

Week 3

The Healing Touch

Matthew 9:18-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:40-48; and Luke 13:10-17

Day 1

Woman with Chronic Bleeding

In the 21st century people who experience chronic pain or illness often suffer emotionally as well as physically. Depression is a common partner of chronic suffering, along with guilt and anger. The guilt can come from the inability to contribute fully in the home or workplace – it's simply impossible to keep up with the activity level of other wives, or other mothers, or other ministry workers—and self-worth is diminished. Anger, among other things, arises because the medical establishment cannot fix the problem and maybe because family and friends don't understand or aren't supportive enough.

In the ancient world, suffering people had an added burden: Physical disabilities were often looked upon as divine punishment for sin. As far back as the patriarchal age of the Old Testament, Job struggled with his culture's assumed connection between suffering and sin. In the first century Jesus's disciples once saw a blind man and asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2) Some Jewish rabbis of the day even thought that they could name the specific sin at the root of every disease.⁴

Jesus came on the scene and seemed to take a different approach to people suffering from physical ailments. Much of his ministry was devoted to healing, and the Gospels record the details of two women Jesus healed: a woman with chronic bleeding and a woman with a deformed back.

Bible Reading: Matthew 9:18-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:40-48.

Jesus was on his way to heal a sick little girl, the precious daughter of a synagogue leader, when he was stopped in his tracks by the touch of a woman who just wanted her suffering to stop. *What do you know about the woman and her situation from these passages?*

You may remember that back in Week 1 you looked at some Old Testament scripture in Leviticus that is relevant to this woman's plight. Review Leviticus 15:19-30, especially verses 25-27. Under Old Testament law, to be unclean meant that a person was cut off temporarily from both regular social privileges and also from the privilege of approaching God in worship or participating in Jewish religious festivals.

No historical evidence exists that Jews were still following these regulations in the first century, but since they were still following the childbirth purification regulations (Luke 2:21-24), it is likely they were. *How would these regulations have impacted the life of a woman experiencing years of chronic bleeding?*

What motivated the woman to reach out and touch Jesus?

How did Jesus treat this woman? Did he seem concerned that her touch would have made him ceremonially unclean?

Why did Jesus call the woman out in front of everyone? (Was he trying to embarrass her?)

What negative things did Jesus say about the woman? What positive things?

How do you think the woman felt after this interaction?

What do you think Jesus may have considered about her life as he spoke with the woman?

Jesus probably knew what was in this woman's heart, even before she touched his robe. He knew of her suffering, of her frustration with the doctors, of her financial problems. He also knew how healthy people looked at her and what the religious leaders thought of her. He knew about her guilt and her secret fears that she suffered because God didn't love her.

There may or may not have been healing power in the hem of Jesus's robe, but it seems clear that Jesus purposely and freely healed her, even though she was unaware of his notice. Then he brought her out of the obscurity she had lived in for 12 years, called her "Daughter," and praised her faith.

How do you imagine Jesus's face as he looked on this trembling woman?

Prayer Time: Pray for someone you know who is struggling with a chronic medical condition.

More Healed Women

These are not the only women Jesus healed – just the only ones for whom their conversation is recorded.

You probably noticed that when Jesus met the woman with chronic bleeding, he was on his way to heal the daughter of Jairus and ended up raising her from the dead (Matthew 9:23-25; Mark 5:35-42; Luke 8:49-56)

He also healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39), and it can be fairly implied that women were included in the many crowds that came to Jesus for healing.

Day 2

The Bent-Over Woman

Although the woman with chronic bleeding had been suffering for 12 long years, this second woman had been suffering even longer. For 18 years she had been bent over, crippled by a “spirit” and unable to straighten up. As you read this passage, notice that whenever the synagogue ruler spoke of what happened, he referred to it as *healing*. But when Jesus referred to his action, he spoke in terms of *liberating* the woman – setting her free.

Bible Reading: Luke 13:10-17

What do you know about the woman and her situation from this passage?

What does it mean that she was “crippled by a spirit”? Was she demon possessed, or was this more of a figure of speech? (More scriptures about demon possession can be found in the lesson for Week 4, Day 4.)

This woman didn’t cry out to Jesus for help or even sneak up behind him and touch his robe, as did the woman with chronic bleeding. *Why do you think this woman sat or stood so quietly there in the synagogue in the presence of a well-known healer?*

It may have been because it was the Sabbath and she was in the synagogue. She would have known that it was neither the time nor place for healings to occur. Jesus did not stand on the burdensome ceremonial traditions created by the Jewish leaders, however. *He noticed the woman and called her forward. How did Jesus treat this woman?*

What did Jesus require the woman to do before he “liberated” her (notice the language, “set her free”)?

What do you think Jesus felt for this woman?

What do you think Jesus may have considered about her life?

Two options present themselves when considering Jesus’s motive for calling this woman forward:

1. Jesus wanted to make a point about the Sabbath, and this woman made a handy object lesson.
2. Jesus saw a woman who was suffering and used his power to help her despite the fact that it was the Sabbath.

Which option do you think was most likely Jesus's motive?

How do you think this woman felt when Jesus set her free?

How about after Jesus spoke about her to the synagogue ruler?

This poor woman had been bearing the weight of some spiritual oppression for 18 years. Then one Sabbath day she fell within the gentle gaze of Jesus. With no regard for the controversy that would ensue, he acted without hesitation—and without demands for her faith—to liberate her from her infirmity. Jesus's act was consistent with the mission he had announced on an earlier Sabbath in a synagogue in Galilee:

“...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Luke 4:18-19

The synagogue ruler objected to this miracle because of its timing, and he provoked a scathing response from Jesus: “You hypocrite! This woman is a daughter of Abraham.” She is your sister, Mr. Synagogue Ruler, and she is infinitely more important than your livestock! For the first time in 18 years, this woman could stand up straight and look directly into the eyes of another adult. What she saw was the face of her compassionate healer and defender, the Son of God.

Prayer Time: Think of one way God has liberated you (set you free) and say a prayer of thanksgiving.

Remainder of the chapter not provided in this sample