

June 8, 2008  
 Matthew 4:23-25 / Mark 8:22-26 / Luke 6:17-19  
 Luke (#22) - Yearning Simply to Touch Jesus

In our passage for today we find the one thing more than any other that drew people to Jesus then, and has continued to draw them to Him ever since :

Their desire for healing combined with His well-known power to heal. The desire to be whole or complete, and Christ's ability to complete them. Their desire to be freed from that which inhibits and restricts and binds and hinders and enslaves and paralyzes and afflicts them — and Jesus ability to free them from it.

That's what we see in today's passage — people coming from all over — walking or traveling great distances (surely at quite an expense to themselves) simply to have the opportunity to touch the One from whom, or out of whom, was coming the power to heal.

Verse 17 tells us that when He *“went down with them”* (that is, the 12 disciples He had chosen and designated as Apostles, after praying on the mountainside all night) there was *“a large crowd of His disciples”* (those who had already committed themselves to following and learning from Him) on the “plain,” or “the level place.”

But that's not all. We read in the last half of the same verse that there were also gathered there, *“a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon.”*

Disciples and non-disciples. Believers and seekers. The committed and the curious. Those who were lost and those who had been found.

But regardless who which group they belonged to, Luke tells us in verse 19: *“and the people all tried to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all.”* That is, all the people tried to touch Him, and all who did were healed.

Can you picture it? Jesus coming down from the mountainside with the 12, and finding a huge number of people streaming in from all directions, and gathering on the flat plain at the base of

the mountain where He had spent the previous night praying. And not just a huge crowd, but a huge crowd of people seeking to be healed.

And within their ranks, Luke tells us, there were the diseased and the demon-possessed, which surely included the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the crippled; those with sexually transmitted diseases, ulcers, epilepsy; maybe even cancer, migraines, or birth defects.

Damaged people; handicapped people; hurting people — all coming from far and near simply to get the opportunity to touch Jesus and be healed.

You see, there's something in all of us that yearns to be whole. To be healed and complete and freed from the things that cripple us — either physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually.

And I dare say that just as that was what drew people to flock to Jesus on that flat place, so also it remains, the desire to be healed that keeps people coming to Jesus, and keeps us going back to Jesus even after we've come to Him.

Listen: It wasn't my abilities that caused me to seek after Jesus, and touch Him, it was my needs. It's not our wholeness, it's our brokenness — not our completeness, but our inner sense of incompleteness.

It wasn't the sense that I had everything I needed, but the sense that I needed what Jesus had — namely the power of God to help me, and heal me, and fix all the parts inside me that were damaged, twisted or broken by the things I did, and the choices I made, and the things people did to me, and the things I inherited from Adam (like my sin nature), or inherited from my parents and the culture in which I was raised.

Like the people in this passage, what drew me to Jesus was that I heard of One who could bring healing to the areas of my life that were diseased, or captive to sin or Satan. That was what made me pursue Him, and want to touch, or be touched by Him.

That's what we often forget. That the word "salvation" in the Bible, not only carries the sense of being saved from the PENALTY of sin, but also of being rescued or saved from the POWER that sin has over our lives.

As the old hymn puts it, when speaking of what God does in the act of saving us: "***He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free.***" That is, He liberates us from the dominion or control of sin by breaking it's power over us — and with it, our bondage to sinful attitudes, sinful habits, sinful obsessions, sinful desires and sinful addictions. Yet although God

does do that for us, that liberation or deliverance is not always instantaneous, nor is it ever complete -- in this life.

In fact, that's the other aspect of "salvation" that needs to be emphasized frequently — that there is a sense in which being "saved" means "being salvaged" — slowly and gradually restored into the image of God.

*To be saved from the power or dominion of sin is the "new birth" aspect of salvation.  
To be saved from the penalty of sin is the "justification" or "pardon" aspect of salvation.  
And to be saved in the sense of being "salvaged" is the "sanctification" aspect of salvation.*

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Some of you who have been to my house have seen the before and after pictures I have of a Triumph GT-6+ sports car that I bought when I was in college for 450 dollars. It had been in a bad accident, and although the frame was good, the body was crunched, the wiring harness had to be replaced, and the engine, rear axel, seats and dashboard had to be replaced.

So I spent about 2 years, every spare minute I had, cutting off the jagged pieces, and sanding off the rust, and banging out dents, and filling holes with body putty (even replacing entire metal quarter panels with fiberglass ones — welding, and hammering, and grinding and priming and painting it, until it looked almost new!

Some of you have done the same (and much better than I did), and I've always thought that was a wonderful picture of what God does to us in "salvation."

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But my point is this: In this life we become like damaged cars. We take wrong turns in life, ignore red lights, go through stop signs, or speed down unfamiliar roads at excessive speeds, or use too little caution in stormy conditions, and as a result we get into accidents. Our "body" gets damaged, and sometimes even our "engine" — our heart gets wounded, our spirit gets broken, or soul gets damaged.

Our "internal wiring harness" sometimes gets messed up or twisted all around so that we find ourselves feeling impulses that shouldn't be there and wouldn't be there if we hadn't driven off the road into that ditch. Connections come loose, and circuits get overloaded, and we blow a fuse, or short-circuit our GPS, and thus lose our direction — sometimes, if the damage is too severe, ending up in the junk yard!

And what God does in "salvation" is He comes along, and saves us from going to the crusher (that's the penalty of sin). He sees us in our damaged condition, but so loves us and wants to

see us restored, that He pays the redemption price of Christ's blood to purchase us, and then begins the process of "salvaging us" or "restoring in us the divine image."

He begins by giving us a new heart (a new engine) and a new Spirit (an endless supply of gasoline)! Then in our first few years as a Christian He snips off the jagged and twisted pieces of metal with the tin snips of trials.

Over the next few years grinds off the rust with the abrasive disc if interpersonal interactions (sparks sometimes flying in all directions!) / Then He takes some time to weld new pieces of metal to the rocker panels and floorboards with the acetylene torch of trying situations.

Then comes soothing part — He applies the moist body filler and lets it harden / followed by sanding / then comes the cool spray of primer / then more sanding with a finer grit sandpaper of lesser trials / followed by a second or third coat of primer and 500 grit wet sandpaper that's so fine you can barely feel it .

But that's where the process ends in this life — because we are never completely restored in this life. That comes only after death, when we get to see Him as He is and are made like Him in our glorification, or the resurrection of the dead when we will receive our spotless, high-gloss, multi-coat acrylic paint job that makes us look better than when we came off the assembly line the first time!

Now, I don't know where you are in that whole process of restoration, but if you are a believer, God is in the process of salvaging you — its part and parcel of that whole package the Bible calls "salvation."

And it is true — some start off their Christian lives "more damaged" than others. All of us have been damaged, but some only have a fender and door crunched, while other were rolled 2-3 times and have dents all over! Some let the oil run dry and threw a rod, while others seized the entire engine! Some need only minor adjustments, while others need a total overhaul.

But don't miss the point: We all have areas of our lives that have been damaged. And its that "damage" — that incompleteness / that woundedness / that sense that something's just not right — which drives us (like the people in this passage) to seek to find Jesus and "touch Him" (or be touched by Him) and thus be healed by "the power that comes from Him."

It's no different today than it was back then — We are all drawn to Jesus by that inner desire to be whole, or fixed, or healed, or made complete. The desire to be at peace with God (and thus at peace within ourselves and at peace with others). The desire to have that gnawing sense of emptiness filled, our twisted parts straightened out, our bleeding parts cauterized, our weak parts strengthened, and the unsettled parts stilled.

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So, how does that healing come? In TWO ways: **FIRST**, as we read in verse 18, ***“A large crowd of disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases.”*** They did come “to be healed of their diseases,” but part of that whole process of being healed included ***“coming to hear Him.”***

You see, Jesus is the Divine Physician. And like any physician, you don't simply go and have them cut on you without first talking to them and listening when they talk to you! You listen to their advice, and heed their counsel, and follow their instructions, because (usually) they know what their talking about. They'll advise you on better eating habits, what exercises to do, what medicines to take, how many to take each day, whether or not to take it with food, or fast before an exam — whether to engage in certain activities or avoid them.

And the same is true with Jesus. As the Divine Physician who participated with the Father in creating you (John 1:3 / Col. 1:16) He knows what makes for health in body, soul, mind and spirit.

That's why Jesus can repeatedly tell his hearers to listen to His words. After going through the entire Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus finishes by saying:

***“But everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. The rains came, and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against it, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But the one who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like foolish builder who builds his house on the sand — the rains come, and the streams rise and the winds beat against the house and it falls with a great crash.”***

‘The words I have spoken to you,’ says Jesus, ‘are spirit and they are life.’ Being divine, His words have power to bring into being the very thing they declare! ‘Heaven and earth will pass away,’ says Jesus, ‘but my words will never pass away.’

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Why? Because Jesus knew what we also know—there are people in the Gospel’s whom Jesus heals, but they never receive the full and complete healing others receive, because once healed, they go their own way. They don’t stick around to become disciples, or listen to Jesus words of life, or learn from His teachings, or hear the truth that will set them free!

They don’t put His words into practice or build their house on the rock. / They miss out on the long term healing that comes to the body, mind, soul and spirit that meditates upon Jesus instruction. / The surgeon can, by his touch, remove the infected or diseased part, but if you don’t heed his advice and counsel and follow-up instructions, the disease may return worse than it was before.

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We know that is true with demon possession, for Jesus said that if the *“house if swept clean”* and no new resident moves in (that is, if the demon is cast out but the Holy Spirit does not come in) *“the demon returns with 7 more demons more wicked than himself, and the final condition of the man is worse than the first.”*

The same occurs with the physical healing of the man Jesus heals at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus heals him and then he goes on his way. But as the text tells us: *“Later Jesus found him at the temple, and said to him, “See you are well again. Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you.”*

Listen to Jesus my friends: Much healing occurs gradually as you *“put His words into practice”* and *“build your house on that rock solid foundation.”*

It comes over time, as the Gospel liberates the conscience from false guilt, forgiveness washes the soul clean, pardon delivers you from the fear of condemnation, obedience to His commands stabilizes your life, and the love of Jesus strengthens your inner person and fills you with all the fullness of God. Jesus is a good doctor, which means He’s not in the business of the quick fix!

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Then **LAST**, we see the need to touch the One from whom the power to heal goes forth. We don’t know how much these people knew about Jesus, or His ethical teachings, or His views on Sabbath observance or synagogue attendance. But one thing all of them knew without question was that He possessed the power to heal, and that brought them from near and far.

David Watson, a prominent British pastor with a wide-reaching ministry back in the 1980’s, writes this: *“I believe in this materialistic age we need to see God at work in unmistakable*

*power and that we should pray for this and expect it. I asked a young Muslim who had become a Christian whether it was the Christian message which had convinced him. He replied that it hadn't—he'd heard many religious messages. But what had convinced him was witnessing two healing miracles. A deaf woman had been healed and that had impressed him, but not convinced him, because she could have pretended to be deaf, he said. But then he'd seen a twisted leg straightened out before his very eyes, and this had convinced him that the living god was at work. In places where God's Spirit is clearly at work, people are being converted mainly through healings, deliverances, or direct visions from the Lord."*

Being told of the miraculous healing power of Jesus impressed him, and actually seeing the healing power of Jesus convinced him. But one further step is necessary. We must somehow come into personal contact with Jesus, for it is only those who touch Him who are healed (something we now do by faith rather than physical touch).

Let me conclude by reading a true story to you. It's by John Powell, a professor at Loyola University in Chicago who holds degrees in the Classics, English, Psychology and Theology, just to name a few, and it comes from his book, "He Touched Me." It's a story about a highly neurotic woman whom he predicted would only be "*slightly more functional*" at the end of years of psychotherapy.

He counseled her off and on for 6-7 years, and regularly for the last three. After it all he writes: "*There was the same old neurotic whine, the same indecision, the same egocentricity that is born of deeply embedded pain... she had not become one bit more comfortable or functional then when we had first met.*" That was at the beginning of the summer.

Three months later he wrote this: "*At the end of that summer, just before our university classes were to begin, I answered the phone to hear the voice of my troubled friend. I knew she would want another appointment and that I would agonize along with her while she resurrected the same old problems... But how the Spirit loves to surprise us. The voice I heard on the phone was somehow the same, but somehow different... there was a new peace in her. I had to ask (myself) several times, 'Who is this?' She quietly and peacefully said she did not want an appointment, that she knew I was busy and wanted to take no more of my time. The only purpose of the call, she said, was to thank me for the patience and help I had given her... I couldn't believe what I was hearing... such abrupt personality changes just do not happen in real life. So I said: 'You're different, aren't you?' 'Yes!' she replied.*

*'What happened?' 'I met Jesus Christ,' she said. 'You what?' 'I met Jesus Christ. Before this I knew about Him, but now I know Him.'*

So he asked her if he could see her. *"When she came into my office," he says, "my eye confirmed what my ear had heard—this was a healed person. I do not mean to detract one iota from the contribution they make to the lives of wounded human beings, but psychology and psychiatry must not be allowed to pose as saviors or redeemers. Therapy can never be a substitute for a life of faith...by supportive psychotherapy we can be comforted, and by reconstructive psychotherapy we can be somewhat readjusted... but we cannot be healed or cured. And this women seated before me, expressing gratitude and claiming to have met Jesus Christ was healed. She knew it and I knew it."*

For years she told him, *"there had been a high, hard, impenetrable wall between her and God."* But somehow, during a prayer meeting where she was encouraged to surrender her life to Jesus, the wall came down. *"Somehow," she says, "Jesus was standing there with arms held out to embrace me, and I knew Jesus as real for the first time."*

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Interesting isn't it? The spiritual encounter. The experience of Christ. The sense of being touched. The faith and the result that always comes about when faith touches Jesus and we experience the healing power that comes from him.

It can be yours as well. You lay hold of it and of Him by faith. / You reach out and touch Him by faith. / You stop resisting Him and surrender to His overtures by faith. / Do it now.

Maybe like Mr. Powell's friend, you know about Jesus, but you don't know Him, and today He asks you to go further, and reach out the hand of faith and touch Him. Because only then will you experience the healing power that comes to those, and only those who touch Him.