

THE UNTOUCHABLES

Read Mark 5:25-34

What would you do if you were a Jewish woman stricken with an endless menstrual period? Would you go from doctor to doctor seeking relief? Would you spend all your money on a cure? If you lived your life according to the Old Testament Law you might be desperate enough to do so. Not one person could freely touch you; not one person would want you to touch them. No one would wish to incur the consequences—anyone who even bumped against you would be considered “unclean until evening” (Lev. 15:19). Parent and stranger alike would avoid coming near you. It might seem that God has forsaken you because He is the One who declares you “unclean.” You are reckoned among the “untouchables.”

Even when the woman’s menstrual period lasted the normal seven days, the Law obligated a husband to refrain from sexual activity with his wife during that time. The husband who had intercourse with a menstruating woman would also be deemed unclean for seven days. An obligatory ritual of cleansing and sacrifice would then have to be observed (Lev. 15:29). But, until that ritual was complete, everything the man or woman touched would be regarded unclean (v. 24). For the woman, this became a natural part of life; for the man it was an irritation to be assiduously avoided.

But what if the body’s reproductive system went haywire and your period never ceased? What man would willingly go through the rigors of the cleansing ceremony every time he touched you? If this plight occurred at the onset of your first period, you would probably remain husbandless. Neither would you ever be what every Hebrew woman longed to be—a mother. The woman of Mark 5:25-34 was in such a predicament.

The woman in Mark is never named so she could be “Any Woman.” She had been pursuing a remedy for her ailment by exhausting her funds on ineffectual physicians for twelve years. At the point when she had “endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse” (5:26), she saw Jesus in the midst of a crowd of people who were vying for his attention. Her faith drew her near Him; the Law’s requirements kept her from grasping Him.

After she “came up in the crowd behind Him” she merely “**touched** His outer garment”; perhaps this was her attempt at preventing Jesus from becoming ritually “unclean” (5:27). She reasoned, “If I just **touch** His garments, I will get well” (v. 28). She was proven right for “immediately the flow of her blood was dried up” (v. 29). And she knew it! Unexpectedly, however, Jesus, “perceiving in Himself that the power had gone forth,” swung around and demanded, “Who **touched** my garments?” (v. 30).

The disciples were baffled. “A crowd is pressing in on you!” they exclaimed. With so many people, how could He inquire, “Who **touched** Me?” (v. 31). Jesus’ eyes searched for the “woman who had done this” (v. 32). The woman’s faith changed to “fear and trembling” as she pressed forward and “fell down before Him” (v. 33). But Jesus declared, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction” (v. 34).

Because we have read or heard this story on a number of occasions we are prone to read the words as one would read a loved but timeworn nursery tale. We have a

tendency to read a familiar Bible story without paying much attention to the details. That is why the “Keys to Dynamic Bible Study” are so helpful. The “keys” force us to slow down, read carefully, and read the passage often. Without the first “key” to a dynamic Bible study—deliberately paying attention to repeated words—we may not have noted that the term “touch” is being accentuated through repetition. It is Jesus, the “Holy One of God” (1:24) who allows himself to be “touched” by an untouchable one. It is Jesus, the “beloved son” of God (1:11) who responds to the “touch” of a wearied, rejected yet faith-filled “daughter.” It is Jesus, the “touchable” One who sends her home in peace. God has not forsaken an “untouchable.”