

Series: **JESUS...INTERRUPTED!** - May 3, 2009

STOP THE AMBULANCE!

Mark 5:21-43

I. INTRO

- A. Late one afternoon in the sleepy town of North East, PA, someone from the church called to tell us that an ambulance had just been called to the home of Butch Schroeder—a 39 year old Dad who had lost his leg to cancer several years before.

-When the Senior Pastor and I arrived at their home, we had no idea what awaited us there. Butch's wife was frantic; Butch was laying on the floor gasping for breath—and the ambulance was no where in sight. As we moved Butch to the couch, he stopped breathing, his eyes became fixed—and bubble's drooled from his mouth.

We got down beside him and begged God to intervene. About 5 minutes later, the EMTs arrived—but they were about 5 minutes too late. They did CPR all the way to the hospital—to no avail. Butch was gone—leaving a 38 year old widow and 16 year old daughter.

-I thought about this incident—and I wondered, would they have been able to save Butch if, instead of taking 20 minutes to get there, it would've only taken 15? Or 10? Was it just driving time—or was one of them in the shower and missed the scanner call? Did they get interrupted—held up in traffic?

- B. Those who recorded the narratives of Jesus' life make it clear that there were times when it **seemed** that He was **too late**. In one case, two close friends of Jesus—sisters—were **very** upset with Him when Jesus arrived four days after the death of their brother. The message they communicated was, "**Where were you? If you had been here our brother would still be alive!**" In the story we're going to look at today, Jesus was late because of an interruption.

1. Have you ever prayed and asked God for help and been disappointed because He seems like He never even got the message? And you think, "Why? If someone *I* loved was in trouble like this—**nothing** could keep me from intervening! Why doesn't God step in to save a parent, or save a business, or save a marriage?"
2. There's a slight chance that this story from Jesus' life will raise more questions than it answers—but **maybe** it will give some insight into the heart of God when it comes to suffering and healing.

II. TWO STORIES...TOO PUBLIC...TOO LATE

- A. This story starts on the heels of last week's story about the storm and the madman and the pigs—and Jesus being asked get back in the boat with his disciples—and **please LEAVE!** The crowd he meets when He comes back **desperately** wants Him!

Let's read:

Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live." Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. (Mark 5:21-24 NLT)

1. I don't know how many of you remember "Baby Jessica"—the 18 month old girl who fell into an 8" well in October of 1987. In the 59 hours she spent in that well, while rescue workers dug through solid rock to save her life—she became **everybody's** baby. When she was finally rescued—church bells rang around the world! In fact, 20 years later [picture], she is still called Baby Jessica. -When a child's life is at stake—it grips **everyone's** heart.

Capernaum, where this takes place, was Peter and Andrew's home town—and Jesus apparently lived there for a while. So they all knew Jairus—the leader of the local synagogue—and probably knew his daughter. This situation was **personal!** Jesus was his **only** hope for saving her life.—and he **begs** Jesus to immediately come and heal her.

-And Jesus wastes no time; the two of them are moving like an ambulance moving through the crowded streets to get there in time.

2. That's where this story starts to get complicated. Let's read on:

A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition. (Mark 5:26-29 NLT)

-We aren't given a lot of detail here, but it's very important to understand that a condition like hers—ongoing menstrual bleeding—was socially devastating in a culture like hers. The Law of Moses was quite strict—that a women in her condition was ceremonially unclean.

And everything she **touched** was ceremonially unclean. A single touch from her complicated other people's lives; they had to bathe, wash all their clothes—and **they** would remain ceremonially unclean, like her, until evening.

-This woman's hemorrhaging had massive implications for her life, her marriage, her worship, shopping in the market—everything. **Everything!** There was not a single part of her life left untouched by this condition. Hers was a humiliating, isolating, crippling road to walk. Twelve years. **Twelve years!**

-What's interesting about this account is that there is more information given on her medical history than any other person Jesus came in contact with. She'd spent 12 years—and all her money—in a medical system that created **more** suffering instead of relieving it. Can anyone relate to that? It's funny. The other recorder of Jesus' life in the Bible is Luke, a physician—and, though he tells her story, he leaves this part out!

-This woman, caught in her misery, sneaks out into the streets when she hears about Jesus thinking, "Maybe if I can just **touch** his robe—it will end my nightmare. Think about this for just a minute. How would you feel if you knew the person next to you had the swine flu? You'd be a little wary—and a little ticked that they came into a public setting and put everyone at risk. Touching this woman who came to touch Jesus had the potential of **really** complicating a person's day in a world without bathtubs and washing machines and soap!

-What she does is really kind of risky. To reach out and touch a man—to potentially contaminate him—and for Him to have the power of God behind Him that Jesus did—**it could have huge consequences**. But her courage and her faith transformed her future. She was totally healed!

3. Then something puzzling happens. Jesus **stops the ambulance**—right in the middle of this emergency—to find out **who** touched him:

Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?" His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But he kept on looking around to see who had done it.

Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over." (Mark 5:30-34 NLT)

-This stop was obviously quite puzzling to Jesus' disciples—and probably to the Dad—and maybe to everyone who's there. This girl's at the point of death—and Jesus stops.

-In this crowd Jesus asks, **Who touched me?** The disciples are quite impatient with Jesus. **What do you MEAN, "who touched me?" Everybody touched you! Look at the CROWD around you, Jesus!** As Jesus waits for someone to come forward—the tension level sky-rockets. A little girl is dying—and a woman who's **not supposed to be in a crowd like this** has just reached out—and potentially contaminated Jesus, who can't **afford** to be contaminated where he's going!

Would Jesus, like everyone else, have to go and bathe, wash his clothes, and be ceremonially contaminated for the rest of the day? Did she, in essence, disable the ambulance?

-And in asking for her to identify herself, Jesus has stopped the procession and is broadcasting her humiliating problem: **Hello...Hello? Is this microphone working...Test, Test—1, 2, 3? Okay, who touched me? Please come forward and identify yourself—who touched me? I felt a release of power. I'm not moving on until I find out who it was.**

-Now, if **you** were this woman—how would you be feeling about now? “Is there a mouse hole somewhere, because as **small as I feel**, I think I could fit into it!” Even in a culture like ours of emotional flashers, people usually talk euphemistically about *female* problems. This would be both scary and embarrassing.

-But, actually, it's the **best** day of her life. She comes forward, trembling—and tells him why she touched his robe—and what happened, the warmth and grace and gentleness of his response **assured** her that God had not forgotten about her. And her private 12 year nightmare was over in a single act of reckless faith.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.” (Mark 5:30-34 NLT)

B. It's in this delay that this Dad's worst nightmare has come true. Let's read on:

While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, “Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now.” (Mark 5:36 NLT)

1. How many of you, if you were this guy, would be at least puzzle by Jesus—and maybe angry with this woman?
I'd be thinking, “She got what **she** wanted—why did you have to take all this time—and let my little girl die in the process. Now it's **too late! You could have SAVED HER LIFE! But now it's...too late. Too late. Too late.**

2. But **too late** isn't where this story ends. Let's read on:

But Jesus overheard them and said to Jairus, “Don't be afraid. Just have faith.” Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn't let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw much commotion and weeping and wailing.

He went inside and asked, “Why all this commotion and weeping? The child isn't dead; she's only asleep.”

The crowd laughed at him. But he made them all leave, and he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. Holding her hand, he said to her, “*Talitha koum*,” which means “Little girl, get up!”

And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat. (Mark 5:36-43 NLT)

-I'm sure that Jesus telling Jairus to not be afraid and have faith stopped the fear and agony and hopelessness he felt.

-But then this is Jesus. Son of God. Nothing in Heaven and on Earth can stop Him from doing what He wants to do. So Jesus stops the crowd and makes this encounter very private—only allowing Peter, James and John—and the girl's parents into the room. **Don't be afraid. Just have faith!** The professional mourners have all jammed into the house, wailing and doing a frantic dance of death. Jesus sends them out—and they're upset because, see, if the girl *is* only sleeping, **they don't get paid!** It's amazing how quickly they turn off their grief—and then *laugh* at Jesus!

-The next moments are astounding. This little girl is **clearly** dead—but Jesus tenderly her hand—and with a simple phrase, **Little girl, get up!** she does. No drama. No throwing his coat or waving of hands. Nothing. Jesus final request is very normal—kinda boring, really. “Give her something to eat!” And an **astounding** miracle has taken place!

3. There are some very interesting comparisons in these two stories that have been forever connected. One woman has an excruciating hemorrhage that finally stops after 12 years; a girl—who's only been around for those same 12 years gets sick and dies. **Both** are given new lives.

-Another interesting contrast is that Jesus goes to a great deal of trouble to bring one story out of the shadows and make it public—and keep the ending to a dramatic public story—private. The first story wouldn't have made headlines—it's too subjective, but the second, **PROPHET RAISES DEAD GIRL**—is hidden—leaving everyone to think, “I guess she **was** asleep!”

III. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S INTERVENTION

- A. These stories **both** raise questions as to how God does things, don't they? And the timing. And how—and **why** He allows things to go on the way they do. And, especially, **why** He waits to intervene. Sometimes until it seems too late.

-The common thing in both stories is desperation. Public desperation--**My little girl is DYING!** And **private** desperation—a woman **desperate** enough to break out of her secrecy and social isolation—for a chance to be healed. Pain, need brings desperation. Desperation makes us vulnerable. We're vulnerable to trying **anything** at **any** cost to find relief. And the common question that always arises is, **Why doesn't God DO something?**

1. The big question is—**What's the deal about healing?** Does God in fact still heal? If He does—how do you **make it happen?** Is there some special person you have to see, some special prayer you have to pray? And the frustrating

thing is that God doesn't have a single MO—method of operation. And, like we see in both stories—His timing is different than ours. It's a mystery—and God **will** not be put in a box or reduced to 10 easy steps to get what you want from Him.

2. When study supernatural healing—it gets even more confusing. Sometimes Jesus, God in flesh, seems to heal everyone in sight. And sometimes He seems to pick out **one person** who's in need—and touch them and nobody else. On one occasion, he told a man that he needed to stop sinning or something even worse would happen to him. In another case, he made it clear that sin had nothing to do with the person's physical problem.

-Sometimes Jesus healed people from afar—and sometimes His healing is **very** personal. Sometimes Jesus heals by not even saying a word, and on at least one occasion, He spit into the dirt, made some mud, smeared it on the guy's eyes and asked him to go and wash in a special pool. This sounds unsanitary—but one time Jesus spit on his finger—and then touched the tongue of a man who was mute.

-Sometimes the healing was instantaneous; at other times it happened after people left, or happened in two stages.

3. I'll tell where our greatest struggle lies. Sometimes God does not intervene—when we believe with all our hearts that He should. For example Jesus said that John the Baptist was the **greatest** prophet ever born. And yet John got thrown in prison by Herod for criticizing his marriage and in his discouragement began to doubt that Jesus was even the Messiah—and sent his disciples to make sure. Jesus never rescues John from prison—and John gets beheaded at the request of an exotic dancer at a big party Herod held. And you ask, **Why? WHY?**
4. I find it heart-breaking when vulnerable, desperate people are told by religious professionals that it's always God's will to heal them. And if they **don't** get healed—well, it's their fault. They either don't have enough faith, or there's sin in their lives. And I need to say—**that is simply not true!** And it's not what you see in the records of the Early Church in the book of Acts and the letters of Paul.

-For example, the early church created a **lot** of controversy—and two of it's leaders were imprisoned: James, brother of John, and Peter. The church prayed fervently. James was executed, and Peter was miraculously released from prison by angelic intervention. Was that because people's prayers were defective—or because Peter had more faith? There's **no** indication of that at all.

- Paul, an early church leader, does **all** the signs the accompany the apostles—which would healing, miracles and casting out demons. And yet in his letters he says that a close friend and companion, Epaphroditus, almost died; and that he

had to leave another traveling companion, Trophimus, behind in his travels because he was sick. He tells Timothy, his understudy, to **drink some wine** to solve some of the stomach problems he's having. Paul tells the Corinthian believers that he prayed three times for God to heal a medical problem he had. God's answer? **My GRACE is enough for you—my strength is made perfect in WEAKNESS!**

5. But that's not what we want to hear is it? We want to hear that, if we have enough faith, we'll have plenty of money, our kids will have healthy whole bodies—and God will automatically heal them if they ever get sick. We **want** to believe that, because we are followers of Jesus, we'll all live to be 90 or so and die in our sleep with a smile on our face.

-Does God heal? Of **course** He does! Is faith a part of that? Of **course** it is! Two comments on this. First, **faith** is confidence—trust in who Jesus Christ is and His love for you—and His willingness to get involved in your pain. Faith isn't some attitude you pump up by thinking positive thoughts and praying in a loud voice. Healing is a gift from a compassionate Father who dearly loves His children—not a reward, something God begrudgingly gives us when we beg and plead and push the right buttons.

-Secondly, I am convinced, personally, that it takes **greater** faith and **deeper** trust to love and serve God and believe in His goodness when the ambulance is late and God works differently than you want Him to and ask Him to.

6. I once did a review of all the healings that Jesus did in his ministry. What I found out was revealing. I've already told you some of my findings: Do you want to hear the rest in list form?

*No disease, injury or condition was off limits. Jesus healed **everything!**

*He never **once** paraded the people He healed in front of others—or even talked about it

*He never told people they weren't healed because they lacked faith

*Jesus never showed disrespect for the medical people or practices of his day

*Jesus healed people with a **lot** of faith—people with **some** faith, and people who didn't ask or expect to be healed

7. There **is**, however, one consistent thing you'll find in every single healing in the Bible. Want to know what it is? Healing was only a **temporary solution**. Whether it was a heart attack or an accident or an infection or an execution that took them, 100% of these people eventually died. Some of them, like this 12 year old girl, for the **second** time.

-Believe it or not—this is a very important perspective to have. **Every** gift, **every** answer, **every** healing, **every** good thing, **every** miracle—is temporary. The other side to that is that **every** illness, **every** crisis, **every** need, and **every** deficit—is **also** temporary—even though this stuff seems relentlessly eternal!

B. I know this talk raises a **lot** of questions, but I want to close by talking about three things, if you don't mind. I want to talk about secrecy and shame; I want to talk briefly about **delay**, and then I want to talk about asking for God's intervention.

1. This woman Jesus touches was enduring one of the very **worst** kinds of misery in life—something that takes you into hiding and locks you away. In her case it was an embarrassing physical condition that completely isolated her—really, from just about any social setting.

-Why would Jesus spend so much time—in a **crisis**—to bring her into the light when it could be so potentially humiliating? Why would He take the trouble to do this? And I realized how secrecy, over time, affects us. If she suffered with a private problem for 12 years that had kept her socially isolated—a secret healing wouldn't automatically end the fear and shame her condition had created. Jesus wanted to make sure that she could **openly** celebrate the end of a 12 year ordeal in a way that would truly set her free—socially, emotionally, spiritually—in **every** way.

-For some reason, we North Americans are usually **very** secretive about the hurting, messy sides to our lives. Oh, we don't mind people knowing about our wins and our successes and our **brilliant** children, but we keep our wounds and difficulties—the messy part of our lives **behind** the curtain. Because, see, to be **vulnerable**, to admit that you're **struggling** is not cool. People might take advantage of you—think they're **better** than you. So, we tend to be just like this woman. We'd rather sneak through the crowd and get healed—and sneak away unnoticed.

-And when we do that—we likely miss the power of finding out that people really do love us. That it's okay to humble ourselves—and sometimes be small and weak—and reach out for others. And we **don't** actually contaminate them—they help us find healing and encouragement and strength. We find that life is a lot easier when you allow people into your mess. Cause, see, **they** live in messes too. Everyone has one.

-I've told you about the time as a kid when I got a brushburn on my thigh—was too ashamed to pull down my pants in front of the nurse—so hid it with a band aid. I ended up with a raging infect that ruined a whole summer. There are some things, some secrets, that if you refuse to expose them to the light—just get worse. There are some secrets and some shameful areas, friends, where if you don't reach out and ask for help, it will just get worse and leave you ashamed and alone and isolated—when you **could** be free. Would you be willing to let God in? Would you be willing to let light in? And love. And truth?

2. There are some of you this morning who are in pain. "Why is God delaying? I've **begged** for help—and I'm not hearing a thing. Where **is** He?" And some of you might say, "Frankly, I've just given up—it's too late. It's **too late!** It's too late for the dream I had. It's too late for a relationship that died. It's too late for my business; it's too late to change. It's too late.

-And I need to let you know this: I don't **get** the delay—why Heaven **seems** silent to the desperate prayers we pray. I don't understand why someone get's their prayer for a parking space answered—and someone's prayer in a crisis **doesn't** get answered. I don't get it at all.

-I **do** know God. He is more compassionate and wise--and more engaged in his children's lives than the best parent who has ever lived. And you need to know this about the struggle or disability or problem that you're facing: **He didn't cause it!** It is the result of living in a world that has been spoiled by millennia of rebellion and sin. Because of Jesus and His Kingdom, **death** and **suffering** and **trouble** do not have the last word! Jesus does.

-I think God would want you to know that He works through medicine and physicians and researchers. I think God would want you to know that your suffering is **not** wasted—**ever!** All through the Bible, God tells us what He is solidly at work in us in profound ways—right in our suffering. In fact, it would appear that God uses suffering **more** than healing to do His work. Even though we hate it. See, what He does in our souls lasts forever; what He does in our bodies and through our wins and successes only lasts a few years. The cross proves that God can take the very worst of human experience and bring ultimate good out of it.

-God is **always** working. Remember what God said to Paul about his suffering?

“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”
(2 Corinthians 12:9a NLT)

-Here's the deal; when you pray, I can guarantee you that one of two things will happen. God will either heal you—or **all the grace and power you need to endure.**

Sometimes what happens, when things don't go our way, we assume God doesn't care, doesn't hear, or isn't interested—and we respond by defecting—turning away from Him and the people who would walk with us and love us. And we **miss** the comfort He offers. So, whatever happens—**stay in the game!** Okay?

3. The Bible's most specific teaching on healing is very simple to understand—and follow. Let me read it for you:

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. (James 5:13-15 NLT)

-There really aren't a whole lot of qualifications here in this passage. God is obviously still healing people. And if you want the touch of God—ask! But the deal in this passage is that it happens like everything else in God's community called simply, **the Church**.

It happens by engaging others. Asking for their prayers and for their anointing. That's a humbling thing sometimes—but that's the deal. If there's any sin involved—it will be forgiven in that moment of grace.

-So—you ask—and then you let God be God and either heal you—or give you grace and make his power complete in the weakness you feel. So. Will you just **ask?** James says earlier in his letter, "You don't **have** because you don't **ask!**" Would you reach out to Him today? We're prepared to anoint people for healing right now.

-And this is a community thing, friends. We are called, not just to **pray** for people in need—but **walk** with them; **serve** them; **help** them! Will you do that?