

## The woman with the discharge of blood. Bethesda Meditation. 24 June 2012.

Each of the first three gospels record for us our Lord's healing of a woman who, for twelve long years, had suffered from a medical condition which caused her to bleed continually. This is Doctor Luke's account of the incident ...

As Jesus went, the people pressed upon Him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and, though she had spent everything she had on physicians, she could not be healed by any.

She came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment, and immediately her discharge of blood stopped. And Jesus said, "Who is it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press upon you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I know that power has gone out from me".

And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and, falling down before Him, declared before all the people *why* she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace".

As most of you know, this was one miracle which the Lord Jesus performed when on His way – at the urgent request of a local synagogue ruler – to perform another. The verses immediately *before* tell us that Jairus had 'implored Him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying', while the verse immediately *following* tells us that 'someone came from the ruler's house and said, "Your daughter is dead"'.<sup>1</sup>

And these two intertwined stories – of the healing of this unhappy woman, and of the raising back to life of the daughter of Jairus – certainly combine to illustrate the Saviour's power to give cleansing to the unclean and to give life to the dead.

But these two incidents have far more in common than simply demonstrating the greatness of our Lord's power.

I note, for example, that, according to the Law of Moses, for any normal person to have had physical contact either with a woman suffering from constant haemorrhaging,<sup>2</sup> or with any dead body, would have resulted in that person becoming unclean himself.<sup>3</sup> Although we discover that He (our Lord Jesus – the Holy One) both cleansed the chronically ill woman and raised the dead girl without contracting any defilement.

I note also that each incident centres on a female for whom the period of twelve years held great significance. The *woman*, Luke notes, had suffered from her uncontrollable flow of blood for twelve years, and *the daughter of Jairus* was then exactly twelve years of age.

There can be no doubt that, in the case of Jairus, he would gladly have given everything he had to hold onto that which he *loved* and had *enjoyed* for the past twelve years; whereas, in the case of this poor afflicted woman, as we read, she had already given everything she had in regular but unsuccessful attempts to rid herself of that which she *hated* and had *endured* for the past twelve years.

But the woman's medical condition was not only defiling; it was acutely embarrassing. And I suggest that, in part at least, this explains *why*, as we read, 'she came up *behind Him* and touched the fringe of His garment'.

Job, in his response to the last – and shortest – speech made by any of his friends, speaks of God's vast and majestic power<sup>4</sup> ... of His creating both outer space and the earth ('hanging the earth upon nothing'), of His control of the clouds, of His marking the boundary between light and darkness, of His shaking of the mountains and of His rousing and calming of the sea.<sup>5</sup> And Job concluded his speech with the observation, 'Behold, these are the edges (these are the outermost parts ... the fringes<sup>6</sup>) of His ways ... !'<sup>7</sup>

And to think that this poor woman reached out her hand and touched the 'fringe' of the garment<sup>8</sup> of the One whose immense creatorial and providential works represent but the 'fringes of His ways'!

I said that the accounts of the healing of the woman and of the raising of the young girl have far more in common than simply demonstrating the greatness of our Lord's power. They are, I note, also tied together by the stress laid on the need for *faith*.

In the case of the woman, the Lord made it very clear to her that it was her faith – and not her physical touch in itself – which had 'saved' her ... which had released His power to dry up her flow of blood. And both her past history and her present condition certainly called for great faith. This woman was a hopeless medical case. For

‘though she had spent everything she had on physicians’, we read, ‘she could not be healed by any’ – indeed, as Mark points out in his gospel, not only was she no better, but she – and I quote – ‘rather grew worse’.<sup>9</sup>

And yet such was her faith in the healing power of Jesus that, as Mark tells us, ‘she said, “If I shall touch but His garments I shall be healed”’.<sup>10</sup><sup>11</sup> In the case of Jairus, when informed that his daughter was dead, Jesus immediately told him, ‘Fear not: only believe, and she shall be made well’.<sup>12</sup>

Also, in both cases, the effect of our Lord’s power was instantaneous. In the case of the woman, Doctor Luke reports both that as she touched the fringe of His garment ‘*immediately* her discharge of blood stopped’, and that she declared before all ‘how she had been *immediately* healed’. What the doctors had failed to do over a period of twelve years, Jesus did in an instant.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Jairus’s daughter, we read that, when He (our Lord) took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Child, arise’, ‘her spirit returned, and *immediately* she rose up’.<sup>14</sup>

A short time before, while visiting the house of Simon the Pharisee, ‘a woman of the city, who was a sinner’ (as Luke described her) ventured in to wash, kiss and anoint our Lord’s feet. Simon was horrified, and, Luke records, ‘spoke with himself, saying “This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner”’. Our Lord revealed to Simon immediately that He was indeed, at the least, ‘a prophet’ ... by answering Simon’s *unspoken* challenge, by informing him that He (Jesus) knew indeed that the woman’s sins were ‘many’, and by proving that He certainly knew ‘who and what manner of man Simon was!’<sup>15</sup>

‘This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him’, were Simon’s words. Interestingly, in the case of the woman with the discharge of blood, which followed soon after, Luke makes it clear that our Lord did indeed know who the woman was who ‘touched Him’.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly also, whereas *Simon the Pharisee expected* Jesus (if a prophet) to know who it was that touched Him, as we read, *Simon Peter* (who knew Jesus to be much more than a prophet<sup>17</sup>) *didn’t expect* Jesus to know who it was that touched Him.<sup>18</sup> And I note that the encounters of these two women with our Lord ended in exactly the same way ... with Him addressing both with the very same words, ‘your faith has saved you; go in peace’.<sup>19</sup>

What a story! A woman made clean by power which went out from our Lord. But we know that to make *us* clean needed more than any amount of His power going out ... it required His blood being shed. And so this morning we must travel on to the place where, not only His upper garment, but all His garments, would be, not touched, but taken from Him!<sup>20</sup>

Earlier we sang the words of James Montgomery, ‘Slain to redeem us by His blood, to cleanse from every sinful stain’. Last Lord’s Day evening, we thought together of the Christian as ‘redeemed’. This morning we rejoice that – not by healing energy which went out from Him – but by the same blood which redeemed us, we have been *cleansed* ‘from every sinful stain’.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> From which we learn something, not only of how busy He was, but of His overflowing grace.

<sup>2</sup> Lev. 15. 2; Num. 5. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. 15. 19; Num. 19. 11.

<sup>4</sup> In the first of these two chapters (26 and 27) Job addressed his remarks to Bildad's last speech. In the second he broadened his view to include all three of his companions. The "you" in 26. 2-4 is singular in Hebrew, but the "you" in 27. 5, 11, 12 is plural. After this speech of Job, his friends appear to be completely overcome and silenced, and the third of them (Zophar) does not venture to renew the attack.

<sup>5</sup> Job, demonstrated God's authority over the domain of Mot (the god of death) in vv.5-6, and over the domain of Baal (the cosmic storm god in vv.7-10). In vv.12-13 Job drew attention to God's awe-inspiring power over the domain of Yam (the stormy sea-god).

<sup>6</sup> NIDOTTE, 7895.

<sup>7</sup> Job 26. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Although I understand the 'fringe' of the Lord's garment which the woman touched to be one of four tassels which formed part of the upper garment or mantle worn by Jews in Bible days ... being in particular that tassel which hung down over the shoulder of the wearer and was at our Lord's back. Hence the woman approaching Him from behind.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 5. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 5. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she had heard of that occasion a few months previous when, Luke informs us, a great multitude of people 'from all Judea ... and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon ... sought to touch Him, for power (healing energy) went out of Him, and healed them all', Luke 6. 17-19; cf. Matt.14. 34-36; Luke 5. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 8. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Note Mark's addition, 'And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him ... ', Mark 5. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 8. 54-55.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 7. 47-50.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 8. 47 with Luke 7. 39. The Lord's question in verse 45 doesn't necessarily mean that He was ignorant of the woman's identity – only that it was His intention of singling her out.

<sup>17</sup> John 1. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 8. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 7. 50; 8. 48 – the literal translation in both cases. The Saviour's words to the healed woman convey the lesson that it was her faith, and not a mere physical touch, which had saved her. She had been healed, not by a garment but by the Lord – not by her touch but by her faith. Having received power, she now receives peace.

<sup>20</sup> The Greek word 'garment' is the same as in Matt. 27. 35; Mark 15. 24; John 19. 23-24.