

‘THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT.’

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN RICHMOND STREET WESLEYAN CHURCH, TORONTO,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPT. 26, 1867,

BY

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“THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT.”—MATTHEW XX. : 9.

What is the hem of Christ's garment? We will consider this bye-and-bye. First of all, let us think of the beautiful narrative of which our text forms a part. It is an account of one of our Lord's miracles—a miracle of a very interesting nature. The miracles of Christ were wrought for several purposes. One obvious purpose of a miracle was to heal the person suffering. A second was, perhaps, to give an evidence of the divinity of our Lord—that he was really a messenger sent from God. A third benefit connected with, at least, one of his miracles, was of a spiritual and instructive character; some of them were evidently designed as parables as well as miracles. The record is a record of an actual fact, and yet the record is full of spiritual instruction. Spiritual truths seem embodied in the acts of our Lord. Everything our Lord said and taught—as I have been endeavoring to shew in the other church—was an illustration of the character and conduct of God the invisible, and we may well suppose that the reason why some of the miracles were selected for description rather than others, was that there was instruction conveyed of a moral and spiritual character in the miracle itself, even as all nature, to a contemplative mind and ear, contains spiritual and heavenly lessons. This miracle was a very suggestive one. Here was a woman who was diseased; this is a fitting representative of sin. As disease with the bodily organs hinders their operation and shortens life, so sin interferes with our spiritual functions, prevents our hearing God's voice, seeing God's face, feeling God's love, running in God's ways. This woman

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had been ill a long time, and she knew it. And so, many there are who, for many years, are conscious that they are sinners. Some persons are not conscious of it. Some persons have that very worst symptom of all disease, namely, not to know it. If you were very ill and did not know it, you would not be taking measures of relief. To know that we are ill, prompts us to seek a cure; and so, for a person to be a sinner and not to know it, not to feel it, to be indifferent to it, is the worst symptom possible. If there is any one here who does not think himself a sinner—who, instead of seeking mercy, is trying to shew how much better he is than his neighbor—that is the very worst symptom he can have. You are a sinner, but you do not seem to know it. It is like a man in a sinking ship saying The ship is not sinking. Others say it is, and are trying to get a life-buoy or a rope or a raft ready, but you say I am all right; but you are in much greater danger than the person who knows it. This woman ~~knew~~ knew that she was diseased. She had been for many years trying to get rid of her infirmity. She had been to many physicians. One after another had promised to help her. She had spent her living on them, but she was no better—if anything worse. It sometimes happens that some persons go from one doctor to another—and there are some who profess a great deal, but know little and do less—and they go to them in vain. This poor woman seemed to have been unfortunate in this particular, and this is a true illustration of what the sinner does. A sinner goes to many physicians, but till he goes to the one and only true physician, he always gets worse.

Some one may object and say Does it not seem hard that a person should be anxious to be saved, and because he does not go to the right physician, get worse? But it is an obvious necessity. Suppose you had cut an artery, and there was only one way of stopping the bleeding; if you did not try that way, you would be still losing blood—not so much as if you were doing nothing perhaps—but still losing blood. You would be getting worse. You would be getting worse if you were doing nothing at all, and you are getting worse now in spite of all your strivings, if you do not do the one thing needful to stop the bleeding. And so with the sinner. Christ is the only Saviour, and if I try to get rid of my sin without going to Christ, I am worse and not better. If I try to be outwardly better by my good resolutions or in any way not provided by the Gospel, I am getting worse and not better. If I say I will try and wait till I am better and then go to Christ to heal me, I am only getting worse as this woman was. O sinner, if you are not going to Christ you are getting worse. Whatever you intend doing—whatever you are doing now—in spite of all your efforts and promises, you are getting worse every day—losing blood every day—getting further and further from God every day. You are only getting worse till you come to the only physician that is able to help. This woman heard of Jesus—how he had healed many. She felt he would not repel her. She had many doubts and fears. She did not like to make known what her trouble was. She shrank from the rude crowd. There are very often rude people even in a religious

crowd—I have seen them. Sometimes people are very rude when they want to get a favorite seat in a church, and weak women are sometimes jostled when they are trying to get into the building. There was great difficulty in the way of this woman, but when a person is really in earnest no difficulty will keep them away. You may say If I become religious my companions will laugh at me, my employer will dislike it; my own family will look hardly upon it; I shall be a loser. Very likely. But if you are in earnest you will say I will perish there, at the cross, but I will not keep away. Nobody was ever kept away from heaven by circumstances. We were never intended to be the creatures and the slaves of circumstances. Circumstances were intended to help us if we have an earnest heart to look to God for His assistance to do what is right. This poor woman was in earnest; and if you and I are in earnest, what seem to be hindrances will be no hindrances at all. She pushed her way through the crowd. Very likely some one said Keep farther back. Another would say Why make such a fuss there, woman? Don't disturb us. But the poor thing kept on, little by little. Every inch she gained was a little nearer. And so, if people try to hinder you from getting near to Christ, don't be hindered. Keep on earnestly, perseveringly. Keep your eye fixed on Him, and still press onwards towards Him. This poor diseased person found her way through that crowd to Christ, and you can through any crowd. When she reached him she stood behind him. She did not like to make it known. She did not come forward in the enquiry class or in the church; she did not go to any minister; she hid herself in the crowd. She thought If I can only touch the hem of his garment virtue will come out of him; and so she would hope in him—very likely with some doubts and misgivings and little faith. Faith is not something that has no doubts to contend with; it is confidence prevailing over doubts. Don't think you will have faith without doubts—nobody ever had. David, Daniel, Moses—all of them doubtless had some doubts. Faith is the victory of confidence over doubt. This poor woman touched the hem of his garment. Oh, let us in this manner lay hold on Christ. Whatever our fears and doubts be let us apply to him for mercy. And what was the result? At once she was healed of her plague. At once the disease was stopped; and let a sinner apply by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, and at once the grace of the Lord Jesus is imputed to that soul. There is forgiveness at once. He is justified at once. He ceases to be under condemnation. He passes out of death into life. I do not say at once he is made perfect and thoroughly sanctified. There is a great work now done in perfecting the cure; but at once the believer passes out of darkness into light, out of death into life through the grace of Jesus Christ. O sinner, if you will but come to Christ now and lay hold of him now you shall receive the grace of Christ—you shall receive it now—"just now," as your simple but beautiful hymn expresses it. The Lord Jesus knew all about it. The Lord Jesus said Who touched me? Did not he know? He knew very well but he wanted her to confess it. We are to believe in the heart and we

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are to confess with the mouth. There may be much secrecy in seeking Christ. I do not reprove such secrecy. Sometimes those may be most in earnest who say least about it; but when we have found him—when we have been healed by him—when we have been saved by him—there should be no more hesitation about confessing it; we are to acknowledge it, to join his people, to identify ourselves with his kingdom. We are to tell to others what a Saviour we have found as the woman did now. Oh yes, she did now thankfully what she hesitated about before. She fell down before him in thankfulness and confessed before them all what great things he had done for her. With what joy she would have ministered to him of her substance if she had any left, and with what devotion she would follow him in the way and listen to his words. Beautiful illustration this of the way in which Jesus the good physician heals the soul and saves the sick. Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.

Now we may gather from this miracle these three lessons; first, that as sinners we are in a state of helpless incurability; secondly, that Christ is the only Saviour; thirdly, that we are to be saved by laying hold on Christ. I need not detain you long on these points; they are so obvious and so clear. We, like that poor woman, are sinners—diseased beyond cure—none can cure us save the Lord Jesus Christ. Our works cannot save us. We are constantly preaching this truth, and yet how many there are who seem as if they could not receive it, and are imagining that their works can help them. How many there are who say, I have lived a bad life, it is true, but I will try to do better for the future, and I hope my amended life will recommend me to God by and bye. It is something like this—if you owed a hundred pounds—a hundred dollars, say, at a store, and could not pay one cent, and then you were to say, well, I will do my utmost, I will pay for everything I get there; you go for several days to that store and pay a cent or two every day for something you get, and then you say to the person who keeps it, I don't owe you anything now. "Why not?" Have not I paid for everything I have got? "Yes, but you have got what you paid for." Now suppose we were able to do our duty every day—to obey every command of God—it would only be paying the new debt and leaving the old debt untouched. And supposing you were perfectly good and holy every day, your old life would still remain. We can never pay the old debt; we are always adding to it. We can never cure the old disease—it is always getting worse. Christ is the only Saviour, the only physician. "Neither is there salvation in any other." That is one great truth taught here.

And then there is this great truth. We are to be saved by applying to him. As this poor woman came to him for the healing of her body, we are to come for the healing of the soul, and the answer to the question, what shall I do to be saved? is simply this—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Some persons might wish us to say something else, but we have nothing else to say. It is the old story, eighteen hundred years old—we have found nothing else. Still it is, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and

thou shall be saved. Art thou a murderer, swearer, drunkard, licentious? Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. There is no other method. Art thou virtuous, honorable, amiable, refined? What must you do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other answer. Not if I pay all my debts to my fellow men—if I am generous and every one speaks well of me? I try to be kind and pleasant in all my transactions. Will not that recommend me to heaven at the last? You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned. We are all sinners before him in some way or other. One man has sinned in one way, another in another. You have not sinned in drunkenness and profligacy—you have had no temptation to do so—your companions did not lead you into such sins, or you have been too much engaged in your worldly business; but your heart may have gone astray as much as that profligate person. You may be as much a lover of yourself instead of God. You may have had more light and have quenched it, and you may be a greater sinner for ought I know and you know than those whom you regard as specimens of profligacy and evil. There is no other way of salvation than Jesus Christ. What, not if I believe in this or that church? You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or else believing in the church won't do. Not if I have been baptized? You must believe, or all the baptism in the world will do no good. But I am a member of society—have joined this or that class. All will do you no good unless you believe in Christ. But I have had great spiritual experience—I can tell you when I was converted and when I experienced great joy. Now if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you are saved, but not by your religious creed, not by your church professions or your outward conduct, not by any kindness you may have shown to God's people, not by all the benevolence and amiability and refinement and loveliness of your character, which we do not dispute or under-estimate. Nothing can save but the Lord Jesus Christ, just as if there were only one remedy for a fatal disease; and as long as you refuse that remedy, nothing can save you from dying. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and without him we cannot be saved; but he is able to save to the uttermost, to save every one, to save us. Oh, let us trust him.

Had I ten thousand gifts besides,
 I'd cleave to Jesus crucified,
 And build on Him alone;
 For no foundation is there given
 On which to place my hopes of heaven,
 But Christ the corner stone.

Well, but says some one, you told us at the beginning you would tell us what the hem of the garment was. I remember years ago hearing an eminent divine whom I greatly admired say that the hem of the garment was the church and the clergy, and that those who wanted to be saved should come to the church and the clergy. You will perhaps say that is not the meaning of it, but tell us what it is—you have forgotten to tell us. Well, I may have forgotten, for we have been talking

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about something better than the hem of his garment—we have been talking about, the Master himself. But now what of it? Oh, says some one, it is the church. The church—but which is the true church? My church of course. You think your church is the true church and if you did not you would leave it and belong to what you thought was the true one. Every one has a right to think his church is the true one, or as near as may be. Therefore if the hem of his garment is the church it means “Your church.” But if that be the case what a sad case it is for those who do not belong to your church. If you, the Wesleyans, are the hem of his garment and the Baptists, Episcopalians, and Quakers are not, what a bad state these and all others must be in. But you would not like to think that your church is the hem of his garment and that no other people would be saved. I would pity you if you thought so.

Then, says some one, it is the universal Church. Is that the hem of his garment? If that is the hem of his garment the universal Church is the first thing to come to; we must come there before we come to Christ. What is the first thing we come to in a house? The door. Then if the church is the hem of the garment the church is the door. But says Christ “I am the door;” not the church but I—the church may be the house, but I am the door. Some people seem to think that the church is the door to Christ, but Christ says I am the door to the house. They that have not come to Christ are not inside the church, and those that have come to Christ cannot be turned outside the door. All are church people that are inside the door—that is, who have come to Jesus; and all that are outside Jesus are outside the door. It cannot be that.

Is it the clergy? Well, but the clergy are all diseased alike. We all want to be saved. They are all one in this particular, and they have to be saved as much as others.

The sacraments? Which sacraments—baptism? Is baptism the hem of the garment? Some there are who seem to think that salvation comes through that. Well, which way of baptism do you profess? Infant baptism you say perhaps. Some say that that is the way we get grace from Christ. Some infants are by their sponsors asked if they denounce the world and the devil with all his works, and the infant has to say through its sponsors that it does. If it does it has grace already, for no one can renounce the devil and all his works till, by presumption, it has grace. Therefore grace comes before baptism and not after it or by means of it. Others profess adult baptism. But whom do you immerse? Do you admit persons before they are believers? You wish to know if they are believers. Well, if a person believes he has got salvation already, and therefore immersion, even in the case of adults, cannot be the receiving of grace, for it should come after believing.

Well then, the Lord's Supper—perhaps that is the hem of his garment. Nay, the Lord's Supper is for those who love Jesus, and who meet together to remember him, and who must love him before they meet together. But if we love him we have grace already, and if we have not we ought not to come there; and as lovers of Christ we have received his salvation. So it cannot be that.

What is it then?

It is nothing at all. Any way by which we come to the Lord Jesus Christ may be said figuratively to be the hem of his garment. All persons whom Jesus cured were not healed by touching him. One was healed by only sending a message; another, by Jesus touching his eye; another received from him the assurance of his mercy.

The hem of the garment is nothing. If all persons healed had touched the hem of his garment it might have meant something special, but it simply means that coming to Christ is everything and that the outward means and manner by which we come are nothing. Brethren the hem of the garment is Christ, and coming to Christ is touching the hem of his garment, and the hem of the garment is close to us. You may be dying—there is no need to take the sacrament. Christ is there. A poor man in my neighborhood was dying and his friends said let us send for some minister. Oh, said the good man, it is late at night, don't disturb anybody—I have Jesus close to me. He had the hem of the garment. You may be far away on the sea or on some lone island—far from the church going bell—near no place of worship, no congregation, no ministry, no outward sacraments, blessed as these things are, and thankful as we ought to be to God for them. But there is the hem of the garment. There may be no human creature to speak a word of sympathy, but there is Christ, and O brethren, let us rejoice that there is the hem of his garment where there is Christ. There is the unity of the church. There is the blessed bond that binds us together. Let us come to and cleave to Christ. Oh, is there any one here that is like that woman? Do you feel diseased, weary with sin, sore and sad? Are you timid? Would you like to be saved, but are you afraid of being noticed? We wont demand that in these early stages you should tell what is going on in your mind. It might be well if you were to tell some confidential friend—some good, kind minister; or it need not be a minister—some one else who deserves your confidence and will sympathise with you. But if there is no one, and sometimes we like to speak least to those who are nearest in earthly relationship—come in the crowd. His eye is upon you. Don't you think he saw this poor woman all the while? Would she have got to him without? Was he not assisting her—making it easy for her, comforting and cheering her. Oh, he would not have allowed any one to prevent her coming to Him. He was helping her all the time. And he is helping you. His eye is upon you, Every one of you that has a sin begotten spirit, push through the crowd, Jesus is helping you. Come right up to Him. Lay hold on the hem of His garment. Cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner. O Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me a sinner." He never did reject any one. You shall be saved; you shall be healed, and then you will be willing to confess Him, to tell of His love, to invite others to do so too, and you will follow Him whithersoever He goeth. Which may God in His mercy grant.—Amen.