

A Hurting Woman

Mark 5:24-34 "So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." "

The story of the sick or hurting woman is a story of Faith. It's a teaching on how it can look and how it works on a practical level. Let's start with some background.

The woman in this story had been bleeding for 12 years without stopping. According to the law in Leviticus she was unclean. What did that mean on a practical level? Let's take a look at what Leviticus 15:25-31 tells us:

" 'When a woman 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, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. " 'When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement for her before the LORD for the uncleanness of her discharge. " 'You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.' "

For 12 years she has been treated like a Leper. No man would want to be near her or near any place she's been. It wouldn't be worth the risk of becoming unclean themselves and then having to go through the ritual of cleaning themselves and waiting until evening to be clean again. She would be like a perriah and very alone. What do you think she thinks of herself? Near the end of the verses above we read that Israelites must remain separate from things that make them unclean because it defiles the dwelling place of the Lord who lives among them. How would it feel to know that you were the cause of defiling God's dwelling place and had no control over it?

It's not like she hadn't tried to do something about it. She had been to many doctors and she only got worse. There were eleven different cures in the Jewish Talmud for this problem and it would appear that none of them had worked for her. There is little doubt that these different attempts had cost her financially. It says specifically that she spent all she had to doctors trying to be healed. Look at what it cost if she healed up just on her own. It cost her two doves every time she got better for a week. It must have felt a little like it can today when you become very ill or severely injured and stuck in a hospital.

You may find there are few people who can or will come to visit you to console you or keep you company. Some people just won't go in a hospital. So you are isolated. In your isolation you realize that every minute you spend in the hospital is costing hundreds of dollars you don't have. You do everything you can think of to get better but it doesn't work. You're left in desperation and loneliness. This is where we find this woman who heard of a man named Jesus who could heal anyone.

When she reached him she thought to herself "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Then she touched him and was immediately healed. Now, let me ask you something. What healed her? Was it touching his cloak that healed her? Was it touching something that touched him that healed her? If she had managed to touch his skin instead of that his cloak would she have received even stronger healing? I ask these things because some times I think about how I wish Christ was here on Earth with us again. That he would come home to his people and walk among us again. There's something about me that needs a physical representation of his power. Maybe it was that need of a physical representation that enticed Israel to worship statues instead of their own God who said to never create a physical representation of Him. Perhaps it was that belief that made the woman think she had to touch Him in order to be healed. Perhaps that is why Saint Matthew's Church in Tulsa Oklahoma feels that a "Bible Faith Handkerchief" is the surest way to spread the Spirit.

You see, Christ answers our question in a very direct and clear way. But the message is hard for me to accept some times. He says "your faith has healed you". Notice He didn't say "touching my robe has healed you". You see, it wasn't touching Him that healed her. It was her faith in Him that healed her. The touching Him part was something she needed. Something that gave her Faith just enough of a boost that she could believe she would be healed. If she had thought "If I just get within a few feet of Him I will be healed", would she have been healed simply by being in His presence? It is our faith in Him that can heal us, or strengthen us, or protect us from evil. If I ask Him for anything, in faith, it will be done. That faith should rest solely in knowing that Christ is alive and well and with us as God is with us and He is listening to our requests and giving us those things that we ask for that are good for us.

Matthew 7:9-11 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

You see, He only gives us good gifts. I think that's the hard part and the part we don't always understand. We can fall into the trap of saying "There must be something wrong with my faith because God doesn't answer me. He doesn't give me what I want. Why not?" There's never a "good enough" reason. But the Truth is that God does hear us and he does answer our prayers. However, he only gives us good gifts. Those things which He knows will be a true blessing in our lives.

But when we are desperate and trying to "pray harder" we start to fall back on physical objects that help us embolden our faith don't we? Some times we might feel our prayers are heard better inside a church building, or kneeling in front of a cross. Some times we feel we need something physical to focus at when we pray. I think that so long as our faith is in God and not in the object, we're not crossing any lines. What we must be careful of is not praying to the object instead of to our Father in Heaven. Perhaps that was why He gave us the commandment not to make idols and bow down to them or worship them. I think He knows we can get confused and think the physical object is more important than the Spiritual Truth behind His power. Our faith must be in God, and we must remember that He

sees and hears us even in secret. Objects don't make our prayers louder, our faith in Him does.