

Faith Amid the Crowd

Why does lightning strike where it does? The position and the conductivity of the material either draws lighting, or it doesn't. And why does God's power seem to be attracted to some people and not to others? Why does God reveal Himself and His nature to some, and not to others? That's a crucial question to answer, because we all need God's grace. We all need to know Christ.

In the miracle our key passage retells, we have something just like that – all these people thronging Christ, and yet His power seems to be attracted to one woman. Let's look at the text:

*Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."
Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"
But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'"
And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."*

Mark 5:25-34

Here we have a lady with a bleeding problem of twelve years who seeks to touch Christ, believing that the mere touch of His garment will heal her. She manages to do so, and the bleeding stops. She feels the healing. But so does Jesus – who feels power go out of Him. So he asks, 'Who touched me?'

When hundreds of people are just about crushing you, the more apt question seems to be, 'Who *didn't* touch you?!' so the disciples, Peter in particular, suggest that Jesus' question is an understatement. Jesus knows something has happened, so He looks about to see her. The woman knows her plan of getting healed and going her way is blown. She comes fearfully, thinking she is in trouble. Before everyone, she confesses what her problem was, and what she did. Jesus comforts her, calls her daughter and tells her not to worry – her faith made her whole.

The main question this passage raise is this: Why, if merely touching Jesus was enough to heal, wasn't everyone who touched him being healed? What was the difference between the crowd and this woman? And what is the difference between the crowds today, and the believer who experiences the power of Christ?

The issue was not in any mystical properties of Jesus' clothing. It was God's sovereignty responding to faith. Jesus gives answer to why she was healed: "Your faith has made you well." The difference between her and the others was not the touching, it was the attitude and action of this woman – one of faith. It was her faith that brought the power of God into her life. We can learn three key things about how faith manifests here:

- 1. Only if you diligently seek to connect with Christ in faith will you experience His power**

What does this mean? For starters, you must come to the end of yourself, and realise the direness of your need. This woman really understood her need. Her trial had been long (verse 25); there was nothing more man could do for her (verse 26); she had done everything she could, and had not improved, but instead had gotten worse (verse 26).

In her time and culture, that meant that she would be continually unclean (according to Leviticus 15:25-31) and could not go to the temple to worship. She could not touch anyone, or they would be unclean for the rest of the day. If she sat in a chair, it was unclean for the rest of the day, etc. So she was basically cut off from normal fellowship with others and with God. Her dire need, her bankrupt state, was the state she needed to be in to truly come to Christ in faith.

By contrast, the crowd was unaware of their needs. They were not focused on personal salvation, or growth – they just loved the activity, the social event. They enjoyed Jesus meeting other people’s needs – seeing other people being healed and helped. But it was not for them. The crowd was still playing spiritual tag. Jesus’ power is for someone else.

Many people live this way – thinking, ‘Christ’s saving power is for the real down and outs. Christ’s fellowship is for those Christians who really are fanatical about this whole thing.’ But for as long as you play spiritual tag, you will not experience Christ’s power.

Why *not* you? Why is seeking God with all your heart, being devoted, being surrendered, not for you – but for the next man? Are you content to just be around Christ, but never experience His power? Why is knowing Christ gloriously and seeing His power not for you? Why are you satisfied to be one who hangs around the Lord, without ever really seeing His power at work?

Think of accounts in the gospels about the Pharisee and the tax collector, or the Pharisee and the sinner – how many Pharisees remained at arm’s length, self-righteous and smug, while tax collectors and sinners came to Jesus in humility. When we understand our need, and that we do not have the resources ourselves, that’s when we turn to someone else.

You must recognise that you cannot make yourself good enough for heaven. You cannot turn over a new leaf. You cannot come to church enough, do enough kind deeds, even pray and read the Bible enough. For you to come to saving faith, you must come to the end of yourself. You must know that nothing and nobody else can save you.

In addition, you must realise that you cannot know and love God on your own. You cannot just keep doing various religious things. You must come to a deep sense of your need for revival, of your need for growth, of your need for grace. You must groan regarding the deadness of your heart, and long for revival within.

And you must call your sin what it is: ‘I have a serious problem with lust’ or ‘I have a serious problem with disrespect’ or ‘I have a serious problem with laziness – and I need help.’

2. You must be absolutely convinced of the power of Christ to help

This lady did not have a ‘Jesus, and...’ philosophy. She adopted a ‘Jesus-alone’ philosophy. She had given up on man. But she had heard of Christ (verse 27).

Commented [AJ1]: This just said "Illus: Pharisees and tax collectors, sinners" - please check it's been expanded accurately/ adequately, or change.

Consider her high view of Christ. She did not demand an interview with Him. She did request that He come to her home. She did not even cry out like others. ‘Have mercy on me!’ She actually wanted to be discreet. She believed such was Christ’s power, that a mere touch of His clothing would heal her, and she could go on her way without bothering Jesus (verse 28). Her faith was in the great power and person of Christ.

In contrast, for much of the crowd – they knew about the power of Jesus, but it was more a source of entertainment than something to be sought after. Seeing Christ at work was a great social scene. And many people are still that way.

They might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, they might believe He saves, they might believe He changes lives, and families, and transforms characters. And they like to be around that – they like the church scene, they like to talk Jesus, sing Jesus. They throng Him. But they do not request His power, and His Word, to change their lives, to transform their characters, to invade their families and work places and change it.

Think about trips that people will make from all around the world to see the Dalai Lama – because they are convinced of his power to help them. That will not save their souls, though. Have you come to a place where you are convinced that only Christ can meet your need of satisfaction or salvation? Not “He and a number of other things.” But that ultimately – you would agree with Solomon in concluding, ‘Vanity, vanity – all is vanity’ without Christ. As the hymn *Rock of Ages* puts it:

*Not the labour of my hands, can fulfil Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, all for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.*

3. You must be completely determined to make contact with Christ

The woman knew her deep need. She was absolutely convinced Christ was the answer. So her faith acted.

Consider what excuses she might have used. “He’s busy.” “The crowd is pressing in on Him, I’ll never get to Him.” “I’m not an important person like Jairus.” “If I touch Him, I will make Him unclean.” “Nothing’s worked thus far, why should this work?” “Jesus will be insulted that I come to Him as a last resort.”

But she didn’t. And you can tell what kind of determination she had to get to Jesus. The word Mark uses here for ‘throng’ in the original means to press on all sides. There were so many people around Jesus, crowding Him, it was probably nigh on impossible for Him to move. Now picture a lady trying to get through this crowd close enough to Jesus to touch His clothes. She no doubt fights her way from behind through the crowd. No obstacle, no excuse was going to stop her from trying to make contact with the Lord.

The more you think of Christ, the more you’ll want to get to Christ.

Crowds are like the many people today thronging Jesus. They like to ‘touch’ Him for popularity, for novelty, for social reasons, for amusement, for interest. People like to be near Jesus. They like to touch Him, not to have His Person give them grace, but because they like to be identified with what He stands for. So they enjoy thronging Jesus, and they call themselves Christians – but no power is flowing to them, because there is no faith. But

Commented [AJ2]: This said “Illus:...” not sure if you want to expand more on it.

they're not urgent, not insistent to get to Him, don't care to personally make contact with or connect with Him – they just like the religious noise.

But the woman is our example. She had faith. Consider how often the Bible exalts the idea of diligently seeking, following hard after God, pursuing God with all of our heart, seeking Him passionately. What lengths men go to, to find earthly treasure. Small wonder we are told to seek God with all of our hearts. And we are to seek Him **until** we find Him.

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

Song of Solomon 3:1-4

What are you willing to do to be saved, to have your sins forgiven? For some, even admitting they need to be saved seems like a mountain too tall. But when you recognise your need and realise Christ is the answer, you run to Him!

Christian, what are you willing to do to know Christ all the more? If He is the source of your satisfaction, what are you willing to do? Can you overcome the obstacle of your own laziness? Of your own sleepiness? Of your own indifference? Would you pursue Jesus – read the Word until you see Him? Pray until you know you have been heard? Would you commit yourself to the local church not as a spectator, but as a participant?

What does it take to stop you when you know what you need, and know that that is all you need? Are you determined to seek and to find Christ? That's the faith which God honours.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

When you search for me, then you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

He promises to be found. The question is – are you willing to seek in the way the Bible tells you to?

The result will be true power, and a true testimony. When the woman gets to touch Jesus, and there is instant healing. He does not let her slip away. Then she would have perhaps thought superstitiously about Christ's garments. She also would not have encountered Him. But Jesus was not satisfied for her to just get help, He wanted her to encounter Him. He was loving and receptive: *"Daughter, be of good comfort, go in peace."*

By the way, note that the power of God is not only meant to help us, it is meant to glorify God. God has every right to expect that what He does for you is made known to others.

In this passage we see how Jesus' power came out on one individual out of hundreds who were pressing on Him. In the same way – there are millions of people in the world, thronging Jesus. They sing about Jesus, they talk

about Jesus, they may even preach Jesus. Everyone identifies with Jesus one way or another. But His power still goes out to individuals. Individuals who come by faith.

You've got to come as an individual. Don't copy the crowd. Ask yourself, will you be a 'thronger,' who never experiences the power of Christ, while being near to Him, and pressing on Him – or will you be a true seeker, who experiences His power?

Will you be content to have a basic knowledge of Jesus, to simply be around His people and His things, and to feel good that you are in the general area of something religious? Or are you going to be like this woman? Will you believe your deep need of Christ, will you believe He is both willing and able to help? And will you do whatever it takes to get to Him?