

Jeff Kennedy / May 19, 2019

**Setting the Scene:** I want to tell you a story today. It's a transforming encounter of a nameless woman in Mark 5. She is suffering from a horrible physical condition, and she has reached the end of her *resources* and the end of her *rope*. She's gone to other faith healers. She has shelled out a lot of denarii to these Jewish *shamans* for their miracle remedies, only to be told that their bizarre healing cures were botched and didn't take.

Scripture **Mark 5:21-34** (also Luke 8:40ff; Matt. 9:23ff)

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. <sup>25</sup> And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." <sup>29</sup> Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

<sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

<sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

<sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

**Transition: I want to make some observations about this woman's story today.**

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## 1. The woman was greatly suffering.

Mark 5:24 Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. 25 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve **years with constant bleeding**. 26 She had suffered a great deal **from many doctors**, and over the years **she had spent everything** she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse.

- **She suffered physically** – she could have been a hemophiliac (more common in men), or probably suffered a menstrual condition known as menorrhagia. **This condition was referred to in Greek medical writings by the very word that Mark chooses here.**
- **She suffered socially and emotionally.** We modern readers of the story have to gain an appreciation for how difficult this was on the woman. This was a ritual purity culture. A condition like this would have, according to Lev. 15, made her off limits—**she could not be touched by any devout Jew or they would in turn become ceremonially unclean.**
  - **All of their feasts, holidays, festivals, and national celebrations were religious.** And according to her religion, she could not participate in any of it...*When her kinsmen gathered to celebrate the feast of tabernacles*, she couldn't go... *When her family went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover* and offer sacrifices at their sacred temple – she had stay inside and away from people...This religious culture had become so obsessed with ritual contamination, that anyone she touched would contract her ritual uncleanness. **Can you imagine the psychological toll this would have if you couldn't touch your little children, or be intimate with your husband?**
- **She suffered financially.** The subtext of the text is that she had a husband. How do we know this? Because it states that she could afford doctors (plural), and that she had exhausted her life's fortune on trying to find a cure. Only the wealthy could afford doctors.
  - **Now, in terms of their reputation, Doctors were considered just a little higher than tax collectors in that society.** They often preyed on the hopes of the sick, and offered no real remedies or cures to the ailing. In fact, I want to read you what an ancient Jewish prescription for this exact condition would be, which sheds light on what she must have gone through.

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### It comes from the Babylonian Talmud. It reads:

- “Let them (the sick), procure three Persian onions, boil them in wine, make her (the sick) drink it, and say to her, “Cease your discharge!” If this doesn’t work...
- “She is to sit at cross-roads, hold a cup of wine in her hand, and a man comes up from behind, frightens her and exclaims, ‘Cease your discharge!’” If this doesn’t work...
- “She is to take a handful of spices, a handful of saffron, and a handful of fenugreek – boiled into wine, she is to drink it while the physician shouts at her ‘Cease your discharge!’” And if this does not work...
- “She is to take sixty pieces of sealing clay of a wine vessel, let it be brought to her, smeared over her eyes and they are to say, ‘Cease your discharge!’”
- “Finally, she is to fetch a barley grain from the dung of a white mule, eat it, and hold it in for three days. Then, her discharge will cease forever.”  
(Zondervan Background Commentary p.237)

This gives you a good idea of what this woman had to endure under the auspices of physicians “care.”

This woman had spent a small family fortune on a bunch of quacks who didn’t have the first idea how to heal her.

**Mark’s text says that she not only suffered from her condition, it says “she had suffered a great deal under many doctors.”** The implication is that they weren’t much help – in fact she became worse, even though the disease was not necessarily chronic.

### The very people she trusts to help her, are harming her...

**Illus.** I took the kids for a little ride many summers ago in the yard cart... They were having so much fun, yelling “faster daddy, faster!” I accidentally dumped over the yard cart and they went tumbling into the fence ending up with goose eggs, cut lips and bruises. They trusted me, and I let it get out of control. I was supposed to protect them, and I let them get hurt. I felt terrible! (But you’d be amazed what Ice Cream and Slurpees can heal).

In the same way, many of you put your trust in someone who “dumped” you. You thought that person was supposed to be competent enough to not flip the yard cart, and dump your face into the chain link fence. Anyone would make this assumption, right?

**Application:** But she has heard stories, undoubtedly about Jesus, that are just fantastical. The accounts of mind blowing miracles have reached her ears and she must take her chance.

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**2. Jesus is the healer of the broken:** Jesus is on his way to help Jairus' daughter—and her miracle causes Jesus to be late for that event—and the daughter of Jairus dies.

Her story is an interruption to a prominent person's miracle.

### **Mark 5:30-34**

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

### **Let's talk about this woman's touch...**

- **Her touch made everyone she touched unclean.** Leviticus 15. The narrow passage that Jesus is traveling is cluttered with market **vendors, beggars, shoppers**, and an **anxious fan** base who wants to watch what Jesus does next. **She would have to penetrate this claustrophobic passage and press through to even get close to Jesus. Every person she rubs shoulders with, every person she brushes against is immediately ritually unclean** by her according to Jewish ritual law. And every person that every person is touching contracts her ritual impurity. Once she is outted, all of them will have to undergo a ritual baptism and cleansing.
- **Her touch contaminated Jesus** and was in violation of religious protocol. She touches a holy man. Jesus was a rabbi – a popular faith healer, and a well-known sage, and in fact most of the people held that Jesus was a miracle working prophet. If Jesus had been cold and merciless, he could have judged her and had her hauled off to be tried before the courts.

### **But her touch was something more**

#### **Background on her belief system**

**According** to Numbers 15 – Moses commanded all Jewish men to wear tassels on the corners (Heb. Is Kanaphim) of their garments to remind them of the commands.

Observant Jewish men in Yeshua's time and today have worn fringes on the corners of their garments, in obedience to Numbers 15:37ff...

**Because of the passage in Malachi 4:2** "the sun will rise with healing in his wings"

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(The word “wings” is the same word for “corners” called “Kannaphim” and the tassels are “tsit tsit”) by Jesus’ time, the somewhat superstitious belief among many Jewish men was that the true Messiah would have healing powers in even his clothing, especially his tassels on the fringes (the wings) of the garment.

*Her faith was risky. Her desperation factor-quotient has exceeded her fear factor. She risks much in faith in belief that Jesus the master can heal her of this miserable condition.*

*Her faith is demonstrated by action. She takes action. She follows through.*

*Her faith seeks anonymity, but Jesus draws her out of the crowd. That she may be an example to others.*

**Illus.** Corrie ten Boom’s story is now world famous. She was a dutch watchmaker, her and her sister Betsie aided many Jews to help them escape the horrors of Nazi persecution. In return, the Nazi’s captured them and threw Corrie, her father, and sister Betsie into Ravensbruck concentration camp. She was let go by a clerical error.

Her sister and father died in that camp. And many years later she was giving a message on the power of God’s forgiveness, the power of letting go and releasing those who have hurt you. At the end of the service, a man came forward whom she immediately recognized as one of her tormenters in the prison camp. The man stuck out his hand and said, “fine sermon on forgiveness fraulein. You mentioned Ravensbruck, I was a guard there. I have since become a Christian and I know that God forgives me of the horrible things I’ve done. But if I could hear it from you...”

At first she could not forgive him, but knew that it would be quite impossible to disavow the sermon she had just preached on it.

In a mechanical fashion, she stretched out her hand—and with matter of fact resolve, she offered him forgiveness. But then something happened. When their hands touched, Corrie said that a current of electricity went from her shoulder to her palm, and in that moment they both felt a healing presence. Both in tears, she offered her Christian brother, who had once ben her tormentor, forgiveness. Release from his debt of sin.

*When she first arrived back in Holland, her tortures in the Nazi camps made her close herself off. She aches for family, to be reunited with them in her home in Harlaam, in the Netherlands.* But Jesus had other plans. She stated, **“I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work He will give us to do.”**

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This woman who had embedded herself in the crowd, hoping to receive healing, release from her prison—just wanted to go back to her home, to the market, to synagogue.

***The crowd protects our anonymity. it protects our secret pain.*** It shelters us from further judgment or hurt. But **You** and I can't just hide in the crowd forever.

*And we know her name today—it is peace. It's restored by a faith that risks much, takes action, and brought to the light that others may know.*