

Two desperate women

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A twelve-year hemorrhage

The relevant texts are: Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:24-34 and Luke 8:42^b-48.

Matthew 9:—20 And then, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. 21 For she kept saying to herself, “If only I may touch His garment I will be healed”. 22 But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, “Take courage, daughter; your faith has made you well”. And the woman was healed from that *very* hour.

Mark 5:—24 A large crowd was also following Him, and they were pressing around Him. 25 Now a certain woman—who had been bleeding for twelve years, 26 and had suffered many things under many doctors, and had spent all that she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse—27 when she heard about Jesus, she came from behind in the crowd and touched His garment. 28 (She had kept saying, “If I can just touch His clothes, I will be healed”.) 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she knew in her body that she was healed from the affliction. 30 And instantly Jesus perceived within Himself that some power had gone out of Him, and turning around in the crowd He said, “Who touched my clothes?” 31 So His disciples said to Him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’?” 32 But He kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 So the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her: “Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace and be healed from your affliction.”

Luke 8:—Now as He was going, the crowds were pressing against Him. 43 And a woman—suffering with a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent her whole livelihood on physicians, but could not be healed by any—44 approaching from behind touched the border of His garment; and immediately the flow of her blood stopped! 45 So Jesus said, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter and those with him said: “Master, the people are pressing against you and crowding in, and you say, ‘Who touched me?’?”¹ 46 But Jesus said, “Someone did touch me, because I noticed power going out from me”. 47 Now when the woman saw that she could not hide, she came trembling, and falling down before Him she told Him in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately. 48 So He said: “Courage, daughter, your faith has healed you. Go into peace.”

Here we have a moving account of faith, determination and perseverance; perhaps it will have some practical lessons for us. My discussion will attempt to follow the actual sequence of events. Matthew’s account is abbreviated, so I will depend mainly on the other two.

- 1) The street was presumably not very wide, and both Mark and Luke inform us that it was filled with a crowd that was pressing around and against Jesus. Indeed, Mark 5:31 and Luke 8:45 reinforce the observation. Obviously this represented a problem for the

¹ Perhaps 1.5% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, omit “and you say, ‘Who touched me?’?” (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

woman; how could she get to Jesus through that crowd, the more especially if it was made up mostly, if not entirely, of men? For any woman to push through a crowd of men would be unacceptable, but she had an added problem.

- 2) From Matthew 9:1 and the context we may conclude that this episode transpired in Capernaum, which really was not all that big a town. The point is, that woman would be a known person. The available space was packed with people, the crowd was on both sides of Jesus, as well as behind, so she would have to force her way through. However, this represented a difficulty beyond just being rude. According to Leviticus 15:19-27, any discharge of blood made a woman 'unclean', and verse 25 deals with prolonged hemorrhage—anyone who touched her, or even her clothes, became 'unclean' as well. So everyone she touched on her way through the crowd became 'unclean'! Now she and her problem were well known, so the people she touched were NOT happy. She no doubt got plenty of dirty looks, and maybe a few elbows, as well as some choice expressions. It would have been easy to give up, but she kept repeating her expectation to herself (Matthew 9:21) to keep up her courage, and she was desperate.
- 3) So why was she desperate? She "had been bleeding for twelve years, and had suffered many things under many doctors, and had spent all that she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:25-26). In other words, she was at the end of her financial resources and of any medical hope. Mark almost seems to be accusing the doctors of malpractice. Luke, himself a doctor, is more cautious: "a woman suffering with a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent her whole livelihood on physicians, but could not be healed by any" (Luke 8:43). No wonder the woman was desperate, but then "she heard about Jesus" (Mark 5:27), and all of a sudden she had hope!
- 4) Well, she managed it. She wormed through the crowd and "touched the hem of His garment" (Matthew 9:20). "Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she knew in her body that she was healed from the affliction" (Mark 5:29). Note that all she had to do was touch; this sort of thing, people getting healed just by touching His clothes, happened repeatedly during the Lord's earthly ministry. Jesus could have let the incident pass, but He chose not to. He stopped and turned around.
- 5) "Instantly Jesus perceived within Himself that some power had gone out of Him, and turning around in the crowd He said: Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30). When Luke writes that "all denied it" (8:45), we may understand that it was by their silence; no one spoke up. But Jesus insisted, "He kept looking around to see who had done it" (Mark 5:32). When the disciples protested that He was being 'touched' all the time by the jostling crowd, Jesus said, "Someone did touch me, because I noticed power going out from me" (Luke 8:46). He was referring to a purposeful touch. The woman had evidently withdrawn into the crowd, and may even have been hidden behind others. But Jesus did not let her get away with it.
- 6) "Now when the woman saw that she could not hide, she came trembling, and falling down before Him she told Him in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately" (Luke 8:47). That was not easy, in front of the crowd, but Jesus gave her no choice. Was He just being mean? No, He was doing her a big favor. The people knew who she was, and about her physical problem; Jesus was declaring her healing, and therefore her cleansing, to the assembled multitude,

and by implication those who had been 'contaminated' by the woman could relax on that score.

- 7) Then Jesus said to her: "Courage, daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace and be healed from your affliction" (Mark 5:34, Luke 8:48). That is what the Text says, 'into peace' not 'in'. To go 'in peace' is to leave on good terms, no hard feelings. But what might going into peace be? I would say that you take the peace with you; you live within an atmosphere of peace. Now that is a proper 'blessing'! Sovereign Jesus never said 'go in peace'; He always said "go into peace"—He was giving the person a new life. How about a doxology!

A crumb for a 'puppy'

The relevant texts are: Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-31^a.

Matthew 15:—21 Going out from there Jesus withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And then, a Canaanite woman coming from those parts cried out to Him saying: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demonized." 23 But He answered her not a word. So His disciples came and urged Him saying, "Send her away, because she is crying out after us". 24 But in answer He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel".² 25 So she came and worshipped Him saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 But in answer He said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs". 27 So she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table". 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that *very* hour.

Mark 7:—24 Then He got ready and went from there into the region of Tyre and Sidon. He went into a house and did not want anyone to know it, but He could not escape notice. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at His feet. 26 Now the woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first; it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs". 28 So she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs". 29 So He said to her, "Because of this saying you may go; the demon has gone out of your daughter". 30 She went away to her house and found that the demon was gone and the daughter had been placed on the bed. 31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus came to the Sea of Galilee by way of the Decapolis region.

Here we have a moving account of faith, determination and humility; perhaps it will have some practical lessons for us. My discussion will attempt to follow the actual sequence of events.

- 1) To begin, we observe that Jesus left the Jewish Galilee and went to the Gentile Tyre and Sidon. Now why do you suppose He did that, since He would presently say, "I was not

² Although His ultimate mission included the whole world (see the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20), His earthly ministry was directed to the "house of Israel".

sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24)? In that case, what was He doing in Tyre? Well, maybe He just wanted to get away and rest a bit; upon arriving “He went into a house and did not want anyone to know it, but He could not escape notice” (Mark 7:24). A group of thirteen foreigners would tend to attract some attention, even if they tried to keep a low profile. Still, the Text plainly says that Jesus tried to avoid being noticed. How then did the ‘puppy’ know that Jesus was coming before He even arrived?!

- 2) From Mark’s account one could assume that the woman appeared after Jesus was in the house, but Matthew’s account tells us something else. Notice verse 23: His disciples came and urged Him saying, “Send her away, because she is crying out after us” (Mark does say that she kept asking, verse 26). They were still on the road, and the woman was following them. Further, she addressed Him as the Jewish Messiah: a Canaanite woman coming from those parts cried out to Him saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demonized” (Matthew 15:22). “Son of David”—as a Canaanite she appealed to the Jewish Messiah, upon whom she had no claim. But how did she know that? I suspect there is more to this story than meets the eye. The only explanation that I can see is that the woman received divine orientation; she was told where to go and what to say. In that event, helping that woman may have been the purpose for the trip.
- 3) The woman began with, “Lord, Son of David”, to which Jesus returned no answer, since she had no claim upon Him in those terms. However, since she would not stop, and did not keep her voice down, she was ‘blowing their cover’. So the disciples appealed to Jesus for relief, to which He replied, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The Lord spoke loudly enough for her to hear, since His answer was as much, if not more so, for her as it was for the disciples. So she came and worshipped Him saying, “Lord, help me!” (Matthew 15:25). She got the message, because she now dropped the appeal to the Messiah. Mark 7:25 tells us that she “fell at His feet”, so either Jesus had stopped or she had run ahead so she could stop Him.
- 4) Now we come to an unusual conversation. Our Lord’s choice of terms would probably strike most readers as being unexpectedly harsh. “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (Matthew 15:26, Mark 7:27). Dear me, Jesus called her a dog (and a ‘little’ one at that)! To be sure, at that time Jews commonly referred to Gentiles as ‘dogs’, but why would Jesus follow suit? I imagine that He was testing her humility, since she had already, as I believe, received a special dispensation of grace. (One is reminded of Cornelius.) And she passed the test! So she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27). Big dogs would not be in the house, so these would be little house pets, or perhaps puppies. Then Jesus answered and said to her: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire. Because of this saying you may go; the demon has gone out of your daughter” (Matthew 15:28, Mark 7:29).
- 5) “She went away to her house and found that the demon was gone and the daughter had been placed on the bed” (Mark 7:30). The verb ‘place’ is perfect passive; evidently the child was too small, or too weak, to have gotten there by herself.

6) “Departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus came to the Sea of Galilee” (Mark 7:31). We are not told whether Jesus did anything else while in that region. If not, He apparently went there just to help that woman. But why would He do something like that?—it involved time and inconvenience. Well, consider 2 Chronicles 16:9. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (NKJV). God’s ‘search’ covers the whole earth, so is not limited to nation or place, and not to time either. Cornelius is a biblical example, but there have doubtless been many others down through history (I have seen it myself). So if you are needing some ‘strong’ help, here is the key—the language of the Text indicates that God is just waiting to give that help. How about another doxology!

This episode always moves me. In effect, Jesus called the woman a ‘dog’ (that is what Jews called Gentiles), and she accepted the classification. She was determined to get her ‘crumb’, and she did! And she left us a great example of humility, determination and faith!