Breakthrough - Part 3

# Getting Closer to Jesus

## (Luke 8:43-48, Matthew 2:1-12)

I’m so glad you came to church this morning because we are in the middle of our message series entitled “Breakthrough” and we’ve been looking at how to position ourselves to receive a breakthrough. In other words, how do we overcome the spiritual struggles and situations that we are facing in our lives? Like getting back to that first love, in week number one. Or last week, we talked about overcoming condemnation. And today, I want to talk about another important thing we must do to position ourselves for breakthrough, and that is getting closer to Jesus.

We need to get as close to Jesus as we possibly can, because the closer we get to Jesus the more we’re going to see breakthrough, radical change in our lives. And so, as we seek him and encounter his presence, we’re going to see his promises come true, and we are going to see the impossible made possible. However, the true motivation for desiring to be closer to Jesus should ultimately be to know him and develop a deeper relationship with him. And the good news is that Jesus desires to be close with us, he wants you to know him more, and he wants you to experience victory in the challenges of your life.

This morning, I want to share with you two different stories of people seeking to get closer to Jesus and both stories have different outcomes. The first is a story of instantaneous supernatural healing, demonstrating what can happen when we get close to Jesus. Luke tells us the story and he writes from the perspective of a doctor and his testimony carries a great deal of weight.

Reading from Luke chapter 8, he tells us that there was a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, but no one could heal her.

“She came up behind (Jesus) and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped” (Luke 8:43-44).

This is the story of a desperate woman, she needed a miracle, because for 12 years she had constantly been bleeding. And so, not only was she weakened by the loss of blood, suffering with this incredible inconvenience, but she was an outcast of society and unable to worship God together with her own people.

Luke tells us that no one had been able to heal her, she was out of options, when she hears about this man, Jesus of Nazareth who is going about healing people. Now, she had learned of God’s promise to send a Messiah as a young Jewish girl, she had memorized the Scriptures, and so she knew the words of the prophet Malachi.

“For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2).

Driven by her belief in the promise of God to rescue his people, she had to get close to Jesus, because she had heard what the people were saying about this miracle worker. She knew that Jesus had healed others and she believed he could heal her as well.

Hoping that Jesus was the answer to her prayers, she sets out on this difficult journey alone, and even though she is weakened by the continual loss of blood, she was determined to get to Jesus. When she finally found him, it seemed like the whole town was trying to get to Jesus, people were pressing in on him from all sides, but she was both determined and desperate because Jesus was her only hope. She had no other choice, and so, in spite of being ceremonially unclean, she pushed her way through the crowd to get to Jesus.

She thought, if only I could touch the edge of his cloak that will be enough; after all, the Scripture said that the Messiah would have “healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2).

Interestingly, the Hebrew word “wing” is also the word translated for the corner of a garment. And so, maybe she understood that ancient prophecy to mean that the Messiah would bring healing if she could just touch the corner of his cloak. And so, with determination she pushed her way through the crowd, Jesus’ back was towards her, but she got just close enough to reach out and touch his garment.

Immediately she was healed, she felt it, she knew that she had been healed, and she didn’t want to cause any problems, but suddenly she heard Jesus’ voice over the noise of the crowd. “Hey, who touched me?”

"Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me” (Luke 8:45-46).

In other words, Jesus wasn’t asking out of curiosity, he was looking for this woman to come forward as a witness, testifying to the glory of God.

“The woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace” (Luke 8:47-48).

Jesus honored her faith even though it was almost superstitious, and he calls her “daughter.” I believe this is significant, because not only is it a term of endearment, but it signifies that she has been made completely whole. In other words, in that moment, this unnamed woman, this daughter of God, is restored to fellowship with the community of Israel.

Today, Jesus wants you to know that like this woman, there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God. He wants you to know that, because he wants you to seek him like this woman did. He wants you to be desperate to find him, to go to great lengths to reach him, to let nothing keep you from being close to him, because no matter who you are or where you are, he loves you with an everlasting love.

I want to illustrate this with a second story, found in Matthew chapter two, where the Bible says,

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1-2).

Now, for those of you who think this is a Christmas story, it’s not a Christmas story, because the wise men came about two years after Jesus was born. And so, when the wise men came, Jesus is no longer a baby in the manger, and the Bible says,

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary” (Matthew 2:11).

And so, the Magi, came from a great distance, because they were astrologers who had taken notice of a particular star in the sky. This star was unusual because it didn’t move, it just remained in that one place in the sky night after night.

Now, in ancient days, not only were stars symbols of royalty and power, but it was believed that great kings were heralded by the appearance of stars or comets. In fact, you may remember, Balaam said this regarding the future of Israel,

"A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).

Of course, Balaam was referring to a king or a ruler, but I wonder if the Magi understood that Scripture to refer to a literal star, and maybe that was the confirmation that they needed. And so, they went towards the star believing it to be the sign of the coming of a great King in agreement with the Scripture that a “scepter will rise out of Israel.”

The Bible says when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem they began asking around, looking for the location of this newborn King of the Jews. Verse three says,

“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3).

In other words, the good tidings of the angels and the news of the shepherds on that first Christmas never made it to Herod in the palace. And so, now he was deeply troubled by the news of another king and the Bible says,

“When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written” (Matthew 2:3-5).

And so, the chief priests and teachers of the law didn’t even hesitate because they knew this, they simply quoted the Scriptures, telling Herod where the king of the Jews would be born. And then they simply went back to their religion, their rituals, and their normal routine, unmoved and uncaring about this news of the Messiah.

However, the Magi “after they heard the king” took that information, they believed it, and therefore they acted according to what they heard. Verse nine says,

“They went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead as of them until it stopped over the place where the child was” (Matthew 2:9).

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh” (Matthew 2:11).

“Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route” (Matthew 2:12).

I have to wonder sometimes what I would have done if Jesus was born when I was alive? You know, would I be like Herod who was threatened by Jesus, or like the teachers of the law who have all of the information about Jesus but don’t do anything with it? Or maybe would I be like the Magi who aren’t satisfied with information about Jesus, but who went to great lengths to have an encounter with Jesus, to see him face-to-face and worship him?

As I thought about this, wondering what we would do if Jesus were born today, I think the answer is that many of us would do the same thing that we’re doing with the Holy Spirit right now. In other words, for many of us we would do absolutely nothing, just like when Jesus was born, and most people were completely indifferent to it. They were satisfied with knowing information about Jesus, knowing where he was going to be born, but very few cared enough to seek him, find him, worship him, and get to know him.

Today there is something very significant happening right here, right now, that Jesus told us was going to happen. In John chapter 14 he said,

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17).

And so, Jesus told his disciples and us that another is coming like me, but even greater than me, because he is in many places at the same time. He’s not only going to be found in Israel, he won’t only be in the temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus said, “You will know him,

“For he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

Jesus said, the Holy Spirit is another just like me, equal to me, and he is here and will be in you who are born again.

The good news is that he is right here, right now, closer than ever before. And so, my question for you today is the question I have been asking myself, in what ways are we like the teachers of the law, having this feeling of superiority, even as stewards of the Holy Spirit, because we have the information? In other words, feeling like we have this special connection with God because we’ve been baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues.

You see, the truth of the matter is that just because we have received the information about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit doesn’t belong exclusively to us, and so we don’t have a copyright on the accompanying signs, wonders, and healings. The reality is that the Holy Spirit belongs to those who are hungry for his presence and are willing to seek him, walking with him, and going out of their way to have deeper encounters with him.

Today, it doesn’t matter what you have known or believed in the past, because Jesus said the time has come, this is in John chapter 4,

“A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).

And so, it doesn’t matter what form of religion you have known in the past, because God is seeking true worshipers today, people who say, “God, I want to see you, I’m hungry for more of you.” Because not only is God seeking, but he wants to be sought out, he wants to be pursued.

My prayer is that we as a church would seek the Holy Spirit like the woman with the issue of blood or the Magi who followed the star to Jerusalem, desperately seeking to find Jesus; not just to find out about him, but seeking to have a personal experience with him regardless of the cost. To have a very real personal encounter with the Holy Spirit and to worship him because the Bible says,

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

And that’s the way we must live out our faith, seeking a daily experience to match what we read in the Scriptures.

That’s important because the chief priests and teachers of the law read the word of God, they had the information, but they didn’t have the experience. And so, we don’t want to be like some religions that are like the teachers of the law, who create doctrines for why miracles are not happening in their lives. In fact, the Bible says that God has not changed. Hebrews chapter 13 says,

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

And so, I want this to be a spiritual challenge for the church, that we would desperately seek after Jesus like that woman with the issue of blood, and that we would search for him regardless of the cost like the Magi. My prayer is that you and I together as the church would seek the presence of the Holy Spirit every day, moment by moment, moving step-by-step, closer and closer so that we would experience the power and the presence of the living God.

I want us to be a church that worships in spirit and in truth, where we see the sick and hurting healed, and where those who are burdened and trouble are delivered. And as your pastor I want to see you walking in freedom, not being like the teachers of the law who read about it but never see it. I believe this is so important, because God is within our reach, the Holy Spirit is not somewhere else, in another country, or on another planet. The Bible says that God wants us to seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

And so, God the Holy Spirit is here right now, and I am praying that your curiosity, your hunger, and your desperation would push you out of your comfort zone and out of your religiosity to seek a deeper encounter with the Spirit of the living God. Not just knowing about the Holy Spirit, but knowing him personally, intimately, and passionately.

I have no doubt in my mind that God wants to have a personal encounter with each one of us. Not only meeting the Holy Spirit, but walking daily with the Holy Spirit, so that there would be evidence that you know the Holy Spirit. I believe that because the Bible says,

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (James 2:14).

And so, God wants there to be results, evidence that you walk with him, that you are filled with the Holy Spirit, and I’m not just talking about speaking in tongues, but I’m talking about you walking with him, that you are with him, and that he is working through you.

For this to happen we need to have an encounter with the Holy Spirit, we’ve got to have the right information, the right inspiration, and then we have to make the application. Both the woman with the issue of blood and the Magi were willing to take the information and apply it, to walk with it, and seek to have an encounter with God. On the other hand, the Pharisees had the information, they memorized it, they got their degrees, they studied it in other languages, but they never made a move.

Today, you and I need to apply what we’ve heard, we need to move forward, we need to pursue a deeper encounter with the Holy Spirit. It may not be something big, in fact it may start out small, like the Magi went to see a king and found a toddler. Their experience certainly wasn’t like the one that Moses had with God when the mountain was covered with the cloud and Moses came down to the people with his face shining. Their encounter wasn’t like others who saw chariots of fire or who heard voices thundering from heaven, their experience was small, it was just a little thing, but it was so much bigger than anything else they had ever encountered.

I want to encourage you that when you begin to seek God for an encounter with the Holy Spirit, don’t be disappointed if it comes as a gentle whisper. If you felt the presence of God and it wasn’t anything big, it may have been small but it was real. And sometimes the reason why God gives you a little encounter, just a little taste, or little sample, is because he wants you to keep seeking him for more. He wants it to be your first experience, your first encounter with him, so that he would stir your appetite to come back for more.

Unfortunately, the Magi had one little encounter with Jesus, they gave all that they had, they worshiped Jesus, but they never came back again. And so, since they didn’t come back to worship Jesus, they never saw him walking on water, multiplying the loaves, and raising the dead. They didn’t get to see the curtain in the temple split in two and the dead come out of their tombs. All they had was this one little encounter with Jesus, and yet I believe God intends for us to experience so much more.

You see, when we have an encounter with the spirit of God, it will radically change us, and I’m ready for more of God. That’s why I read the Bible over and over and over again. I don’t just read it to get a message, I don’t just read it for a sermon, I don’t just read it for insight, but I say Holy Spirit I want to find you here, I want you to give me direction, I want to have some fresh revelation. And I pray that each one of you would seek to experience more of God, hungry and thirsty, curious about the Holy Spirit, not just happy to have knowledge of the Holy Spirit, but to experience the presence of God and know his power. As we close, let us not be tombs where life used to be, but being temples of the Holy Spirit where he is worshiped and where he is alive and well today.

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