

INTRODUCTION

Life is full of setbacks. Did you hear about the milk cow that tried to jump over the barbed wire fence? It was an udder disaster. Did you hear about the guy who fell into a furniture upholstery machine? He is fully recovered. Did you hear about the butcher who accidentally backed into his meat grinder? He got a little behind in his work.

Okay, seriously, did you hear about the woman who had been sick for twelve years? She spent all her money on doctors to find a cure, but she was still sick. It's a true story and we're going to read about her. This passage contains two miracles. It begins with an important man begging Jesus to come heal his dying daughter. But on the way to that miracle, another miracle broke out.

Mark 5:21-34. When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

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."

There are many classical paintings of this scene; but an American artist, Stephen Gjertson, has painted my favorite. He captures the moment when this pale, emaciated woman crawls through the crowd and grabs the prayer shawl that Jesus wore. She has a desperate look of hope on her face as she risks it all with a touch of faith.

There are four truths that we can take away from this miracle of Jesus.

I. SUFFERING IS A PART OF LIFE—BUT JESUS GIVES US HOPE

Back in the olden days, before 24/7 news channels and breaking news streaming to our digital devices, we usually only got the news from two sources—a daily newspaper, and the nightly

news. We live in an age now where we have instant access to anything bad that happens around the world. And it is the nature of the news to report the bad things that happen.

I heard about a man who came home from work one evening. He walked into the kitchen to find his stay-at-home wife who took care of their three preschoolers looking terribly flustered and upset. He could tell she was about to deliver some bad news. He held up his hand and said, "Honey, I've had a bad day at work. Nothing went right, and I can tell that you have more bad news. But whatever you do, please don't give me any bad news. Give me some good news."

His wife looked at him and said, "Okay. You have three children, and today two of them DIDN'T fall out of a tree and break their arms."

That's why I love the Bible. While the world is full of bad news, the Word of God is full of good news. In this incident we find a woman who was suffering on many levels. She was suffering physically from a blood disorder. Apparently her body didn't produce the plasma proteins to make her blood coagulate, so she bled constantly. This led to other problems such as weakness and anemia. And she had been like this for twelve years. We live in 2014. Imagine that you contracted a chronic health problem in 2002 and it was still nagging you every day.

She was also suffering financially. She had spent all her money on doctors who couldn't cure her. Of course in the time of Jesus, doctors were more like magicians, they didn't have to be trained or licensed. The Jewish Talmud lists several ancient cures for blood disorders. One of them involved cracking open a large duck egg, burning the shell and contents, and then wearing the ashes in a linen pouch around the neck. This woman had probably tried the duck-egg remedy. No wonder they called those doctors "quacks."

She was also suffering socially. Her blood disorder causes her to be a social outcast and religiously impure. According to Leviticus 15 any chair, bed, or person she touched also became ceremonially unclean. She wasn't even supposed to be out in this crowd. She was required by law to verbally warn people of her presence by crying, "Unclean, unclean, unclean!"

I can assume that among those reading these words there are many of you who can relate to this woman because you're suffering physically, financially, or socially.

There was a popular song when I was a child entitled "Charlie Brown" sung by the Coasters. It was a catchy tune and funny lyrics, but at the end of every verse a voice would ask, "Why is everybody always pickin' on me?" When you're going through suffering you may be asking that question. But suffering is a part of life—but Jesus gives us hope.

Besides the Lord Jesus, who stands as the greatest spokesman for the Christian faith? It would have to be the Apostle Paul. But even Paul suffered. He had some kind of physical problem that tormented him. He called it a thorn in his flesh. He begged the Lord three times to take it away, but the Lord never did. He did something better. He showed Paul that His grace would sustain him in the midst of his suffering. Paul wrote, "He said to me, 'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Suffering is God's way of making us stronger and suffering forces us to depend on Him. Have you ever looked closely at a golf ball? They all have dimples in the surface. The first golf balls in Scotland were smooth. It would seem that a smooth surface would make the golf ball fly farther and straighter. But these old golfers discovered when the smooth golf balls got scratched and roughed up, they actually flew further because of an aerodynamic principle. The old golfers would cut grooves and shallow holes in their golf balls. Eventually golf balls were manufactured with dimples instead of smooth surfaces. A golf ball is a parable of our lives. God knows that if our lives are perfectly smooth that we wouldn't go as far. He knows that a few rough edges and rough experiences will actually take us further in life. The second truth we find is:

II. CASUAL CONTACT WITH CHRIST ISN'T THE SAME AS A DESPERATE GRASP OF FAITH

Try to picture the scene. Jairus is leading Jesus through the narrow streets of a village and people are pressing in from every side. Every time we visit Jerusalem we walk through the narrow streets and there is always a traffic jam of people trying to move in both directions. I always hold up an umbrella with my Texas hat on top so the people in our group won't get lost.

There was a pushing and shoving crowd around Jesus that day. They wanted to see this famous miracle worker. Luke writes that the crowd almost crushed Jesus. In the midst of this mob where everybody was elbowing each other to get closer to Jesus, there was one desperate woman who was quietly slipping below and around the people. Finally she was close enough to touch his prayer shawl. She had such faith that she didn't need Jesus to touch her or speak to her; she believed if she could only touch His robe, she would be healed.

So she reached out and grabbed Jesus' prayer tassel with a grip of steel. The word that is used doesn't mean to lightly touch something; it means to grasp it with all your might. She grabbed onto His prayer shawl like a drowning person would grab onto a lifejacket. In that instant she knew she was healed. For the first time in a dozen years, her bleeding stopped.

Jesus stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" I can almost see Simon Peter rolling his eyes and saying, "Come on, Jesus. Look at this mob, everybody is touching you!" And that was true. Dozens of people were touching Jesus with the elbows of curiosity, but there was only one person in the mob who reached out with fingers of faith—and Jesus recognized the difference.

There's a crowd of almost 5,000 people worshipping here today. Jesus is here. He promised to be present whenever two or three people gather in His name. There will be many people who will casually touch Jesus with their prayers or songs of praise. But I wonder if there is anyone here today who is desperate enough to grab hold of the power of Jesus like you're grabbing onto a life jacket?

Many people came here today to seek Jesus, but they are seeking Him in a half-hearted way. To them, this is just a part of your weekly routine. You show up in church on Sunday morning, and then go off totally unchanged. The key to grabbing hold of the life-changing power of Jesus is to seek Him with your whole heart. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13)

Vance Havner wrote these words about this woman: "Mind you, this woman was shy and timid. She was not in habit of elbowing her way through the crowds, but when we are desperate enough, we'll do anything to get through to God. Our Lord said, 'if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.' Thirst is not casually wanting a drink of water. When we really thirst, water must be had and we will drive through any obstacle to get it. Christians do not drink of the Living Water because there is no burning, feverish, consuming thirst after God. The situation is desperate but the saints are not." (*The Secret of Christian Joy*)

In the crowd that day there were two kinds of people, spectators and seekers. Jairus and this sick woman were desperately seeking Jesus; the others were just there as spectators. They wanted to see that happened. The odds are there were many other people there who had a physical need, but only this one woman was willing to grab onto the healing power of Jesus. In this crowd today, how many of you are here as spectators? But if there are some of you who are willing to reach out with fingers of faith you can find God's power.

III. THERE IS A PERSONAL COST TO JESUS IN EVERY SPIRITUAL TRANSACTION

The Bible says, "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him." I had studied this miracle for many years before I picked up on this amazing nugget of truth. There were dozens of people crowding around Jesus. How did Jesus know someone touched Him in faith? He told Peter He literally felt healing power flow out of His body. That really opened my eyes to the fact that every time Jesus performed a miracle, power flowed out of him.

When Jesus touched a blind man and healed him, there was healing power that flowed from Jesus into that blind man. When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus and said, "Lazarus, come forth." There was the power of life flowing out of Jesus into the corpse of Lazarus. In other words, it cost Jesus something to heal people. He could literally feel the power flowing out of His body. It is exhausting to give yourself away to someone. The great Baptist Pastor Hershel Hobbs who served FBC in Oklahoma City was told by his doctor for many years that preaching a 30-minute sermon drained him as much as a man working an eight-hour shift in a factory. Anyone who teaches or preaches the word knows it can be physically and spiritually draining.

A few years ago there was a movie entitled "The Green Mile" starring Tom Hanks. It was about prisoners on death row. One of the main characters is a large black man portrayed by Michael Duncan. In the story, he has the power to take away sickness. For instance, Tom Hanks has a painful bladder infection. Out of compassion, the big prisoner reaches through the bars and takes the infection into himself. He literally swallows it and then he coughs out a thick dark swarm of ugly insects but Tom Hanks bladder infection is gone. But the big prisoner is so tired he has to lie down and rest. The movie is pure fiction, but when I saw it, I couldn't help but think about how Jesus took our sins and our sorrows and made them His very own. But He didn't breathe them out as a swarm of insects. He took our sins and sorrows all the way to the cross.

The ultimate miracle Jesus performed was when He went to the cross to take our sins upon Himself. Imagine the power that must have flowed out of Jesus on the cross. The Prophet Isaiah focused his telescope on the cross and wrote, "But he was PIERCED for our transgressions; He

was CRUSHED for our iniquities; the PUNISHMENT that brought us peace was upon Him; and by His WOUNDS we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

A Holy God must punish sin, and the punishment for sin is hell. Jesus experienced hell for us on the cross. Hell is torment—Jesus was tormented. Hell is separation from God—Jesus was alienated from His Father. That's why He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It cost something for Jesus to heal the woman with the issue of blood and it cost Him life to heal us of our terminal sin sickness. There was a huge price for our salvation, but it's free to us. That's because Jesus paid it all; All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow."

IV. JESUS ASKS US TO OPENLY CONFESS HIM BEFORE OTHERS

When Jesus asked the question, "Who touched me?" He wasn't asking for information. He knew immediately this woman had touched Him and been healed. Out of compassion to this woman, He wanted to give her the opportunity to declare that she had been healed. It seems she would have been content to just slip away into the crowd with her secret healing, but Jesus wouldn't let that happen.

She wanted to be a secret believer, but there is no such thing as a closet Christian. Jesus wants us to openly confess Him before others. He said, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33)

So the woman came forward and knelt at Jesus feet and told her story. She gave her testimony that Jesus had changed her life. When you confess your faith in Jesus before others, it encourages them to trust the Lord as well.

The first way we usually openly confess our faith in Jesus is through baptism. Whenever we baptize someone we ask them to confess that Jesus is their Lord. One of the great joys of my life is taking people to the Jordan River in Israel and reconfirming their baptisms or for some people they are baptized for the first time. There is always a large crowd of onlookers at the baptism site because there is a large gift shop there. Every year after I baptize those in our group who wish to be baptized, while I'm standing in the water I look up to the crowd and share the a brief plan of salvation to those watching, and I ask if anyone would like to place their faith in Christ and follow Him in baptism. Last year we had eight additional people from many countries around the world accept my invitation. When you confess that Jesus has made a difference in your life, it always encourages others to trust Christ.

When you confess your faith in Jesus, He welcomes you into His family. This woman thought that her main problem was an issue of blood. But she had a deeper problem; one we all have. She was a sinner and she needed forgiveness. Jesus just didn't say, "Great, you're healed, see you later." No, He said something much more important. He said, "Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace and be freed from your suffering." He called her "Daughter." She was in God's family. What Jesus literally said was, "Your faith has SAVED you." The word He used is *sozo*. It's the same word that appears in Romans 10:9, which says, "If you confess with your mouth,

Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved.” This wasn’t just a healing encounter; this was a saving encounter. She came to Jesus full of sin and sickness. He healed her of her sickness and forgave her sins.

CONCLUSION

So where are you in the crowd today? Are you part of the mob rubbing shoulders and elbows of Jesus? Or are you reaching out in desperation to touch Jesus and receive His healing power?

The people in Scotland are known to be rather frugal. I read about a Scotsman who finally had his house wired for electricity. After several months the electric company came to investigate because the Scot was only using a tiny amount of electricity each month. When asked to explain the Scotsman said, “Aye, I only turn on the lights long enough to see to light the candles, then I turn them off.” He had access to a lot of power, but he chose not to use it. That reminds me of thousands of Christians. We have access to the remarkable power of Jesus, but we seldom claim it.

I came across an interesting prayer based on this miracle, and I’d like for it to be our closing prayer to the Lord. Ken Gire wrote it: “God, I know that only those who suffer greatly reach out to grasp You. People who have nothing to offer but the faith that you can make them whole. I confess, O Lord, how often I have followed in the crowd pressed around you. Yet how few times have those brushes with you changed my life? I have touched you, but only in the rush hour of religious activity. Sunday after Sunday I take my part in the crowd as I sit through the service. I sing the hymns and hear the sermon. I read my Bible, say my prayers, give my money. How could I be so close your presence yet so far from your power? Could it be that my arms are folded? Could it be that my hands are full? I pray that if my arms are complacent, you would unfold them in outstretched longing for you. And if my hands are full, I pray that you would empty them so that I might cling only to you.” (*Intimate Moments with the Savior*)

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For the Joy...
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