

Linking Jairus' Daughter, The Hemorrhaging Woman, and Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

Lauren Braswell

Faculty Mentor: John G. Cook, PhD

Humanities Department/Religion and Philosophy Program

On the surface, the Markan sandwich of Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman can be seen as having little to nothing in common. Jesus could also be seen as having no direct connection to the women, but that is far from the truth. Because of the Mosaic Law and the miracles, Jairus's daughter, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jesus are all linked by gender, name, number, blood, and social status.

Jairus's daughter

Jesus went to the opposite shoreline and a large crowd was following him. Jairus, a synagogue leader, asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter, and Jesus went with him. The crowd that had gathered around Jesus was pushing on him (Mark 5:21-24).

While Jesus was interacting with the hemorrhaging woman, people came from Jairus's house and told him that his daughter had died. They asked, "Why bother the teacher any longer?" Jesus tells Jairus to not be afraid and to simply believe. At the same time, Peter, James, and John were the only three who were allowed to follow Jesus.

When they arrived at the house, Jesus said that the little girl was asleep. The people in the house laughed at him, and Jesus cast them out of the house. Being followed by the girl's parents and the three disciples, he went into the house. He took her by the hand and told her, "*Talitha koum!*" ("Little girl, I say to you, get up!") The twelve-year old girl woke up, and Jesus told her parents to feed her. He also told them not to tell anyone (Mark 5: 35-43).

"A synagogue official was an eminent layman whose duties included oversight of the synagogue's activities and finances. [. . .] The request that Jesus lays [puts hands on her] reflects the Jewish sense of the capacity of the human body to mediate God's grace and power" (Healy 105). Jairus was a respected member of society and a leader of a congregation like Jesus was, so he "[had] enough prestige to ask Jesus to come to his house, and his presumption [was] not disappointed, for Jesus [went] with him" (Edwards 204).

Although Mark does not mention Jairus's feelings at that moment, losing a child feels like a pit full of despair, grief, regret, and unanswered questions. The people who come from Jairus's house have no faith or hope, and they are

willingly (or unwillingly) trying to make Jairus feel the same way. Jesus tells Jairus not to be afraid. "The exhortation [is] both an expression of consolation and a call for courage" (Collins 284-285). It is also a call to faith. The people who ridicule Jesus are put out because if there is a lack of faith, then Jesus cannot do miracles. Also, "it is not appropriate that divine power be seen at work" (Collins 285).

For his followers, "Jesus is calling his listeners to recognize that death is not the ultimate end of human life; it is only a temporary phase from which all will be awakened at the resurrection" (Healy 109). He also allows for his most trusted disciples—Peter, James, and John—to follow him. "Their presence here is a signal that what is about to happen is another key moment in Jesus' mission, giving a glimpse of his divine identity" (Healy 109).

The parents and those who are in the house are considered unclean, according to the book of Numbers. "This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days." In the Old Testament, the dwelling is called a tent because the Israelites were migrating. In the New Testament, a house can also be considered a tent because it is a dwelling place. By Jewish standards, Jesus and his closest apostles are also considered unclean.

Mark correctly translates "*Talitha koum!*" from Aramaic. BDAG (988) also states that "*Talitha*" means "girl, little girl" and "*koum*" means "stand up" (563). Collins agrees with this, stating the following: "[Jesus] also said to her *ταλιθα κουμ* ("*Talitha koum*"), an Aramaic phrase that the evangelist translates as "Girl, I say to you, wake up!" (Collins 285).

The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (CAL), according to John Cook, professor of Religion and Philosophy at LaGrange College, lists two meanings for the masculine version of "*Talitha*": "ṭly, ṭly' (ṭlē, ṭalyā) n.m. lamb (m.); youth." Lamb (*talyā*) is masculine (CAL) and therefore would mean "male lamb." The CAL has this lemma for the precise word Jesus uses: "ṭlyh, ṭlyt' (ṭalyā, ṭlītā) n.f. young girl" and does not give any examples where the feminine form of the noun means "lamb." The feminine form, consequently, occurs only with the meaning "young girl" in

Aramaic. Black states: "'Talitha koum,' which means 'Little girl [literally, 'little lamb'], get up!'" (5:41) is one of the Semitic expressions that Mark translates, presumably because they would otherwise not be understood" (Black 144). However, since the feminine form means "young girl" only in extant Aramaic texts, Black is almost certainly incorrect in his claim that the term "Talitha" means literally "little lamb."

There is a thesis that the words "*Talitha koum!*" are magical incantations.

Certainly, the use of foreign words was a common feature of magical incantations, and it is entirely possible that Mark's primary audience would have interpreted Jesus' healing of the girl as magic, rather than miracle. We may speculate that Mark's inclusion of the Aramaic phrase was part of his rhetoric, his intention being to call attention to the magical possibilities, and then to expose the secret and destroy the magic power of the word by offering a translation. He thus affirms that Jesus' power is miracle and not magic in the same way as he authenticates the power of miracle over medicine in the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman. On medicine, miracle and magic as competing modes of healing in Judaism and the traditions of the late Hellenistic world [...] (Haber 188)

"It is noteworthy, however, that the only words of Jesus that the evangelist gives in Aramaic in this context are the powerful words by which, in part, Jesus raised the girl from the dead" (Collins 285).

For this thesis, there are pros and cons. One pro is that it provides insight into the life of first-century Israel. Even though the official religion was Judaism, magic was still a great part of life in secret. There are two belief systems: Judaism and the monotheistic God; and magical beliefs that comprised many gods and goddesses. There were people who had secret amulets and small idols in their homes, and for "*Talitha koum!*" to be considered a magical incantation supports the history.

Another pro is that the New Testament was written in Greek, not Aramaic. Aramaic can be considered a foreign language by those who read the New Testament. Haber stated that "the use of foreign words was a common feature of magical incantations," so any Aramaic word or phrase that is used in Scripture is considered a magical incantation.

One con is that in first-century Israel, Jesus would have spoken Aramaic in daily life. In other parts of Scripture, Jesus uses Aramaic phrases such as "*Ephphatha*" (Mark 7:34), "*Abba*" (Mark 14:36), "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34), and "*Raqa*" (Matthew 5:22). Collins states the following: "One can argue that, since Jesus was an Aramaic speaker, there is nothing unusual in the evangelist quoting his speech in Aramaic here" (Collins 285).

It would be considered ordinary if Jesus used "*Talitha koum!*" to tell the little girl to rise. Although the words were transliterated rather than translated, that does not make them magical incantations. If they are considered magical, then that would shake Christianity's beliefs in miracles and Jesus' divinity. To construct Jesus as a magician would undermine his authority.

Jesus shows a bit of empathy and compassion for the child by telling her parents to give her something to eat. He may also be showing that she is not a "revenant" (Black 145) by telling her parents to feed her. Jesus also tells them not to tell anyone about what has happened, due to his messianic secret and for the privacy of the family. "A rumor that he has raised a dead child to life could lead to a superficial acclaim that would only hinder the understanding of his messiahship" (Healy 110). "The command to silence follows naturally enough on the amazement of the witnesses: the overwhelmingly impressive event should not be spoken about" (Collins 286).

The hemorrhaging woman

There was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, and she had gone to multiple doctors. She spent everything she had, and her condition had gotten worse. Seeing Jesus, she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." She touched his cloak, and she was healed.

Knowing that his power left him, Jesus looked around and asked who touched him. No one knew, and his disciples asked, "You can see the people crowding against you, [. . .] and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5:25-31). Not listening to the disciples, Jesus kept looking around, and the woman fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:32-34).

The hemorrhaging woman is desperate and close to becoming a beggar and death, if not already there. Her faith, however, allows her to be in a crowd that has deemed her unclean, and she has the courage to touch Jesus. "The woman's faith forms the center of the sandwich and is the key to its interpretation. Through her, Mark shows how faith in Jesus can transform fear and despair into hope and salvation" (Edwards 205).

When Jesus asks who touched him, she is terrified because she had made him ritually unclean. Being rebuked by him in public means that she will never be allowed into society again. Touching Jesus is her last chance to become healthy, and she earns her place in society by being faithful.

Jairus's daughter, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jesus

Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman are linked by gender, name, number, blood, and social status. Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman are both female and are called by their roles in society. Because Jairus is a prominent member in the community, Jairus's daughter

can be considered respected in the community. The hemorrhaging woman is defined by her problem that cements her role in society. "Both women are called daughter. . ." (Baert 666).

Both women are linked by number. "The girl faces the beginning of her menses, while the woman is healed through the stopping of the flood" (Baert 665). Because Jairus's daughter was twelve years old, she was on the verge of being seen as or considered a woman. In Jewish society, a young girl is considered an adult once she is twelve years old. "With regard to a girl who is eleven years and one day old, her vows are examined to ascertain whether she is aware of the meaning of her vow and in Whose name she vowed. Once she is twelve years old and has grown two pubic hairs, which is a sign of adulthood, even without examination her vows are in effect. And one examines her vows throughout the entire twelfth year until her twelfth birthday" (*Mishnah Niddah* 5:6).

The hemorrhaging woman has been bleeding for twelve years and was subject to Levitical law. A "woman who has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period" will be considered unclean. Any person or thing she touches will be considered "unclean until evening" (Leviticus 15:25).

It is also quite possible that she became menopausal. "If the latter interpretation is correct, it may have eschatological connotations: the human being of the new age or the kingdom of God is beyond sexuality" (Collins 282).

They are considered societal outcasts, "one because of death, the other because of menstruation" (Baert 666). Being raised from the dead, Jairus's daughter is unclean because, if we are being technical, she was in an unclean house that held a dead person. She has to become ritually clean in order to live a normal life. "Whereas those with corpse contamination would only be temporarily excluded from the community, others with ongoing symptoms of scale disease or genital efflux could be separated from community and family indefinitely, and forced to live out their lives in isolation on the edge of society" (Haber 176-177). Through Jesus, both women regained their places back into the society.

Jesus is linked to both women by gender, name, number, blood, and social status. Jesus is a Jewish man who, being the firstborn son, is the head of the household because Joseph has passed away (according to tradition). He is also seen as the provider and is the leader of a congregation. He can be seen as the head of a family who takes care of men, women, and children who believe in him and need his help.

Like Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus is not called by his name. Instead, he is referred to as "teacher" (Mark 5:35). He is also an instructor, and this is seen when he instructs the parents to feed their daughter and to not tell anyone. He also instructs the hemorrhaging woman to "[g]o in peace and be freed from [her] suffering" (Mark 5:34). His words to the latter are "grounded in Jewish history

tradition [because] these words seem oddly placed and redundant. [. . .] The statement is best understood against the background of Jewish purity and its distinction It is only after [the Levitical law's seven days] that a woman is considered completely healed from her disease and thereby undergoes the purification procedure" (Haber 184, 185).

The number twelve holds significance for Jesus. The number twelve can "refer to the twelve tribes of Israel" (Baert 665). When Jesus was twelve years old, Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem for Passover. He was found three days later in the Temple and was with the teachers (Luke 3:41-42, 46). Jesus could have been considered a man by Jewish standards and might have known that Jairus's daughter needed more time to learn about God and Scripture.

Jesus is linked by blood because he predicts the Passion in the upcoming chapters of Mark. He, like Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman, will experience death in both societal and literal terms. During the Passion, the crowds that followed him (societal) turn against Jesus, and he dies a bloody, painful death (literal).

Jesus is made an outcast three times. Firstly, he is made ritually unclean by the hemorrhaging woman because she has touched his cloak. Secondly, Jesus becomes ritually unclean by going into a house with a corpse in it. Jesus could have raised the child from outside the home, but he goes inside in order to "hide" his power from the never-ending crowds and those who lack faith.

Third, he becomes ritually unclean when he takes the girl's hand. "Whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. [. . .] If they fail to purify themselves [on the third and seventh days] after touching a human corpse, they defile the LORD's tabernacle. They must be cut off from Israel" (Numbers 19:11, 13). That means that Jesus would have to be considered unclean for seven days. In another way, Jesus can be seen as cutting himself off from Israel. In Jesus' time, Israel was more secular than religious because it was all about laws and tradition rather than faith.

Conclusion

The Markan sandwich of Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman needs to be understood as not just two different miracles that have no relation to one another. They are equally important and necessary in order for the sandwich to work. Because the women were linked to Jesus by gender, name, number, blood, and social status, the reader can see how Jesus was human. It allows us to know that ordinary people can be made great through Jesus.

Bibliography

Baert, Barbara, et al. "An Issue of Blood: The Healing of the Woman with the Haemorrhage (Mark 5.24B-34; Luke 8.42B-48; Matthew 9.19-22) in Early Medieval Visual Culture." *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol.

- 51, no. 3, 2012, pp. 663–681. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41653858. Accessed 4 Apr 2021.
- Black, C. Clifton. *Mark* Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2011. Print.
- Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*. <http://cal.huc.edu> Accessed 6 May 2021.
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. *Mark: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. Print.
- Cook, John Granger. Lecture at Callaway Science Building. 5 March 2021.
- Danker, Frederick William and Walter Bauer. “κουμ” A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG]. 3rd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.
- Danker, Frederick William and Walter Bauer. “ταλιθα” A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG]. 3rd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.
- Edwards, James R. “Markan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives.” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1989, pp. 193–216. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1560460. Accessed 20 Feb. 2021.
- Haber, Susan. “A Woman’s Touch: Feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5.24-34.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 26, no. 2, Dec. 2003, pp. 171–192. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001382277&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 4 Apr 2021.
- Healy, Mary. *The Gospel of Mark*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008. Print.
- “Mark 5” *Bible Hub*. n.d. Accessed 11 Feb 2021 <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/mark/5.htm>
- “Mark 5” *Bible Gateway*. n.d. Accessed 12 Apr 2021 Mark 5 NIV - Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man - Bible Gateway
- “Mishnah Niddah 5:6” *Sefaria*. Accessed 26 Feb 2021 https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Niddah.5.6?lang=bi