

As we come to the end of the summer and prayerfully evaluate our labors for the sake of the Gospel, let us reaffirm that our confidence is only in the Word of God. Whether that Word was shared with VBS students, distributed to some flood victims during our week of disaster relief, or preached each week, we can pray with confidence that there would be fruit from that Word, in terms of conversions, renewed consecration, and growth in holiness. We may not see this right away, but God promises His Word will not return void; it will in fact accomplish the purposes for which He sends it (Isaiah 55:11).

Interestingly, God chose to underline the importance of His Word by commanding His people Israel to sew tassels on the edge of their garments so that they would never forget the commandments of the LORD (Deuteronomy 15:39). Such tassels were meant to be reminders that God had taken Israel as His people, having redeemed them and then given them laws for their spiritual lives and citizenship.

We are not commanded to wear such symbolic garb. However, just as the priests who wore these tassels were called to teach the Word which such clothing represented (Malachi 2:7), so Christ Himself as our High Priest shows the saving power of His Word in that even those who were only able to touch the fringes of His garments were healed and even saved by faith. Even the strange laws about holy garments in the Old Testament came to their highest use and fulfillment in Christ's ministry of Word and deed.

As we study some of the miracles associated with the Word of God in Christ's life, may we trust that God's Word will be effective and will provide us hope in the midst of the skepticism of our day.

Monday: Read Matthew 9:18-20 & 9:23-26.

The Word's Power to Help and Heal

How balanced the Lord is. Contrary to so many social and labor movements of our day, which assume wrongly *that poverty is more spiritual than wealth*, we see Christ show His healing mercy to a powerful synagogue leader as well as to a lowly, anonymous woman. There is no favoritism from our Savior. All may come with their griefs and needs!

We began last week by sympathizing with the grief-stricken father, Jairus, whose only daughter died before Jesus can get to her home. What a loss: an only daughter, just twelve years of age! But what a contrast between the despair of the mourners and Jesus, who alone insists that this girl is simply asleep (Matthew 9:24). Christ's power is such that it can reach into the grave with life!

Meditate and Pray: Please make this hymn your prayer for the beginning of this week, that God in Christ would walk into the darkness of our homes and into our most intimate griefs, with the power of His Word to help and heal (1961 Trinity Hymnal, # 336):

1 At even, when the sun was set,
The sick, O Lord, around thee lay;
O in what divers pains they met!
O with what joy they went away!

2 Once more 'tis eventide, and we,
Oppressed with various ills, draw near:
What if thy form we cannot see;
We know and feel that thou art here.

3 O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel:
For some are sick, and some are sad,
And some have never loved thee well,
And some have lost the love they had;

4 And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
For none are wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.

5 O Savior Christ, thou too art man,
 Thou hast been troubled, tempted, tried;
 Thy kind but searching glance can scan
 The very wounds that shame would hide.

6 Thy touch has still its ancient pow'r;
 No word from thee can fruitless fall:
 Hear in this solemn evening hour,
 And in thy mercy heal us all.

Tuesday: Read Matthew 9:18-21

Opening the Way

As Jesus walked to the house of Jairus, His power was not reserved just for this prominent man. We also see the woman with an issue of blood, unnamed and forgotten by everyone except Jesus, who by faith presses through the crowd and touches the hem of our Lord's garment. Let us focus our attention on these two acts of faith. Today, we will focus on her pressing through the crowd. Tomorrow, on her simple yet bold act of touching the hem of Christ's garment.

Is it not a miracle that this woman, weakened by 12 years of bleeding, would have the strength to press through a jostling crowd to get to Jesus? Consider the stark description of her wasted condition in Mark 5:25-26:

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.

How would such blood loss affect this woman's strength, especially since, as Luke points out, the crowds were almost "crushing Jesus" (Luke 8:42)? A crowd like that takes all the strength that the strongest members possess to keep from being trampled! Yet by a miracle of grace, this woman reaches Jesus to touch Him. Marvelous how God can open up all the doors when it is true faith which seeks to access His saving, healing mercy!

Meditate and Pray: *Oh Lord Jesus. You are the Way, Truth and Life. Please open for us the gates of glory that we may enter into the Throne-Room of your grace, to find the timely, urgent help which we need so desperately. We are beset by discouragement, depression, failure, as well as bondage to besetting sins, and sorely tempted to give up. O, Thou who parted the Red Sea and the river Jordan! O Thou who makes His footsteps in the sea! We see how you parted the crowds of unbelief in unbelieving Capernaum – so that this one daughter of faith could reach you. Please part the doubts, fears and thoughts of unbelief which crush our lives, that we might reach the robe of your Son's glorious, saving power! Make us clean! Answer our cries and assure us of your salvation! Amen.*

Wednesday: Read Matthew 9:20-22

Small Faith still Powerful

Yesterday we marveled at how this desperately sick woman could reach Jesus. She reasoned within herself, "If I can just touch his garments, I will be made whole." Now, we must grant that there may have been a degree of superstition on her part in believing that she had to touch His garments to be made well. Her faith was not perfectly formed, and we must guard ourselves from any error of attributing magic to Jesus' healing mercy. Nevertheless, Jesus clearly confirms her in what she did, declaring that, in the action of touching the hem of His robe, she had indeed been saved as well as healed! There was something very powerful in the hem of Jesus' garment, and very gracious in His willingness to forgive this woman's superstition and instead strengthen her weak faith!

Meditate and Pray: Sing hymn #164 from our red Trinity hymnals, using its verses to ask the Lord Jesus to make every contact you have with His power to be a fruitful, life-changing event:

1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace.

2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of thy name.

3 Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life and health and peace.

4 He breaks the pow'r of reigning sin,
he sets the pris'ner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.

5 He speaks and, list'ning to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

6 Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
your loosen'd tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your Savior come;
and leap, ye lame, for joy.

Thursday: Read Matthew 9:20-22 and Numbers 15:37-41

Fringe Reminders

Continue to meditate on the woman with the issue of blood and her desire to touch the hem of Jesus' clothing. Is there some symbolism here for us to study? Well, in the Old Testament, the hem of the high priest's garment was to be embroidered with bells and pomegranates (Exodus 28:33-35), which would form an alternating pattern of embroidered fruits of blue, purple and scarlet, and bells that would ring as the high priest ministered in the Holy Place. Such a tinkling sound would function as proof that the high priest was properly dressed to appear before the Lord without dying.

But what exactly did such a priestly hem with bells represent? Scholars point to Numbers 15:38-39, which speaks of a similar "fringe" or "tassel" of blue thread which every Israelite was to sew into their clothes to be reminded of the commands and precepts of God's Law. God's intention was that, through such a reminder of God's Word, sewn into the very fringe of all their garments, God's people would be reminded of their consecration to the Lord, thereby resisting the sinful lusts of their hearts and eyes. Thus the Israelite's robes, like the high priest's robe, were to be hemmed in such a way that the Word of God would constantly cover them as they went about their daily tasks.

Meditate and Pray: *Lord, give us such a hunger for your Word that we cover our minutes, hours, and days under its protective influence. Thank you especially for your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who made your Word His daily delight, so that He could faithfully live an obedient life as our Savior, in our place. Please make your Word, O God, powerful and fruitful.*

Use these stanzas of hymn # 376 to sing about such fruit from God's Word in your life:

*Here Thy praise is gladly chanted,
Here Thy seed is duly sown;
Let my soul, where it is planted,
Bring forth precious sheaves alone,
So that all I hear may be
Fruitful unto life in me.*

*Thou my faith increase and quicken,
 Let me keep Thy gift divine,
 Howsoe'er temptations thicken;
 May Thy Word still o'er me shine
 As my guiding star through life,
 As my comfort in my strife.*

*Speak, O God, and I will hear Thee,
 Let Thy will be done indeed;
 May I undisturbed draw near Thee
 While Thou dost Thy people feed.
 Here of life the fountain flows,
 Here is balm for all our woes.*

Friday: Read Matthew 9:20-22, Exodus 28:33-35 and Proverbs 25:11

The Refreshing Word

Continue to muse on the significance of the hem of the garments of the high priest as an explanation of the power of Jesus' hem when the woman touched Him. Just as the Word, symbolized by tassels, was to regularly cover the Israelite's clothing in their daily tasks, so the clothing of the high priest was to be a symbol of the *fruitfulness* of God's Word as it came from the priesthood to God's people. That may explain the symbolism of the pomegranate on the high priest's garments. The Word was to be as nourishing as the fruit of the pomegranate tree! This is the idea in Proverbs 25:11, which compares godly, wise words with the fruit of an apple. In the same way, all through the Old Testament, the Word of God is spoken of with the qualities of refreshing fruit which the godly never want removed from their mouths.

Take Psalm 119:25, 43 & 103 as examples:

*My soul clings to the dust;
 give me life according to your word ...
 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
 for my hope is in your rules ...
 This is my comfort in my affliction,
 that your promise gives me life ...
 How sweet are your words to my taste,
 sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

Now, does this not fit Jesus' ministry to this desperate woman in Matthew 9? She had found no refreshment from the many doctors to whom she resorted to heal her issue of blood. *But now* she finds refreshment from Jesus. Even the fringe of Jesus' clothing has power, since every "corner" of Jesus life is saturated with the Word of God. By virtue of the Word dwelling richly in Jesus, He becomes a reservoir of refreshing, life-giving, healing power!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank Jesus that He has fulfilled the words of Isaiah 50:4. He is the faithful Servant of the Lord who "has the word to sustain the weary," even as His words refreshed and assured this woman of her salvation: "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

Saturday: Read Matthew 9:20-22 and Exodus 28:33-35**Bells Proclaiming**

What was the significance of the bells on the fringes of the garment of the high priest? According to the Old Testament commentators Keil and Delitzsch, the priesthood were not only to *wear* symbols of God's Word, they were to proclaim that Word at all times and in every place. According to Malachi 2:7, it was from the priests that Israel was to get her instruction in God's Word. The fruit of God's Word as it was proclaimed by the priests was to nourish all God's people. The priests were to be the source of instruction in God's Word and were to literally *live* by that Word as their protection before the holy presence of God! These bells symbolized the speaking of the Word into all places where the priests travelled.

Meditate and Pray: *Lord, you have given your Word to be proclaimed with fruitful, life-saving power. Help us as your church to hold to this definition of your church: We are here as a church in order to proclaim to sinners that they can only have living fellowship with God because of His Word fulfilled by and exemplified in Jesus Christ.*

Sunday: Read Matthew 9:20-22; Ephesians 5:25-26 and Revelation 1:12-15**Rushing Waters**

If the woman with the issue of blood was to be truly cleansed, not only of her physical bleeding, but especially of the spiritual uncleanness of sin, it would be only because Jesus Christ had the power to apply His Word to her life as His cleansing agent. Just as He washes the church with water through the Word (Ephesians 5:26), so His very movement in our lives is meant to refresh us by that Word.

Does Jesus still have that cleansing, renewing power? Yes! For just as the high priest of old wore bells as a constant proclaiming of the Word of God's protective and empowering influence over his priestly ministry, so the Son of God's life lived before God on our behalf in Heaven is a life full of the sound of God's Word. But now that Word is not simply the gentle rustling and tinkling of priestly garments – it is the “sound of many rushing waters” (Revelation 1:15)! There is a fountain of cleansing for our daily, life-destroying and bloody sins. Now Jesus merely speaks in Heaven, and the waters flow into our lives, providing cleansing anew from our deep uncleanness! How wonderful it must be in Heaven to hear the Word of God on the lips of our Savior as He prays *with that Word* for us in this unclean, sinful world!

Sing about the Word of God one more time this week, using the following hymns:

*Thy Word is like a garden, Lord, with flowers bright and fair;
And every one who seeks may pluck a lovely cluster there.
Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine; and jewels rich and rare
Are hidden in its mighty depths for every searcher there.*

*Thy Word is like a starry host: a thousand rays of light
Are seen to guide the traveler and make his pathway bright.
Thy Word is like an armory, where soldiers may repair;
And find, for life's long battle day, all needful weapons there.*

*O may I love Thy precious Word, may I explore the mine,
May I its fragrant flowers glean, may light upon me shine!
O may I find my armor there! Thy Word my trusty sword,
I'll learn to fight with every foe the battle of the Lord.*

(1991 Revised Trinity Hymnal # 139)

The following old-time hymn by J.M. Engard speaks ultimately of the Word of Christ speaking to us in the Scriptures:

Oh, speak to me, my Savior,
Some words of holy cheer,
That I in joy or sorrow
May know that Thou art near;
O Lord, how condescending
To stoop and talk with me!
I know I am unworthy,
But hear my humble plea.

Oh, speak to me, my Savior,
And tell me of Thy grace—
Sufficient for Thy people,
For every time and place;
Oh, speak to me in trouble
Some consolations dear;
Be with me in the conflict,
And I shall feel no fear. **Refrain**

Refrain
Oh, speak to me, my Savior,
I wait with listening ear;
Thy words, so full of comfort,
My soul delights to hear.

Oh, speak to me, my Savior,
I long to hear Thy voice,
For when I am despondent,
It makes my heart rejoice;
Thou lovest me, my Savior,
Thy love I feel—I know,
But oh, my soul is waiting
To hear Thee tell me so. **Refrain**