

## The Touch of Faith

**Mark 5:21-34** <sup>21</sup> Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. <sup>22</sup> And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet <sup>23</sup> and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him. <sup>25</sup> Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. <sup>28</sup> For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." <sup>29</sup> Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. <sup>30</sup> And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" <sup>31</sup> But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" <sup>32</sup> And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

When I was in school, one of the questions that my classmates would often ask the teacher was, "Is this going to be on the exam?" And by that question, the students were saying, "Because if it isn't, we don't want to know about it. We only want to learn those things which will enable us to pass the exam." That's a pretty frustrating thing to hear, as a teacher – that your students don't really want to learn the subject, they just want to get through it. They want the simplest, easiest way through the course, and want the certificate when all is done.

There's a way that Christians can have the same approach to the Lord. Instead of seeking Him and trying to know as much about Him as possible, they can have the attitude of those students – Is this on the exam? Is this going to come up on Judgement Day? Do I absolutely have to know this or do this? Because if it is not compulsory, I'd rather not have to know it or do it.

Such an attitude must be grievous to the Lord who saved us – that we want to know and do the bare minimum. Not only does that attitude grieve the Lord, but such people do not know spiritual victory, joy, growth, answered prayer or increased usefulness.

The Christian life is not meant to be a life of doing the bare minimum – getting in a quiet time every few days, attending one service on a Sunday, witnessing to one person a year. That's the approach of slaves – who do only what they must. The approach of worshippers, people who are living by faith is one of glad, wholehearted, persistent devotion. We see a picture of that kind of faith in this woman. This desperate woman's condition is more than a wonderful example of what the Lord does for people who seek Him. It's a picture of the kind of faith that we should all have.

After casting out numerous demons from a man, Jesus was asked by the residents of the nearby town to leave. Sadly, that's what He did, getting back into the boat, and heading west to the other side. When He got there, before long, a huge crowd had gathered. In that crowd came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name. The ruler of the synagogue would have been a layman, but a well-respected, and probably wealthy man. He begged Jesus to come quickly to his house, because his daughter was at the point of death. Jesus goes with him, with the crowd in tow.

And it's as Jesus is on His way, that another miracle occurs. This is a miracle sandwiched within a miracle, which ought to give you an indication of how powerful our Lord is – when miracles happen on the way to another miracle, Christ's boundless power is simply spilling over everywhere.

## **I. The Woman's Condition**

<sup>25</sup> *Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.*

This woman had lived with a terrible physical condition for twelve years. Some kind of haemorrhaging condition that had plagued her for more than a decade. According to the Law of Moses, this would have rendered her unclean. She would not have been able to go to places of worship, or be a part of normal society. It may have even denied her a husband and children. She would have been an outcast, an unclean one. Hard-hearted Pharisees may well have seen her condition as a judgement from God for her sin.

To rid herself of this condition she had gone to many doctors. The remedies of the time were humiliating, heartless, superstitious and degrading.

This comes from Talmud 110a, two of eleven proposed remedies for this kind of condition: “Let him take an ostrich egg, burn it, and wrap it in linen rags in summer and in cotton rags in winter. If [this does not work], let him broach a barrel of wine specially for her sake... let him fetch barley grain which is found in the dung of a white mule: if she holds it one day, it [her discharge] will cease (or two days; if she holds it two days, it will cease for three days; but if she holds it three days, it will cease for ever.”

Not only had she suffered through all these remedies, but she had spent all that she had. She had been so desperate to find a cure, she had basically ruined herself financially. She now had nothing left financially, and to make matters worse, her physical condition had worsened over the years.

Picture the misery of her life. Loneliness, social rejection, excluded from the joys of Jewish life, physically harmed, living life with a debilitating and painful condition, always hiding, and now in poverty. Her whole life dominated by her physical ailment.

## **II. The Woman's Conclusion**

<sup>28</sup> *For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."*

Verse 27 tells us she had heard about Jesus. No doubt Jesus' reputation had spread all over Israel by now. She knew that if He could heal lepers, heal the blind, cast out demons and restore withered hands, He could heal her.

She had complete trust that Messiah had more than enough power to heal her.

But here was her dilemma: she probably avoided crowds. She was ritually unclean, she was not allowed to touch people. According to Leviticus 12 and 15, such a woman was unclean for seven days, and could not touch her husband, children or strangers. She would be liable for punishment if she violated those laws. Here is a woman who has been in that condition for twelve years.

She is probably known in her community. She cannot just walk up to Jesus in a crowd. So she comes up with a plan. When Jesus is on the move, she will secretly work her way through the crowd, probably in disguise, and just touch the fringes of Jesus' garment. So certain was she that Jesus was powerful, that she believed just a touch of his clothes would heal her.

This wasn't an uncommon idea. We find similar things in the book of Acts,

**Acts 5:15** <sup>15</sup> *so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.*

**Acts 19:11-12** <sup>11</sup> *Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul,* <sup>12</sup> *so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.*

It is not that she thought there was power connected to the clothes of Christ. She realised that it was Jesus Himself who would heal, and just a touch of Him would do it. Then, she could probably secretly make her way back, without being accused of touching people and making them unclean.

In some ways her faith was great, and in some ways it was incomplete. It was great in that she thought Christ's power was great enough that even if she simply touched Him, she would be healed. She didn't even look to Him to say any words or speak to her. On the other hand, her faith was incomplete if she thought she could receive healing from Jesus in an almost impersonal way.

### III. The Woman's Cure

<sup>27</sup> *When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment.*

<sup>29</sup> *Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.*

She worked her way through the crowd, keeping up with Jesus, who probably would have been walking quite quickly to get to Jairus' house. No doubt she was elbowed and shoved by taller and stronger men, her face no doubt squeezing through arms and backs as she pressed through to get to Jesus at the centre.

When you think of how Jesus would have been dressed, don't think of it as primitive and basic. Jewish dress was fairly elaborate, made up of at least 5 elements. Since this was springtime, He would have had sandals on his feet. He would have had a *Sudar*, a kind of turban that could be placed on the head, and descended down to the shoulders. His inner garment was a *Kittuna* made of linen or wool; one garment without seams, a close fitting garment that went down to His feet. Over this inner garment, He would have worn the square outer garment, the *Tallith*. On each of the four corners would have been four long white threads, knotted together on each of the four corners. It's those white threads, the *tzitzit*, that she was reaching for.

Amazingly, she gets through the crowd, touches His garments, and she is immediately healed. As if she were touching something electrified – instant, immediate reaction. She feels within herself the flow of blood has stopped, she has been instantaneously and miraculously healed. She was not wrong in her belief and trust in the power of Christ. She must have been ecstatic and overwhelmed. Time must have stood still. Perhaps she just stopped, as the crowd flooded around her and past her. And then it all changed when she heard Jesus speak.

### IV. Christ's Question

<sup>30</sup> *And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"* <sup>31</sup> *But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "* <sup>32</sup> *And He looked around to see her who had done this thing.*

The moment she touched Him, Jesus knew she had done so. He felt the power go out of Him. Does

that mean she was healed automatically, without Jesus' knowledge? No. Instead here we have the two natures of Christ united in one Person. The Person that is Christ who is 100% God knows this woman, knows her need, knows her faith, and desires to heal her. The Person that is Christ, who is also 100% man is being mobbed and thronged by people all around Him. And as He did during His earthly humiliation, He has submitted the independent use of His divine privileges to the Holy Spirit. According to His human nature, He wants to know who has touched Him. According to His divine nature He has healed her. The Person knows, and the Person asks. Mark says "He was looking around to see *her* who had done this", not merely "*who* had done this". He knew her, and now He was looking for her physically.

His disciples answer him with bewilderment – "You see people thronging you, and you ask, 'who touched me?' Isn't the right question, 'Who has not touched me?'" Everybody's touching Jesus!

Why, if merely touching Jesus was enough to heal, wasn't everyone being healed that touched him? What was the difference between the crowd and this woman?

So what is going on here?

Jesus knew that all these people were touching Him. But He knew that when a particular person touched Him, it was different. There is a world of difference between the touch of interest, and the touch of faith. There is all the difference in the world between those who are fascinated by Jesus, entertained by Jesus, interested in Jesus, and happy to go where the crowd goes, and with those who are seeking Jesus personally.

The crowd 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. Many people are 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.

This woman had come to Jesus in an altogether different way from the others. She possessed true faith, she was more than just a spectator, more than just an onlooker.

Some have the idea that faith is a passive, weak, thing, that because it is a matter of trust faith is weak, flat-on-your back nothingness. But this woman shows us that while faith is an act of trust, it can be a diligent, intensive, deliberate.

Here faith was at least three things:

First, it was personal. She was seeking Jesus. She was not just seeking a feeling or an experience, but Christ and His power for people like her. She had heard about Him, and needed who he was to help her.

Second, it was purposeful. She had a clear purpose in mind – to make contact with Jesus and be healed. She was not, like so many people, caught up in a vague, fuzzy religious feeling, not knowing who she was seeking and for what. She knew what she needed and was not going to stop till she got it.

Third, it was persistent. She was not going to stop because of obstacles or be hindered by excuses. She could have said, "He's busy" or "The crowd is pressing in on Him, I'll never get to Him" or "I'm not an important person like Jairus" or "If I touch Him, I will make Him unclean" or "Nothing's worked thus far, why should this work?" "Jesus will be insulted that I come to Him as a

last resort". She pushed through until she found Him.

Doesn't Scripture describe faith like this?

**Hebrews 11:6** *<sup>6</sup> But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

**Jeremiah 29:13** *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

In Pilgrim's Progress there is a scene where Interpreter shows Christian a series of dreams. In the one, there is a crowd of people outside a palace, desiring to enter. There is a man at the table with a pen and paper, ready to write down the names of people who want to go in. But guarding the palace are a group of armed soldiers with armour and swords and spears. Lots of people want to go in, but no one is willing to fight his way in. Finally a man goes up to the table, has the man write his name down, puts on a helmet, takes his sword, and battles his way in, wounding and being wounded.

What was John Bunyan illustrating? Lots of people want to put their name down for heaven and for a relationship with God. But of them, who is willing to have faith that perseveres? Who purposely seeks Christ personally, with the whole heart? Ours is not a time when people's desires are too strong, but when people's desires are too weak. We are so easily discouraged, distracted. Our energies and thoughts are divided. We need to take a leaf out of this woman's book. Faith is not wispy, weak and whimpering. It fixes its eyes on Christ, and pursues Him with purpose and perseverance.

An old Methodist preacher once said, "The measure of a man's character is what it takes to stop you." So what does it take to stop you from pursuing Christ? Cold weather? An argument with another Christian? A disappointment? A financial setback? What keeps you from your time of prayer each day? What does it take to keep you from coming together to worship with God's people?

Whatever things you are going to say in defense of how you seek Christ, in the end your life stands right now as a living testimony of how diligently you seek Him. You are right now as Christlike as you want to be. You are as spiritual as you want to be. Yes, you might wish you were more Christlike or devoted, but when all is said and done, your choices reflect what you actually want. Your life is the sum total of those choices, and they say to God, to you, to all those who know you that you have decided to seek Christ with a certain amount of devotion.

You've decided to be involved in the life of your church to a certain degree, and no more. You've decided to read the Word and Christian books to a certain degree. You've decided to pray as much as you do. You've decided to get rid of sin in your life with a certain vehemence and you've decided to keep other sins around. You might have very sophisticated-sounding reasons to justify why you seek Him the way you do. But when our lives are evaluated before Christ, all that will be needed to silence excuses would be to bring this woman out.

She was an outcast from society. She was physically weak. She received no help from pastors or spiritual leaders. She had less Scripture than you do. She expected much opposition. She risked open shame. She set her mind on Christ, and would not stop until she found Him and experienced grace from Him. Next to her, what will our excuses sound like about being tired, and a bit sore, and having had a late night, and being a bit hungry, and being a bit upset at how that Christians said or did something?

And let me encourage you, if you seek Him with no excuses and no holding back, you will find Him. He calls us all, but those who pursue Him find that He treats them as if they were the only one in the world. God treats each of us as individuals, seeing our approach to Him as if we had no one around us. When we seek Him like this woman, we really do have His unique attention.

“The sunflower that turns its face to the sky all day long gets more sun than the violet that hides among the leaves. But the same sun shines in fullness upon both. God has no favorites, except as some of His children by their loving response make it possible for Him to shower more love upon them.” - A.W. Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*

Her faith was different, and it brought different results. But real faith is not a secret, private faith. This is largely why Jesus says, “Who touched me?” Faith like this cannot merely be in the heart, it must go public.

## **V. The Woman's Confession**

<sup>33</sup> *But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.*

As much as she believed in the greatness of Christ, she was weak in believing in the goodness of Christ. She thought she could greatly trust in His power and then quietly walk away, and not risk going public, or perhaps being accused by others of defiling them, or maybe even risk the anger of the Lord for defiling Him. But in doing this, she did not properly know or trust in the goodness of God.

But now as she sees Christ looking, she has been found out. She knows there is no escape now. She cannot run away, or now remain silent, lying and deceiving in her silence. She must fall at the mercy of Jesus, and tell Him everything – what her ailment was; what she had tried in years past; what she had come to; what she had believed about Jesus; what she had planned in her mind; what she had done and how she had been healed.

Perhaps she fears she will be seen as a thief, perhaps she fears that Christ will rebuke her for her boldness. Perhaps she fears that when her whole story comes out, she will be ridiculed and humiliated. But she has no choice except to confess all, and to do so publicly.

We cannot receive great grace from our Lord, and then hide it under a bushel, or shelter it in our own private little lives. Christ deserves the reward of recognition, the honour due to Him, which is praise, thanksgiving for His grace.

But look at Christ's response.

## **VI. Christ's Comfort**

<sup>34</sup> *And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."*

Can you not hear in it great gentleness? Perhaps even a smile, an encouraging tone of setting her at ease. “Daughter” (a term of affection), your faith has made you well. The word in the original translated as 'made you well' literally means 'saved you.' There are other words in Greek to mean *heal*. Jesus here is saying that her trust in His person has done more than heal her body. She has placed her whole life's hope in Him, because she believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. She has trusted in Him, and it has saved her. It is not the faith itself, but that the faith was centred on the saving person of Jesus Christ. Faith is the firm hold on the lifesaver Himself, as He pulls us from drowning.

Jesus sends her with a blessing – Go in peace, and be healed from your affliction. Go and live a life

of wholeness, of mental, spiritual, physical peace.

What enormous benefits await the one who will pursue Christ! What rewards of forgiveness, life, and peace! What eternal rewards! Why do we allow this world to make us lukewarm? Why do we allow the apathy and laziness of this age to slow us down until we are spectators?

**1 Timothy 6:12** <sup>12</sup> *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

There are times when we need to renew our commitments. There are times when we need to admit that we have wandered from our first love, allowed our love to cool, allowed our devotion to weaken. In those times, we need to not keep doing what we are doing, but change some things. Change our habits of devotion. Change what we are doing regarding our church commitments. You do not warm up apathy and laziness into devotion. You repent of it. You do not adjust unbelief and passive spectator Christianity. You turn from it. You see in Christ what this woman saw – all her answers. Her fullness of joy. Her salvation. Her new life. And so she went after him not with half a heart but with her whole heart.

When we are living by faith, we don't ask, "Is this on the exam?" We don't ask, "Do I have to read my Bible? Do I have to attend prayer meeting with other believers? Do I have to seek Him?" We say – "I get to! Let me do so!" We say with Isaac Watts:

Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
to help me on to God?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign;  
increase my courage, Lord.  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
supported by thy word.