

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – July 1, 2018

Mark 5:21-43 & Psalm 130

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Read the provided commentary below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Mark 5:21-43 (From the *Homiletics* archive; “The Amazing Jesus-Man”, July 1, 2012)

One of the trademarks of the gospel of Mark is what scholars call the Marcan intercalation or the Marcan "sandwich" in which the writer of the book skillfully weaves together two stories. He does this by beginning one story, then interrupting the first story with another story (intercalation) and then returning to conclude the first story. The less elegant designation of "sandwich" descriptively applies in that the first story becomes the bread with the story in the middle becoming the meat. The pericope 5:21-43 illustrates this literary element of Marcan intercalation beautifully. The audience hears Jairus' request to Jesus, and while Jesus travels to Jairus' house, the narrative about the woman with the issue of blood occurs. Finally, the pericope ends with a conclusion to the story concerning Jairus' daughter. As with other Marcan sandwiches, the weaving together of these stories demonstrates that they are to be read together because "each episode throws light upon the other" (Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002], 107).

A number of features link these two narratives. Both stories have women as central characters and both are linked with the number 12. The woman has been ill for 12 long years and Jairus' daughter is 12 years old. Moreover, the two stories are linked by the juxtaposition of two characters who have opposite genders, economic statuses and honor. Jairus is male and a synagogue ruler as well as the leader of his household. In contrast, the woman with the flow of blood never receives a name in the narrative and, unlike Jairus, does not dare to approach Jesus openly for her healing. The fact that she remains unnamed as compared to the synagogue ruler who is named illustrates that she has no status and no one to "defend her as Jairus defends his daughter" (Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, [New York: MaryKnoll, 2003]: 200-201). Yet both, regardless of their status, fall at the feet of Jesus. Mark describes their actions similarly by using a similar verb (πιπτω) "fall" in verse 22 and (προσπιτω) "fall down before someone" in verse 33. Such similarity in description indicates that in Mark's eyes status presents no obstacle to those who seek Jesus in faith and that all people regardless of their status bow before the one called beloved son (1:11).

Moreover, Jairus as leader of the synagogue plays an important role in the life of the Jewish community. Yet the woman's illness prevents her from being active in the community since it renders her as ritually impure at all times, according to Leviticus 15:25-27. In effect, her condition segregates her and places her "outside" the people of God (Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002], 107). In addition, not only is the woman ill, but she is also poor, which Mark describes using a participial phrase "having spent all her money/means" (δαπανησασα τα παραυτης παντα). Thus, the woman has not only suffered greatly physically, but has also wasted her money, and instead of getting better, has gotten worse. Physicians have been

unable to help her, but now the true physician (2:17) will remedy her situation (Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, [New York: MaryKnoll, 2003], 201).

Additional themes that connect both stories are the themes of touching and purity. In Mark 1:29-31, Jesus touched Simon's mother-in-law by taking (κρατεω) her by the hand and restores her to health. Here in these two stories in 5:21-43, women who need healing reappear, and in both narratives the concept of touch becomes important. In 5:28, the woman with the flow of blood thinks to herself, "If I touch (αψωμαι from απτω) even his garments I shall be made whole." Here the woman not only breaks purity rules by mixing in with the crowd but also in touching Jesus' garments. In 5:30, the aorist form of the verb appears in Jesus' question "Who touched (ηψατο) me?" And lastly in 5:31, the disciples repeat Jesus' query. The theme of touching occurs in the last part of the Jairus episode in which Jesus takes Jairus' daughter by the hand (v. 41). Although the verb απτω is not used here, the same word κρατεω that appears in 1:31 is used here and again denotes the act of touching. Consequently, in both stories, Jesus touches the unclean -- one woman determined ritually impure by the law due to her flow of blood and one woman unclean as determined by the law due to death (Numbers 19:11-13). In each case Jesus defies and resists ritual and cultural barriers and reverses the outcome. Instead of becoming impure himself by touching these women, he removes what causes them to be unclean and restores them to wholeness and life (Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002]: 110-11; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, [New York: MaryKnoll, 2003], 201). Interestingly, the woman with the flow of blood, who was an outcast because of her condition, now through her encounter with Jesus becomes elevated to the status of daughter. "Daughter (θυγατηρ) your faith has saved you" (5:34; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, [New York: MaryKnoll, 2003], 202). Thus, this woman who had no one to defend her has now been reincorporated into the people of God. Her status assured and recognized. One could argue, however, that this woman is not being reincorporated, but that because she is already a daughter of Abraham, she receives restoration of her health. In other words, Jesus merely reaffirms her rightful location as a daughter in the people of God. Although her illness has seemed to deprive her of this status, Jesus confirms that she has always been a "daughter" despite her previous plight.

The theme of faith that occurs in this pericope connects to Mark's overall theme of faith in the gospel. In the passages preceding 5:21-43, Mark links faith and miracles. In 1:42-2:1-5 and 4:35-41, miracles produce faith as well as reveal unbelief. In this pericope, Jairus demonstrates his faith by falling to his knees and asking Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter. The woman with the flow of blood demonstrates her faith by approaching Jesus and touching him. She presents a stark contrast to the disciples in that while Jesus declares that her faith saves her (5:34), in several places throughout the gospel Jesus upbraids the disciples for their lack of faith (4:40; 8:17-21; 9:19). For Mark's audience, such a depiction of this woman in contrast to the male disciples would have left quite an impression, especially considering the cultural attitudes about women, which include women's being viewed as less stable and mentally and emotionally inferior to men (Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, [Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993], 149). The issue of faith reappears when Jairus learns the news about his daughter's death. Jesus tells Jairus, "Do not be afraid, only believe" (5:36). Thus, Jesus encourages Jairus to continue in the faith which brought him to Jesus originally and to follow in the footsteps of the woman with the flow of blood whose faith saved her.

When Jesus arrives at the house (5:38), professional mourners have already gathered. Professional mourners were mandated even at funerals of the poor, yet more mourners would gather at the death of a prominent person such as in the case of Jairus' daughter. But because bodies decomposed quickly in Palestine, mourners assembled quickly as can be seen in this episode in which they have already arrived before Jairus returns home (Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, [Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993], 149). Jesus' decision to take only Peter, James and John with him highlights these disciples as not only the ones called first as disciples (1:16-20) but also as his inner circle who appear with him throughout the gospel at significant events (1:29; 9:2-8; 14:33). Although Jesus characterizes Jairus' daughter as sleeping and not dead (5:39), it is highly probable that here Jesus uses sleeping as a euphemism for death (cf. John 11:11; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:15) indicating that her death will be only temporary. At any rate he speaks to the young girl in Aramaic which may suggest that this was the girl's first language even though Greek was also widely spoken in Palestine (Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, [Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993], 149).

The raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead foreshadows Jesus' own resurrection in that the miracle illustrates Jesus' power over death. Moreover, Mark seems to want his readers to make the connection between this

resurrection and Jesus' resurrection in that he uses the same word (ἐκστασις) to describe the amazement displayed in 5:42 and the amazement of the women at the tomb when they learn of Jesus' resurrection (16:8). These are the only occurrences of this word in the gospel, strongly suggesting that the writer wants his audience to see these resurrection episodes together. Jesus' admonition not to tell anyone about this miracle corresponds to other admonitions in the gospel in which Jesus wants his miraculous deeds to be kept in secret (cf. 1:43-45; 5:19; 7:36). Yet Jesus' wish for secrecy may be tied to the desire that the Savior not be known for his miraculous deeds but rather as a crucified and risen Lord, whose ultimate deed is dying himself by going to the cross and conquering death. Furthermore, this theme of Markan secrecy may have developed from the historical Jesus' own rejection of some messianic expectations of his day (Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 153).

Commentary on Psalm 130

(From the *Homiletics* archive; "Within Earshot" – July 1, 2018)

One of the best-known pieces of liturgical prayer, Psalm 130, is a plea for help -- specifically, a cry for a divine hearing -- that combines the deeply personal with the nationally corporate. It reflects the psalmist's awareness of the pervasive nature of human sinfulness in the face of God's righteousness and justice -- making it one of the penitential psalms -- and the despair that such an awareness can provoke. But it is also a clear affirmation of God's mercy that overcomes human despair.

Scholars have recognized for centuries that the book of Psalms -- collectively known as the Psalter -- is made up of two different types of collections of psalms. Many psalms contain headings, or superscriptions, that suggest an author (such as the psalms of Asaph, e.g., Psalm 83, or the Korahites, e.g., Psalm 85) or a type of musical composition (such as a Maskil, e.g., Psalms 88, 89) as the source of the psalm.

Today's psalm, Psalm 130, is described as a "Song of Ascents" (as is the entire collection of psalms 120-134), which may mean a type of musical performance with gradually rising tones (which would correspond appropriately with the psalm's gradually more hopeful content), or it may indicate that the psalm was sung as part of a procession up to Jerusalem and/or the temple (both of which are on higher ground than their surroundings). We simply don't know for certain.

Alongside these traditional psalm collections, modern scholars have identified a second kind of classification of psalms, psalm types, such as songs of thanksgiving, laments, royal psalms, etc. Laments make up the largest group of psalms (e.g., 5, 6, 59, 83, etc.), and Psalm 130 comes from this type of psalm. It is a lamentation for the situation in which the psalmist is found.

The psalm falls naturally into two sections. The first, a private plea for God's attentiveness (vv. 1-6), opens the psalm and lends its defining tone, and the second, a rousing call for confidence on the part of all Israel (vv. 7-8), has the feel of an addendum. Although the closing verses may have been part of the psalm since its inclusion in the psalter, they may have been added to an originally more somber composition to bring it to a more hopeful (and more broadly appealing) conclusion.

The psalm opens with a cry "from the depths," using a Hebrew word, *ma`amakim*, which occurs infrequently in the OT (here and at Psalm 69:2, 15; Isaiah 51:10; and Ezekiel 27:34 -- all poetic contexts) and is based on a verb meaning "to be deep." (A number of other Hebrew words are also translated into English as "depths.") The word has both a literal meaning -- the depths of the sea (Isaiah and Ezekiel) -- and also the figurative use here and in Psalm 69, emotional/psychological/spiritual distress.

Unlike our contemporary understanding of life and death, the writers of biblical poetry, especially in the Psalms, perceived the relationship to God and life to be relative, rather than absolute. One could be more or less in the divine presence (and life) or one could be more or less away from it, i.e., in death (or Sheol or hell or the Pit or the depths, all used relatively interchangeably). To be gravely ill, for instance, was often perceived as having been dragged into the vestibule of death; one wasn't simply near death, one was actually in it, and it was from that frightening and unhappy location that one cried out to God for deliverance, as does the author of today's psalm.

Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, is addressed directly by the psalmist ("I cry to you, O Yahweh," v. 1). The second verse begins also with the direct address, "Lord, hear my voice!" but the word translated Lord in verse 2 is the generic word for lord ('adonai) rather than the proper name of the Israelite national deity. Many Hebrew manuscripts repeat the divine name at that spot, suggesting that later editors of the psalm, for reasons of piety or poetic variation, substituted the more generic term for the divine name.

Although the line, "Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications" (v. 2) is poetic parallelism here (to correspond with the request "Lord, hear my voice"), the ancient writers of the Bible had no compunction about presenting the deity in highly anthropomorphic terms. The God of Israel, like the gods of other nations, was perceived to be a great, big person -- an oversized version of a male Israelite in Israel -- with all the corresponding attributes, both physical and psychological. Thus, God strolls in the garden of Eden at creation; God speaks in words that Moses, Elijah and other humans can hear; God's "nose burns" with anger; and the mighty warrior who fights for Israel rides upon chariot clouds. The divine ears which the psalmist seeks, thus are not merely poetic; they are based on a literal understanding of the deity.

The reason for the request is divine forgiveness (v. 4) for human misdeeds, the pervasiveness and depth of which the psalmist acknowledges in verse 3. The scene sketched very economically in verse 3 is juridical (derived, ultimately, from the battlefield). If Yahweh should actually take note of all human iniquities, no one would have the right to remain upright before him; everyone, by rights, should throw themselves on the mercy of the divine judge (by literally throwing themselves face down on the ground, exposing the back of the neck for crushing, as by the foot of a victorious warrior). The chasm between the human and the divine presented here is vast.

But the psalmist's appeal is grounded in the awareness of divine mercy, which, rather than raw divine power, is the attribute that allows the deity to be "revered" (v. 4, literally, "feared"). The Greek translation of the second half of the verse reads, "because of [or "according to"] your *torah/law*," substituting a word that is graphically similar to the Hebrew passive verb. The change in meaning is significant but entirely consistent with biblical thought, so it's difficult to say which is the original reading.

The waiting expressed by the psalmist in verses 5 and 6 is more than passive waiting; it is *expectant* waiting, based on the psalmist's previous experience with the Lord's "word" (v. 5), in which he hopes. The "word of the Lord" is one of the most commonly occurring biblical expressions (more than 250 occurrences), and only rarely does it mean what moderns understand it to mean, which is simply "the Bible." In the Bible itself, the word of the Lord was the totality of divine revelation, usually condensed rather than given in written form, and much more commonly expressed through auditions and signs.

Thus, in the call of Abra(ha)m, the word of the Lord came to the patriarch "in a vision" (Genesis 15:1), described in the subsequent narrative as a discussion and a vision. Similarly, when the prophet Samuel is called by God (1 Samuel 3), the account opens with the observation that, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (1 Samuel 3:1b), and the account continues with a confused three-way conversation among the deity, the boy Samuel and the aged priest Eli.

The divine word for the biblical writers, including the author of today's psalm, was far more than a codified book of laws. It was the guiding principle, worked out in the vicissitudes of historical existence, that ultimately determined all of reality for ancient Israel collectively and ancient Israelites individually. This understanding of the word of the Lord is what links the first half of the psalm, the personal portion, with the second half, the corporate portion. The same deity who responds in mercy to the individual responds also to the nation as a whole and with the same redemptive power (vv. 7-8).

Although the historical setting of individual psalms is notoriously difficult to determine, the sentiments of Psalm 130 would bring great consolation to a nation suffering exile or foreign domination, and so the psalm may date from the exilic or post-exilic period, but this is simply conjecture.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading this passage?