

Osaka International Church
Sunday 31/7/16
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Luke 8:43-48 "Hope for the Desperate"

Luke 8:40-48

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

A famous Western Philosopher named Henry David Thoreau was reflecting on human life and came to the conclusion: "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the song still in them." All around him he saw people labouring with a sense of desperation - a desire for things to change, for them to finally be happy or at peace - but they never achieved it. All their efforts were in vain, and they went to the grave restless. We've all come across this in some way: plans or relationships that fall apart, things that we thought would make us feel at peace end up not satisfying us for very long. And we walk through life with our quiet desperation. Well, here is a story in the New Testament with a woman who is in a lifelong desperate situation, and Jesus' encounter with this woman speaks to the desperation we may feel in our lives.

*Because this story of the woman with a discharge of blood is not just a human interest story. It has a lot to tell us about the desperate state of a fallen humanity, and how Jesus has come to deal with that state. We're going to walk with Luke through the emotional journey of this woman by looking at her **curse**, its **cure**, and the **cause of the cure**. So firstly, let's look at the **curse**.*

1. The Curse (v 43-44a)

- a. Now, the scene for this passage is actually set at the end of the previous verse: "But as He went, the multitude thronged him." Jesus has just returned to Galilee, and Luke paints the picture of a huge crowd surging around him and pressing in on him but chooses to draw our eye to this one anonymous woman.
- b. And in verse 43 Luke gives us a window into her tragic life: "Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any..."
 - i. She has suffered from a constant and debilitating discharge of blood for twelve long years. She has clearly lived a life of misery and desperation, because we're told she spent all her money on treatment and has gotten no better (Mark tells us in his gospel that she actually grew worse out of the ordeal).
 - ii. She is probably very weak and anaemic on top of her poverty. This sickness has taken both her physical health and her livelihood from her.
- c. Now, this would be tragic enough, but along **with this physical problem comes a social and spiritual one**. According to Jewish belief this woman has been in a constant state of impurity for *twelve years*.
 - i. Now, in our culture we don't tend to think along the lines of clean and unclean or pure and impure, but the Bible does. **Actually the whole dynamic of clean and unclean was a major part of Jewish thinking**. It seems like the whole Jewish world was separated into 'clean' and 'unclean', not in terms of hygiene, but ritual cleanliness; fitness to be in the presence of God. And **this whole**

worldview actually gives us a better way to understand our own state before God.

- d. To really see just how deep this woman's tragedy goes we need to spend some time in the mind-set of the Jewish readers of Luke's gospel.
 - i. Turn to Leviticus 15. I'm just going to read out verses 25-27.

²⁵ "When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. ²⁶ Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. ²⁷ Anyone who touches them will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

- 1. Could you see just how many times the word 'unclean' or 'impure' is used here? Multiple times in every verse.
 - ii. Not only that, but in this passage the Hebrew word for 'discharge' is '*niddatah*' or '*niddah*', which has its roots in words that mean 'separation' or 'to make distant'. And in the Old Testament this **term '*niddah*' is used as a metaphor for sin and impurity.**
 - iii. The message is clear: **uncleanness and impurity make you an outsider.** They impose a sort of social or spiritual quarantine on you just in case you spread the pollution of your impurity to other people. You can't worship God in the temple; you can't make others impure as well. That's this woman's horrendous problem.
- e. This woman is a total outcast, she bears a particularly heavy mark of the curse placed on all humanity by God at the fall. She is sick, weak, and a total reject from her society. Everywhere she goes she cannot escape feeling dirty, and running the risk of polluting everyone and everything she touches. **She has an internal sign of the curse that neither she nor anyone else can cure.**
- f. So do we.
 - i. Where this passage should hit home for us is that in this woman **we see a picture of our own spiritual standing before God.**
 - 1. In fact many, if not all, of Jesus' miraculous healings in the New Testament, though they deal with a physical problem, serve to show us something about our own state of helplessness to cure ourselves of our curse.
 - ii. **But where did this 'curse' come from?** The Bible tells us that it is not just the random process of evolution. As soon as Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God the direct result was that the whole of creation was struck with a curse. God says, "Cursed is the ground because of you." The New Testament refers to it as the world being 'subjected to futility.' Toil, sweat, disease, broken relationship and death all came into the world. I'm sure that all of us have experienced that futility in too many ways for me to list effectively here.
 - iii. Even though we acknowledge these kinds of things as tragic we often find ourselves saying things like "It's natural. It's just the way of nature." But the Bible says **this is not the way things are supposed to be.**
 - 1. Where this hit home for me this year was when I was standing over the body of my grandfather in his hospital bed and everything in me rebelled against the idea that he was gone. It just didn't feel *right*. I was standing over someone that was completely familiar and yet in that moment totally strange. There was a profound sense of wrongness

- about the whole thing. Maybe you've felt that about a situation you've been in, or the loss of a loved one.
2. Disease and death and futility weren't God's original design for the world, but sin brought with it a curse. The whole of creation has been struck by decay and futility, that's what we're seeing here. **The personal consequences of a cosmic rebellion.**
- iv. So where are we with all this? Well, the upshot of this is that, just like this woman is with people, **we are all outsiders before God**, ritually unclean and impure. Longing to be reconciled with our creator yet unable to purify ourselves from the curse that separates us from him.
 - v. And like this woman, we will do anything to shift the uncleanness. We really will: think about the things we put all our time and effort into to make us feel at peace.
 1. Pursuing a high quality education, or employment to feel like we're successful. Searching for that next relaxing holiday, or a relationship to cure our sense of loneliness, buying things to make ourselves feel less stressed. Now, in and of themselves there is nothing wrong with these things, but they are all often turned towards suppressing the sense that everything is not as it should be; keeping that nagging sense of wrong at bay. And it never works, does it? We're always coming back to our sense of discomfort or dissatisfaction with life. We can't find peace.
 2. But the truth of the Bible is that we have a kind of sickness that nobody can heal, no matter how much we spend or how hard we try. **It's a stain on our soul so deep that it cannot be removed.** We live in a broken world; nobody in their right mind would deny that.
 - vi. Similar to the woman from last week, unless we realise that we have a curse that makes us impure and unclean we won't come to Jesus like this woman; as her only hope for restoration.

*So this woman has a curse on her both physically and socially that has drained all her money and taken her life from her. And we can see in her actually a reflection of ourselves if we're honest. But thankfully the story doesn't end there. She may bear a **curse**, but there's also a **cure**, so let's turn to look at that now.*

2. The Cure (v 44)

- a. Because she hears that **Jesus is in town**. This Jewish preacher from Nazareth who can heal the sick. God himself, born into a world of hurt to rescue us. But by this point she doesn't know any of this, and can only have heard about him second hand from others, but **she trusts what she's heard**.
 - i. And that's how all of us here who are Christians became Christians in the first place. We trusted what we'd heard about Jesus. This woman didn't have all the facts, but something in her was willing to trust this man Jesus.
- b. And that trust moves her to take a **faith-filled risk**
 - i. Remember, everything and everyone she touches becomes unclean, and this crowd is 'thronging' Jesus. She has probably made a lot of people unclean. What if she's found out? She could run the risk of serious punishment, even death for such a reckless act.
 - ii. **Coming to Jesus involves risk** no matter who we are
 1. Rejection from family or even death in some parts of the world.
 2. People will think we have thrown logic out of the window or rejected your culture, or national identity. We may be perceived as weak or naïve or desperate by others. They might see us taking on beliefs that seem ridiculous or unscientific to them.
 - iii. But what we receive when we come to Jesus far outweighs the risk involved.
- c. The **immediate reversal of her condition**
 - i. In this woman's healing Luke is making a contrast for us to see. This woman merely touches the hem of Jesus' garment and what no doctor could heal over

twelve years, what no money could remove is cured in an instant. The word 'immediately' in verse 44 contrasted with 'twelve years' from verse 43 is supposed to make us marvel. All that sickness is undone and wiped away. Her uncleanness is removed.

- d. And this is not just a physical healing, but represents so much more (remember the context of Leviticus?) She gets her life back. She gets her freedom back. She is no longer an outsider but is brought into community again.
 - i. She can go to the synagogue, take part in festivals, have friends, have a husband, even have children potentially. She is brought by the power of Jesus and her trust in him from the very edge of society right into the centre again, from a pariah to an insider.
 - ii. One encounter with Jesus changes her whole existence from desperation and wretchedness to peace. In one instant the curse is not only removed but totally reversed.

So we've seen the nature of this woman's curse and the cure of that curse. But why was it cured? Was it magic or some sort of mystical transferral of power? What we're going to see is that Jesus comes face to face with the woman to explain why she's been healed.

3. The Cause of the Cure (v 45-48)

- a. Because the story should have ended there with this woman going back to her life and Jesus being left to go on his way to Jairus' house. But Luke records this seemingly strange reaction of Jesus: "Who touched me?"
 - i. Imagine that, with the crowds pressing in around Jesus, hundreds of people jostling him he asks: "Who touched me?" and Peter says what we're all thinking: "Look at all these people! What on earth are you talking about, Jesus?" They're on their way to rescue a dying child and Jesus stops to ask who touched him!
- b. It's not hard to think how nervous this woman must be to have been called up in front of everyone. What's Jesus going to do? Is he going to be angry with her for touching him and making him unclean?
- c. But instead what Jesus says should floor us: "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."
 - i. She is referred to as the 'woman' in this passage, but what does Jesus call her? "Daughter". **The first word she hears out of Jesus' mouth is daughter.** Can you imagine how powerful that small word would have been for this woman after twelve years of being an outsider? Twelve years of being avoided as unclean? Jesus turns to her and says "Daughter", and twelve years of hurt and isolation are instantly undone by her faith in him.
 - ii. The term 'woman' is pretty unfamiliar and anonymous, but 'daughter' is almost as intimate and familiar as it gets. Can you see the contrast here that Luke is making? From just some 'woman', to 'daughter'. In a single encounter with Jesus: curse removed. Relationship restored.
- d. And that's the point: Luke is teaching us through this meeting that **faith is something deeply personal and relational.**
- e. She comes to be healed in secret, but gets far more than she could ever have hoped for. Instead she comes face to face with the person of Jesus himself and ends up testifying in front of the whole crowd what she has done. She cannot maintain her anonymity.
 - i. Because Jesus doesn't just want to heal her, he wants to have an encounter with her, to have her in his family. He wants her and all of us to know that it is our trust in Jesus that cleanses us.
 - 1. Jesus is not just a means to being forgiven; he wants to have a relationship with you. You cannot go unnoticed by him. Being saved, and a relationship with Christ go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other, and trusting Jesus is a deeply personal thing.
 - ii. And this is the wonder of the Gospel. God doesn't just wipe away your sin, bringing you back to 'zero' then let you get on with trying not to sin any more.

Our sins are forgiven and then we're given more than we could have possibly have ever dared hope for: God draws us into a relationship with himself. **He cares deeply not just that your sins are cleansed, but that their removal allows you to have fellowship with him! That is the great prize for the Christian. You go from just being a 'person' to being a friend of Jesus, a son or daughter of God.**

- f. But the careful reader is left with a question: if this woman makes people and things she touches unclean what about Jesus? And where is the sin offering she's required to give for her healing in Leviticus? Is salvation really that simple, Jesus just giving out power and confirming it with his words? Doesn't that just cheapen the seriousness of sin?
 - i. The whole of Luke's gospel and Jesus' ministry is marching straight towards Jerusalem. Not long after this Jesus will tell his friends that he's come to die. What this woman doesn't know is that Jesus will bear her ceremonial uncleanness to the cross and, by dying, make atonement for its removal.
- g. The removal of our uncleanness was paid for by the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross. Jesus knew that he would be the sacrifice offered so that this woman could be purified. The cost of restoring this woman to being an insider again was that the Son of God would become the ultimate forsaken outsider. Jesus removes this woman's curse, our curse, and it passes to him. In every encounter throughout Luke's gospel we should hear the echo of nails hitting the saviour's hands, so to speak.

If there's anyone here who wouldn't call themselves Christians: who haven't given their lives to Jesus, can I just say it's great that you're here. What we want you to know, and what this passage is saying is that *Jesus is in town today*. The good news of this passage is that by trusting him you can be washed clean from the sin you have been carrying for your whole life. You can have peace. The restlessness due to the separation between you and God caused by the fall can be removed totally. Will you come to him and take hold of him like this woman does? You can see how she does it isn't perfect or even that well planned, but that's not the point. The saviour she trusts is perfect. He is sufficient and powerful enough to remove every stain of sin from you past, present and future, and restore you to a right relationship with God. To give you peace. Jesus is in town today.

It also encourages those of us who are following Christ to ask, "How is my personal relationship with Jesus?" It's an undeniable part of being a Christian. He's not merely a means to an end, but he wants to share fellowship with us. And we do that by reading about him in the Bible, praying to him, and obeying his words and commands. And finally, it shows us we must never move past this simple fact of the gospel: we were unclean, and Jesus made us clean *forever*. We've been restored to a right relationship with God. That should release you into a joy and freedom unlike any other.