

attitude of worship, falling down at His feet (5:33). The proof of her sincerity was that she told Jesus immediately 'the whole truth' (5:33), and we can see from Jesus' response that He was entirely satisfied by what she said. There is no hint of rebuke or questioning in Jesus' last words to her, which have become so important for the ministry of the church (see above).

Jesus' words, 'Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction,' are well worth exploring, because they contain several important features. The word 'saved' in Greek is one of those words which has multiple meanings, and could mean 'be saved', 'be healed', 'be rescued', 'be delivered', 'preserved', 'cured', or 'made well'! We should not be worried about this, because it helps us understand that God's salvation can at any one moment mean any or all of these things. Certainly, the woman with the haemorrhage was truly set free by what had happened to her. Although she may have faced many difficulties, she was now able to claim her place back within society.

Jesus also said to the woman 'go in peace', the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew greeting 'shalom', meaning peace in its widest sense, as peace of body, mind and spirit. This, together with Jesus' acceptance that her illness was an 'affliction' (5:34) and therefore not her fault, completes the picture of this great healing miracle of faith.

### Application

It is easy to become focussed on the healing ministry after reading an amazing story such as this. However, Jesus appears to have placed together the two words 'faith' and 'saved' for the first time in His ministry in this passage, and it is clear that Jesus was not merely interested in whether the woman was 'healed'. If that was all Jesus was concerned about, then He would not have sought her out and talked further with her. As each healing miracle goes by in Mark's Gospel, we gain the impression that Jesus sought to preach the Gospel of salvation through everything He did. The man on the bed had his sins forgiven (2:1f.), and the demoniac who was delivered of 'Legion' (5:1-20) became an important preacher. Jesus did not give this woman anything special to do, but He said to her 'your faith has saved you' (5:34), which has become an important statement of faith for Christians. Many have pointed out that this phrase was well known in the early church and wonder whether it found its way into the Gospel because of its use in the church. This is not necessarily so, for the process could well have worked the other way round, and the phrase became used because Jesus said it first here in this story, and it encapsulated faith for many people.

Salvation for all people is not merely a spiritual thing, because as spiritual beings, our bodies and our spirits are intertwined. Because of this, whether we are physically well or ill does indeed affect our spirits, and it may be unwise for us to think little of our own minor illnesses as if they did not matter, or expect others to do the same for what may be more serious illnesses. All illness matters; and the whole of our condition both physically and spiritually is of importance to God our Father. He is always willing to heal us, if, like the woman in this story, we will come to Him.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. What illnesses carry the same kind of stigma today as the flow of blood experienced by the woman in this passage?
2. How is our understanding of Christ's healing affected by modern medical practice?
3. How important is faith to the healing ministry of the church, and is it always a necessary feature?

### Discipleship

As most people grow older, they live with a variety of conditions, some of which are potentially difficult (everything from weight problems to genetic diseases) and others which are dealt with apparently routinely (changing eyesight or hearing loss). Ask yourself what illnesses or conditions you would consider taking to the Lord in prayer for healing? If your list only contains illnesses that are fatal, what does that say about you or your faith? Consider whether you should find a way to pray about your health on a regular basis.

### Final Prayer

Jesus, grant us all peace this day. We have worked, we have talked, we have thought and spoken, and we have done what we believe to be right even though we may have slipped up along the way. Forgive our sins, we pray, and grant us peace. AMEN

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have blessed us with a deep and enduring assurance that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God, our Creator and Redeemer. You have shown this to be true within Your own life, and by giving us Your Spirit to empower us every day. Thank You, Lord Jesus! May our whole lives give You glory for the awesome treasure You have given us! AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Personal Decisions

Some people find it hard to take decisions themselves because their lives are dominated by others, sometimes beneficially, more often by those with purely selfish intent. It is not easy, nor often right, to presume on the life of others, so pray generally for people who are unable to live fully because of the domination of others, and pray with care for any such people you know.

### Meditation

People choose to say that God does not exist;  
Everything we experience has developed of its own accord, they say.  
But tell me, if there's no meaning in the universe,  
Why do most people seek 'meaning' for how and why they live on earth?

People choose to say that God is good, and the church is bad;  
Look at how they argue, fight themselves and typify irrelevance, they say.  
But tell me, what makes 'you' so good and others bad?  
And why perpetuate the grievances and not be brave enough to play a part?

People choose to say that God is bad, because their life is hell;  
Jesus cannot be a God of love if life is cruel, damaging and evil, they say.  
But tell me, where does evil really come from?  
And why blame God for everything instead of accepting His love and help?

Yet others choose to say that Jesus is their Lord and God:  
They take the risk of ridicule and persecution to pin their colours to the mast.  
They know and see that the most needy, hurting people  
Have always found in Christ, a Saviour; and a meaning for everything in life!  
And all they ever did, was 'taste and see that the Lord is good!' (Psalm 34:8)

### Bible Study - Mark 5:21-34

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had crossed by boat back to the other side, a great crowd gathered around Him; and He stayed by the sea. <sup>22</sup> Then one of the synagogue leaders named Jairus came, and when he saw Him, he fell at His feet <sup>23</sup> and repeatedly begged Him, 'My little daughter is dying; come and lay your hands on her, so that she may get well and live.' <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him, and a large crowd followed and thronged around Him.

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had endured much under many doctors, and spent all she had, but instead of bringing any benefit, she grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothing, <sup>28</sup> for she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed!' <sup>29</sup> Immediately her bleeding stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. <sup>30</sup> Jesus knew straight away that power had gone out from Him, so He turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' <sup>31</sup> Then His disciples said to him, 'You can see the crowd thronging around you, so how can you say, "Who touched me?"' <sup>32</sup> But He continued to look around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, realising what had happened to her, came forward in fear and trembling, fell at His feet, and told Him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> So He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.'

### Review

This beautiful and remarkable passage (5:21-34) contains the story of the woman Jesus cured after suffering years of bleeding. However, it starts with the introduction to another story, the healing of the synagogue leader's daughter (which concludes in tomorrow's reading - 5:35-43). These two stories convey something of the difficult patterns of real life ministry; for although many of the Gospel stories are told one after the other, a few reveal the disorder of real life, just like these. Here, Jesus began to respond to one heart-rending appeal for His healing touch (5:21-24), and in the rush to help, He found Himself dealing a woman who needed help in a profoundly intimate manner.

At the very least, the way these two stories are juxtaposed tells us that Jesus showed no partiality. He dealt with the inconveniences of life as required, and the life of the young daughter of an important official could not be compared with the dire health needs of a poor desperate woman who had lost her money trying to get help from doctors (5:26). The interruption may well seem unhelpful, but Jesus did not let this affect either the woman with the haemorrhage or the young girl. He showed His command of time by healing the woman before going on to the house of the synagogue leader (5:35-43), where He healed the young girl.

These two stories convey a sense of hectic activity as soon as Jesus arrived back on the Jewish side of Lake Galilee, after the incident at Geresá (5:1-20). The synagogue leader (5:21) was a man of the highest standing in Jewish society, a 'pillar of the community'. The synagogues were not run by rabbis or priests but by local men who made arrangements for the activities of a local synagogue and ensured that everything was done properly. Here, the local leader was a man named Jairus (see also Luke 8:41), and the sight of one such as he begging Jesus for help (5:23) stood in stark contrast to the rejection he received earlier in His ministry from the scribes (2:6,16, 3:22). The difference was simple; the scribes were threatened by Jesus' power and authority, but with the life of his daughter at stake, this pillar of the community risked his reputation for the life of his daughter (we will continue this story tomorrow).

The woman who followed Jesus in the crush of the crowds should not have been there. She suffered from a continual menstrual blood flow and consequently, would have been regarded as ritually unclean; she should have remained at home. Yet there she was in a thronging crowd following Jesus, risking everything to find not just healing but life! The remarkable nature of this story has captivated people for centuries, in particular the woman faith in Jesus. She clearly believed that she would be healed if only she could touch part of Jesus' clothing (5:27). In those days, the belief that power flowed from the robes of a great man was something close to a superstition, as Paul found out many years later (Acts 19:11,12); but Jesus was prepared to overlook even this in order to help the distressed woman.

Remarkably, the story tells us that Jesus felt the woman's touch, because He knew 'power had gone out from Him' (5:30). After a brief search in which the disciples expressed their astonishment (5:31) and Jesus persisted in looking around (5:32) despite His urgent mission, the woman came forward and 'fell at His feet' (5:33). According to the Law, she had to prove that her blood flow had stopped for at least seven days before she could be pronounced clean; but Jesus absolved her immediately! More than this, He even declared that she had been 'saved' by her faith in Him and pronounced 'peace' on her (5:34).

It is not surprising that the early church began to use Jesus' phrase 'go in peace, your faith has made you well'. It well suited the Christian healing ministry, and it has continued to be used to this day. This is the only place in Scripture where it is found, and we are blessed if we remember the circumstances in which it was first said.

### Going Deeper

Exploring this story, we can only wonder at the compassion of Jesus. Every detail of it raises even higher the sense of social injustice and deprivation from which the woman came to Jesus, and her condition was no fault of her own. In many ways it is this story, far more than the dramatic raising of Jairus' daughter in which it is set, which is close to being an 'ideal' story of Jesus' healing ministry in Mark.

#### **The illness**

The woman had 'suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years' (5:25), and the way that this is described in the Greek of the New Testament leaves us in no doubt that she had uncontrolled menstrual flow for this long period of time. If that were not bad enough, the Laws of Leviticus 15 (15:25-30) state clearly that if a woman's menstrual discharge continued for longer than usual, then she remained in a state of impurity which meant she could not touch any other

human being (Lev 15:27), and no-one could touch anything she had touched. In Jesus' day, the Pharisaic interpretation of this law meant that a woman had to stay in the home and was not allowed to go out. In addition, because the main role of a woman in the home was bringing up children and preparing food, and this poor woman could do none of these things. She would not be able to bear children because of her condition, or look after them because of her uncleanness. Neither could she prepare food for others because this too would be ritually unclean. It would be surprising that if she was married, her husband had not already written her a notice of divorce, as he was allowed to do if a woman was not able to fulfil her duties in the home. I set these things out so that we realise how destitute this woman was.

In addition, we read that she 'had endured much under many doctors, and she had spent all she had but instead of bringing any benefit, she grew worse.' (5:26). It is difficult to convey the Greek meaning here without explaining that the word for 'benefit' in this sentence is used by Mark almost sarcastically, because it is the Greek word for what we call 'profit!'. The clear implication of Mark's careful wording is that this woman had spent all of her wealth on doctors who had taken her money and cured her of nothing! She was not only socially ostracised, but destitute. However, something in her spirit prompted her to seek healing from the man who had become well known because of His healing ministry. Perhaps having heard that Jesus not only healed but pronounced lepers clean (1:40f.), forgave sins (2:1f.) and healed in spite of religious opposition (2:23f.) encouraged her to persist. The cumulative effect of what Jesus did (even if it was not quite in the order Mark presents it; see the other Gospels), must have had some impact on those who saw what Jesus did and assessed their chances of receiving help!

#### **The Healing**

The manner of this woman's healing is unlike any other of Jesus' healing miracles, largely because she came and received the physical healing she needed as a consequence of her own actions, rather than those of Jesus. Although the idea of touching the clothes of a holy man lay behind her actions, this was probably the only thing she felt able to do in her circumstances. To have fallen at Jesus' feet and requested healing for her condition would have left her open to immediate ridicule from the crowd (and perhaps identification by some) when she should not have been there at all. Her 'woman's problems' were not the kind of matter mentioned openly or with men outside of a home. What else could she do except touch the hem of His garment in faith? And this faith was rewarded by a response from the Holy Spirit which Jesus clearly felt, although because of His humanity, He did not know who had touched Him (5:30).

At this point in the story, the woman had been physically healed (5:29) by the power of Jesus (the Holy Spirit) working through Him. The text of Scripture says that 'she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction' (5:29), which is a beautiful statement. Most people who have had a chronic illness of some kind will know what it is like to have a sense of the illness and what it is doing, or to know its presence or absence. This woman could feel that her chronic condition had ceased and she knew she was healed.

Many have wondered how it could be that Jesus' healing power was used without His knowledge. The passage does not give us an answer to this, and we can only interpret this story subsequently in the light of the experience of the Christian church and its understanding of Jesus' healing ministry. Jesus was personally limited by His humanity, but the Holy Spirit within Him was not, and able to respond to the need of the woman. She came to Jesus, the Holy Spirit responded and Jesus felt it. It was a unique moment in Jesus ministry.

One other feature of the woman's illness is worth noting, and it is that in two places in this story, the Greek word 'mastigos' is used which means 'affliction'. In each language there are a number of words which describe illness; for example, in English, we have 'illness', 'disease', 'sickness' or 'infirmity', and each word has its nuance which is largely defined by culture. In this text, the word 'affliction' was related to 'beating' or 'whipping', so it contained the idea that it was something 'done to you' rather than something that was your own fault. In a society that was quick to see the connections between sin and sickness (see 2:1f.), it was important that Mark identified the woman's illness as something which was not her fault.

#### **Healing and 'wholeness'**

But that was not enough, Jesus called out 'who touched my clothes' (5:30) and after dismissing the disciple's lack of understanding of what was going on (5:31), he persisted in His search. Then, remarkably, God moved in the heart of the woman a second time. Now emboldened by the healing, she made herself known to Jesus, coming forward in 'fear and trembling' and in an