

A TOUCH OF CHRIST'S GARMENT

Preached at Rehoboth, Swindon,
Monday, February 17th, 1958.

For she said within herself, if I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. Matt. ix. 21.

Human nature, especially where religion is concerned, is very fickle. Mark and Luke, who record with greater detail the journeyings and activity of the Lord Jesus Christ, relate how that the Saviour went into the land of the Gaderenes, crossing the lake for that purpose, and then, having delivered a poor lunatic man from the devils that troubled him, He caused him to be clothed and put him in his right mind, gave him to sit at His feet and beg the privilege of being with Jesus. Jesus did not grant him his request, but told him to go home and tell his friends what great things the Lord had done for him, which Luke records that he did.

But when the devils were sent into the swine and they rushed into the lake and were drowned, the people were afraid. They evidently feared that further losses to their property, and maybe their persons, might follow His remaining with them, so they begged Him to depart. They little thought of the benefit of the poor lunatic man, of the blessing it was to him, and what relief it would be to them afterwards, because of the terror he had been in their midst. So the Saviour crossed the lake again, and when He came to the other side it is said that the people gladly received Him, for they were all waiting for Him.

We are not to place too much value on this, for a great deal of this would be natural, as it often happened in the days of Christ's ministry. There are only two instances of blessing among the people that gladly received Him; these two were exceptional cases. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, was evidently more than impressed by the authority of Jesus. He had an inward persuasion of the power of Christ to heal his dying daughter, and he made his request to Him. And as Jesus was about to go to heal the maid there was such a crowd about Him that they pressed Him on every side. And in that crowd there

was an unnamed woman, languid with a sickness of many years, who felt within herself, as she said, "If I may but touch the border of His garment, I shall be whole."

There was a difference in the exercise of the faith of these two. Jairus believed implicitly that He could heal his daughter, and made request to Him; but the woman had confidence in Him that if she could but touch His garment she would be made whole. And so it was; it came to pass to the honouring of her faith and to the glory of God her Saviour.

In attempting to look at this incident and to make a few remarks in connection with it, I would in the first place, if enabled, notice the object of her faith. It is thus expressed, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." It was required by the law of Moses that the Jews should wear in the hem of their outward garment a blue ribbon, doubtless significant of some gospel truth, or some truth which had relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was to His garment, or to the ribbon, that she looked in respect of her need. But we can hardly think that the object of her faith was the garment, simply and alone. It was not that she had any confidence in His garment but as He wore it. It was the garment of Christ; it covered His Person, and it had altogether another aspect in her mind from what it would have done if she had seen it hanging on any other body, separate from Him. So it is in the experiences of God's people. If at times a child of God is blessed to hang upon the naked word of God's promise, it is more often given to others to have relation to Christ in faith by venturing to Him through some blessing, some blessing of salvation, some favour which the Saviour has to give, and does give, of His mercy to poor sinners. But His garment is very sacred. I mean, the garment as worn by Christ. It could be nothing apart from Him. If the garment covered Him, so does the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which is compared to a garment that covers. When He was crucified, the soldiers cast lots for His garments, but for His robe they cast lots because they could not separate it, seeing it was all of a piece, woven from top to bottom; very wonderfully describing the perfect righteousness of Christ, His obedience in life and death; that righteousness that admits of no additions of men in any sense whatever; but it is *His* righteousness. You know how

beautifully Kent expresses this in his hymn in connection with a coming sinner: he says,

"Without a seam His garment's wove,
Bequeathed in everlasting love;
Ere time began, designed to be
A royal robe to cover thee.

We seek no other blood or name,
To cleanse our guilt and hide our shame,
But that wrought out by Christ the Son,
Which God imputes, and faith puts on."

The righteousness of Christ clothes or covers the guilty sinner, and in it he is justified and reckoned righteous in the sight of God, so that in this righteousness he has nothing to fear, for it is that which God Himself has provided. Every blessing of the gospel is connected with the robe of His righteousness. Be it sanctification, it flows from Christ; be it adoption, it flows from Christ; be it an interest in the Saviour's blood, it flows from Christ; and the hope of heaven is His to give and His alone.

Now as the woman looked at the robe of Christ, feeling and believing if she could but touch it she should be made whole, so there are times in the experience of quickened sinners when the only object of their faith is the righteousness of Christ.

But let us notice in the next place her confidence; we might say the confidence of her faith; for she said within herself, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." It was a wonderful confidence; perhaps some might say, a presumptuous confidence. I would not say that presumption never enters into the notions of some in regard to the things of God, for it does. But it was not so in the case before us. Look at her sad state, and look at Him Whose garment she desired to touch. She was in a languishing state; her disease was numbering her days; her faith in Christ was warranted by His power to save, by the miracles that He had wrought, by the words of grace that He had spoken. She did not presume wrongly upon Him but ventured to Him in the confidence of His ability, and of His willingness.

The leprous man said, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." And the poor woman said, "Lord, have mercy upon me." So it is with faith when it ventures to Christ; and it is a wonderful element in faith that it has confidence and trust. I have mentioned her case. She had seen various physicians, doubtless been the subject of various experiments; she had spent her money; she was nothing bettered. What a sad description; but what a true description that may be of some before me! Some at least know something about it, others may yet know about it; but some may be in that place in their present state - spent their all, and nothing bettered. When the Lord convinces a sinner of his sins in the definite way He did Saul of Tarsus, the sinner is immediately cut down and there is no question of seeking to escape from it, it is too deeply, yea, it is permanently fastened in his conscience. But not always does the Lord so produce conviction in the souls of those whom He intends to bless. He often troubles them with one sin, and then with other sins. He makes them uneasy; He makes them unhappy. They hardly know what is the matter with them. They know things are not right; they know that they are in peril, but what to do they know not. They try various physicians, and maybe for a time are drawn to seek relief for the distress of their minds by going into what the world calls harmless diversions. That may seem for the moment to relieve, but does not in reality, because the trouble returns with greater force, and the more they try this physician the more they come to this place, they are nothing bettered; and they have spent their money in so doing.

Others in trouble of soul and try to obtain relief to their consciences, will feel that reformation is necessary. They will give attention to their duties and responsibilities and discharge them to the best of their ability; and doubtless there is a certain measure of satisfaction in doing those things that are expected of us honestly and properly. But if we seek to ease the troubles of our mind in that way it will come to this, we are nothing bettered, but rather worse, because we have spent our all.

Others, to relieve their minds, will try to work out a righteousness of their own. There are millions who, in their judgment, think they can do this, that, and the other; but the more they struggle against sin's power, they stumble yet the

more. Their condition worsens; they have nowhere to go to, they are nothing bettered, and they have spent their all; little enough it is true, but it is their all. When a man comes here it is as in the words of the parable, he has nothing to pay, nothing to discharge his debts, nothing to ease his conscience, nothing to heal his disease, nothing to bring him relief, for all the means that he has tried have proved altogether in vain. And it is a blessing that it is so. If it were not so we should rest short of Christ; we should be content without an experience of His salvation; we should be proud of our abilities. But the Lord will not have it so. He deepens conviction first by one thing then by another until we are reduced to desperation, as this woman was. There was nothing left for her but to venture to Christ.

How beautifully this sets forth the Spirit's work in the soul of a sinner! He knows the best time to commence to testify of the Person of Christ, His fitness to be a Saviour, His suitability to such a needy soul as he feels himself to be; to testify of the love that will take a wretched sinner in, the efficacy of His blood that will pardon the vilest sinner and that will justify guilty sinners in the sight of God. As the Spirit of God is pleased to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in all His suitability, sufficiency, and adaptability, it is made attractive to the soul. He will feel, This is such a Saviour as I need. If I can but have an interest in His precious blood, if He but applies the word of His grace to my soul, if He will but say, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." if He would but, as David requested, "Say unto my soul I am thy salvation" that would meet all my case. Can we honestly say as in the sight of God that the blessings of Christ in salvation are attractive to us? Why are they attractive? they are not so unless we are guilty and needy and filthy and nothing bettered by all other physicians, but left in desperation. If that is our case the remedy is attractive; we can believe that "None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good."

We notice in the next place her venturing. She "said within herself." It is a remarkable fact that this woman with her disease, which she had had for twelve years, and which rendered her ceremonially unclean, so that every person she touched and every person that touched her was rendered unclean legally, that is, until they had passed through the provision that the Lord had

provided in the law of Moses, they could not enter into the sanctuary; and yet this poor woman, though unclean and thus unable to enter into the sanctuary, ventured to say within herself, "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole." Did she not consider that she might make Him unclean? Not in the least; for her faith doubtless apprehended this, that she could not make Him unclean, but He could make her clean. So it is with souls under divine teaching. They do not lose sight of their guilt or their filth or their uncleanness. The Lord sees to it that they do not. Neither, while they are such worthless, unclean sinners, and sometimes fear they might contaminate others that are about them, do they think that they can ever contaminate Him. There is that in their souls which believes that if they may but get near Him, if they may but lay their hands upon Him, the hands of faith, it will not make Him unclean, but He will make them clean. He will cleanse them with His precious blood, He will heal them with His great salvation, He will communicate to them the grace that saves, that sanctifies, and that ultimately glorifies. It is a wonderful truth in the gospel, especially so in experience, that a venturing, trembling faith may receive virtue from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not frustrated by the badness or the sadness of our cases. It is our mercy to realise that we have nothing to pay, that we are nothing bettered, for such cases are suitable to Him. It is a mercy when our bad case and His good case come together, for it will be salvation to the sinner. I remember a young man, I think inadvertently, in his prayer asking the Lord to make him fit enough, or good enough, to receive salvation. I pointed out kindly to him afterwards that his goodness would keep him from the Saviour; it was better to be seeking a knowledge of our utter unfitness, for only thus can we receive the Saviour.

"She said within herself, If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole." We need not think that this was the only thing that she said within herself. We can well imagine that she might say, "May I touch Him? Will it be of use if I do? Shall I not be discovered and brought to light?" But there was this also, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." Do not be over-distressed by the many things that you say within yourself; but is there this in your heart, "If I may but get a touch

of Christ, if I may but pour out my heart in penitence at His sacred feet, if He will but speak to me, I shall be whole." I like what Beddome says,

"Though by my sins deserving hell,
I'll not despair, for who can tell?"

That is what faith says within herself. Or, as another hymn writer,

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I shall for ever die.

"I'd tell Him I'm a wretch undone
Without His sovereign grace."

And with such hopes and such expectations, in the confidence of faith she ventured to touch Him, with the result that she was immediately healed.

And she knew it in herself. That is the remarkable thing about this salvation. When one's faith is brought into exercise upon the Person and work of Christ there will flow into the soul the pardon of sins. We shall look for our sins and be unable to find them; peace will be in our hearts, and a sense of gospel healing experienced in our souls. It is not a matter of speculation, but of experience as the woman felt it in herself. We do not want a religion of feelings, but we must have a feeling religion; and a religion that knows nothing about the experience of His pardoning love and blood and power is a sad religion. I do not speak against that religion of the Spirit of God in which He leads the sinner to Christ, but of that religion that has nothing to do with Christ personally, believably and experimentally. She got her blessing. Faith was honoured and her person was healed, and, as we may hope, her soul was too.

But then the Saviour addressed His disciples and said, "Who touched Me?" Luke records that all denied. "Peter and they that were with Him said, Master, the multitude throng Thee, and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?" You see, the poor woman, although she got the blessing, did not say, It was

I; but she kept silent. Not unlike some of the Lord's people. They want a blessing, they obtain a blessing, and they want to keep it in the secret of their hearts; they fear lest others should think that they presume, or that, by speaking, they should lose what they have got. And so, like her, they would keep quiet. We can understand the disciples saying that, with all this throng of people about Him, it was to no purpose to say, 'Who touched Me?' as, doubtless, several touched Him; but, there is a difference between a casual touch and the touch of faith. And the Lord Jesus said, "Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me." The Lord Jesus knows the slightest touch of faith, and He responds to it out of His fulness. We cannot venture upon Him in vain. He that believeth shall not be confounded or put to shame; and the Lord Jesus knew this, as He knows it still. What a consolation that is that He knows when there is the least grain of faith, or the most trembling touch of faith! He knows it, and knows what is gone out of Him in respect of it. "When the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before Him, she declared unto Him before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately." A wonderful passage! The woman saw that she was not hid. Has the Lord found some of you out in such a manner? Has He discovered to you that you cannot keep the blessing to yourself? that you cannot hide what He has done for your soul? And although it causes you to tremble, as it caused the woman to tremble, for she fell before Him, and declared unto Him before all the people for what cause she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. If the woman had gone away with her blessing, the Saviour would not have had the testimony of her lips to her faith and to the healing that she had received.

And how happy the woman must have been when He spoke to her in that crowd, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." She had the approbation of the Saviour in her soul; and she had the approbation of her conscience that she had spoken of Christ the thing that was right.

I will leave these few remarks in the hope that God may use them to your soul's good and His praise.