

Broken Body, Broken Heart

by Steve Zeisler

Recently my four-year-old came to me and asked if Jesus was more powerful than The Hulk. We had a great conversation as a result of that, and it proved to be a teachable moment for him when we got to talk about Jesus. That discussion reminded me how important it is that we understand who in fact Jesus is, that our image, our understanding, our vision of Christ be clear and accurate. I think that those of us who live in this age and have the sorts of backgrounds represented in this church have difficulty in this regard: Many of us do not have as clear and biblical an understanding of who Jesus is as we ought to have. We picture him, too often, as a combination of renaissance art, Charlton Heston movies, King James phrases that we never understood very well, and all of that mixed in with some truth. We end up with what is actually a caricature of him.

We have another problem as well. We live in an age when Christianity itself can become the enemy of Christ. Our Christian experience itself can make the Lord less important to us, further away from us, more in the distance. We get caught up with Christian meetings, Christian ethics, Christian lifestyle, Christian friendships—and we forget about Christ. So I would like you to return with me to the Gospels over the next few weeks. We will be jumping around a little bit in the different Gospels, but in each case we will take a passage of Scripture that will allow us to see the Lord, that will remind us of the character of Christ, that will return our attention to the way he treated people, to the things that were his priorities: to how he walked with God and worshiped his God, how he dealt with his enemies, how he led his disciples, how he taught the world. What was Jesus like? What is Jesus like? Finding some answers to those questions will be our goal for the next few weeks. To begin this morning I would like you to turn with me to Mark 5:25-34 (NAS):

And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at ail, but rather had grown worse, after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind Him, and touched His cloak. For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I shall get well." And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was bested of her affliction. And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" And His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' " And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

We have here a statement, a picture, a description of Jesus' love for people, of the tremendous concern in our Lord's heart for people who are deperate and needy and hurting. This paragraph, though, is easy to undervalue. It is easy to go by it too quickly and to miss what is happening here. It is relatively short; the events in the paragraph take place within a fairly brief period of time. Jesus does not stop to teach us anything as a result of the events recorded here. So it would be easy to pass by this paragraph and not "see" it on our way through the Bible.

We have another problem with this passage; we live in a world that is culturally removed from these events. The world of Palestine in the first century was founded on Old Testament history and law, and the Law of Moses in particular has important bearing on the events and the people in view here.

The Greek word that is translated "hemorrhage" or "flow of blood" here is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in Leviticus 15, where laws about menstruation are stated. Let me read part of Leviticus 15 to you: (Lev. 15:25-27 RSV):

If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge

beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies, all the days of her discharge, shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. And whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening.

There were painful consequences—spiritual, social, and psychological—that added to this woman's distress even beyond the physical hurt and torment. She bore an additional burden because of the Law's statement about her condition. We need to empathize with this woman as she lives with tremendous temptation toward discouragement. Twelve years she has suffered, twelve years without accurate diagnosis, twelve years without remedy for the problem, and presumably the future stretches before her interminably. "There is no answer for my problem."

People on the staff here at PBC and many of you too, have had to battle the same kind of discouragement. A brother on the staff here has irremediable cystic fibrosis; and a sister's disintegrating hip is apt to lame her for the rest of her life. Many of you recall the hurt Ron Ritchie experienced while his eyesight deteriorated.

Further, this woman has faced the problem of doctors telling her, perhaps, that they had an answer to her problem, offering her help. She has gone to many doctors, and again, that seems to be a significant detail. Individual after individual has raised her hopes only to dash them by failing to help her, leaving her with the desperate frustration that comes with hoping time after time that something helpful will happen and yet being disappointed. We are told that she has spent all her money. She not only has all of the physical problems but by now she is poor as well. She has to deal with the fact that she is poverty-stricken, in addition to everything else that has happened to her.

But most important, I think, are the social and spiritual consequences that her condition has caused her in her culture. Because she is unclean and because contact with her renders others unclean, it is not hard to imagine that friends, family, neighbors, relatives, others have grown increasingly distant. People have perhaps treated her in somewhat the same way they treated lepers; in order to avoid contamination you had to keep your distance. She is hurt by the things she has to face, including loneliness and being deprived of the people she wants to have around when she is hurting.

Most critical, I suspect, is the fact that she is prevented from worshiping God-- at least, prevented from being part of the prescribed way in which worship was to take place among her people. She cannot enter the temple. She cannot bring her sacrifices to the priest. She cannot hear the priest declaring to her that her sins, indeed, have been forgiven, that her sacrifice has been accepted—the reminders that God is interested in her.

The reason I am suggesting these things is to ask you to imagine what her psychological condition must have been, and what life must have been like for her. I suspect she had to deal regularly with bitterness, with anger—anger perhaps against her circumstances, perhaps even against the God who allowed these circumstances to continue: loneliness, self-hatred, fear of the future, alienation from God. It is not hard to see these things as part of the condition of the woman Mark describes in these verses.

Now it seems to me that if we look at the Christian church in today's world, as well as at the lives that those apart from Christ have to live, this very condition persists everywhere around us. It's true of people all over, and it may be true of you. Something inside you manages to reach out and destroy virtually every opportunity you have for happiness; something seems to come up over and over again to ruin and foul things and to take away your hopes and leave discouragement, time and time again. It may be a physical problem like this woman has. It may be an injury. It may be an illness. It's something that always gets in the way, that cuts you off from people and opportunities, that never lets go, and that you have tried and tried to be free of and yet persists in ruining things; there it is living inside you every day, and you cannot get rid of it.

More likely it is something in your personality, something in your emotional life, that accomplishes the same end. It is part of you, and yet it is a ruiner, a poisoner. It may be an obsession like alcohol or a fixation with food or

drugs or gambling—some obsession that returns and seeks to destroy. It may be a desperate kind of shyness that refuses to allow you to have good friends, that denies you the opportunity to be part of a community of people you want to be a part of. It may be a voracious possessiveness that smothers every relationship you have ever had, that demands so much of other people that they run scared. And you cannot stop yourself. Marriage is spoiled and children rebel because you cannot avoid dealing with people possessively.

You see, there are all kinds of things that can put us in the category that this woman is in. A disease inside, an affliction, a problem that I long to be free of and yet I cannot turn myself loose from and it has done nothing but make life hard to live. There are folks who sense these things about themselves, who just like this woman have gone to physician after physician, participated in every medical fad, been in various therapy groups, had consciousness raised, read all the self-help books, listened to all the media preachers—people who, just like this woman, have spent hundreds and thousands of dollars getting the best training, Lifespring training, buying wheat germ and jogging suits and everything else, desperately hoping that, "If I just get this thin—if I just take this, join this group, buy this—it can free me" and ultimately they never work. The condition persists. It has not gone away, and the next opportunity is ruined as well.

It is at this point in this woman's life, we are told, that she hears something about Jesus and decides that maybe he is different from all of the hope-shatterers she has sought out. We do not know how she has heard of him. We do not know whether she has interviewed someone who has been healed, or has listened to him teach from a distance, but somehow she has confidence that maybe it can be different this time. I would suggest that hundreds and thousands of everyday people everywhere hearing about Jesus approach him this same way—wondering if he can help, determined to approach him but at the same time protecting their broken hearts; anonymously, hesitantly, reaching out, touching his cloak but not letting him know who they are, running for cover, but longing to know if he can help. "I am going to keep my cover. I am going to keep the wall I have built and the pride I have erected around my hurt. But I still would love it to be true that Jesus could help me." That is the condition this woman is in.

I imagine you know personally many who have that kind of longing mixed with fear—that kind of wariness as they approach Christ. It reminds me of situations I have seen at funerals where a man or woman's spouse has died, and for the first time in years—maybe the first time ever—they find themselves gravitating toward the people of God and toward the message of Jesus, coming into a church and asking for help and, in the best circumstances, getting help. Somebody stands with them as they bury their spouse. Somebody prays with them to a God who understands life and death and who has provided victory over death. Somebody encourages them and supports them and sings hymns of victory; and the darkest part of the tunnel is traveled, the heaviest grief is dealt with. Yet eventually they walk out of the church into the street and leave the whole thing behind. No real change has been made. No eternal transformation has taken place. They are just like this lady. She touches his garment. She receives only temporary help, because the body that is healed now is going to break down again some day. It is going to grow old and fail again. She has received temporary help and she longs now to run back into the crowd, hide away, and protect the pride and the broken heart that are inside. She has received from the Lord more than she could have possibly hoped, but much less than she needed.

But now the story turns at a critical point. The story might have ended here with her melting back into the crowd. But it does not—because Jesus initiates now instead of the woman. The camera turns to show us the action of the Lord, not as one being pursued but as one now being the pursuer.

At this point, Jesus had been on an errand that had life-or-death consequences. A little girl was dying. In fact, she died before he could get to her. An important man, a synagogue official, was involved, somebody who carried weight in the community; and a crowd of people were accompanying him, so many that Jesus was jostled on every side. His own disciples treated him as if he were a fool for stopping and could not understand why he seemed not to heed the urgency of proceeding quickly. Yet Jesus loved that woman enough to stop the procession, enough to set everything else aside. We are told in verse 32, "He looked around to see the woman who had done this," who had touched him. He acted just like the shepherd in the story he would later tell, who left the ninety-nine sheep who were saved and went out looking for the one that was hurt, the one that was lost, the one that was

crushed, the one that was in need. He stops, turns around, and begins to scan the crowd, looking for her because she needs him and he knows it. It is important for people with burdens of fear, frustration, anger, broken hearts, to know how utterly important they are to him. He is willing to stop everything to find us. He is willing to put up with the ridicule of his followers. He is willing to apparently risk other important matters to find those who need him. That is the kind of Lord we are dealing with: not one who will reject us for being hurt, but one who wants to bear our hurts and meet our needs.

Now, what follows is the crisis point in this woman's whole life. Jesus is looking for her. Jesus has reached out to her. Jesus has stopped everything to find her. "Who touched me?" he asks. She can continue to back away, continue to hide behind and head toward the periphery of the crowd and run for her life, grateful that the temporary help had been given. Or, she can answer his question and identify herself, which is what she does. "She fell at his feet and told him the whole story:" all the things that had bothered her, all her anger against those who had mistreated her, all her concern about her distance from the Lord, all her anxieties, all the things bound up in the broken heart that lived inside her broken body. She tells him everything. It is embarrassing. There is a crowd of people around. But it does not matter. She is willing to deal face-to-face with Christ, to receive his attention to her and give her attention to him. What happens, in effect, is that Jesus moves from being a kind of distant Saviour, to being her Lord: someone she speaks to and listens to and embraces, someone she worships face-to-face, not someone she touches anonymously. He is a person to her now, not just a religious figure.

That is critical for us to see. So many of us have allowed ourselves to set Jesus off in the distance, where we periodically go for a kind of electric battery charge, where we go for temporary help. But we have never, or not for a long time, had this on-our-knees-before-him relationship, where we open up the hurt areas inside, where we confess and speak to him about our burdens, where we ask him to lift the burdens from us and expect him to respond, where Jesus is our Lord individually.

Mark 5:34 then is the great, magnificent statement of the Master of the Universe speaking to his friend, to the one he loves, to his intimate. What a great relief these words are: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." "Your faith has made you well." I want to mention some things about this verse too. First of all, I don't think the translation I just read is a very good one. A better one is this, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." I am sure that Jesus is using the Greek word "sozo" here to mean "salvation" in the broadest sense. It is not just that your body has been fixed up but that you have received salvation for eternity, you have received God's supply for all your needs—those on the inside, those in your spirit, those of your body, and so on—salvation in the fullest sense. "Your faith has saved you."

Second, when he says, "your faith," he is referring not to the moment that she touched his cloak—not to that act of faith—but to the act of faith that allowed her to fall on her knees in front of a crowd of people and talk about things embarrassing to herself, confessing her hurts because only Jesus mattered to her. This act of faith was the great turning point in her life, for it dealt with the more difficult problem of her pride and required much more courage than it did to touch his cloak anonymously.

The Lord then mentions two results of her faith—not a healed body alone. He says, "Go in peace and be healed of your affliction." She had already received the healing when she touched his cloak. What she had not received until now was his great promise that "You shall go in peace"—peace of heart.

I would like to conclude by reviewing two of the important lessons this passage has suggested to us. One is to watch Jesus as he brushes aside his disciples' objections, as he stops a procession of people, as he turns around and begins searching for a woman who needs him. He is still looking for hurting people, brokenhearted people, damaged, frustrated, and afraid people, who cover all those things up and who have been hurt so many times they do not want to trust anybody anymore. He is looking for people like that; and whenever we are in that condition—whether now or later—we need to believe that this is the kind of Lord we serve: not one who is cold and

distant and harsh but one who seeks the lost, the needy, the broken.

The second thing we ought to remember is that salvation turns not on cloak-touching, not on a self-protective, anonymous, at-a-distance interest in Jesus, but on answering his question, "Who touched me?" When we come forward and fall on our knees at his feet, when our pride is crucified, when we let fall the self-protective wall and meet him face-to-face—that is when salvation comes. Jesus loves us. He is seeking us. His concern is for people like us. And the big issue, the central decision for us is whether we are willing to lay down our self-protectiveness and to receive Jesus as Lord. Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, for a time of music and study and prayer and singing. Thank you for allowing us to be together this morning. Thank you for your searching love. Thank you for the fact that we are important to you. Help us to respond to you as Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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