

BLEEDING WOMAN

Date: March 26, 2020

Scripture: Mark 5:25-34

Hey, this is Charles Martin. This is the story of the woman with the issue of blood.

Jesus steps out of the boat and the crowds rush the beach. The country of the Gadarenes sits behind Him. Across the water, the rumors have already spread. Even His disciples are whispering. Jesus laughs. He has several appointments to keep. What happens in these next few minutes will upend the world.

A man runs across the beach, robes flowing. He's wealthy, one of the rulers of the synagogue. He darts through the crowd. The apostles move to protect Jesus. When Jairus falls at His feet and begs Him earnestly saying, "My little daughter is dying, come put your hands on her that she may be healed and live." Jesus smiles and gestures with His hand, "Take me to her." Moving through the street, Jairus screams at the crowd, fearing his daughter's death saying, "Move."

But Jesus is not hurried. In fact, He slows purposefully. He chose this street. He's been waiting for this day, this moment. The crowd squeezes in, but He's not bothered. He's taking His time. He catches a glimpse of her behind Him and His heart leaps. He knows her by name. There she is again, weaving through the crowd. Desperation painted across her face. He is her last hope and He knows it. He smiles to Himself.

She's heard the stories. Word has spread throughout all Judea. There was the man with the withered hand, the Centurion's servant, the son of the widow of Nain, who was in a coffin being carried out through the gate. The paralyzed man lowered by his friends through a roof and after the Healer touched him, he walked out the front

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door. How He calmed the wind and the waves with just a word, how He laid His hands on those with various diseases and how He healed them all. Everyone.

Lastly, she's heard how He delivered the demon-possessed man of the Gadarenes and then just recently she's heard how He read the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue. Now, the spirit of the Sovereign Lord was upon Him. She knew the prophecy. He was the Healer, the one the prophets talked about.

Through no fault of her own, she's been bleeding for 12 years. We're not sure why, but we do know that Leviticus gives strict instructions to anyone like her. This law has declared her unclean. Everything that she touched, laid down on, sat on or wore and everything that touched any of these things that she laid down on, sat on and wore was unclean. This included people. She was not allowed to quote, "be with a man or for a man to know her." The message given the law applied to her was, "Stay away. You are cast out."

Given her condition, she had been excluded from worship and from offering sacrifice. She was not allowed in the front door. Had been excluded for over a decade. She could not get access to the priest and hence, God. There was no atonement, no forgiveness. She didn't shake hands in public, didn't kiss anyone, didn't hug anyone. She'd been kept at an arm's length. How many times had she wondered if she'd be better off dead?

Then there was the issue of constantly having to wear a diaper. Something to soak up the blood so it didn't trickle down her leg, but sometimes it's soaked through. Sometimes she left a trail. Her shame had soaked through, too. In the back of her house where she dried her laundry, she hung the stained rags. Her neighbors couldn't

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help but notice when they flapped in the breeze. They wished she'd do something about the smell.

She'd tried everything. Been to every doctor. Now broke, she'd traveled far and spent every penny. The problem had not improved, only gotten worse. Everyone knew about her condition, which also meant they knew the source of her shame. It was sin. Either hers or her family's sin had brought this curse on her. The Law of Moses said so. So she lived under the constant shadow of whispers. Whatever sins she'd committed must've been significant and she's paying the penalty and only God knows. She was a walking, steaming, stench-filled mess. She was also a quote, "Daughter of Abraham."

We know from the narrative what's wrong with her. And to some extent, we know what she knows or has heard about Jesus, but we don't really know why she is stalking Jesus. And make no mistake. That's what she's doing.

To truly understand the depth of this woman's pain, desperation and courage, I need to push pause and leave her in the street for a moment. To truly get where she's at, we need to understand what, or who, has fueled the hope that brought her to this moment and has her standing in the street. And to do that, we need to back up to Moses.

In 1500 BC, Moses marched some three million Hebrews out of Egypt. They were a nation of slaves. Three days out of Egypt, they're thirsty. They come upon a well, but the water was bad and they grumbled. The Lord told Moses to throw a tree in the water. He did and the water turned sweet. And then He said, "I am the Lord who heals you."

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It's significant that one of the first names with which the Lord names Himself after His people's deliverance from generations of slavery is, Yahweh Rapha. It means the Lord your Healer. Three months later, Moses stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and said, Scripture says, "And Moses went up to God and the Lord called to him from the mountain saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel, you have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.'"

Following the Exodus, wings become a symbol of His protection and His deliverance and to make sure they remember, God gave instructions to Moses on how to build the Ark of the Covenant. He said, "And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings and they shall face one another. The faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the arc and in the arc you shall put the testimony that I will give you and there I will meet with you and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat from between the two cherubim."

Okay, so His wings are now a covering and a protection for His people. More than that, He invites them to come and meet with Him there under His wings. Psalm 91, probably written by Moses, says it this way, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I will trust. Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with his feathers and under his wings you shall take refuge."

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Note the meanings, cover, refuge, deliverance, trust. And because God is practical and He didn't want His people to forget, He took this one step further. He told Moses, "Speak to the children of Israel, tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have that tassel that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord."

The word here used for tassels in those pages is *kanaf*. It means an edge or extremity, specifically of a bird or an army. It means a wing or like a garment of bed clothing, even a flap. So, the corner or border of a garment is the same word used for wings. God was making a mental connection for His people. In a sense, He was saying, "The corner of your garment should remind you of me and my protection, of my deliverance and your healing." This idea became a major element in Hebrew culture.

Around 1000 BC, David was fleeing Saul in the wilderness of En Gedi. Scripture says, "Then Saul took 3000 chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in the rocks of the wild goats. So he came to the sheepfolds by the road where there was a cave and Saul went in to attend to his needs. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave. Then the men of David said to him, 'This is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand that you may do to him as it seems good to you.'" And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe."

What do you think David cut off? That tassel represented God's covering and protection. God had given Saul into David's hand and when David held it up and showed it to Saul and Saul glanced down at his now three-winged shirt, Saul knew it and he understood.

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Then around 740 BC, the prophet Isaiah said, "But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."

Lastly, the prophet Malachi, speaking around 400 BC said, "But to you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves."

The prophets fell silent for 400 years. Then Jesus, the boy, appeared wearing a shirt with four corners and Jesus, the boy, grew into Jesus the Messiah. Yeshua Hamashiach. How do we know this image, this idea, is important to Jesus? Well, He tells us. He said, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

From Psalms to Isaiah to Malachi to Matthew, the same word was used for wings, kanaf, and our bleeding woman in the street knows all of this.

News has traveled and even the outcasts have heard the stories of Him. Something in her stirs, hope, desperation, a mixture of both. Being unclean, the woman cannot get to where He is. They won't let her. The law prohibits it. She knows she is not allowed around other people. She's been forced to live and sustain herself on the outskirts. And if she knows anything at all, she is certainly not allowed to reach out and touch anyone, most of all Him.

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But she doesn't care what they think. She has come to the end of herself. She doubles the cloth rag between her legs, covers her head more so than usual, crowding her eyes and brow so she might not be recognized. The crowd passes. He's in the middle. Everyone's attention is focused on Him. She follows Him behind, out of sight. Then gathering her nerve, she begins picking up her step, working closer, weaving, elbowing. If she's caught, she'll be disciplined. Greater shame, complete and total public embarrassment.

Both bleeder and believer, she picks her way through the crowd. Just a few steps away, the crowd encroaches. She has to elbow her way through. She knows she's in violation. If she's caught, she doesn't want to think about it. A few more steps in there He is, at arms length. Standing next to Him are several men that look like they're from Galilee. The loud, big one must be Cephas. She's heard of him, too.

The crowd shoves and pushes and tightens and she's losing sight of this man named Jesus of Nazareth. In desperation, she lunges, extends her reach and grasps the corner of His garment, His shirt, the tassel, the wing. She clings and holds tightly. He feels the tug, feels the power leave. She feels it enter.

Now, a certain woman had a flow of blood for 12 years and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment for she said, "If only I may touch his clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.

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Luke recorded it this way. And Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press you and you say, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus said, "Somebody touched me for I perceived power going out from me." Now, when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling. And falling down before Him, she declared to Him, in the presence of all the people, the reasons she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately.

Mark and Luke say immediately or straightaway. Matthew says from that hour. But right then and there, her broken body is healed and she knows it. 12 years of pain and shame and anger and exasperation begin working their way out her soul. The tears begin to fall. She tries to back away, to escape. She's trembling. She is shattered and her knees buckle. Jesus pauses, stops. She's fearful of what He might say next and then He says it.

"Who just touched me?" She is discovered, found out. More shame, cast further out. Will they stone her for so great a violation? Jesus raises His voice, "Who touched me?" His friends, led by Peter, say, "Master, all these people, everybody's touching you." Jesus shakes His head. They don't get it. He is the Son who has come with healing in His wings and somebody who both knew and believed that, touched Him with intention. The Son of righteousness wants her brought before Him.

Why? Because He fashioned her, knit her together. He's known her pain. He suffered with her. He saw her coming through the crowd. He knows she's been weakened by 12 years of chronic anemia, so He slowed just enough so she could reach out and touch Him. He's not finished with her, not by a long shot.

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He lifts a hand. "Somebody touched me with intention. Power left my body." Everybody, all those big men began looking around for the perpetrator in the crowd, the thief. Trembling, having lost total control of her emotions, pleading on the inside that God would either have mercy on her in this moment or just strike her down. She falls to her knees, bowing her head, hiding her eyes. She tells the truth, spills it, lays it out there for the whole world to hear. Saying, "Here is my shame."

She soaks the earth with her tears. Her cries echo off the stone city walls. She is a woman undone, laid bare. Jesus, who knows her name, steps forward. He's so glad to see her. He's missed her and He's been looking forward to this moment for a long time.

He chose this road because He knew it wound near her house. Because while her body is battered and torn, it's her heart that is broken. In this moment, Jesus has already healed her body. The fountain of her blood was already dried up. He's calling her forward because He's about to heal her heart.

Then of all the words He could have spoken, He says the one singular word she needs to hear. "Daughter." The word echoes inside her, dancing around her insides like a pinball until it comes to rest in that place in her gut where her soul lives, down where her hope is buried.

Scripture doesn't say it, but I think Jesus reaches out and lifts her, raises her up in front of everyone else and hugs her tightly while she weeps and smears snot on His shoulder. He welcomes this daughter back into the family. And then just so everybody knows and to ensure there's no doubt and no question, He says, "Your faith has healed you."

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And somewhere in there it hits her. I am healed. It's over. I am what I once was. What I've always longed to be. The knowingness spreads across her face. I am a child of God.

Years ago I was working on a book in Africa. I met up with some doctors who were treating women with obstetric fistulas. It's a condition caused in countries with limited medical care. Prior to birth, the baby gets stuck in the birth canal, dies and, in so doing, tears a hole in either the bladder, the bowel or both. After delivering a stillborn, they're left with uncontrolled leakage of urine, feces and blood. And with no cure, the women eat and drink less to control the flow. Considered cursed by God, they are thrown out like lepers. Many sleep with the animals to keep warm. Suicide is common.

The stench is significant. No, it's awful. I have walked among them, so I'm speaking from experience. The only thing worse than the smell is the shame carved into their faces. Few, if any, look you in the eyes. And in colloquial language, these women are called the bleeders.

For whatever reason, this tormented woman in the street was a bleeder. I wonder how much time passed before she took off that diaper? How long before she tore down the laundry line, burning every last rag? In my mind, she stands alone in the street and screams at the top of her lungs, "He called me daughter!"

We're all bleeders. You, me, that person over there, all of us. We are draped in shame, bleeding out and yes, our bodies need healing, but it is our hearts that are broken and we are in need of hearing one singular word.

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If you think this is an isolated event in the life of a woman that didn't and doesn't pertain to you, let me read to you Matthew. "And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent out into all the surrounding region, brought to him all who were sick and begged him that they might only touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched it, were made perfectly well."

The wings of His garment are here, now. Will you reach out and grab hold? Some days I find myself at the end of myself. I am bleeding and I am broken and I'm getting worse. But I've heard the stories and He's passing by. So I bathe quickly, wrap on a diaper, elbow my way through, cling to His shirttail, plead to God to have mercy. And then He calls me forth saying the thing I need to hear, "Son, Charles, I've missed you. I was hoping you'd find me today. I'm so glad to see you." It's around here that Jesus hugs my neck and I weep on His, smearing snot.

First John says, "See what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. For that is what we are, children."

You and I are not disqualified by a decade of shame and pain by nonstop blood, by stench and smell and filthy rags. We are not too dirty. We, each of us and yes, that includes you, are welcomed in, lifted up, healed forever from this very hour.

The question is this. While you are a bleeder, are you a believer? Close your eyes. He chose this street. He's waited for this moment. He's walking slower, taking His time. He chose this route because He knew He'd pass by you. The multitude is with Him, but there's a break in the crowd. He sees you behind Him. His heart leaps. Go.

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Forget the diaper. You don't need it. Run fast. Don't worry what anyone else thinks. Throw elbows, lunge, reach out, cling, cling. Now, just listen.

Lord, Jesus. I am a bleeder and I am helpless to help me. I am bleeding both from what I've done and what's been done to me. I've tried everything and only made matters worse. Nothing I did changed my situation. I'm a mess and I'm sorry.

Today, I bring my shame and my infirmity to You. All of it. Today, I bring the truth of me and lay it bare before You. I don't want to live in hiding anymore. No more lies about the truth of me. Today, I'm exposing all of me before all of You. I believe that You are who You say You are. You tell me that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, will be delivered. That if I confess with my mouth and believe with my heart that You are the Savior and Redeemer of the world, that You alone paid my penalty and died my death, that I'm saved from an eternity without You and welcomed into an eternity with You. Jesus, that is both my confession and my belief. Here today, I reach through the crowd and hold tightly to Your wings, to You alone I hold and I'm not letting go. You are Yahweh Rapha, my Healer. Today, I declare out across the stratosphere that I am Your child and that You are my God. In Jesus name.