

Are You Bumping Into Christ Or Touching The Hem Of His Garment?

Luke 8:43-48

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In order for a person to look in faith to Christ alone for eternal salvation, there must be some sense of urgency. One must realize that there is absolutely nothing that he/she can do to make himself/herself acceptable before a holy God. One must have come to an end of all human resources to heal oneself of the dreaded disease of sin and the inevitable consequences of that sin—eternal death in hell. Without such an urgency moving one to faith in Christ, why would fall before the Lord and call out to Him for salvation? Without such an urgent, desperate faith, a sinner will continue to look to some righteousness within or to some work of righteousness on his/her part as sufficient for salvation. Before the prodigal son would come to his father and receive of the mercy offered, he first had to see his desperate situation, his hunger, his poverty, his rebellion, and his inevitable death. He had to exhaust himself of his own resources, so that he could cast himself upon the abundant and merciful resources of his merciful father alone. That is the urgency which leads to faith and repentance.

We see in the biblical account before us this Lord's Day an example of this urgency that leads to faith. The main points from our text in Luke 8:43-48 are the following: (1) The Woman's Urgent Need Revealed (Luke 8:43); (2) The Woman's Urgent Faith Exercised (Luke 8:44); and (3) Jesus Distinguishes Between Two Kinds of Faith (Luke 8:45-48).

I. The Woman's Urgent Need Revealed (Luke 8:43).

A. The context leading up to our text has Christ and His disciples returning by boat across the Sea of Galilee from the land of the

Gadarenes (where he had delivered the demoniac from the legion of demons). As Christ disembarks, a crowd gathers around Him and the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, works his way through the crowd and falls at Christ's feet and pleads with the Lord to come to his house because his daughter was on the verge of dying (Luke 8:41-42). Upon hearing the plea of Jairus, the Lord with great compassion begins the walk to the house of Jairus, even as the crowd presses in and follows so as not to miss the drama now unfolding before their eyes.

B. This is where we now meet a poor needy woman, who was one of those in the crowd at that time. What do we know about this woman from the text?

1. She had what Luke (the human author, who himself was a physician) describes as “an issue of blood”, and she had suffered with it for twelve years (Luke 8:43).

a. An issue of blood was a hemorrhaging similar to a woman's monthly cycle, but a hemorrhaging that was more frequent than once a month. It was an ailment that had several terrible consequences: a continual weakening of the body from the loss of blood (perhaps eventually leading to death), an inability to bear children, and a continual uncleanness according to the law of God in the Old Testament (as we see in Leviticus 15:25-27—thus illustrating that the very springs of life have been corrupted with sin—“in sin did my mother conceive me” Psalm 51:5).

b. Whatever family or friends she had, she could not touch them or have them into her home or visit them in their homes, for not only was she unclean, but everything she touched became unclean. This meant she was cut off, not only from family and friends, but also was cut off from the public ordinances of worship with God's people. She could not publicly gather with God's people to sing God's praises or to hear God's Word expounded. There were no hugs, no kisses, no touching

one who had such an issue of blood. Here was a social and spiritual outcast. For twelve long years she had lived in this lonely, isolated condition, growing weaker and weaker physically as time passed by and being defiled and cut off from the holy things of God's worship.

2. Furthermore we know about this woman that she had suffered through seeing many physicians ("and had suffered many things of many physicians" Mark 5:26). She had availed herself of all the outward means through the physicians of that time. Perhaps her suffering indicates that she had suffered physically from the many procedures that were used by the physicians (a case of the cure being worse than the disease), or perhaps that she had suffered mentally from the sense of hopelessness that overcame her each time a doctor said to her, "I'm sorry, but I can't help you. Your illness is incurable."

3. Moreover we learn about this woman that she had spent all that she owned to remedy the problem ("and had spent all that she had" Mark 5:26). As if the physical and mental hopelessness were not enough to make her situation desperate, she was now penniless from having spent all she had to find a cure. This may also indicate that she was not married and had no one to care for her. After all, she didn't come with a husband or a father—but came all alone. Physically, socially, spiritually, and financially she was alone and in desperate need.

4. Finally, note that she not only had not improved, but had grown worse ("and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" Mark 5:26). For all the time and money she had expended, her condition had become increasingly worse and worse—this is indicative of the seriousness of the problem, that without help, it would seem that death was not far away.

C. What a picture this paints of the urgency necessary in the heart of a sinner that would drive one to see the utter hopelessness of one's condition before God, if one looks to his/her own remedies or resources

to bring salvation from sin, death, and hell. For just as this issue of blood defiled the woman as a type or figure of sin and separated her from God's people and from God's ordinances, so sin separates the sinner from the kingdom of Christ and from communion with Christ. Just as the woman tried everything that might help to cure her but only found herself closer to death, so the sinner may try everything to find salvation, peace of mind, and contentment in this world through work, pleasure, immorality, freedom, education, family, works of righteousness, or even through the church (i.e. going through the outward motions), but will only come to the same conclusion as did the woman in Luke 8: "I am only closer to death than I was before. I have tried to cure this guilty conscience, I have tried to drown this restlessness in my soul, but nothing I have tried works. If salvation depends upon me, I am hopelessly lost."

D. This is not only the place to which the unconverted sinner must come, but dear ones, this is the place to which the Christian must come each day of his/her life—without Jesus Christ I am helpless and hopeless, **WITHOUT CHRIST I CAN DO NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING.** Dear ones, have the trials and heartaches in your life hardened your hearts to the Lord, or have they brought you to that place of urgency before the Lord? That is precisely what Christ intends them to do in your life. You need an urgent faith in Christ every day, but until you see your urgent need of Christ every day, you will not reach out to touch Him (as did this needy woman in Luke 8).

II. The Woman's Urgent Faith Exercised (Luke 8:44).

A. How this desperate woman came to hear of Christ, to be in that multitude of people on that particular day, and to believe in Him we are not told, but her urgent faith was placed in Christ alone, in His mercy and

power alone to heal her: “If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole” (Matthew 9:21).

1. Some have suggested that there was a superstitious knowledge associated with the woman touching the outer garment of the Lord. However, I would suggest that it was not superstition, but rather a sense of shame and modesty over the nature of her condition that led her to the least conspicuous manner of exercising her faith in Christ, namely, secretly reaching out and touching the border or hem of his garment.

2. If she were to plead with the Lord in that public context, it would draw more attention to her scornful situation and perhaps lead to her public shame. For here she was in public in her condition, no doubt bumping into people whom she was not to touch.

B. Nevertheless, with an urgent faith she reached out and “touched the BORDER” of Christ’s garment (Luke 8:44). Whereas Mark 5:27-28 uses a more general term for the outer garment which Christ wore, Luke 8:44 specifies particularly “the BORDER of his garment” is what she touched (the same Greek word is translated as “hem” in Matthew 9:20). Why is that significant?

1. It would seem that Luke is drawing attention to that part of an Israelite’s outer garment called the fringe, border, or hem of the garment. This part of the outer garment was not optional for an Israelite, but was required to be added to their outer cloaks. On the four corners of the outer garment were placed blue tassels as a reminder of God’s Law which they were to keep (as observed in Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12). This woman with great urgency reaches out in faith and touches one of these blue tassels hanging from Christ’s outer cloak.

2. Whether she realized the full import of her action or not, the Spirit of God has included this piece of information so as to portray for us that she was turning from her own works of righteousness and law-

keeping and was touching in faith the perfect righteousness and law-keeping of Jesus Christ as her only hope of salvation and healing. She was laying hold of Christ alone; she was turning from herself and her works to the perfect and complete work of Christ for her.

3. Whereas the Pharisees are condemned by Christ for enlarging the borders of their garments in order to draw attention to their self-righteous good works (as we see in Matthew 23:5), this woman did not take hold of the tassel hanging from her own garment, she did not reach for the tassel hanging from a priest or rabbi, but reached out in faith to touch the blue tassel hanging from Christ's garment. For only is our righteousness, our salvation, our power, and our healing.

C. Did she not realize that being unclean (due to her disease) she was not to touch the garment of anyone? Here is where this woman's urgent faith was evidenced. Though defiled herself, she realized her defilement would not defile Christ, but rather her defilement would be remedied by Christ. She did not see Christ as an ordinary man, but as the Son of God who though touched by her infirmity was not tainted by her defilement. She could touch no one else, but here was one whom she could touch—one who was holy, harmless, and undefiled (Hebrews 7:26). Here was one who could make her whole (both physically and spiritually).

D. Immediately upon touching the blue tassel hanging from Christ's garment, she was healed and set free from her defilement (Luke 8:44). This account does not imply that the faith in this woman sprang from her own efforts, from her own sincerity, or from her own desperation. The origin of this genuine faith was not from the woman, but was freely given to her by God (as is taught in Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29).

E. Dear ones, sin defiles us before the Lord. But in spite of all our

shame, guilt, and sense of defilement, when we come to the Lord even secretly with urgency and sincerely touch the hem of His garment, we will not defile Him, even if we come seven times having committed the same sin against Him. If we are to forgive a brother who sins against us and who sincerely repents seventy times seven times (Matthew 18:21-22), how much more will the Lord forgive us at a throne of grace (where He is the source of all mercy and forgiveness)? For, dear ones, He has taught us that He is not ashamed to call us His brethren in Hebrews 2:11 (though we are ever so weak, helpless, and failing). If Christ is not ashamed to call you His brother or sister (knowing the worst about you), how can you be ashamed to call one another your brother or sister (or at least give that impression) even though you are more weak, helpless, and failing before Christ than they will ever be before you? Where is our shame in such double standards?

III. Jesus Distinguishes Between Two Kinds Of Faith (Luke 8:43-48).

A. When this desperate woman with an urgent faith reached out and touched the hem of Christ's garment and was healed, Jesus knew that He had been touched in faith (laying hold of His power and righteousness), for He asks, "Who touched me?" Christ did not know this due to some drain on His power as if He were less powerful after this miracle than before it. He knew that His Divine power had been directed to a very needy woman with an urgent faith, because He is the Son of God and knows all things. Although He walked and talked as a man with the mass of people on the way to Jairus' house (seemingly preoccupied with the imminent death of this little girl), nevertheless, as the Son of God, He was as aware of this desperate woman's secret need (in fact He had brought her to this point) as He was aware of the public need of Jairus' little daughter. You see, dear ones, Christ is not distracted by all "the important things" that go on in others lives. Christ needs no help

from other mediators to hear you and help you today (whatever your need may be). He is sufficient for all who come to Him in faith.

B. Christ did not ask this question (“Who touched me?”) in order to know who had touched Him any more than God asked Adam in the Garden of Eden, “Where art thou?”, in order to know where Adam was hiding. He asked the question in order to draw this woman out of the crowd so as to bear a faithful public testimony to Christ’s undeserved and free mercy she had freely experienced (which occurred in Luke 8:47-48).

C. The disciples even become a little condescending to the Lord of glory when they say, “Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me” (Luke 8:45)? Perhaps the disciples were thinking to themselves, “Lord, there is a little girl (the daughter of Jairus) that is about to die, and Your asking, ‘Who touched me’ in the midst of this crowd who are bumping into you on every side?” I find it amazing how the Lord continually forebears with the weaknesses of His disciples, as in this case (and as in our lives every day). Dear ones, it is not the one who is quickest to correct his brother or sister, wife or husband that is the most mature in faith, but the one who knows when to forebear (and allow love to cover a multitude of sins) and when to correct as did the Lord Jesus.

D. Here the Lord draws this desperate woman out from the crowd because she had touched Him in a way that those in the crowd, who were bumping into Him, had not touched Him. Her touch was the touch of an urgent faith—theirs was the touch of a faith given to curiosity, the touch of faith given to excitement, and the touch of faith that follows the multitudes (wherever the multitudes might lead). But when the curiosity wore off, when the excitement of Christ turned to a crucified Christ, when the popularity of Christ became hostility against Christ, their touch

of faith was revealed for what it was—a temporary faith that sprung up for a while in following Christ, but which would soon fade away when Christ would hang upon the cross and become a curse for undeserving sinners who would with urgent faith lay hold of the border of His garment. There was no urgency in the touch of their faith as was true in the touch of this woman’s faith.

1. Dear ones, do you come to worship each Lord’s Day just to bump into Christ as it were, just to rub shoulders with those in the Church, just to go through the motions of following the crowd because it is expected of you, because your parents are doing it, or others are doing it? That is not the faith that reaches out with a sense of urgency to touch the hem of Christ’s garment.

2. Some of you may be in need of God’s everlasting salvation. Some of you may be in need of physical healing. Some of you may be in need of employment. Some of you may be in need of housing. Some of you may be in need of wisdom in making an important decision. Some of you may be in need of purity of heart and mind from lust. Some of you may be in need of perseverance in the midst of much waiting for an answer from the Lord. Some of you may be in need of a healed or restored marriage. Dear ones, all of us are in desperate need of Christ and His grace in overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil in our lives.

3. Reach out with a desperate faith now (whatever the urgent need that you have), seeing that without Christ you can do nothing, without Christ you will perish. Dear ones, touch the hem of His garment, embrace Christ, His righteousness, and His power instead of your own, and be healed of your sin, and receive the grace and mercy of God that you so urgently need now and for all eternity. Do not simply bump in Christ, lay hold of the hem of the garment of Him who works what is impossible to man.

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