

“Worthy of Attention”

Rev. Dr. Scott Paczkowski

My name is Jairus. I am an extremely wealthy and powerful figure in Israel. I am the leader of the synagogue and people understand that I have earned what I have. I have the right to demand from *anyone* what I need, and I feel so incredibly blessed in my life to have *earned* everything that I have received.

The only real passion and joy in my life is the day that my little girl was born. Something happens to a father when a little girl is brought into this world. I looked at her and I felt such joy and a little bit of fear, because I have been able to control everything in my life and I was able to make anything work.

But, I had a feeling, on the day I looked into those little eyes, that I was out of my league; that I couldn't fix every little need that this little darling was going to have. So, as I moved forward in faith and I watched her grow, I tried to lay everything out to so it would be just perfect for her. She had everything she ever wanted, because I could provide for her anything she needed and I was so proud of her, and she was such a *good* little girl. I was amazed at the feelings she brought out in me. I could be kind of harsh, demanding and a little temperamental sometimes, but when I saw her it was such a joy. And, there was no greater feeling than, when I would come through that door at the end of a hard-working day, and she would run up and yelling, “Abba, Abba!” and grab my leg and hug me. Everyone else in my life cared for me, I think, because they needed something from me, except her.

And, as she grew, I mourned - because she was just about to the age where she would need to find a husband. She was 12, and I was worried that pretty soon she would have to be given to a man to be his wife, and I was kind of coming to terms with what it would be to lose my little girl, and hopefully gain another child in my life.

Then, all of a sudden, one day my wife and I went into her room. You see, even at 12, she was still a little girl in many ways. We were lying on the mat together, sleeping, and we were used to her charging in and jumping on the mat, and waking us up, every single morning. I tell you it was cute when she was six, but it got to be a little painful by the time she was 12. But, this particular morning, she didn't come in, so my wife and I looked at each other, and wondered what in the world was going on. She always woke up before we did.

We went into her little area - her room - and she was still lying on her mat, My wife dove down and checked her forehead. She was hot - hot as coals. We listened and her voice was gurgly and raspy, all at the same time. We sent one of the servants out to get the physician and the physician came back. He did tests and couldn't find a single thing he could do. So, he went and got another physician.

Two different physicians had looked at our little one. The second one turned to me and said, “She is in God's hands now,” and [I felt] that feeling of your heart and throat dropping into

the bottom of your belly, and the anger and the hopelessness, all twisting in your body at the same time.

I've *always* been able to do whatever I needed to do to *fix* it and, by *God*, I was going to make sure I fixed this as well. She wasn't going to go down; but what to do? I had called the very best physicians because *I* could *afford* to pay for anything she needed, and that wasn't enough.

Then I remembered I had heard some of the servants and some of the people in the synagogue talking about this itinerate preacher who had gone around and was doing the most incredible healings - exorcisms for people who had just been off the wall - who had been healed and restored. People who couldn't walk, brought in through a thatched roof - and he healed them - and they walked out of that room. People standing in line for hours to receive healing, and each and every one of them did.

I always thought it was kind of a hoax. I figured if somebody wanted something bad enough, they could fool themselves into the idea that they were healed. But, it couldn't really be real. Then I sat there and I thought, "God's hands, now." I don't have any other choices. I'm willing to do anything, even swallow my pride and, if I have to, even beg.

So, I threw my traveling cloak over my shoulders, and got my traveling sandals, and I went looking. I went to the synagogue, first, and I asked if anybody had heard where this guy was. Finally, [after] about the fourth or fifth person I asked, [I] heard where he might be. I gathered a couple of servants to go with me, so I would be safe, and we went out looking. Sure enough, we found him right along the Sea of Galilee hopping out of the boat. It looked as if he was actually trying to avoid the crowds that had gathered around him.

They were following him along the shore while he was still out in the boat, and I thought to myself, "Maybe there is something to this. That many people would not waste their time following along the shoreline, unless there was something to this."

I pushed everyone out of the way. They were just peasants. I had a right to go first. My servants helped. We pushed everyone else out of the way, and I said to Jesus, "I will even beg you, and get down on my knees if I have to, but please come with me and save my daughter." He looked at me and, in that moment, he said, "All right." I was so relieved, There was still a part of me that said, "I'm going to throttle that man if he is just fooling us, if he is just getting gullible peoples' hopes up. He had better heal her."

So we started off and if that *stupid* crowd wasn't following us. It was like they were banging into us! I don't like people pushing on me and getting around me, and they wouldn't leave us alone.

My servants tried to keep them at bay. I hollared at them; but Jesus was just so calm. He just walked along, but it was just so confining. Then all of a sudden he stopped. He turned around and he said, "Who touched me?" And I heard his own Disciples saying to him, "What are you talking about, man? We are all being touched. They are banging in on us in all directions." I almost chuckled at that one: "Who touched me?" And he wouldn't let it go.

He stopped and he waited for someone to come up and admit they had touched him. I saw people around him kind of looking at themselves, like, "What did I do?" Then it was like the sea parted and this one pathetic-looking woman with dirty, old clothes came up and started talking to him about how she'd needed to be healed, and I am sitting here thinking, "Come on, man. She is not worth it. My child is in trouble. She is just this filthy, little peasant. Get moving." I tried to be polite about it because I wanted him to get there and deal with this - and you never know about these itinerate preachers anyway. They can be obnoxious and have other goals, and not know the priorities the way they should be. And I said, "Excuse me. We need to get going. My daughter is in trouble."

And, it was as if he didn't even hear me. I am *so* angry, and I am trying *so* hard to hold back, not popping him one, and he sat there and he listened to her. [He] treated her with respect and dignity, when my daughter is dying. He listened to her until she had said everything she needed to say. Then he got down right next to her [and] touched her. You know what worried me when he touched her, he became ritually unclean for seven days - that ritual uncleanliness was going to mean that God wouldn't bless him to heal my daughter. If he was unclean, how could he *spiritually* heal her? How *dare* he *waste* his healing on that filthy woman?

Finally they get done. He gets up and turns to go heal the girl he should have been healing all along, and up come three of my servants. I will never forget it. They said, "She's dead." The only reason I didn't deck Jesus right there, is because he wouldn't have made it anyway. My God! If we had been five steps from the door and they had said it was too late, I would have killed him myself. But, he said, "Come on," and we walked.

I was in such a state of shock and denial, I just walked. I couldn't say anything or do anything. I just walked along until we arrived home. I heard from a distance everyone wailing and crying. I was so numb, I couldn't cry with them. The little one who hugged my leg, and called me, "Abba," was gone.

I looked at Jesus, and he didn't say a word - he didn't even change expression. What in the world is that guy thinking? I thought he was a religious man. Doesn't he have any sense, or an ounce of compassion? And then, he has the gall to say, "She is only sleeping." That was horrible. Why would you say something like that, when we know she is dead. We had physicians - two physicians - in that room who had determined she was dead. Why would you even attempt to get anyone's hopes up?

He went in - made my wife and I go in with him. I guess I was in such shock, I didn't even fight it. I just went in to prove him wrong and to see my little darling one last time. He told her to "get up." In that moment my life changed forever. She stood up.

She looked at me and said, "Abba," and I just started to cry. He had done it - but not fixed in exorcism, who helped some guy who was filled with demons; not some woman who was filled with hemorrhages; but, someone who had actually *died*: my little girl, and made her well again,

I think I passed out, because when I came to I was on the floor and I looked up and she was right there. I looked around for Jesus and he was already gone. I hugged her with all my heart. She tried to squirm away. I was squeezing a little too tight. I ran over to the corner

and I knelt down, and I prayed. First, I thanked God for giving her back to me. Then I thought about what Jesus had done and I offered a prayer of confession, because I had been the jerk in the room. I had treated everyone else like they were not worthy or acceptable, and that everything was about me and my little girl. I didn't care about another single person. Then I thanked God that Jesus healed her in spite of me. I promised God, in that moment, that I would never again be so arrogant; and, that I would be as loving, as forgiving and caring as Jesus had been to me and to that dear woman that he had healed on the way.

I hope that God will forgive me and I hope that, for the rest of my life, I will see other people as equals, and as worthy, and I hope that you will, too, because God came for the least of us, and we have an obligation to love each person the way Jesus did, from the richest to the poorest, and for those who had the least, to those who have the most. When we do that, you and I will be Christ-like in our love, and our devotion, and in our care.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.