

What's the Issue?

Introduction: My family loves mystery stories. Sherlock Holmes? Check. Detective Chief Superintendent Christopher Foyle? Check. Hercule Poirot? Check.

I think we like putting on the shoes of a detective (without the necessity of all of the training and danger) and trying to figure out the “who” of the age-old question: “who done it?”

You see, mysteries require the detective to get the “little grey cells” working “mon ami”. Good mysteries are full of secrets, twists and turns, riddles, unexpected events and dramatic revelations.

The Bible is like a mystery. (This is an oversimplification, but I think you will understand what I am saying here.)

- The Old Testament contains numerous clues about what is to come.
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ (the New Testament) is the dramatic revelation of the end of the story.

Just like any good mystery, not everyone reading the clues of the Old Testament had really figured out what God meant when He promised them a coming Savior and a kingdom. There were many people in Jesus’ day that expected the Messiah to come and set His kingdom up on earth in the form of an earthly kingdom complete with its government, military, bureaucracy and budgets.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God “turned human expectations upside down. (That) the kingdom of God was a realm of surprises.”¹

Context: Take, for instance, the place of women and children in the days and times of Christ. (Story of Keyshawna and Isaiah at VBS?)

In the first century, before Christ began His ministry, women and children were seen as relatively unimportant and powerless. They were largely marginalized.

mar·gin·al·ize *verb*

\ˈmārj-nə-,līz, ˈmār-jə-nəl-,īz\

: to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group

¹ W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 47.

In the Jewish culture:

- It was a patriarchal society. Men held authority and rule over everyone and all matters.
- Children were valued, but only in the sense that they were the hope of the future. The Jewish community needed them to grow up and remain good Jews so that the society would not cease.
- Women were valued, but only in the sense that they bore the hope of the future (children) and maintained the household.

IF YOU REMEMBER, IN THE FEEDING MIRACLES OF JESUS, THE BIBLICAL WRITERS COUNTED NUMBERS OF MEN ONLY. CHILDREN AND WOMEN LITERALLY DID NOT COUNT.

- Time Permitting: read excerpt from (Ben Sira) Ecclesiasticus 42:9-14. This represents the sentiment of many Jewish men leading into the time of Christ.

9 A daughter is a secret anxiety to her father, and worry over her robs him of sleep; when she is young, for fear she may not marry, or if married, for fear she may be disliked; **10** while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and become pregnant in her father's house; or having a husband, for fear she may go astray, or, though married, for fear she may be barren. **11** Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, or she may make you a laughingstock to your enemies, a byword in the city and the assembly of the people, and put you to shame in public gatherings. See that there is no lattice (or window) in her room, no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house. **12** Do not let her parade her beauty before any man, or spend her time among married women; **13** for from garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman's wickedness. **14** Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace.

In the Gentile culture (Roman or Greek influence):

Children and women were valued in most cases far less than in Jewish culture.

- Abortion (decision of the male, under the guise often of birth control)
- Exposure (only decided by the father, and most often when girls were born)
- Abuse (from household slavery to child prostitution)
- Harsh Treatment (these were the lucky ones!)

NOTE: Jesus lived in this context. His ministry addressed all of these perceptions. We will see just a glimpse today about how Jesus' viewed women and children.

Scripture: **Mark 5: 21-34** (cf. Mt. 9:20-22; Lk. 8:43-47; This story is often referred to as "the woman with the issue of blood." It is important to note that this story is sandwiched in the middle of the story of Jairus' daughter.)

25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding (flow of blood) for twelve years. **26** She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. **27** When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, **28** because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed (be saved)." **29** Immediately her bleeding (fountain of blood) stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering (not just physical!). **30** At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" **31** "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " **32** But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it (the one made whole). **33** Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. **34** He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you (saved you). Go in peace and be freed from your suffering (whip/torment, flogging/disease)."

The woman in the story had what the Bible calls "an issue of blood."

But the issue was much more than just an issue of blood!

Tell the story:

She was a Jewish woman (Jesus was sent to "the lost sheep of Israel," Mt. 15:24.), old enough to be married, but not elderly.

She had been bleeding for 12 years. This was a chronic, abnormal condition (possibly a fibroid tumor of the uterus?) that produced "fountain of blood". This was an affliction that she could "feel," and which made her suffer in more ways than one. Chronic loss of blood probably meant anemia and physical weakness for her. She had endured medical "cures" (vs. 26). She had suffered under medical treatments. She had consulted many doctors. She was hopelessly incurable: she had only grown worse under the doctors' care. To make matters worse, she was destitute: she had spent all she had.

She had “heard” about Jesus (Mk. 5: 27). The Galilee area had previously seen Jesus heal a paralytic (Mk. 2), a man with a shriveled hand (Mk. 3), large crowds of their diseases and evil spirits (Mk. 3), raise a centurion’s servant from the dead (Lk. 7), raise a widow’s son from the dead (Lk. 7:14,15). Others had been healed by Jesus in Galilee through touching Him (Lk. 6:19). She believed that Jesus could heal her: she said “If I only touch His cloak I’ll be healed” (Mk. 5:28).

She was willing to break social taboos. As an “unclean” woman she was unwelcome in society (Lev. 15:19-30). Everything and everyone she touched became ceremonially unclean, so she would have been shunned by everyone, even family. Sexual relations would have been unclean, her bed and even her husband would have been ceremonially unclean, so she probably would have been divorced by her husband (Deut. 24:1). Worship in the synagogue would have been barred to her since she could not make atonement for her blood flow (Lev. 15:28-30). As an “unclean” woman if she touched Jesus, under normal circumstances, she would make Him ceremonially “unclean.” As a woman she was restricted from touching a man in public.

She was willing to hope in Jesus and she was not intimidated by the large, dangerous crowd. {“Large,” *polys* = super large crowd—“a large crowd followed [Him]” (Mk. 5:24). “Crush,” *sympnigo* = choke or crush—“the crowds almost crushed Him” (Lk. 8:42). “Crowding,” *synecho* = hemming in—“the people are crowding and pressing against You” (Lk. 8:45). “Pressing,” *apothlibo* = press up against—“ the people are...pressing against You” (Lk. 8:45).} She believed Jesus would help her, even though she interrupted Him as He on His way to heal the mortally ill daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader and man of social prominence.

She reached out to Him. Perhaps she had to force her way through the crowd after she heard about Him? “She came up behind Jesus...” (Perhaps she could only reach His back? Or was she too shy to face Him?). She “touched the edge of His cloak...” possibly to one of the two tassels on the corners of the *shimla* hanging down His back. (Perhaps she almost missed Him?) She touched Jesus’ cloak—“touch,” Greek, *haptomai* (*hap-tom-ahee*) means to fasten onto or grab; so, she clung to His *shimla*, the large square cloth that comprised His outer robe. (See Jn. 10, Mary Magdalene, for another instance of “haptomai”.)

Jesus received her. He knew “in His spirit” (Mk. 2:8) both her need and her touch. Jesus did not heal all who touched Him in the crowd. But, He perceived her secret touch. Jesus controlled His power—power did not automatically flow from Him or from His clothing—and He “responded by letting His power go out to heal her” (Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel*, Mark 5:30, pg. 223). Jesus allowed touch to produce the healing, though He did not need to touch anyone or to be touched by anyone to effect a healing.

Jesus saved her from her affliction. He healed her body by His power immediately and completely.

Jesus restored her social standing. He made a public declaration that power had gone out for healing. She publicly confessed her healing. He made a public declaration of that she was the one healed.

Jesus saved her from her sins. She expressed faith in Christ through her approach, her trembling and her confession. He granted redemption to her: “Your faith (pistis or “saving faith”) has made you well (redeemed from sozo, as opposed to healed from iaomai)” (Mk. 5:34).

1. Baffling power of Christ! (cf. OT: Haggai 2:12-13)---TIME PERMITTING
2. What were the issues for the woman and what happened when she touched Jesus?
 - a. Physical: Instead of being sick, she is well.
 - b. Familial: Instead of being unnamed, she is called “daughter”.
 - c. Spiritual: Instead of being unclean, she is pure.
 - d. Communal: Instead of being isolated, she is included.
 - e. Emotional: Instead of being in emotional turmoil, she is at peace.
 - f. Financial: Instead of remaining in poverty, she was restored to become a contributing member of society again.

Did you pick up on this in the text as we read? This unnamed woman, previously excluded and known only by her disease, found acceptance and identity in Christ! When she made it to Jesus he looked at her and gave her one of the most precious names that can be given to a woman who has been isolated and unfit. Jesus called her “daughter.” By doing so what he was saying was that she was no longer alone. Rather, she was part of a family. The faith that drove her to Christ for restoration had saved her and had made her a part of God’s family.

Conclusion: Is there an issue in your life?

- Physical?
- Spiritual?
- Relational? (Problems at home? Without friends?)
- Emotional?
- Financial?

What’s the issue?

In this story, Jesus revealed these mysteries:

1. Jesus honors our faith, however small.
2. Jesus is approachable in every circumstance.
3. Jesus has compassion on the those who come to Him in faith.

4. Jesus sometimes allows circumstances to enter our lives that reduce us to desperation so that we will reach out for Him.

TIME PERMITTING:

Matthew 14:35-36

35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him **36** and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 3:9-12

9 Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. **10** For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. **11** Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." **12** But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Mark 6:56

56 And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.