

Lesson 4

The Woman with an Issue of Blood

Mark 5.25-34

Introduction

This story, a story in the middle of a story, is found in all the synoptic gospels. There is a reason why. I believe Matthew, Mark, and Luke want us to know about a Savior who will embrace our brokenness. We serve a God who is not distracted from our trials and troubles. In fact, our God takes our troubles upon Himself personally. He is willing to come to us to touch our brokenness so we can be made whole.

Leading up to this, Mark's emphasis is that Jesus has more than enough power to change who we are. Just before this, in Chapter 4, Jesus displays his power over nature – instantly calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Leading up to our story in Chapter 5, Jesus displays His power over the supernatural – by casting out a legion of demons.³² The conclusion is that Jesus has miraculous power over disease and death. As Creator He can restore and renew. His power is without limit. His might is incomparable. On top of that, all the while He works these amazing things His heart reveals His desire to help. We readily see the mercy, gentleness, sensitivity, and lovingkindness of Christ on display.

The Story Leading Up to our Story

As Matthew 5 begins Jesus has traveled across the Sea of Galilee to Gentile lands. He is immediately approached by a man possessed with a demon named Legion. From Legion's short conversation with Jesus, we learn that there were many demons living inside this man, who was in constant torment. The man had resorted to living in the mountains and graveyards. Jesus heals him and sends the demons into a large herd of pigs, who run off a cliff into the Sea. The village people reacted with fear and asked Jesus to leave.

So, beginning in Mark 5.21, Jesus returns to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee where a large crowd has gathered. Jairus, a synagogue leader, approaches with an urgent request. *My little daughter is dying. Come and lay your hands on her so that she can get well and live*, 5.23. Jesus grants the man's request and goes with him. Mark adds that the crowd follows ... there are so many people that the crowd was pressing against Him. Luke adds that *the crowds were nearly crushing Him*, 8.42.

As Jesus is making his way with Jairus a woman presses through the crowd to get to Jesus. She is in the most desperate of situations. In fact, the only thing that would have been worse was if she had had leprosy. Why is she so determined to get to Jesus? And, why is her story mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke?³³

³² These accounts are found in Mark 4.35-41; 5.1-20.

³³ Matthew 9.20-22; Mark 5.25-34; Luke 8.43-48.

The Woman's Dire Circumstances

Of the three accounts, Mark goes into the most detail. Mark 5.25-26 say she had been bleeding for 12 years and had endured much at the hands of many doctors.³⁴ She had spent all she had and her condition had only worsened. But don't just casually read over this. Mark helps us catch the emotion of the situation by the usage of emphatic language:

- She had endured *much* under *many* doctors.
- She spent *everything*.
- Nothing had helped *at all*.
- Things had only become *worse*.

Also, his usage of the word *affliction* in 5.29 is important as we try to understand her plight. In the original language, this word is used in other places in the New Testament to describe various forms of whipping, scourging, torment, or suffering.³⁵ It's a word that expresses the physical discomfort, social humiliation, and stigma that would have no doubt been attached to her. She had been cut off religiously as she was perpetually unclean. Anyone who touched her became unclean.³⁶ If she had been married, she was now likely divorced. All associations with family and friends would have been impacted as everyone would have to maintain the appropriate social distances.

The Woman's Decision to go to Jesus

Jesus' fame had spread throughout all of Galilee, which is evident because of the number of people who were attracted to Him. No doubt this woman had heard of Jesus' ability to cast out demons, heal lepers, cause the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. Having tried every possible human remedy,³⁷ she knew there was only one source who could take care of her condition once and for all.

So she presses and pushes her way through the crowd. She doesn't care what society thinks. *If I just touch his clothes, I'll be made well.* The wording here (Mark 5.28) is written in such a way that it communicates she kept on repeating this. Getting to Jesus is the only thing on her mind. Nothing will stop her. Her great desperation *and* her faith in Jesus and the power possessed would not be satisfied until she could be in His presence. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, she knew He was the only one who could heal her. Luke tells us she got just close enough to touch the end of Jesus' robe, Luke 8.44. It should go without saying

³⁴ Jewish literature is not often kind to doctors. The Mishnah says *the best among physicians is destined for Gehenna*, Qiddushin 4:14.

³⁵ This word was used of distressing bodily diseases. It is used also of afflictions which are regarded as a scourge from God. How this illness had whipped and scourged her. But now she was healed. See Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, Vol. 1, p. 111.

³⁶ Leviticus 15.25-27.

³⁷ The Jewish Talmud lists out several remedies, ... like these: "Take of the gum of Alexandria the weight of a zuzee (a fractional silver coin); of alum the same; of crocus the same. Let them be bruised together, and given in wine to the woman that has an issue of blood. If this does not benefit, take of Persian onions three logs (pints); boil them in wine, and give her to drink, and say, 'Arise from thy flux.'" See Lightfoot, John. *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew-1 Corinthians, Matthew-Mark*. Vol. 2. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010, p. 412.

that the object of her faith was Jesus . . . not his clothing. She knew He possessed more than enough power to heal her disease.

The Woman's Faith Rewarded

Instantly her flow of blood ceased, and she sensed in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

– Mark 5.29

There is one word that comes to mind here: *relief*. After at least a decade of sorrow, she is now experiencing relief and rest. Notice also how her healing came *instantly*. Her body has been restored. 12 years of medicine could not accomplish what Jesus did in the blink of an eye.

Jesus felt the power go out from Him. *Who touched my clothes?* It's not that He didn't know. But, Jesus is seeking an encounter with this woman. *He was looking around to see who had done this*, 5.32. He wants her to step out of the shadows. She does. Mark says:

The woman, with fear and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

– Mark 5.33

Again, let's slow down here and visualize what's happening. She now has the full attention of the Creator of the universe. For the last 12 years she has experienced nothing but pain and rejection. It should be of no surprise at all we read of her *fear and trembling*. As she tells Jesus *the whole truth*, she is communicating from a wounded heart. Jesus stops, in the middle of the crowd, to listen and take in her story. He is one on one with her. What an incredible moment!

His heart is touched. In 5.34 he calls her *daughter*, a term of warmth, tenderness, and intimacy.^{38 39} In no way is Jesus ashamed to be with her. In fact, He is embracing her shame and embarrassment. He has provided a cure, not only for her physical ailment, but also her mental and emotional pain. The lesson for us is that our Savior has no qualms about meeting and embracing us in our darkest and most shameful moments.

We must not forget the second part of v. 34, where Jesus addresses her most important need: *salvation*. He says:

"Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be healed from your affliction."

– Mark 5.34

It might also be good to include Matthew's account here too:

Jesus turned and saw her. "Have courage, daughter," he said. "Your faith has saved you." And the woman was made well from that moment.

³⁸ In later Jewish writings, "daughter" is often a respectful and affectionate address to women regardless of age or relationship. See Marcus, Joel. *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 27. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 360.

³⁹ This is the only place in the gospels where it is recorded that Jesus addressed a woman as "daughter."

– Matthew 9.22

Matthew's account helps us understand there was much more going on here than just physical healing. When he writes that she was *made well from that moment*, he is using a word that is usually used in the New Testament to refer to being saved from sin. Her *faith* is not merely intellectual, there is much more. She has an emotional involvement that has propelled her to move in active "trust." What made her different from the hundreds of other people who touched Jesus' garment that day? She reached out in trust . . . believing in His power to transform and make new.

It is because of that Jesus says, *go in peace and be healed from your affliction*. The "peace" here points less to "peace of mind," than it refers to salvation, i.e., peace with God.⁴⁰

For the 21st Century

We need to understand the loathsome nature of sin. Mark goes into detail to describe the immense suffering and desperate plight of this woman, using a very graphic word to describe her *affliction*. If we liken her condition to the devastating and continual impacts caused by sin, we have captured a very important lesson from this story. How amazing it is that we do not hate sin more than we do. It is the cause of so much pain in our life. Just as the woman's debilitating infirmity impacted her on every level of life, so sin devastates ours. Instead of holding on to our sin, we need to come to the point where we loathe it and turn away.

But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen. Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night. We grope along a wall like the blind; we grope like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as though it were twilight; we are like the dead among those who are healthy.

– Isaiah 59.2, 9-10.

Jesus is completely impartial. Remember, this story happens on the way to heal the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. Jairus was a well-known, influential, and respected member of the community. But for Jesus, all that matters little when an unknown, unclean, and unkempt woman appears in desperation and urgency. For Him, she is on an equal basis with everyone else. He is not offended that she grabbed His garment. He's not impatient with her because He is in the middle of something else. This is the essence of His mission:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

– Mark 10.45

Personal power, possessions, and prestige give no advantage when it comes to access to Christ:

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.

– Galatians 3.28

⁴⁰ Foerster, Werner. "Ειρήνη, Ειρηνεύω, Ειρηνικός, Ειρηνοποιός, Ειρηνοποιέω." Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–, Vol. 2, p. 412.

Jesus is personal. When the woman touched the end of Jesus' garment, Jesus knew it. *Someone did touch me. I know that power has gone out from me*, Luke 8.46. He is not detached or aloof. He is personally involved in every act of power. God is not an emotionless, unfeeling, divine force. Paul declares that He *lives in us*, Galatians 2.20, which means He is fully involved in your life. And what He has started, He will complete, Philippians 1.6.

Conclusion

Why did the Holy Spirit preserve this story in all three synoptics? I think the answer is simple. The woman with an issue of blood represents you and me. We are sick and dying with sin. Many of us have tried everything else but Jesus and only grown worse in our condition. Human remedies simply do not work. And yet, Christ has come to each of us through the cross. We need to reach out in faith without fear. When we do, just like the woman in this story, can experience the deepest sense of peace known to man ... peace and assurance that our soul is right with God.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is Jesus about to do when a woman appears in the crowd and touches His garment?
2. What was so bad about her circumstances? How does Mark go into detail about it?
3. What do you think is driving her to Jesus? Is it a matter of superstition or faith? What indications does the text give?
4. How does Jesus react when she touches His garment?
5. How does she respond to Jesus' inquiry? Why?
6. As she explains the *whole truth*, what scenes can you visualize as this is going on? What is the crowd doing? What is Jesus doing? What is the woman doing?

7. What is special about Jesus referring to this woman as *daughter*?

8. Taking Matthew's account into perspective, how do we know there is more than physical healing going on? (Matthew 8.22)

9. How does this story help illustrate the loathsome condition/experience of sin? What should be our reaction?

10. What does this story teach us about impartiality?

11. How can this story warm your heart when you consider the personal attachment God has with you?

12. What are some other applications you can draw out of this story and share with others?