl was in critical condition; the woman with her chronic illness could have waited. The messenger says, “Do not trouble the Teacher any more.” It seems reasonable. After all, the girl’s dead now. Surely he didn’t intend it, but the man’s words not only stun Jairus; they must have devastated him. He’s basically saying, “It’s time, dude. Give up.” Jesus knows how crucial this moment is. Read verse 50. Jesus speaks these words right away. It’s like he’s fanning the dying embers of this man’s faith into flame again. Through the Spirit, our Lord Jesus still gives us his words at just the right time (12:12,42; cf. Isa50:4). We all need to learn how to speak words of faith to one another. Jesus says two things here for us to think about.

**First**, “Do not fear.” Jairus has just heard his daughter has died. It would be easy for him to fear how he could go on without her. In fact, any bad news can make us scared. When things seem hopeless, we get scared. Hardships of all kinds can cause us to fear. Especially death can scare us. What should we do? Jesus puts it simply, “Do not fear.” We need to hold onto these words. It tells us that faith means resisting the temptation to fall into fear. The Bible says when we’re grieved by various trials, faith gives us access to God’s power, which guards us to endure (1Pe1:5–6). It says when we meet these trials, we should “count it all joy,” because they test our faith and make us steadfast (Jas1:2–3). Whatever we’re going through, we need to hear Jesus telling us, “Do not fear.”

**Second**, “only believe.” At first, these words are hard to understand. How can Jairus “only believe” when his daughter is dead? Does faith mean to turn off our minds and ignore realities? Is faith just a matter of our will, to believe something will happen even when it won’t? No. To “believe” means to believe in Jesus. It’s not about getting the outcome we want; it’s about believing in the *person* speaking to us. Above all, it means to start our thinking with *Jesus*. We believe in who *Jesus* is, in what *Jesus* did, in what *Jesus* said, in what *Jesus* can still do. As Hebrews tells us, faith means to “consider” Jesus and be “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb3:1; 12:2). It means to trust him, even when things seem to be going from bad to worse. If we think too much about our realities and problems, we get overwhelmed. We shouldn’t stop thinking, but we need to incorporate faith into our thought world. Our Lord Jesus taught us to think like this: “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Lk18:27).

Abraham is a good example. The Bible says, “In hope he believed against hope…” When he “considered” his own body, which was as good as dead, and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb, he did not waver about God’s promise to have a son; “he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (Ro4:18–21). When he was told to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering, the Bible says he “considered” God was able even to raise him from the dead (Heb11:19). In both cases, when he “only believed,” Abraham “considered.” He thought. He thought about who God is, what God promised, what God is able to do. The Bible promises that our Savior Christ Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2Ti1:10). Even if we experience the worst things life can throw at us, we need to really “consider” this gospel, believe this gospel, hold on to this gospel.

Look at verses 51–53. At Jairus’ house, the environment Jesus finds is not good. Already professional mourners have showed up to create a grieving atmosphere. One minute they’re weeping and mourning, and the next, they’re laughing. They don’t really care about Jairus’ daughter, and they aren’t ready to listen to Jesus, either. Jesus takes only his top three disciples and the child’s parents into the room to witness what he does. He takes the girl by the hand and calls, saying, “Child, arise.” Her spirit returns, she gets up at once, and just like the good shepherd that he is, he tells them to give her something to eat (54–55). When Jairus held on to Jesus’ words, “only believe,” God made his daughter well. Jesus still works through such faith. This event reveals the glory of Jesus, whose resurrection power can still bring all kinds of dead people back to life.

Read verse 50 again. May God help us hear and hold on to the words of our Lord Jesus: “Do not fear; only believe.” May he help us experience his healing in our souls, and may he use our faith to bring his healing to others.

1. (Lk4:24; 8:13,40; 9:5,11,48,53; 10:8,10,38; 15:2; 16:4,9; 18:17; 19:6; Ac2:41; 3:21; 7:38,59; 8:14; 10:35; 11:1; 15:4; 16:21; 17:7,11; 18:27; 21:17; 22:18; 24:3,15; 28:7,21,30) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)