

COURSE CORRECTION PART 2: SHELTER ME LORD - Mark 5:25-34

*The waters rise, and thunders pound
The wheels of war, are goin round
And all the walls are crumbling down
But shelter me Lord underneath your wings
The wind can blow, the rain can pour
The deluge breaks, the tempest roars
But in the storm, my spirit sings
Shelter me Lord underneath your wings
Hide me underneath your wings, hide me deep inside your heart
In your refuge cover me
Shelter me Lord underneath your wings*

(Shelter Me Lord, Paul Thorn)

In Mark 5 Jesus was at His Mosaic-law breaking best. We've talked about the rhymes and reasons Jesus veered outside the established legal structure. Each and every instance is noble and makes sense from our *rear-view mirror* perspective. Jesus was, in His words, perfecting and fulfilling the law of Moses, or at least the original portions, and the original intent, scope and sequence of the original portions. *What?*

An example: A man is walking home with his ox in tow after working his field. It's Friday afternoon and it's getting late. Sabbath begins soon and he knows he must cease work. His ox jolts and bolts, ending up in a deep ditch. The man feels a quandary coming on. If he leaves his ox in the ditch he may never see it again (those pesky Gentiles love it when Jewish oxen tumble into ditches on Friday afternoons); he knows by experience if he

goes in after his ox it will take hours to get the stubborn animal out, and his is not the brightest ox in a world of *not-so-bright* oxen. If he breaks Sabbath law he will be in big trouble with the Pharisees, but if he leaves his ox in the ditch, he will never see it again. If that happens, he won't be able to feed his family. *What do I do? Better yet, what does God want me to do?*

This was the state of Jewish jurisprudence during Jesus' ministry. The law had become so inflexible the original intent had been papered over for centuries. Jesus came to save Israel from the Law, and to fulfill and complete it at the same time. Hard task for sure, but Jesus was good at hard tasks (O.K., impossible tasks).

Understanding the fullest scope of Jesus' ministry allows for a much more rewarding read of his encounters with "damaged," and "troubled" people. When Jesus stopped to speak to the Samaritan woman at the well, she said: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink of water? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4:9).

I imagine it this way: *Uh, you do know where you are don't you? And you should have figured out it's the wrong time of day to draw water from the well so I must be the wrong kind of woman to be talking to... and you are a Jew, and let's face it, you guys don't want us around. So why are you talking to me? You trying to get me into even more trouble? My life's really bad, please don't make it worse.*

The Samaritan woman's need intersected the presence of God, resulting in historic, unprecedented change and transformation. This was Kingdom course correction in a single encounter in an off-limits, backwoods place. She was moving from exclusion to inclusion and found true Shalom and salvation.

How about the litany of lepers who Jesus healed? “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Not one leprosy-plagued person asked Jesus to touch them. They knew that wasn’t going to happen... until it did. Jesus could have simply said, “Be healed,” and *poof*, the leprosy would be gone. He could have *thought* healing into reality. By touching lepers, He broke the specific rules of two chapters of Leviticus. He contaminated himself and became ceremonially unclean, very ceremonially unclean. So why do it?

Let’s add an additional layer, one even more complex than the occasional leper or Samaritan woman who had trouble staying married. Jesus touched dead people. Touching a corpse was a major rules violation. Leviticus (a rule book if there’s ever been a rule book) reads: “He shall not go into a room with any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or mother” (21:11). It doesn’t say don’t touch. It says do not enter the area where the dead body lies. The touching part is covered in Numbers 19:13: “Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days. He must purify himself with the water on the third and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the Lord’s tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel.”

Even the strictest Pharisee might overlook the occasional reprieve for picking up sticks on the Sabbath for the cookstove. Everyone’s gotta eat, right. Touching a corpse? Holding a dead girl’s hand and totally ignoring the follow-up purification quarantine rules? Nope. He’s gotta pay for this. In his well-regarded *Commentary on Matthew* Plummer writes: “In such cases Jesus allowed ritual considerations to give way before the higher principles of love.” Again, major course correction.

But, and this is a rather large however, all of the aforementioned encounters leading to course corrections were instigated by other people or played out in the natural rhythm of personal encounter. Once a woman who had a bleeding condition for twelve years wove through a packed crowd hoping to touch even the slightest thread of Jesus' cloak. No chatting. No requests. No parable provided. She believed the clothes Jesus wore could meet her need. What choice did she have? She was so far beyond being ceremonially unclean she had no options left. Once upon a time she had been near the end of her rope. She hadn't seen that rope in years. *Desperate* was her name.

Mark details the story of this unnamed woman who chronically hemorrhaged:

A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before she had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched His robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on His robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with. At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from Him. He turned around and asked to the crowd, “Who touched my robe?” His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you're asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!” But He went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before Him, and gave Him the whole story. Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.” (vv. 25-34, Message Bible). The Passion

Translation ends a bit differently: “Daughter, because you dared to believe, your faith has healed you. Go with peace in your heart and be free from your suffering!”

To set the stage, Jesus was in a new area. He had just exorcised many demons out of a long-suffering man (Legion) and was walking down a street when a wealthy, well-connected Jewish leader named Jairus told him about his sick daughter. Jairus was the benefactor of the local synagogue. His request to Jesus, made on his knees, signaled he believed Jesus had the extraordinary power of healing the sick. No doubt he was aware of all the stories, some apocryphal, some diminished, many true, of Jesus healing the sick and tossing demons aside. This is where the unnamed woman with a bleeding problem enters the narrative. Jesus agreed to follow Jairus to his home but was temporarily interrupted by someone touching the tassel or wings of his garment. What follows is not only a course correction, but a reaffirmation of the sovereignty of God.

Let’s breakdown this faith-changing encounter via questions and answers:

Who was this woman and what was wrong with her? We do not know her name, only that she suffered from a hemorrhaging-related condition for twelve years. Mark tells us she had consulted many physicians and healers without success, and in the process paid them all her money.

Were there no cures for her physical condition? Even in the mighty Roman Empire this was a condition treated more by hocus pocus and folk treatments than by what we would consider science. William Barclay sums up her treatment options:

“The woman in this story suffered from a trouble which was very common and very hard to deal with. The Talmud itself gives no fewer than eleven cures for such a trouble. Some of them are tonics and astringents, but some of them are sheer superstitions like carrying the ashes of an ostrich egg in a linen cloth in the summer and a cotton cloth in the winter; or carrying a kernel of barley corn which had been found in the dung of a white female donkey.”

David Garland adds: Let them procure three kapiza of Persian onions, boil them in wine, make her drink it, and say to her, “Cease your discharge.” But if not (if that doesn’t work), she should sit at a crossroads, hold a cup of wine in her hand, and a man comes up from behind, frightens her and exclaims, “Cease your discharge!” *And you wonder why she was still sick?*

What was her life like? Aside from hassling with ostrich eggs and looking for rare white female donkeys who may have dined on barley corn, her life was awful. P.L. Metzger describes her as “Unwell, broke, lonely and shunned.” She lived a life of isolation. If she was married before her illness her husband could have divorced her on the spiritual grounds of impurity. If she was single, she had no hope of marriage. She was excluded from being in the presence of other people and was barred from entering the Temple or a synagogue. All women were isolated and considered unclean during normal menstruation (7 days), but she was deemed as perpetually unclean. Without Temple/synagogue access she could not participate in the high holy days, meaning her sins could not be forgiven on Yom Kippur. Holistically, her life was ruined.

And along came Jesus. Had she heard about Jesus and His deeds? He had not been to her side of the lake before but news spreads fast about

the One some say is the long-awaited Messiah. Charles Martin describes her *possible* thoughts this way:

She's heard the stories. Word has spread throughout all Judea. There was the man with the withered hand. The centurion's servant. The son of the widow in Nain who was in a coffin being carried out through the gate. The paralyzed man lowered by his friends through a roof who, after the Healer touched him walked out the front door. How He calmed the wind and waves with just a word. How He laid his hands on those with various diseases and how He healed them all. Everyone. Lastly, she's heard how He delivered the demon-possessed man of the Gaderenes. And then, just recently, she's heard how He read the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue. How the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord was upon Him. She knew the prophecy.

It's hard to tally the number of broken Mosaic laws she leaves in her wake as she makes her way through a thick, packed crowd to Jesus. She cannot touch a man and is not supposed to walk where others might tread on her dropped blood, and the list goes on and on. Desperation gives way to determination. What is there to lose? Her freedom? Her rights? Her pride?

Tassels and Wings. She is determined to reach Jesus. She moves through the throng of people, making contact with more people in that short span than in the past twelve years combined. The closer she gets the tighter the crowd around Him grows. She doesn't have to speak to Him. He doesn't have to speak to her. This can be done with a touch. *She lunges, extends her reach, and grasps the corner of His garment. His shirt. The tassel. The wing. She clings. Holds tightly. He feels the tug. Feels the power leave. She feels it enter* (Martin). She is healed by Jesus through simply touching the wing or tassel of His shirt. How? Two

answers: *It's Jesus so there you go; and second, the tassel/wing goes back to the time of Moses and signifies God as Healer, Deliverer and Refuge.*

Moses to Malachi to Jesus: Shelter Me Lord Underneath Your Wings:

1500 years before Jesus, Moses brought Israel out of Egypt. After three days of walking (it is reported there were between 2-3 million in the caravan) they were tired, hungry, thirsty and asking, *Are we there yet?* They found a well, but the water was putrid. God instructed Moses to throw a tree into the water. When he did the water became pure. God said to Israel, "I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

A few months later at Mount Sinai God spoke to Israel through Moses: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ezekiel 19). It is here that God uses "wings" to signify deliverance and protection, plus a sense of belonging.

Psalms 91: "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress.' And under His wings you shall take refuge." *Deliverance, healing, refuge, community, protection, trust.* God did not want Israel to forget His sovereign provisions and promises so He instructed them to make tassels for their garments:

Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout the generations and put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandants of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are

inclined, and that you may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the Lord your God (Numbers 15).

Deuteronomy 22: 12: “You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself.” The Hebrew word for *corners* means many things, wings is among them, and it is in this sense tassels remind the wearer of God’s sovereign provisions. Martin adds: “He was saying, ‘The corner of your garment should remind you of Me and My protection-of my deliverance and your healing.’”

The final Hebrew prophet Malachi (before God went silent for 400 years) wrote: “But to you who fear (respect) my name, the Son of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (4:2). Malachi was predicting Jesus would become the wings/tassels of God in the flesh...and wear them as well. This prophecy was fulfilled in a literal/spiritual/restorative sense in the encounter with the bleeding woman.

If I can only touch His shirt: She lunged and grabbed hold of the tassel on the wing of his shirt. The unclean woman who had bled daily for twelve years was healed. One touch. One tassel. Theoretically, she should have made Jesus unclean when she touched him, but a major shift occurs. Rather than uncleanliness flowing from the woman to Jesus, healing from Jesus flowed to the woman. The harsh application of the law that led to her exclusion had been recircuited. This shift is physical and theological. It is a course correction and it is a reclamation of God’s earliest promises. She is healed, restored, reclaimed, saved.

Through Jesus every bleeding woman excluded from faith can be redeemed; every outcast leper can find inclusion; the poor, the sick, the orphan...all exiled to the outside will be brought in. The Gospel is one of inclusion.

The burgeoning, expanding law had narrowed the guest list. The breadth of the law had narrowed the path in-to the Kingdom. It would not remain thin and narrow-it would become deep and wide.

Shelter Me Lord Underneath Your Wings

Amen and Amen

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