

February 13, 2011

# *Faith that Heals*

Mark 5:21-34

## INTRODUCTION

Whether we like it or not, the vast majority of what the world has seen as “Christianity” on television for the last forty years has been the ringleaders of the Word of Faith movement. As much as you know about what is wrong with the thinking of this movement, it may be that you have been influenced at some level by their ideas. They have a doctrine of faith that will undoubtedly look to passages like the one we have today. And the most concise way of stating their idea is that *Faith is a force and Words are the containers of that force*. God has made the universe to run by certain immutable laws, such as the law of gravity, and the law of faith, they say, is like one these laws. God himself is bound by it and so that is what a lot of people see when they see Jesus interacting with the woman in this account.

By contrast it would be better to see Jesus crossing back to his home side of the sea to purposefully begin reaching out again. He is going to reach out to two people (in this week’s text and next week’s) who couldn’t be more opposite in their social status, but who are exactly alike in their need. So, let’s look at three things about the patient who comes to the Great Physician:

- THE NEED OF THE PATIENT
- THE FAITH OF THE PATIENT
- THE HEALING OF THE PATIENT

**The Big Idea** is that the faith that heals is only as good as the Power of the Doctor you go to.

We are going to see the faith of this woman on center stage today. I feel no hesitation whatsoever in saying that. There’s a way to say that and be saying something radically different than the Word of Faith idea is saying. The question is which kind of faith glorifies God—namely, the God who is here in the Person of Jesus Christ—and what is it about faith that glorifies God as healer and is effective in this healing we so desperately need?

## DOCTRINE

Now remember, Jesus had just crossed the sea for the lone purpose of reaching out to an outcast of an outcast people, and now, *Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side (21a)*, so that He was back on the shores where He did most of his earthly ministry. That explains the re-emergence of the crowds.

## I. THE NEED OF THE PATIENT

### A) Before the Crowd these Two Patients are Radically Different {21-22, 24-25}

1. The crowd is mentioned twice swarming around Jesus: *“a great crowd gathered about him (21b)...And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him” (24)*. Notice again that, just like all the other times the great crowds are mentioned, Jesus never treats this as an inconvenience. Given what Jesus is about to do, it would seem that He wants them to come and see. The two mentions of the crowds come immediately before the introduction to two very different characters: a respected leader among God’s people and an unclean woman who wasn’t allowed to be out in public.

2. First we meet *“one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name” (22a)*. Some think this is an elder of the synagogue, one of those who ruled over the teaching; others think that he is a member of a Jewish consistory so it is more of a civic position. Whatever the case, this man was well respected and wasn’t in the habit of bowing down to a homeless man, especially one who was Public Enemy Number 1 among his own religious establishment. And yet it says that, *“seeing him, he fell at his feet” (22b)*.

3. Second we meet *a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years (25)*. That means that she was well known as one who could not participate in the life of the people because of her blood. The Law states that for a woman bleeding from childbirth that, *“She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed” [Lev. 12:4]*. By the way, it doesn’t matter whether this was related to childbirth or something like hemophilia. The problem is that she simply wouldn’t heal, so that the purification process could never get started. Now you talk about starting with three strikes against you! She was a) a woman, b) ceremonially unclean and c) interrupting the Master on his way to an important person’s house. This cannot end well for her.

### B) Before God these Two Patients are Exactly Alike {22b-24, 26-27}

1. No human resource can solve the problems associated with sin. First we have to remember that sickness and death are implications and effects of sin, which is why medicine

and money are tools for tinkering at best. They are useful as far as they go; but they can also blind us to the real problem. Jairus could appeal to his status and probably has good doctors already working on his daughter, and this woman has been seeing all sorts of doctors for twelve years. So to the crowd, these two people may have seemed worlds apart. But they were both facing their **ultimate problems** and both knew at some level that only Jesus could help them. The highly respected man's plea reminds us that "all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" [Heb. 4:13]. When he is on his face before God, it says, he "*implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live"* (24). And of course this shows great faith and a high view of Jesus. Maybe if this man was not at the end of his rope, there would have been no motive to come to Christ.

2. Now we are about to talk about the value of faith, but I can imagine a very understandable confusion coming up: it may be said that this woman only comes to Jesus because she is desperate and that she has already tried everything else. Doesn't this dishonor God that He becomes for us our "last resort" and that many of us have the experience of being born again, not after a careful search of the evidence, but in a dizzy, exhausted condition where we have nothing but a few drops of rebellion left in us! How is it that a King should accept such subjects into his city? Why should a doctor serve a patient who has spent every waking hour slandering his practice, picketing his office and stealing his medicine for temporary fixes? So let's look at this faith a little more closely.

## II. THE FAITH OF THE PATIENT

### A) Faith Estimates Between Objects of Power {26-27a}

1. Notice that there are three things that finally dawned on her about these so-called 'saviors'—she "*had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse*" (26)—so, a) they themselves were causing her more suffering; b) they bled her dry of all of her financial resources; c) the condition itself actually got worse on top of it. In other words, these were incompetent at their profession. We can make a mistake by thinking that just because faith is a gift of God [cf. Eph. 2:9<sup>1</sup>], that therefore it is entirely passive. That is wrong. Our soul is passive when God first gives us this light of truth, but, instantaneously, when the light of Christ dawns on us we awaken and begin to see things we should have seen before. This woman was brought to a place where she woke

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Mat. 11:27, Jn. 6:44, 65, Acts 11:18, 1 Cor. 4:7, 12:9, Phi. 1:29, 2 Pet. 1:3

up to how she had been mistreated and she considered the value of this Great Physician in comparison to these quacks. It says that *She had heard the reports about Jesus (27a)*, so really we only wake up to how bad it is in this world when the glory of another world starts to make its claims clear to us. Up until the point that she had heard about Jesus, she thought that the abusive treatment she was under was normal, that there was no reason to expect anything better. She had no categories for any life that was happier, except perhaps in her dreams, but “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” [Prov. 13:12].

2. Now if this bodily condition is a shadow of the spiritual condition (which we have seen, time and time again, that it is), let us picture these medical leaches as the so-called doctors of our conscience using the medicine of Law, and let us call this hemorrhage a **moral hemophilia** which always issues forth in ever-increasing sin every time we scratch it and builds up in a geyser of self-righteousness every time we bandage it up. What does the Bible say about treating our sin with primitive, external means? When Dr. Paul treats the patient of the Colossian church, he asks them:

Why...do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh [Col. 2:20-23].

In other words, treating our spiritual bleeding with physical means is as backward as one of those doctors back in the days when they stuck leaches on your body to suck out the impure blood. It works, of course, if your goal is simply to drain blood out of the body! But the patient lies there, as good as dead, with a bunch of leaches hanging off of him! The leaches of Law can take the form of rules, or character examples of others following rules, but whatever the form of this man-made medicine, what we do is typically to treat all of our bad blood with only slightly better bad blood. Their use of the Law is malpractice and abusive. But now this woman hears about Jesus and she doesn't go to him for just another “second opinion,” because she is hearing about a Physician who speaks to the root of the problem: not just a different method, but a different order of medicine altogether. Where the doctors of death mix blood and compare blood and fix withering bandages, the hopeless patient hears about a Physician who promises a new heart, a heart that He can keep reviving and keep injecting his own pure blood into: and normally, that would be too good to be true— but she's tried everything else.

## B) Faith Esteems its True Object as Ultimately Powerful {27b-28}

1. The way that she plans to get this healing isn't about a method so much as it is about her belief in his power. For one thing, we have no record of Jesus healing anyone else this way up to this point. So when she thinks to herself, "*If I touch even his garments, I will be made well*" (28), the issue is not about any symbolism in the garment. It is almost as if she says, "If only I can stand in his shadow or look into his eyes or have him give me the word—" the only problem being that, in her mind, she couldn't get that close. She was a woman, unclean and interrupting important business. That's why she felt she had to sneak through the back door: *and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment* (27b).

2. So the primary thing we can say about this real, biblical God-glorifying faith is that the object matters! The one trusted in receives all of the credit. If all that we can say about faith is that it's *ours* or that it is of a particular degree of sincerity or intensity, well, then who receives the glory? We can be more specific. What exactly is it about Jesus that we want to glorify, or draw attention to, in our faith? Here the main thing is his **power to heal**. Mark uses that word again (*euthys*)—*And immediately* (29a)—in order to show the supernatural, immediate effect of Christ's power. What I mean by that is that when God acts upon us, He does not need to borrow from the stuff of our natures, but is creating something new. The only difference here from the previous miracles is that here we don't see the word of Jesus coming first. It comes later, but I think that is only to show some more angles of the same thing. Jesus wants to highlight this woman's act of faith. There is something we need to see about it. And what we need to see about it is that it is a lens. It is transparent. When we look closely at this woman's faith, we no longer see this woman's faith at all, but we see the thing on the other side of that glass: the divine power of Christ coming through his humanity. Notice as a clue going into our last section that *first* she is healed, *then* she feels healed: *immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease* (29). So, one more way of seeing that the object matters. Her feelings are only as good as the reality that she feels, otherwise her feelings are deceptive.

## III. THE HEALING OF THE PATIENT

### A) Physical Healing and the Humanity of Christ {29-34}

1. Now, first things first, does this passage teach anything about Jesus physically healing us? Absolutely! But if we treat this passage in isolation, as if the rest of the Bible doesn't address it, then the trouble is that it doesn't say much but that Jesus did this once to this particular

woman two thousand years ago. That is one practical problem with muzzling the rest of the Bible when reading a part. So, since that is obvious nonsense, what *does* the rest of the Bible say about Jesus healing us? Let's start with two main divisions, which I will call the logical and the chronological doctrines of Christ the Healer:

a) *Logical* – **if** sin is the root cause of sickness and death, and **if** Christ has conquered sin, **then** it follows that He has also conquered sickness and death *within* his conquest of sin.

One further implication of this truth is that all healing of physical sickness in this age is a symptomatic healing. In other words all sickness and disease is in the category of symptom. Sin itself is the disease.

b) *Chronological* – since the first coming of Christ is the announcement of his kingdom (continued through his church), and the consummation waits for his second coming, the function of symptomatic healing now is *as an announcement*, or what we call a 'sign.' The final substance of bodily healing is to be expected at the end [cf. Is. 53:5, 1 Pet. 2:24].

So does this healing apply to our sicknesses? Absolutely—in one way or another—and so we are encouraged in Scripture: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, *that you may be healed*” [Jam. 5:14-16]. Notice how James links sin and sickness. Sin is the root and sickness is the rotting fruit. Now the Word of Faith movement sees this and says, “Exactly—you don't get healed now because you don't have faith or some other secret sin.” But in the Bible, sin is first and foremost not secret. It is *the* disease, *the* cause of all our misery. What James is saying is that, one way or another, the prayers of a righteous man or woman will be answered to their healing, either in this age or the age to come. This story today is about coming to God, not playing God!

2. And all this through the humanity of Jesus. Notice the language: *And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” And he looked around to see who had done it (30-32).* So what is Mark's aim in recording all this? What contribution does it make to the narrative to have to keep in mind the divinity and the humanity of Christ in our minds at the same time? There is at least a subtle link between the experience of the humanity of Jesus with the natural experience we often feel in coming to God for a touch. We feel as one insignificant number

among a crowd, brushing up against a sea of humanity in an infinite universe, making our way to God: “Surely these people are more significant than me! God already has important business with this important person. Surely no one would want me to get near them in this crowd or let me get near Him if they knew how unclean I was. If I do receive favor from God, I’m going to have to cheat, to sneak up and creep in, and then to stay away in hiding once I have just enough of what I need to get by.” Interestingly, there the Greek article and participle is in the singular feminine, which some people think should read, “He looked around to see *the woman* who had done it,” indicating that his divine nature knew who it was and that all of this was to bring her and her faith to the center of the stage.

### B) Spiritual Healing and the Divinity of Christ {29-34}

1. Even the best and most compassionate doctors on earth don’t call their patients **Daughter**. You remember that He was on his way to heal a very important daughter. Who was Jesus speaking for and as? If this woman would be saved, whose daughter would she be? He had a message from God the Father. When Jesus brings her forward, we can see that *the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth (33)*. The idea is obviously that she felt she had done something wrong. And according to the Law she had. She had made this Teacher supposedly break the Law! So remember, there is no wasted motion here for Jesus. This is a salvation moment. The physical healing, again, is meant as a sign of the spiritual version of the same. Our sin is like a hemorrhage and our approach to God would be scandalous for us and for him.

2. So in what sense did her faith “make her well”? Well notice the order. Just as before, where her feeling healed followed from her actually being healed, so here there is an order: *And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (34)*. Here is the relevant order: faith, wellness, peace and then an acting out of her healing. In theological terms we would call this faith in God, right standing before God, peace with God, then sanctification. Of course this is not the whole order of salvation. There are other things before and after and in between, but this is the exact order we find among these four things. Paul says to the Romans: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” [Rom. 5:1]—from faith to justification to peace. Her faith didn’t make her well as a creative power that she wielded over Jesus. But let’s not fly off to the other extreme and fail to see that faith matters and that there’s a right kind of faith. Her faith was in the power of Jesus and now that she had met him, her faith could now also be in the love of Jesus.

## APPLICATION

**To the Skeptic** – *Objection*: ‘I thought Jesus was fully God. But here Jesus is shown to be without knowledge of something. So if God knows all things, and there is something that Jesus doesn’t know, it follows that Jesus is not God.’ *Reply*: Jesus was fully Man as well: meaning that during his time on earth, He had to grow, learn and experience limitations that are natural to human nature. When He said to the disciples, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even...the Son” [Mat. 24:36], He wasn’t lying or concealing a truth from them. In his human nature, during the Incarnation, it wasn’t part of the design of his ministry to know that information. So it is here. These words—“Who touched my garments?” and “Who touched me?”—should be taken as literally as they sound. It may be mysterious to see how divine knowledge could be contained in a human mind only in parts, but it might be helpful to remember that this is also how *we* know anything—God reveals it—and the mind of God is not spatial: “God is spirit” [Jn. 4:24]. So there is a big difference between saying that something is illogical and that something is mysterious. How a divine mind that possesses infinite knowledge can be united in one Person to a human mind possessing finite knowledge at one time is something we simply don’t have enough data to say that this data contradicts. That is to misunderstand what logic is.

**To the Saint** – What does this episode teach us about the prayer of faith? Remember, she was coming to God in this crowd and we are coming to God in prayer. Often we hear the comment that there is power in prayer as if this prayer is somehow independent of the sovereignty of the God we’re praying to. But I think that can distract us from the fact that God has in fact given us prayer in order to come to him for his power. And as we saw in the James passage, He commands it, He honors it and He answers it, one way or another.

**To the Sinner** – The last word on the law for purification for a bleeding woman back in Leviticus says, “And **if she cannot afford a lamb**, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And **the priest shall make atonement for her**, and she shall be clean” [Lev. 12:8]. This woman couldn’t afford a lamb, because she couldn’t afford anything. She couldn’t make a living because no one wanted to be around her. The doctors she went to saw her just enough to take advantage of her and send her on her way, so she didn’t have a lamb to make purification so that a human priest could make atonement for her. But the Priest that she came to on this day *was the Lamb* and He doesn’t charge a fee.