



Meditation— Mark 5.²⁴⁻³⁴

²⁴And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. ²⁵And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, ²⁶And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, ²⁷When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. ²⁸For she said, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." ²⁹And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

³⁰And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹And his disciples said unto him, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?"

³²And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. ³³But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. ³⁴And he said unto her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

What a time and place, like nearly all times and places, to be a woman! It was not and is not easy even in the best of circumstances. But it was not the best of circumstances for the ailing and desperate woman who braved potential rejection and humiliation to approach and touch Jesus, a man she had concluded had the power to deliver her from her long affliction. To appreciate just a little the nature of her affliction, we have to consider the culture and religious environment in which he suffered—for suffer, she most certainly did.

"And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean. Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation...."

"Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them. This is the law of him that hath an issue..."¹

Perhaps it is unnecessary, but we feel the need to clarify. First, we are talking about vaginal bleeding. When the text speaks of "the time of her separation," it is referring to a woman's monthly period, when, according to her religion, God required her to physically separate herself from others—particularly men—because she was considered to be unclean herself and a source of defilement for others. Because a woman was considered unclean and a source of defilement during her monthly period, she was not only excluded

¹ Lev. 15.^{25-26, 31-32}

from contacts with men, but with God—naturally enough since God was male. This meant that she was excluded from participating in any religious observance—observances that in the early years of the faith took place at the tabernacle, later in the temple, and later still in the synagogue.

Just let that sink in. Women were taught and made to feel that every month there were several days when they could not participate in cherished religious services and during which they could not approach God lest they defile Him. But, for some women, it was even worse. If vaginal bleeding went beyond the monthly bleeding, a woman was unclean and excluded from public religious observances for as long as the bleeding continued.

Now, the woman who approached Jesus so surreptitiously, we learn, had been experiencing vaginal bleeding for twelve years, notwithstanding her numerous and desperate attempts to find a cure. We should not and do not underestimate the physical discomfort and emotional anxiety that her ailment brought into her life every single day. When one is seriously ill, just the uncertainty can, for some, be nearly debilitating: “What is wrong with me?” “Am I dying?”

But, imagine adding to these painful uncertainties and anxieties, the spiritual element. Imagine being excluded from all worship services. Imagine, further, this woman being taught and believing over twelve long years that she was unclean in the eyes of God. Imagine how she felt about herself, believing that God viewed her as defiling; that he wanted nothing to do with her.

But let your imagine run further. Let it roam over centuries, millennia. Let it roam from one end of the earth to the other. Let it roam over millions and millions of women. Let it consider that over all that time and space, all women were made to feel unworthy in the eyes of God for a few days each month and that some women, like the woman who came to Jesus, were made to feel unworthy in the eyes of God for years, for lifetimes.

Words fail to express how repulsive and hateful this is. So, I’ll just say it. This was never of God. I do not believe that for one nanosecond. There may be a number of objections to my firm assertion. I will address two that I have most often heard. First, some claim, the Old Testament law is replete with principles taught through types and shadows. This matter of uncleanness through vaginal bleeding is one example. The blood is a type for sin. And sin does make one unworthy before God. This apologetic is to be firmly rejected on several counts. First, the religious mind does not need types and shadows to make it feel unworthy through sin. Such feelings are as common to the religious mind as breathing is to the body. Second, this rational it is the sort of characterization of scripture that would just be silly if it were not so belittling toward scripture. But, most importantly, such a view presents to us a God who is willing to sacrifice the emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing of women over many millennia in order to “teach a principle” and “make a point” to future generations that is already far too obvious and experienced. In a word, this apologia is nonsense.

This leads us to the second apologetic. Even though, the argument goes, women were viewed as institutionally unclean because of their vaginal bleeding, God didn’t really feel that way about them. They could have had their own private assurances of God’s love and respect and acceptance of them through personal revelation. This too, must be rejected. For it is a strong and unusual woman—indeed, a strong and unusual individual, male or female—who can rise above a doctrinaire institutional position and chart their own course independent of it and unaffected by it. And if there was that rare woman here and there, what of the other millions? No, women would have felt the emotional, psychological, and spiritual wound that this “policy” inflicted.

This business of a woman being unclean and defiling to God because of vaginal bleeding must be seen as coming from men. It was always inspired by ignorance and a drive to control and dominate women. But

I'll say more, honestly and bluntly. I am disturbed that God let it go on for so long in so many places in violation of so many women. I am troubled that He seems to have so little power that He could not or would not overcome and put a stop to this male-driven religious ignorance. I wonder about any doctrine that presents Him as omnipotent. I am not surprised there are atheists.

Yes, this causes a disturbance in the force. And, finally, I wonder. I wonder what ignorance we are perpetuating today that will look as vile and hateful as this ancient religious ignorance that consigned women to feel unworthy and unappreciated and unacceptable to God because of vaginal bleeding. But, there is one thing I am not uncertain about. I am not uncertain about the fact that such ignorance is still very much present even in the most enlightened moments of modern religious faith. It is present in the faith formerly known as Mormonism.

Now, how's that for an ending? We will go on in the next meditation to reflect on what Jesus did to and for the woman with a twelve year long "issue of blood." It shines bright with hope. So, for now, we conclude as we always do.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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