

Why Baptism?

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[0:00] I'd like to talk for a little while on the subject of why baptism, and I'd like to use this story in the life and ministry of Jesus to answer that question.

What's the significance of baptism? That's where I'd like to get to, but let's look at this story together. Let's pray first. Lord Jesus, we pray that you will step off the pages of Scripture and meet each of us just now as we come to your word.

Enable us so to meditate on it that we meet you and our lives are touched and changed in doing so. Help speaker and hearers alike. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

So why baptism? What does it do? I'm going to say it's a little bit like the woman in this story who had this bleeding. So I've got, I think, six or seven stages to take us through this story.

Let's just look at the basics of it. As Aaron read, it's a sandwich. If you have a Bible there in front of you or can share across, you'll probably find it quite helpful to look at this.

[1:36] It starts off with a little girl, Jairus' daughter. It then stops and talks about this woman, and then it goes back to Jairus' daughter again. So it's a sandwich, two pieces of bread, Jairus' daughter on either side, and the peanut butter in the middle is the woman.

It starts off with an ill girl, and there is Jesus traveling to her house. Then there is this woman in the crowd, and the movement stops until the woman is spoken to and all that is sorted out.

Only then, sorry, she becomes a saved daughter. Daughter, your faith has saved you. Then they travel on to the girl who is by now dead.

She was ill, but because there's been this delay, she's now dead. And she, Jesus, raises her to everybody's complete astonishment.

It says they were all completely astonished. Jesus is an astonishing person, and he does astonishing things. But I just point out from the way the story is structured that Jesus must think it's very important to speak to the woman because it delayed him getting to the little girl, and that had really big consequences because she died.

[3:08] Anyway, that's the sandwich. So let's look at this woman in the middle of the sandwich here. It says, a large crowd followed Jesus and pressed around him.

If you think of a football crowd, particularly think of an indisciplined football crowd with people pushing and shoving, I think Jesus experienced that a lot.

Such was his popularity that people jostled and pushed around him, and along he goes like that. It says, and a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years.

She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. So let's think for a minute about the woman's condition. She had a condition of bleeding, which I presume, without going into all the medical details, I think would have made her menstrually unclean. And in that society, a society very conscious of the polluting significance of blood, that would have had a devastating effect on her, just from a religious point of view, let alone the medical point of view, fertility point of view, marriage prospect point of view, etc., etc.

[4:32] She was in a bad condition. And she would have been, I guess, unable to feel that she could approach God and things like that.

She'd been in this condition for 12 years. That's a long time, isn't it, to have any medical condition. It says that she'd been to many doctors.

Notice, not just one doctor, not just two doctors or three doctors, but many doctors. Verse 26. And she had suffered at the hands of these doctors.

You know, you don't really want to try and imagine what sort of treatments they would have attempted. But we're told that she hadn't got any better. She had got worse. Poor woman. She got worse and not better. And it also tells us that she'd spent all she had. So whatever money she had at the beginning was all gone. A terrible state she was in.

[5:32] And I think we can't do anything other than have compassion on this poor woman. And I believe Jesus had compassion on this poor woman because she's in a poor condition.

So let's think about the woman. And you will have noticed that the story, as Mark tells us the story, he just lays it on very thick. This poor, poor woman, this was the condition that she was in.

Now, let's think about the woman's view of Jesus. It says, verse 27. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak or his outer garment because she thought, and we're told what she was thinking.

Presumably she must have said this afterwards. Because she was thinking, if I touch his clothes, I will be healed.

Actually, the word she used is saved, which is a bit bigger and stronger than healed. But our translation, in English at least, says healed. So she has a view of Jesus.

[6:48] Actually, she has a very high view of Jesus. She says, and she's got this in her head, if I touch his clothes, I will be healed.

So she doesn't think, oh, I've got to have at least a couple of hours with Jesus before it will make any difference at all. And she doesn't say, I've got to really get him to understand me.

She says, all I have to do is touch his clothes. Because he is so full of all the good things that he has, that just a little touch will be more than enough for me.

She has a high view of his power. There's so much power that just a little touch of the clothes will do. So should we think about batteries?

If you have a 9-volt battery without much power in it, if you put your hands on it, you don't get an electric shock. This is true. You can try it. If you put your tongue on it, you might get an electric shock. If you go to the 1,000 volt, 100,000 volt or whatever they are, electric line on the railway, don't bother putting your tongue on it to see whether you get a shock.

[8:10] You just have to touch it because there's so much power in there. And she thinks this about Jesus. He's got so much power. Just touch his clothes. And she also has a view of his goodness.

If I touch just his clothes, I will be saved. She has a view of, what will I be in touch with?

Something that saves. Something that's got goodness. Saving power. Healthy power. Good power. And we're told she thought this.

She wasn't vague about it. Maybe this, maybe that. Not too sure. She thinks it in quite specific terms, doesn't she? She thought, if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.

She had a high view of Jesus. And we learn that so she had such a high view of Jesus, she was prepared to put it into action.

[9:19] And that's one of the things about real faith. It leads to action. There's the story of a visitor center overlooking the Grand Canyon, I think it was.

And the visitor center has a platform which sticks out over the edge of the cliff. And this is entirely made of glass. Please understand this is a preacher's story, so I might not get all the details exactly right.

But you'll see where I'm going with this. So this galley is made entirely of glass, and you can walk in it and look down into the Grand Canyon.

And when it was opened, the designer was there, and he said, here it is. We can walk all the way along to the end, and we can look down into the Grand Canyon.

And none of the visitors wanted to do it. They said, hmm, glass, big drop, not sure I trust you. Do you trust that?

[10:26] And of course the designer said, yes, of course I did. I've done the calculations. I know exactly what it will withstand. And his faith led him to walk out on this glass walkway and jump up and down and say,

yeah, you see, it is strong enough.

So faith leads to action. And this woman believed in Jesus, and it led her to act and to touch him. Well, that's a bit of an odd thing to do, isn't it? Touch somebody's clothes. A more normal way would be to converse with somebody, wouldn't it? But anyway, she goes up behind him and touches his clothes.

And it says, verse 29, immediately she was healed. Immediately her bleeding stopped.

She felt in her body she was freed from her suffering. And I think, what a touch. What an event to so be in touch with Jesus as to have his power change your life as she did.

[11:34] It literally says, immediately was dried up the fountain of blood in her, and she was freed from this plague, from this affliction.

And I think, what a touch. And I think, what a saviour. Doesn't this say something about the quality of Jesus Christ?

That this is the effect he has upon her. So that was number three. So let's look at number four. Let's look at Jesus' reaction. In verse 30, at once, so that's another quick word, at once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him.

He turned round in the crowd and asked, who touched my clothes? So we notice, first of all, that he knows that power has gone out of him.

He has an awareness of the spiritual transactions around him. A little bit of a mystery here about the things Jesus in his earthly life knew and didn't know.

[12:44] We presume that the Heavenly Father opened to him some things that he could know and withheld from him other things that he could know. And Jesus just, from moment to moment, went on what the Father showed him and allowed him to see.

And the Father shows him that power has gone out from him. So he knows this. And then it says, he, what does it say, turned round.

Just stop on that word, because it's often translated repent. Repent. It means to be going one way and turn round and go the other way. And Jesus was going along to see Jairus' daughter and then he stops and turns round.

And I simply point this out because to be a Christian, you're going one way, you have to stop and turn round. That's what repenting is. Jesus, the same word is used of Jesus.

And he asks, who touched my clothes? Now the disciples think that this is a foolish question because you remember the football crowd, people jostling and pushing, and Jesus is surrounded by people pushing him.

[14:02] Perhaps, wait, Jesus, or whatever. I'm sure they would have done it in a very impolite way. You get the sense that these crowds are quite impolite in the way that they jostle and push. So the disciples say, look, there's loads of people touching you.

What do you mean, who touched me? But Jesus says, no, there's an important point here. And the flow of the narrative stops until the question is answered.

So we're going along to Jairus' daughter. Whoop, stop. Who touched my clothes? Come on, quick. We ought to be getting there.

Nope. Who touched my clothes? What's he stopped for? Who touched my clothes? And everything stops until the next thing happens.

It's interesting, isn't it? Sometimes Jesus progresses things very, very quickly because we have lots of immediately, immediately, immediately. And then sometimes Jesus waits and says, no, hold the action.

[15:16] We're waiting for the answer to this question, who touched my clothes? So let's look now, fifthly, at the woman's public confession.

Verse 32. Jesus kept looking round to see who had done it. Do you imagine how embarrassing that would be for the woman?

So everything's stopped, and Jesus is looking round. Hmm, who was it? Who was it? Until this woman, who was actually behind him, wasn't it?

Well, I suppose she's in front of him now because he's turned round. And she sort of rather sheepishly, it was me. And it says, verse 33, fearful, trembling, unknowing, she tells him the whole truth.

She comes and falls at his feet and tells him the whole truth. The verbs are slightly in a different order in the original. But the first thing we're told is that she's fearful and she's trembling and she's knowing.

[16:30] It's an interesting combination. She knows she has received his blessing. She knows that. That's a definite.

But she's also fearful and trembling. Now, what's she fearful of? So I don't know.

It doesn't tell us, does it? But you could say, is she fearful of Jesus' reaction? Does she feel, perhaps, that it was a bit misguided the way she approached him?

She did it sincerely, but now that Jesus is making a point of it, does he think Jesus is going to say, that's no way to get healed? Is that what's going to happen?

Is she fearful and trembling for that? Or is she fearful of the crowd? Because she'd been sort of behind Jesus, out of the way, and now everybody's stopping and looking at her.

[17:26] Is she fearful and trembling because her illness is too embarrassing? Jesus is going to say, well, you've been healed of then. And she's got to explain that. Or do the people in the town know her?

And have they already formed some opinion about her? And this is just going to make things awkward and embarrassing. Or will they mock her? Will they say, oh, I mean... She's fearful and trembling.

And whatever the reason for her fear and trembling, she overcomes it because Jesus says, I want you to say what happened.

Okay? There are many things that cause people who receive Jesus' blessing to be fearful, perhaps what other people might think, perhaps what family might think, what friends might think.

But if Jesus says, I want you to say what happened, please overcome that fear and do what Jesus asks. And what she does do is entirely positive.

[18:32] She, it says, came. So from being sort of hiding out of the way, behind Jesus, she has to come.

Where everybody's looking, in full view of Jesus, it was me, she comes. And it says, she falls at his feet. So I presume they must have made a little bit of space.

They couldn't have been crushing up so close that there wasn't room to fall at his feet. But she falls at his feet. What an absolutely right thing to do. To fall at the feet of Jesus.

You are so great. You are the one before whom I fall. Absolutely right, isn't she? She was there before we were when we sing, at your feet we fall, mighty risen Lord, as we come before your throne to worship you.

She was there first and she was right. And it says, she told him the whole truth. That's the exactly right thing to do to Jesus, isn't it?

[19:39] I don't think we always have to do that in the full gaze of publicity as she did. But we can tell Jesus the whole truth, can't we?

Lord, I've failed you. Lord, I'm ashamed of the things I've thought, the way I've reacted, the things I've done, the choices I've made.

She can tell him the whole truth about herself. She can tell him the whole truth. And you, Lord, have reached into my life and you just healed me. She can tell him the whole truth.

All positive. to come to him, to honor him, to be straight with him. And down through the centuries, many people have done this.

They've just been straight with Jesus. Do you remember the woman at the well? And Jesus said, go and call your husband. And she said, Sarah, I have no husband.

[20:38] And Jesus said, yeah, you're right, actually, you've had five husbands and the one you're living with now is not your husband. So, yeah, we know. I know about you.

You know that I know. That's the way it is. That's fine. We need to be straight with Jesus. And she was straight with him. She was truthful. And I would like to ask you whether you can see yourself in this position.

Whether you can see yourself in some sense coming to him, falling at his feet, telling him the whole truth, and being in that exactly right position.

Okay, that was number five. Number six, let's think of what Jesus, how he responds. So, he says in verse 34, he said to her, daughter, your faith has healed you.

Go in peace and be free from your suffering. Or free, retranslate it a little bit. Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace and be healthy from your affliction, your plague.

[21:53] So, let's see what she, he says daughter. I told you there were two daughters in these two stories. There's Jairus' daughter and this woman who Jesus calls daughter.

And I ponder that because I wonder what age she was. So, if she'd been suffering for 12 years, she might well have been older than Jesus. But, I think it's a rather affectionate thing for Jesus to say to her, daughter.

He's not ashamed to say, we're family. You're my daughter. And, I think that would be a great comfort to her. And he says to her, your faith has saved you.

I think that's a significant thing for him to say. Your faith has saved you. In these stories, it's very clear that the way to relate to Jesus is by faith.

I believe it says it in the last story. I noticed it as, as Aaron read it, don't be afraid, just believe. And, it's important for us to understand this, that, for us now, the way to relate to Jesus is by believing and we believe what he has said.

[23:12] And, what he has said is here in Scripture. That's how we relate to him. There's no other way to relate to him apart from through his word and trusting his word. We have joy and peace in believing.

So, what does he not say? He doesn't say your ethnicity has saved you. Are you Jewish? Okay. Do you have a Jewish family?

Okay, your family has saved you. He doesn't say your family has saved you. I noticed Eleanor was saying you have a strong family. It's a wonderful thing to have a strong family but your family can't save you.

It's faith in Jesus that saves you. In his Jewish context, he doesn't say your careful, scrupulous observance of the laws of being Jewish has saved you.

Your observance of holy days. Your observance of eating this and not eating that. Your observance of working on this day and not working on that day. That saved you.

[24:13] The Pharisees would have been totally happy with that. The more scrupulous, the better. But Jesus doesn't say that. He says your faith has saved you. And he doesn't even say being good has saved you.

Your relation to the ethical commands, even the ethical commands of Moses. He doesn't say that. He says your faith has saved you by trusting me, by having this high view of me which leads you to come and get in contact with me by touching me.

And Christianity, the Christianity of Jesus is a religion of knowing Jesus and trusting Jesus personally.

And I'd like to differentiate it from a religion of institutions where it is simply being part of an institution that saves or a religion of doing rituals.

those things, you know, you can't escape the church being in an institution in some sense and you can't escape doing some things in a certain way.

[25:28] But that's not the heart of it. The heart of it is trusting Jesus Christ. This makes it a personal relationship. and he goes on to say go in peace and be healthy from this plague.

It's actually a very strong word used for the affliction that she had, a plague. When somebody was scourged and whipped if they were being tortured, that's the sort of word that would be used.

And this poor woman, if you like, was tortured in her previous life. And Jesus says, go into peace and be healthy from this plague.

I'd like you just to ponder the position of this woman. She had been healed. She had that blessing already. But what she didn't have was a verbal assurance from Jesus as to what it all meant and how it was all going to work out.

And now she has put up her hand and gone public, said, it's me. She now has the benefit of Jesus' words to her.

[26:46] You have peace. Go into peace. Every step forward in your life now will be a step in peace. You will not be estranged from me.

You will not be under the wrath of God. You will be in peace. peace. So there was a great confidence for her, I think, in her life going forward. This wasn't just a fluke.

This wasn't just a phase, but an entrance into peace. And he says to her, be freed from your suffering.

Be healthy from this plague. And I think in saying that, he's saying to her, you're never, ever going to go back into that plague, that affliction that you were in.

That is in the past, and now the future is ahead of you. It's a word of permanent release. Before, you were subject to a dehumanizing plague.

[27:47] And of course, in our world, which is spiritually hostile and sin-affected, people live lives like that. But Jesus says, no longer go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

You'll never have to go back into that condition. And Eleanor, the Lord speaks that word to you and says, you've been through the waters of baptism.

You don't have to get baptized ever again, which is just done once. And you went in, as it were, as a non-Christian and you come out as a Christian and you will never go back to where you were before.

And there's a promise there from the Lord Jesus. So let's put that into conclusion. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So the same Jesus who walked those streets and pressed through that crowd is the same Jesus who still has power and goodness today.

And his power and goodness is still shareable into the lives of people. The way of relating to him is still the same today. It is faith, trusting his words, his promises and power and acting on that.

[29:10] And he still stops to get people to go public. And this is where I actually get to the answer to the question. There is a considerable lightness between this story and baptism.

Maybe you have received his blessing and become a Christian but have never been baptized. And I think there's a sense in which Jesus holds the narrative and says, right, I want you to say who it was who touched me.

I want you to say in public, I'm a Christian. And maybe you've done that, but there is a particular way of doing this. And Jesus has this particular method of people saying they're Christians.

It's to be baptized. I didn't make that up. That's what he says. And he said it at the end of Matthew's Gospel, didn't he?

He said, going to all the world, make disciples, baptizing them. There we are. That's what he says. And he, I'm sure, has his reasons for that.

[30:26] But that's what he's said to do. If you know that you've received his blessing, then he's waiting for you to put up your hand, as it were, and be baptized.

And his benediction, benediction, is that going to be Italian? Benediction? Benediction? Say something good? Yeah.

Okay, his benediction, that's not a very common English word, but to say something good to somebody. His benediction is the same. Go in peace. My salvation means that you will never, ever have to go back to your old life.

love. And I think there's a promise here. The promise is that if you approach Jesus in faith, he will save you too.

I've finished, and we're going to sing. We're going to sing 302. To ending ending ending ending ending ending ending