

February 19, 2018

**“The Wonder of Touching God”**  
**Matthew 14:33-36**

**FCF:** The great distance felt between us and God.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) God in Christ can be touched.

(magnet) We need to let the implications of this settle in. And live them out.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

As of just a few weeks ago, for the first time in nearly 50 years, you can no longer buy a ticket on a US airline to fly on a Boeing 747. Delta Air Lines Flight 9771 touched down in an Arizona boneyard for stored and cannibalized jetliners. And with that, the “queen of the skies” has been retired from operations by passenger airlines in the United States. The end of an era.

The 747 was a marvel of engineering and another step forward in shortening the distance. Which has been the goal of so many technical innovations - the oar, the sail, the rails, the wing. Each has, in its own way, shortened the distance between beloved people and longed for places.

But there is another distance that no technical leap can hope to overcome - the distance between us and God. Is it possible for the creature to touch the Creator? And, if so, how?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 14:33-36](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

It’s been a while since we were in this Matthew series. So let me remind you of where we’ve been. It begins with Jesus’ arrival in history. John the Baptist prepares for the appearance of the kingdom. Jesus comes on the scene, advancing that kingdom. He declares the message of the kingdom and, with His miracles, demonstrates its coming. He sends His disciples out. Opposition emerges. Jesus then reveals the mysteries of the kingdom in a series of parables.

That brings us to Matthew 14. With the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus shows himself to be the God of the exodus, the provider in the wilderness. With His walking on water, the Lord of the storm, the protector of His own. All of which comes to a climax ([READ Matthew 14:32-33](#)).

Which brings us to our text, this summary of events at Gennesaret - a town on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, just a few miles south of Capernaum. Clearly, Jesus’ fame has spread and the crowds come again, some so desperate they long but to touch the fringe of His robe.

One of the things that struck me with this text is the wonder of touching God. Not that the crowds understood who He was. But we can. We have the benefit of hindsight and history. We can see who this is and what was going on. It’s a simple but profound assertion. God in Christ can be touched. We need to let the implications of this settle in. And live them out.

What are those implications? In at least two areas - the physical and the relational.

**I. THE PHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS**

First, that God in Christ can be touched has what we could call physical implications.

*A) The Notion*

Think with me just of the mere notion of this, the very idea and what it means.

1. Mutual contact

What is it to touch? It means a mutual contact, at least one party moving towards the other.

2. At the same level

And that connection assumes an intersection. Contact demands being at the same level.

*Application:*

Now, think of that. For us to touch God, He has to be on our level - not by our rising to His but by His sinking to ours. This is what Jesus has done. Which demands our wonder.

*B) The Scandal*

That's just the notion of such touch. Now think of the scandal it involves.

1. The Greeks and Romans

The Greeks and the Romans found this idea to be morally objectionable. How could this be? The pantheon of their myths told of gods of such lesser character most had readily rejected it.

2. The Jews

So the Greek and Roman mind found the incarnation to be morally objectionable. And the Jew felt it to be theologically reprehensible. The God of the burning bush would not walk among us.

*Application:*

What are the origins of such scandalous ideas? If they aren't true, where did they come from? Don't you see? This can't be quickly dismissed. It demands our wonder. And a hearing.

*C) The Ethics*

Which takes us to the third point, the ethical implications involved with a touchable God.

1. Matter matters

For starters, it tells us that matter matters. Eastern religions say the physical is an illusion, all part of a greater One. The Greeks and Romans said the physical was bad. Some religious folk say much the same and that salvation is an escape from this world into the kingdom. But the gospel news is of the kingdom coming into this world. What does that tell us? Matter matters.

2. The basis for the stance

Which is why Christians, more than anyone else, have a basis for ethical stances. Since matter matters, we can make a case for environmentalism, work against poverty, stand against racism, fight against the modern slave trade. Because the things of this world matter. They count.

*Illustration:*

Think of William Wilberforce, the 19th century British abolitionist. The turning point of his life is tied to a diary entry in October 1787 ([READ quote](#)): "God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners." Now, by manners, he didn't mean table etiquette but the moral and social behavior of the culture. And both those great objects were tied to the reality that this world really counts. That matter matters.

*Application:*

That is the basis for ethics. It impels and insists on certain paths. And, if we are to be consistent, it has to effect sexual ethics as well. Think of the hook-up culture and our debates about gender identity. We can't say the physical is important on all these other issues and then turn around and say it doesn't matter there. This demands wonder, a hearing, and consistency.

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## II. THE RELATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

But there are other implications as well. And these are of a more relational nature.

### A) *The Separation*

What do I mean by that? Let's start with the separation, the wall, between us and God.

#### 1. The rules and regulations

This is what was behind the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. Some objects were seen as holy and others unholy. And so there were laws about what you could and couldn't touch. This was seen most dramatically at Mt. Sinai ([READ Exodus 19:10b-13](#)). God is that holy.

#### 2. The rationale

Which was the rationale for the rules and regulations. God is holy - other, separate, and pure. God is holy and we are sinful - twisted and crooked deep within, rebellious and bent from Him.

### B) *Our Restoration*

The separation is that great. Which then must require an even greater work of restoration.

#### 1. The cross

Which is what we see with the cross. Think with me. What would it take to tear down this wall? And how far would God's love and determination go? All the way to the judgment laid on Jesus.

#### 2. The curtain

And the result? ([READ Matthew 27:51](#)) The curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was an elaborately woven fabric of 72 twisted plaits of 24 threads each. It was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide. No one was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place behind that curtain except the high priest, and he only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. For it to be torn in two meant the separation had been removed. This was a spiritual reality erupting into the physical realm.

### C) *His Affection*

This was restoration. In which we see what? The Lord's great affection for us.

#### 1. An astonishing fact

Here are two astonishing facts. In Christ, we can touch God. And He wants us to touch Him.

#### 2. The humbling reason

Those are some astonishing facts. Now here's a humbling reason. He wants us to touch Him not for His sake but for ours. It's not out of His need but our need. He sees that and moves to us.

My friends, these are the relational implications of the fact we can touch God.

*Illustration:*

Listen to this sweet passage from C. S Lewis' book, Prince Caspian ([READ PC](#)):

And then—oh joy! For he was there: the huge Lion, shining white in the moonlight, with his huge black shadow underneath him.

But for the movement of his tail he might have been a stone lion, but Lucy never thought of that. She never stopped to think whether he was a friendly lion or not. She rushed to him. She felt her heart would burst if she lost a moment. And the next thing she knew was that she was kissing him and putting her arms as far round his neck as she could and burying her face in the beautiful rich silkiness of his mane.

"Aslan, Aslan. Dear Aslan," sobbed Lucy. "At last."

The great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell, half sitting and half lying between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all round her. She gazed up into the large wise face.

"Welcome, child," he said.

This is a picture of the relational implications of this text - the restoration and God's affection.

*Application:*

Now, what if we believed this? What if the grandeur and the slightness here really landed on us? The grandeur - yes, the gospel is exclusive. Jesus is the only way. But there is an inclusiveness as well. Did you notice? Who was made well? All who were sick. Not the few who were healthy. Not those who knew and did enough. But the sick. That's what qualifies us.

The grandeur of it. And the slightness - we have but to touch the fringe of His garment. We have but to believe enough to reach to Him. The need is not for a doubtless faith, a faith that has everything figured out. The issue is never the strength of your faith but its object, its place.

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## CONCLUSION:

It's worth noting what comes with touching Jesus ([READ Matthew 14:36b](#)). All were made well. They were healed, saved, and rescued. They escaped and were brought to safety. It's a rich word with nuanced meaning, clearly pointing to a healing that goes as wide as it needs to, a healing that begins even now with a completion to come. As far as the curse is found.

There's a beautiful scene of healing in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Return of the King. After the Battle of Pelannor Fields, the wounded were brought into the city. But their condition worsened. One of the nurses recalled an old legend ([READ quote](#)): "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known." Aragorn, the Ranger, proceeded to crush the leaves of a plant and stir them in a bowl of warm water. The scent of the herb stirred those laid low, as did Aragorn's touch and kiss. And the rumors spread that the king had come.

My friends, the rumors are true. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God. The best stories echo this. The king will come, slay the dragon, kiss and wake us from our sleep of death, rescue us from the prison tower, lead us home, and make all things right. All these stories are rooted in the one true story. We had it all. We lost it all. But, in Christ, we gain it all.

The king has come. And in Him God can be touched. We need to let the implications of this settle in - the implications of both the physical and the relational. And then live them out.

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