

Virtue, Power and Healing

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of virtue and character in obtaining and expressing power, and that power is given and developed in proportion to virtue.

Scripture: Mark 5:25

Topics: "Healing", "Power", "Virtue"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the connection between virtue, power, and healing, using the story of the woman with the issue of blood from Mark 5 to illustrate how her faith and virtue led to her healing. He argues that true power is not independent of character and moral conduct, but rather is a reflection of one's virtue and integrity. Katz suggests that as believers, we must cultivate virtue in our lives to access the power of God for healing and transformation, highlighting that power is a consequence of character. He challenges the notion of charismatic power without moral grounding, urging the church to focus on character and virtue as the foundation for true spiritual authority. Ultimately, Katz calls for a return to the understanding of virtue as essential for both personal and communal healing.

Transcript

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The gospel of Mark chapter 5 has intrigued me for the longest time, and something was finally stirred in me that I want to share. It is the episode of the woman with the internal bleeding that no physician was able to heal, but she had a faith to believe that:

"If I am touched by His clothes, I shall be whole." And straight away her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague, and Jesus immediately knowing within Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned about and said, "Who touched My clothes?" And His disciples said unto Him, "Thou seest the multitude thronging to Thee and sayest Thou, 'Who touched Me?' " And He looked round about to see who had done this thing, but the woman, fearing in trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him and told Him all the truth. And He said unto her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace and be whole at thy place."

The thing that intrigues me is the word virtue. Maybe it is an archaic word, used in the times of the King James translators as a synonym for power, but today the word virtue has to do with things ethical and moral. I am wondering if the use of the word is more than just an accident of time and language. Other accounts use the word power. In this translation, the word is virtue, but power is relative to virtue, because Jesus felt something go out of Him. This implies that it is not a fixed, static amount that He bears at all times, being the Son of God, but it is relative. As it goes out, it equally comes in. She took a measure of that power by touching just the outer garment. This led me to consider that maybe there is a conjunction between virtue and power and that the amount of power for healing, in us as in Him, is relative to the proportion of virtue in which we walk.

I even looked up the word in the concordance and in the thesaurus, and it helps to amplify what I am trying to share. The dictionary speaks of moral excellence, perfection, integrity, innocence, honor, saintliness, holiness, virtuous conduct. In other words, virtue means nothing unless it is expressed in conduct. Virtue is an act; it is what you do, how you respond to moral questions that are before you. Virtuous responses build something in a person. Jesus is the pattern Son. Everything that He had access to by virtue of being the Son is what we have access to. By our own moral response to issues that come before us, we have the same opportunity to acquire power as we perform or express virtue.

He felt something go out of Him; therefore, something must have come into Him. When did it come in? I am suggesting, and willing to explore, that it came in with His virtue, with His acts of righteousness and integrity. We are encouraged to practice virtue and resist or rise above temptation, to overcome, to discharge one's obligation, follow one's conscience, to walk humbly with our God. We are continually being charged in the scriptures to a certain conduct, a certain performance, a certain doing. That is virtue.

For myself, I am much more comfortable to think that the release of power is in exact proportion to conduct and character. I have never felt comfortable with the 'magical' charismatic thing that some man performs as the supposed "man of faith and power." In fact, we are learning, to our astonishment, that some of the most uplifted men of our time are now falling in alcoholism and homosexuality, and they are even unwilling to be disciplined for that sin and continue in it. Yet, they were, only months prior, called the "oracle of the hour." They impressed people by their power, their charismatic demonstration, but completely out of proportion to character. If I know anything about God, I cannot believe He would allow power to be obtained or expressed independent of character. It would be reckless, and not in keeping with Himself.

Therefore, the Son of God in the earth, as our pattern Son, had to show what the basis for power is. There is a world that needs to be healed, whose blood has not been staunched, and no physician can heal it. It has got to touch the power that is of God, as it is carried in earthen vessels, but only in earthen vessels who have acquired that power in proportion to their virtue, their conduct, and to their right moral responses to the occasions that are before them, just as Jesus did in His walk.

Chambers, of course, always has something to say about the necessity to maintain the spiritual life. He is talking here about health and maintaining a vigorous mental life: "If I want to maintain a vigorous mental life, I have to fight, and in that way, the mental balance called thought is produced." Even in thought life, there is a struggle for virtue itself. Thinking itself is an exercise and a doing and an exertion. That is why I so much admire theologians, exegetes who exert themselves to struggle through texts and to understand them in the original languages and compare other editions or read what others have said. They exercise their minds through deliberations that bless the rest of the church.

Then, Chambers says, "Morally it is the same. Everything that does not partake of the nature of virtue is the enemy of virtue in me, and it depends on what moral caliber I have [or you could say, what moral caliber you exert] whether I overcome and produce virtue." Is that not interesting, that he should talk in those lines? Evidently, Chambers thinks along these lines, and I am putting this out for consideration, or for further illumination, because it is a remarkable line of thought--that power is not some kind of isolated thing that takes place magically, but it is given and developed in proportion to virtue. It takes power to be virtuous. It takes the grace of God to act rightly in a world that is inhospitable to righteousness and is contrary to God. That grace is the life of God, and that life is the power of God. Somehow when you receive it in your act of virtue and obedience to God, contrary to what is convenient, it is not only a grace given for the power to act in that moment, but something evidently is retained by the grace that is given and becomes cumulative. Something went out from Jesus that had been built up as a kind of residue from walking in righteousness.

Even if I am wrong in these assumptions, it would not hurt the church to think that this is the way in which power is to be obtained, and to put the emphasis on character rather than power. Power is the consequence of character, not an alternative to it. I may be going out again on a plank, as it were, but this is a fresh sense of something that I have never heard articulated by anyone. But if it is God, then it is critical in this charismatic age to put the emphasis where it rightly belongs: on character and virtue. Virtue is an act, and it is a moral act, an act of free choice. We can choose it, but to perform it requires grace, and grace is the life of God, and the life of God is the power of God.

God is in us in proportion to the quality of our walk. It is not automatic, and it is not fixed. If something went out, and He could measure it, then something comes in. We need to consciously grow in virtue, to grow in power, to grow in authority, to grow in the ability to heal by touch and by word. Power is the key, but the key to power is character, and the key to character is virtue, choosing and acting rightly, though everything conspires against it.

We hardly ever here the word virtue spoken these days, but a century ago, you would hear people speak of a virtuous woman. We do not talk like that today, because where are the virtuous women today? What is a virtuous woman? At that time, they still had a sense of what that meant. It meant chaste, one who kept herself by acts where she could have succumbed to a kind of temptation of compromise.

Virtue needs to come into our consciousness. There is not an issue of choice that is not, in its last analysis, moral. It is a moral choice; all of our choices are moral, and have an ethical content. I remember speaking in Albania to the teachers of a high school. They were not believers, and they came out of a country in which religion had been forbidden for 70 years under the communist atheist rule. They had no sense of God, but I shared with them that teaching was a moral profession. If your teaching does not inspire and touch and bring to the consideration of your students moral value, then you are failing. Teaching is more than communication of information; it is ultimately a moral vocation, because it stirs things about meaning, purpose and value.

Convenience is always accessible; we can always choose the thing that is easy and that relieves us of responsibility, but what is the right moral choice? It is almost invariably the more difficult thing and requires grace, and because it requires grace, it requires God.

It is not specifically mentioned in the passage, but I wonder if the woman who was healed of the plague of unstaunched flow of blood was also healed in her soul? Was it a total salvation? In so many miracles of

Jesus, when they received their sight, they also received their salvation and followed Him in the way. Maybe the power we are talking about is not only to meet the immediate need, as expressing itself as a physical crisis, but the ultimate moral crisis of salvation is also met by the demonstration of power, and brings with it a faith to believe, to be freed of sin and to follow the Lord. That is real power, and it comes with the initial deliverance.

Where there is no humility, there is not that virtue. There may be a form of power, but it does not have this quality that transforms. This is evident in the fallen brother mentioned earlier, who not only will not acknowledge his condition, but he will not receive correction and discipline. What he is revealing now in his lack of humility is not a new innovation; it was always true of him. While he was yet exercising and expressing power, he was in the place of arrogance. It is only now being revealed, but it was always true. What was the source of that power that impressed believers, so that they would travel distances to hear and to receive a personal prophesy from the oracle and man of faith and power? Let us not be mindless, wanting only the effect, so that we do not concern ourselves with its source, or the character from which it issues.

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