

HOW TO BE PRO-LIFE Mark 3:3-5; 5:33-42; 10:14-16

So many times when we hear the term “pro-life” the immediate subject we think about is the tragedy and travesty of abortion. That **is** a critical aspect of the overall issue and certainly is an aspect that divides people. The larger scope of being pro-life encompasses a very wide range of considerations and concerns that impact all kinds of people all over the world. Walter Scott is quoted as saying

"The race of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other. We cannot exist without mutual help. All therefore that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellow men: and no one who has the power of granting can refuse it without guilt."

Maybe one question that we should consider is this: Can we be “pro-life” without being “proactive?” What good does it do for us to be pro-life if all that happens is that we think it is the right attitude and that we agree that people are important? Could we say that “faith without feet is futile?” Many times people are guilty of pleading ignorance about the need. We can start a list of those whose lives are at risk (either literally or figuratively):

Homeless, Elderly, Disabled, Unproductive, Uneducated, Mentally challenged, Poor, Ethnically different, Sexually perverted, Unborn, Earthquake victims, Abused children, etc.

Once we’ve identified those who need help, then we have to ask the question of how do we put “feet” on our belief that we really should help each other? The life and work of Jesus show us how He did it. Also, He told His disciple that we would do greater works than He did because He was going to the Father and would send the Holy Spirit to be in us.

We will be looking at four areas of concerns and will try to learn from “what Jesus did” as to how **we** can make a difference. There are concerns related to those with special challenges or disabilities (3:3-5), people with chronic problems (5:33-34); those facing serious illness (5:35-42), and people and their children (10:14-16).

Concern for People with Special Needs

³ He said to the man with the withered hand, “**Get up and come forward!**” ⁴ And He said to them, “**Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?**” But they kept silent. ⁵ After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, “**Stretch out your hand.**” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. Mark 3:3-5 (NASB95)

The issue at hand in this situation is NOT if you have the ability or faith for a healing miracle to take place. In most situations you encounter where there are needs, you DO have the ability to do something to help the person or the situation. So often, in spite of our ability to do something we choose to not do anything. Can we be pro-life without being proactive?

Perhaps what we can learn from what Jesus did would be related to overcoming the barriers that stand in our way of doing the “whatever” we have the ability to do. What were the issues that Jesus encountered in this situation that Mark passed on to us?

Where did this happen? We find in the first part of this chapter, this occurred in the synagogue. Is the synagogue an appropriate place for someone with a special need to find help? That would be like asking if the church would be an appropriate place to help a person with special needs. The answer is obviously “YES!” Since the answer is “yes,” what might a person do to help someone with a special need? We could brainstorm and come up with a long list of possibilities such as hold a door open, give up your seat, offer to help in the home, and pray for healing. Which ones of these are the most likely and the least likely we would find people doing? Why do you think that we are more likely to hold a door and give up our seat than to

help in the home or pray for the person to be healed? Could it have something to do with being reactive versus proactive?

When did this event recorded by Mark happen? It was on the Sabbath. That would raise a question as to whether there are inappropriate times to help a person. In the mind of the Pharisees, it was a question of the legality of the timing. Jesus addressed this directly with a question about doing good or doing evil or harm on the Sabbath. Can we conclude from this question that if we see a need and have the ability to help and we choose not to help that we are in effect, doing harm or evil? This is pretty close to what James wrote in 4:17.

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

The Scribes and Pharisees were looking for something that would give them a reason to accused Jesus of committing a sin. Jesus knew this and He could have decided that it was important to avoid criticism and, therefore, He would have chosen to do nothing. How often does “avoiding criticism” stand in the way of doing what we know we ought to do? It is good to “avoid criticism” if it keeps us from doing something bad, however, this concern should not be a hindrance to doing what is right. It may help to remember that “criticism leveled against us for doing the right thing” is probably the best “evidence” we have that we are walking in God’s will.

When the critics would not answer the question if it was legal to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath, Jesus was angered and saddened because their refusal to be responsive and even think about the question and let it make a difference in their lives. Most of the common people there in the synagogue that day would not dare answer His question because they were intimidated by the presence of the so-called experts - the Scribes and Pharisees. These presumed to have some “authority” by reason of their supposed learning. However, Jesus was not intimidated by their credentials. How often do we let someone who has been to seminary keep us from acting in childlike faith by simply believing and acting on what the word of God says?

Concern for People with Chronic Problems

³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. ³⁴ And He said to her, “**Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.**” Mark 5:33-34 (NASB95)

We have emphasized the importance of our taking the initiative in being helpful to other people. However, in this account where Jesus was trying to walk down the street to help someone else, this woman took initiative herself and approached Jesus (in faith) and believed that just touching His garment would provide the help she was seeking.

Why did she think that would do any good? She had seen evidence of the help others had received from Jesus and she had faith that the power of God was there and it could be accessed by faith. How can the account of this encounter be applied to our relationships with other people as it relates to being pro-life?

Do you think that people who have observed you and your faith walk actually have confidence to believe that if they touched you or if you touched them or even prayed for them that it would make any difference in a need they might have? Has anyone ever come to you with such a request? That is somewhat of a “loaded” question. In actual practice, people ask us (as a church body) to pray for their needs and this happens many times during the week. They are, in effect, reaching out to touch us, believing that our prayers will make a difference.

The other side of this story is not that we would be the one whom others would reach out to touch, BUT are we willing to reach out in faith to God when we have a chronic problem that needs healing? Would we be willing to ask others to pray for us when we have such needs?

Concern for People Facing Serious Illness

³⁵ While He was still speaking, they came from the *house of* the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?” ³⁶ But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid *any longer, only believe.*” ³⁷ And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and *people* loudly weeping and wailing. ³⁹ And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.” ⁴⁰ They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child’s father and mother and His own companions, and entered *the room* where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). ⁴² Immediately the girl got up and *began* to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. Mark 5:35-42 (NASB95)

This account began much earlier in the chapter and the incident of the woman who had the bleeding disease happened as Jesus was on his way to the house of the Jairus, the synagogue official.

When a parent has a sick child and that sickness will not respond to treatment, then there seems to be an overwhelming sense of helplessness because you can’t do anything. When such a sickness progresses to the point that it appears that death will be the outcome, then hopelessness takes over. There are likely to be many other feelings such as anger and guilt that a parent feels in such a situation. Jairus was a leader in his community and was likely to have been a person who could have afforded a physician and whatever medicines were available then and none of these could help his daughter's condition. Humanly speaking, this was a hopeless situation. But Jesus was in that area and Jairus had refused to abandon hope. Jairus had heard about the miraculous healings Jesus was doing and this news gave him hope that some help could be found. Jairus realize that unless Jesus could or would help that all hope was gone. It was a desperate situation. We see the desperation in Jairus as he fell down before Jesus begging Him to come to his house.

This was a period of time in the ministry of Jesus when He was still popular and there were large crowds that gathered wherever He went. When Jairus came to Jesus there was a large crowd there pressing in on Jesus. Apparently, the entire crowd was going with Jesus and the disciples as they went toward Jairus' house.

Immediately after Jesus’ encounter with the woman who was healed when she touched His robe, there came the devastating news that Jairus’ daughter was dead. Jairus had faith to believe that Jesus could help with the difficult situation of his daughter’s sickness. Would he have faith to believe that Jesus could help with the impossible situation of the finality of death? Most people won’t allow themselves to even hope that the condition could be reversed. Certainly the messenger that brought the news to Jairus felt that way about it.

When Jesus sensed that hopelessness was about to overtake the situation, He responded with a promise to Jairus and encouraged him to keep his faith. Without hope, his faith would have nothing to focus on and without the promise that his daughter would be made whole he had no basis for hope.

As Jesus arrived at the home, He encountered skeptics that would not believe beyond their own experience. Notice that before proceeding Jesus separated Himself from those that were skeptics. I am convinced that the reason we don't see more miracles in the church today is because of all the skeptics that make up such a large percentage of the congregations. Having separated those that would not believe from those that would, he then did the impossible from the standpoint of human efforts – He call the dead back to life. Now that is pro-life.

Concern for People and Their Children

¹³ And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.” ¹⁶ And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them. Mark 10:13-16 (NASB95)

You might be wondering what this passage has to do with the subject of “being pro-life.” It is helpful to see in the context of the larger passage in the first nine verses of chapter ten. The subject there is about divorce. Jesus had some very stern words regarding this practice. This was followed by His expression of compassion for children. Who gets hurt the most when a man and woman breakup a marriage? Usually, the children are the ones who really get hurt. In many cases their very lives are impacted negatively. This negative impact can happen from the trauma and sense of insecurity and feeling betrayed or having some sense of guilt that the divorce might be their fault. Divorce also creates a poor example for children that may impact several generations. When divorce happens, the children are inadvertently being taught that this is the way to deal with problems in marriage.

This passage is usually taught in relationship to encouraging small children to make a profession of faith in Christ and that we should not hinder them from doing this because we may believe that they are too young to know what they are doing. As the overall context of the passage is considered we should be concerned about all the other ways children can be hindered from putting their trust in Christ. Do you think that children of parents who are going through a divorce are being hindered from coming to Jesus as compared to children of parents who are true to each other and are seeking to do God’s will in their lives? What about children who are physically abused? What about children who are victims of neglect? We have a responsibility, not only as parents, but also as Christians to do what we can to remove the hindrances that would prevent anyone from coming to Jesus for help or salvation.

What can we learn by considering what was happening, in general, in all four of these examples? The man with the withered hand had a terrific need but did not ask for help. We have no idea if he any faith at all regarding whether he could or would be healed. Jesus took the initiative and intervened in a sovereign way in order to teach us and those who were there “what is really important in life.” Jarius had faith to believe that Jesus could and would heal his daughter. He took the initiative and Jesus responded to the request that came about as a result of Jarius’ faith. Regarding the woman who touched Jesus’ robe and was healed, she had done all that she could and had reached the end of her resources and the end of any trust she had in man-based solutions. In desperation she reached out and exercised what faith she had to access the power of God and did so in complete humility. When we humbly approach God and are trusting in Him only, then we can connect with Him and receive benefits in accordance with His promises to bless those put their trust in Him. It is amazing that when we come to Him with the right motives, then the blessings are available and are ours without even having to ask. In the case of the children, they did not have any particular needs they were aware of. They just wanted the blessing of having someone touch them. Wouldn’t it be great when we get to the point of having no needs except to enjoy the blessing of a touch from the Master’s hand? For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these!