

# **LUKE**

“What Is Faith?”

*Luke 8:40-56*

Sunday, April 29, 2018 (Easter Season)

By David A. Ritchie

<sup>40</sup> Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. <sup>41</sup> And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus’ feet, he implored him to come to his house, <sup>42</sup> for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. <sup>43</sup> And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. <sup>44</sup> She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. <sup>45</sup> And Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!” <sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.” <sup>47</sup> And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. <sup>48</sup> And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

<sup>49</sup> While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler’s house came and said, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.” <sup>50</sup> But Jesus on hearing this answered him, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” <sup>51</sup> And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. <sup>52</sup> And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, “Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.” <sup>53</sup> And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. <sup>54</sup> But taking her by the hand he called, saying, “Child, arise.” <sup>55</sup> And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. <sup>56</sup> And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.<sup>1</sup>

*Heavenly Father, you have given us the gift of your word – your word that is capable of giving hope to the hopeless; your word that is capable of bringing wholeness to the broken; your word that is capable of breathing life into death. May your Spirit who inspired these words to be written now illuminate our hearts, so that we would have eyes to see you, ears that would hear you, and hearts that would respond to you. May faith come today by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. It is in Jesus’s mighty name we pray, AMEN.*

## **Introduction**

I want you to ask yourself a question. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of the word “*faith*”? If I were to give you a pop-quiz right here, right now, how would you define the term faith?

Many people in our culture would consider faith *the opposite of reason*. In fact, whenever there is a debate between a Christian thinker and atheistic thinker, the event is often promoted as a debate of “faith versus reason,” as if they are by nature opposed. The idea is that reason is based on evidence, and faith is based on nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 8:40–56.

But this just isn't true. Biblically speaking the Bible cares very much about evidence. In fact, the lynchpin of all Christian belief that God entered into history through the person of Jesus Christ, that he died, and that he rose again. In fact, the New Testament that is in your Bible is the record of the testimony (or evidence) of the Apostles who knew Jesus and were eyewitnesses to his resurrection.

Others think faith is *wish-fulfillment*. The idea here is that maybe faith is something that isn't true. But I want it to be true. So if I wish for it really hard with my self-generated will-power, maybe it God will make it come true. But in the Bible, faith has more to do with our response to God, rather than God's response to us (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Maybe you might be tempted to think that faith is *knowing a lot about the Bible and theology*. But the Bible says explicitly that even the demons believe and tremble before the truth of God (James 2:19). I would imagine demons know the Bible better than most Christians. But they do not have saving faith.

So if faith is not the opposite of reason or wish fulfillment or perfect theological and biblical knowledge, what is it? Could it be that "faith" one of the most misused and misunderstood biblical terms in both culture and even the church?

Today, I want to work toward a truly biblical understanding of faith by looking at three portraits from Luke 8.

## **Exposition**

### **1.) A Desperate Father.**

Jesus has just arrived at a village on the shore of the sea of Galilee, and the crowds welcome him with joy (Lk. 8:40). It is an environment pregnant with expectation; i.e., "waiting" (προσδοκῶντες).

Suddenly, one of the leaders of the local synagogue casts aside all social decorum and stature and falls down before the feet of Jesus (Lk. 8:41). His name is Jairus, and his "only" (μονογενῆς) child is sick and dying (Lk. 8:42).<sup>2</sup> He begs Jesus to come to his home to lay hands on her and pray (Mk. 5:23). He knows that Jesus is a healer that he is his little daughter's only hope. He is desperate, and his problem is urgent.

Thankfully, Jesus agrees to go at once to his home. But along the way, they encounter an interruption. Out of nowhere, a woman derails the process. Even losing a millisecond at this moment would be frustrating alone. But then Jesus takes the time to investigate and have a full-blown conversation with this woman!

Sure the woman has suffered. Her situation isn't going to get better by itself, but it probably isn't getting worse either. For the little girl, on the other hand, this is a life or death scenario. Two people need healing, but one only one of these needs is truly urgent.

What is Jesus doing? Time is of the essence!

I believe Luke, the gospel writer, would have uniquely understood and appreciated this dynamic of

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<sup>2</sup> "The term "only" is found three times in the Synoptic Gospels and all are in Luke (cf. also 7:12; 9:38). Here and in 9:38 Luke added it to the parallel material in Mark. As in the other two examples, Luke emphasized the tragedy of the situation by this comment." Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 261.

this situation. After all, he was a medical professional, who Colossians 4:14 describes as “the beloved physician.”

Let’s put this situation into a 21<sup>st</sup> century American Emergency Room. Two patients come in the door. Patient 1 is a child carried in by her father with a 105 fever in an active seizure, and she is about to die (this is Jairus’s daughter). Patient 2 is a woman who has struggled with a chronic, but non-life threatening issue (this is the woman with the issue of blood). She has been to her primary care physician and tried a bunch of medical treatments to no avail. She even switched doctors, but the second doctor didn’t get results either. She went to specialists, and when that didn’t work, she started trying every natural remedy that she would find online. After more than a decade, her savings are exhausted. And today she has just had enough, so she goes to the ER.

What would happen? What should happen? Well, last week I called Dr. Kirkland, who is a Redeemer member and an ER doctor, and I asked him this very question.

He told me that when a patient arrives in an Emergency Room, they are seen not order they came in, but instead they are classified and prioritized by severity. This process is called *triage*.

During triage, a medical professional will evaluate and assign an incoming patient an ESI number, which stands for the *Emergency Severity Index*. The ESI scale goes from one to five. A one requires immediate life-saving treatment or resuscitation, whereas a five is classified as non-urgent.

On this scale, the little girl with the high temperature and seizures would be at least an ESI 2, or potentially even an ESI 1. She would be immediately given a room. The doctor would be interrupted – no matter whatever he or she was doing – and start treating the patient.

The woman with the chronic issue of blood would without a doubt be considered an ESI 5. On a busy day, she would potentially be required to wait in the waiting room for up to 20 hours. Once she was seen, it would be possible for her to receive nothing more than a screening and a referral back to her primary care physician without any treatment.

I asked my doctor friend, “So what if you chose to treat the 5 when a 1 was in the ER, and 1 died in the waiting room.” His response was, “Oh, I would definitely be sued.” But this is *exactly* what Jesus does.

Can you imagine being the father? Your daughter is dying, but then the world’s most famous healer shows up on the shore of your village. You come to him. You entreat him. He agrees to come to your home at once. You did what was right. You humbled yourself. But then this woman comes and ruins everything. Then, Jesus gets distracted with a seemingly non-urgent matter.

But Jesus isn’t working on Jairus’s timeline. Nor will he often work according to our preferences, schedules, or scales of urgency. What Jairus doesn’t know – what he couldn’t possibly know – is that Jesus has an even greater miracle in store.

Jesus could have told Jairus, “I want to do more than give your daughter healing; I want to give her resurrection.” But he doesn’t say that. Instead, he says, **“Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well” (Luke 8:50, ESV).**

Jesus is inviting Jairus into a deeper faith. Jairus is desperate. He is humble. And he believes that Jesus is capable. But Jesus is inviting Jairus, as he is inviting us, into a faith that is also patient, a faith that trusts God’s timing.

When we are desperate, and in a place of urgency, we can't guarantee that all circumstances will work out in the way we want to expect. But we can know that Jesus is powerful. We can know Jesus is good. We can rest in the fact that Jesus is in control even when our life feels out of control.

## 2.) A Daring Interrupter.

From Jairus's perspective, it would be easy to dehumanize the woman with the issue of blood. He has a life and death situation on his hands, and this woman cuts him off in traffic. How selfish and inconsiderate does she have to be?

But, as anyone who has suffered from a chronic ailment well knows, even an issue that is medically non-urgent can bring a person to the point of hopelessness.<sup>3</sup> This woman has suffered from a women's health issue for more than a decade, twelve years to be exact. She is in pain. She is embarrassed. And under the old Jewish law, she was considered ceremonially unclean and untouchable (see: Lev. 15:25–30).

But not only has she suffered from her disease. She suffered from the "cures" as well.<sup>4</sup> After trying doctor after doctor and probably a few natural remedies, the woman is now as poor as she is sick (Lk. 8:43).

She is on the outside looking in on the blessings of life that everyone else seems to experience, but not her. But then Jesus comes to town, and whether it was an act of inspiration or desperation, she draws near to Jesus. She doesn't want to be seen or noticed, so, she approaches him from behind and touches the hem of his garment.<sup>5</sup> And, suddenly, healing power is released from Jesus, and in that instant, she is healed (Lk. 8:44).

Jesus stops. He asks the question, "Who touched me?" Peter, stating what is seemingly obvious, says, "Jesus you're on a crowded street and everyone is pressing in on you. Literally, everyone is touching you!" (Lk. 8:45). But Jesus knows the woman is listening. He knows her heart is pounding. He knows she wants to go unnoticed (Lk. 8:47). But he sees her. He has seen her in her pain. He has seen her from before she was even born.

And Jesus wants her to know why she has been made whole. It is not superstition or a magic garment that has healed her.<sup>6</sup> Jesus wants her to know that was her faith in him that has brought about her salvation (οἰσωκέν): **"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:48, ESV).**

Like the woman, often when we begin to have faith, our ideas about God are often wildly unbiblical and riddled with error and misconceptions. Often our faith begins with simple selfish desperation, but even this imperfect faith can lead us to a genuine love Jesus that matures and grows as we walk with him in life.<sup>7</sup> But it is not the perfection of our faith that saves. It is the perfection of Jesus that saves.

Pastor Tim Keller says it this way: **"Imagine you're falling off a cliff, and sticking out of the cliff is a branch that is strong enough to hold you, but you don't know how strong it is. As you fall, you have just enough time to grab that branch. How much faith do you have in the branch for it to save you?"**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller. *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*. (New York: Dutton, 2011), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 235.

<sup>6</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 346.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 318.

*Must you be totally sure that it can save you? No, of course not. You only have to have enough faith to grab the branch. That's because it's not the quality of faith that saves you; it's the object of your faith. It doesn't matter how you feel about the branch; all that matters is the branch. And Jesus is the branch."<sup>8</sup>*

### **3.) A Dead Child.**

For a brief moment in a serious story, there is joy at a miraculous healing. But then, Jairus's servant enters the scene, and everything goes dark. He says to Jairus, *"Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more"* (Luke 8:49, ESV).

But Jesus is undeterred. He enters the home. What a few moments ago was an environment of fervent prayer and hope is now a funeral parlor. It is now a place of death and pain.

Jesus says, *"Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping"* (Luke 8:52, ESV). But the mourners cynically laugh (Lk. 8:53). They know the girl is dead.

Jesus takes only his three closest disciples – Peter, James, and John – along with the Jairus and his wife, and they enter into the girl's room. And without a magic spell or ritual or any fanfare of any kind, Jesus takes the little girl gently by the hand and says, *"Child, arise"* (Luke 8:54, ESV). And at once her spirit returned and rises from the dead.

For everyone else, the situation is hopeless. The story is over. The battle is lost. But to Jesus, resurrection is no more difficult than waking a child from a nap. Even death is not the end of the story.

What does the little girl bring to the table to teach us about faith? Nothing. And that is the point.

*Saving faith is a faith that recognizes that all we contribute to salvation is the death from which we need to be resurrected.*

The Bible says of all of us, *"you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked"* (Eph. 2:1). We were not good people in need of encouragement, we were not wounded, and in need of help, we were not sick, and in need of healing, we were not even dying and in the need of intervention – we were *dead* in sin. This is our condition outside of Christ. We cannot save ourselves. But it is only when we know that we are dead, that we can embrace the hope of grace. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9, ESV).

This means you have a problem you cannot fix by yourself. But this also means that no matter where you are in your journey, your story is not over. No matter hopeless your situation might feel, you are not hopeless! There is no depth to which the hand of Christ is not able to reach you and save you.

### **Conclusion**

Now, the account of this double-miracle makes it into three out of the four gospel accounts. Matthew tells this story. Mark tells this story. And, of course, Luke here tells this story.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller, 55.

But of all the gospel accounts Luke tells us something that none of the other gospels include. Luke tells us *the age of the little girl*. She is twelve years old (Lk. 8:42), which happens to be the exact length of time that the woman with the issue of blood has suffered her ailment (Lk. 8:43). In other words, it was in the same year that this little girl was born that another unrelated woman she began to suffer.

Initially, so much of this story looks like random happenstance. Jesus just happens to arrive in Jairus's village on the exact day that his daughter is dying. As he turns to go to Jairus's house, he just happens to walk down a road near this woman who had suffered all these years chronically. She just happens to reach out and touch him. He just happens to notice her, stop, and have a conversation with her at the exact moment Jairus's daughter dies. But could it be that the life journeys of this dying little girl and this poor suffering woman were destined by providence to intersect and culminate at this exact moment on this exact day? Could it be that what looked like random, pointless, and meaningless pain and anguish had a purpose that no one could have ever expected?

A God that is this powerful and this wise and this precise is worthy of more than our worship; he is worthy of our trust.

Recently, I was reminded how true this is when my friend Jon recounted the story of his family to our Community Group.

My wife and I have know Jon and Rebecca for more than a decade. They met one another at a church college ministry that I led several years ago. I witnessed them become friends. I witnessed them become more than friends. And I witnessed them the day they became husband and wife.

Like many young married couples, they looked forward to the day they could have children together. As their friends and siblings began to have welcome babies into the world, Jon and Rebecca would wait in the hospital waiting rooms to celebrate new life, all the while looking forward to the day when it would be their turn. But their turn never came.

After visiting trying various treatments and remedies and undergoing various medical evaluations, it was determined that it would not be medically possible for Jon to conceive children. Heartbroken and devastated, the couple began to pray and plead with the Lord, before feeling led to open their home to foster children in need with the intent to adopt.

Before they knew it, a precious two-year-old girl joined their home. She was the daughter of a single mom who went to prison, for heartbreaking reasons I won't say. And instantly, the couple fell in love. They knew that without the grief and pain they suffered from infertility that this precious little girl would have never joined their home. Then, less than a year later they welcomed twin newborns into their family.

Soon Rebecca was promoted at her job. The family bought a new house. And even though there were struggles with adult life and parenthood, life was going in the right direction.

But suddenly and unexpectedly, tragedy struck. Late one Saturday night as I was preparing to sleep and preach the next morning, I remember getting a frantic text from my friend. Rebecca was in the hospital undergoing emergency surgery. If the operation was successful, she was to be immediately life-flighted to a specialist at UT Southwestern Dallas.

After rushing to BSA, I remember stepping into the waiting area with my friend and his family. I remember witnessing his face as he weighed the horror of being a widower and a single dad of three

girls, ages three and under. We prayed together. And by the grace of God, Rebecca fought and came through.

The coming weeks would reveal, however, that she had a congenital issue that she never knew about; an issue that had she ever gotten pregnant would likely have ended her life.

In the many prior years filled with pain, anguish, and the questions of “God why?” God was with them all along. He was hearing every one of their prayers, and he was protecting them.

A few weeks ago their oldest little daughter turned six years old. The couple celebrated their daughter’s birthday along with their nephew who just happened to be born on the exact same day, at the exact same hospital nonetheless. And it was at this birthday party that Jon received a gift from his sister. The gift was a picture of Jon and Rebecca in the waiting room, waiting for their nephew to be born.

But what they could never have known all those years ago, is that on this day God had brought a man who couldn’t have children together with a woman who shouldn’t have children to the very hallway on the very day that a little girl who would soon need a home was being born, and that one day that girl would be their daughter.

Faith is not the opposite of reason. Faith is not wishful thinking. Faith is not perfect doctrine.

Faith is a desperate father who casts social dignity aside to plead to Jesus, but then patiently trusts Jesus’s power and promises over and above his circumstances. Faith is a daring woman who presses through the crowd to touch even the hem of a rabbi’s robe, and then publically acknowledges the saving power of Jesus. Faith is knowing that we bring nothing to Jesus but the need to be saved. Faith is trusting that God can be working for our good and his glory in the heartache of infertility, in the threat of death, and in the broken cry of unanswered prayers. Faith is trusting that even in the pain, God is moving.

When life feels out of control, God is in control. Time and time again, in Scripture and in life, Jesus has shown that he is faithful; that his wisdom is infinite; that his power is limitless. And one day – because of his life, death, and resurrection – he will wipe away all tears.

You can trust him. Do not fear; only believe. This is faith.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

- 1.) What comes to mind when you hear the word “faith”? How do people often misunderstand and misuse the term “faith”?*
- 2.) Have there been times when you have had to trust God, even when your circumstances looked hopeless and out of control? How do we cultivate trust in God in such times of trial?*
- 3.) Often times we can see God’s faithfulness when we look back on our life. Where have you seen the faithfulness of God in your story?*

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