

The late Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “*When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.*” But what if your rope breaks? What do you do when you reach that point of total desperation?

It wasn't a great movie, yet it struck a societal nerve. Do you remember the movie, *John Q* (picture) with Denzel Washington? It tells the story of John Quincy Archibald, *John Q*. During his son's baseball game, John and his wife watch their young son, Michael, collapse during the game. They rush him to the hospital. After a series of tests, they're informed Michael has an enlarged heart and needs a heart transplant. But the procedure is very expensive: \$250,000 with a down payment of \$75,000 just to get Michael's name on the donor list. John tells them he's insured, but after looking at his policy, they tell him because his company dropped John from full-time to part-time, his health insurance changed. The new policy won't cover the surgery...his son will die. In total desperation, John takes hospital staff hostage to force them to do the heart transplant. **When Your Rope Breaks.**

We find a **When Your Rope Breaks** scene in our study this morning, Luke 8:40-56 (p. 866). This is a typical day in the life of Jesus. So much to do, so many needs, so many people. It's fairly typical of ministry in general. Ministry is often a bit of a roller coaster.

Here at the end of chapter 8 Luke brings two miracles together into one narrative. It's two for the price of one. All three synoptic gospels record this narrative just as Luke sets it out. Two very different people joined by the human condition of desperation. Wonderfully, need gives way to the birth of saving faith.

It's the last illustration of Jesus' omnipotence as the God-man in Luke 8. Jesus has power over nature and calms a storm, then casts out a legion of demons. Now He demonstrates His power over disease and death. It proves He's the Christ, the promised Messiah. This Christological revelation concludes with a call to faith.

The account of the woman suffering from a hemorrhage is embedded into the narrative of a dying little girl. They're tied together with a number of commonalities and contrasts. Both are female. One is old, one is young. One comes from a rich family, one is poor. One is public, well-known and her father named, the other hidden, anonymous and nearly invisible. One has an advocate of her well-to do father, the other is solitary in her suffering. One has suffered for twelve years, one is only twelve years old. They are at opposite ends of the social and religious spectrum. Yet, one fact unites them – they're desperate! So whether one is male or female, adult or child, rich or poor, clean or unclean – it makes no difference to Jesus.

The word *desperation* comes from the word despair or hopelessness. Someone who is desperate is at the brink of absolute hopelessness.

American journalist, Terry Anderson (picture) understood desperation. On March 16, 1985, he'd just finished playing tennis when he was abducted from a street in Beirut. He was placed in the trunk of a car and taken to a secret location where he was imprisoned for the next six years and nine months by Hezbollah Shiite Muslims. He was the longest-held of the American hostages captured in an effort to drive U.S. military forces from Lebanon during the Civil War. During his imprisonment he lived in isolation, was constantly threatened and deprived of some of the most basic needs of life. Later, of his ordeal, he wrote: “*We come closest to God at our lowest moments. It's easiest to hear God when you are stripped of pride and arrogance, when you have nothing to rely on except God. It's pretty painful to get to that point, but when you do, God's there.*”

**When Your Rope Breaks.** God uses rope breaking experiences to get us to let go in faith and drop ourselves into His loving care. That's the scene before us. When we're most desperate, we seek Jesus. What can we learn from these two accounts of total desperation?

**1. Sometimes we seek Jesus because we are desperate for others we love.** “*Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed Him, for they were all waiting for Him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored Him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.*” As parents we'll do anything to save our children. Jairus undoubtedly thought like any loving parent, “Take my life not hers.”

Jairus is a minister. As a leader in the synagogue, he's rich and prestigious. He selected who'd preach, read the Scripture and lead in prayer. There is no reason to think he was a Christ-follower, a seeker or even a man of faith. He might have been enemy of Jesus but he was desperate. He didn't care what his friends thought or what

it cost him socially. It's amazing what desperation will motivate us to do. Jesus is the only hope to save his dying little girl, his only child. He throws himself down at the feet of Jesus, begging Him to save his daughter. Death brought him to his knees. It's total desperation. Despair is commonly the prelude to grace.

In America, the worst condition is that of being unhappy. Unhappy individuals look for others or something...anything to make them happy. I have some friends who are atheists and they're fairly unhappy. I'm kind to them but do we really want happy atheists? I don't. I want unsaved people to be miserable...and desperate. Because I'd rather them suffer a little misery now if it will drive them to Jesus so they can have eternity in heaven.

God loves us so much He will use either His goodness or desperation to bring us to the end of ourselves. God may have you there or some loved one there. We need a handle on the theology of desperation so we don't get in God's way, particularly when He is turning up the heat on someone we love.

Desperation can drive us to put our trust in Jesus. Sooner or later, we all face desperate situations where we don't know what to do. The bottom drops out from under us and we're overwhelmed. Such situations are never fun, but Jairus' story shows us there are great benefits for us in desperate situations.

***Desperate situations help us clarify our priorities.*** It's easy to drift through life and spend our time in things that aren't in line with our priorities, if we were to stop and think about it. But often, we won't stop and think about our priorities until we hit a crisis.

All of Jairus' success and prestige in the community suddenly paled in significance as he's faced with the loss of his only daughter. Worldly success doesn't insulate anyone from tragedy and death. It may afford them access to the best medical treatment available, but doctors can only do so much. Every person must be ready to face death for himself and his loved ones. When it stares us in the face, we're reminded that love for God and for others is the only thing worth living for. Being successful in the eyes of the world is a foolish priority; being a faithful believer and living for Jesus must be our priority. It counts for eternity.

***Desperate situations strip away pride, motivating us to turn to the Lord.*** Perhaps the male ego was different in first century Israel, but I doubt it. Most men tend to be "macho." We don't want to admit we're weak and needy. We like to think we're tough, in total control.

This situation stripped Jairus of any pride and puts him in total desperation. He falls at Jesus' feet, completely helpless, not exactly a dignified place for a synagogue ruler to be. But he didn't care. He knew he needed Jesus, and is willing to admit his need, and be humbled, even in public.

That's what gives the Lord the opportunity to prove Himself mighty on our behalf! If we protect our ego and come to Jesus and say, "Lord, I've almost got the situation under control, but I could use a little advice from You," He's robbed of His glory. But when we come and throw ourselves at Jesus' feet and say, "Lord, You must do it or there's no hope," He's glorified and others are drawn to put their trust in Him.

Hudson Taylor (**picture**), the pioneer missionary to China used to say when God wanted to open inland China to the gospel that He looked around until He found a man *weak* enough for the task. Desperation strips away our pride and let the Lord prove Himself mighty.

***Desperate situations reminds us of our mortality.*** We don't trust God as we should until we are forced to. There's nothing that drives us to desperation like the threat of losing a child. Yet, our desperation can be God's opportunity if we trust in Him.

Someone has said that we hang the heaviest weights by the thinnest wires. We put our hopes on this life, which is so tentative. We live our lives as if death is some distant thing, something we need not think about until we're in our eighties. But that which matters most to us can be taken quickly and without warning. When we stare death in the face, whether it's our own or the death of a loved one, suddenly we're reminded life is a vapor and we must be right with God.

Extreme necessity often drives a person to Jesus who wouldn't come under less dire circumstances. Jairus had a position of prominence. He needs to maintain good relations with the Jewish leaders. Jesus wasn't well liked by them. In fact, they're plotting how to kill Him. Chances are, Jairus wouldn't have risked their disfavor by coming to Jesus if he didn't have to. His dying daughter forced him to seek out Jesus. This crisis proved to be of great benefit to him, not only in the healing of his daughter, but by giving birth to his faith in Christ, which meant eternal life.

Maybe you're here and you're desperate? Let God use your desperation to be of great benefit to you. Let it clarify your priorities, strip away your pride, and drive you to trust in Jesus so that He can be glorified through it.

**2. Sometimes we seek Jesus because we're desperate for ourselves.** If you've ever ridden in an ambulance with a loved one who needs emergency care, you're quick to get out of the way of ambulances. I vividly remember riding in the front seat of the ambulance as we rushed a teen to the ER who'd suffered a heart attack. It was shocking how inattentive some drivers were.

Jesus is going with Jairus to heal his dying daughter and there's a traffic, or people jam. Verse 42, "*As Jesus went, the people pressed around Him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.*"

Do you know someone who's gone to doctor after doctor? There's something majorly wrong but no one can find a cure. That was this woman. You women have some understanding of what she'd endured. This "*discharge of blood*" had lasted twelve years. That's 4,383 days, 144 months, 624 weeks. 105,192 hours. It was a long, long time.

And this is ancient Israel. She not only has this seemingly incurable disease, probably some kind of uterine hemorrhage for twelve years, it's a stigma which made her ceremonially unclean. According to the Law (Leviticus 15:19-30), she's untouchable. Anything she touched, anyone who came in contact with her was considered unclean. She was forbidden from having sexual intimacy. If she'd been married, by now he'd probably divorced her. She's ostracized from society and banned from worship and the Temple. No one could touch her. She hasn't been hugged or kissed or touched by another human being for twelve long years. She'd tried everything. It had bankrupted her and she still wasn't cured. Her situation is hopeless. She's desperate.

This woman's ceremonial defilement is a graphic picture of how sin defiles us all. It creates distance between us and God, as well as distance from our family and friends. Often, like her problem, our sin is an embarrassing sort of thing. We'd rather not discuss it or have anyone know about it. We clear our throats and try to change the subject if anyone dares ask about anything that might bring it out into the open.

Like this woman's problem, sin is costly. Sins such as drunkenness, drug abuse, and gambling can reduce a family to poverty and can cost a person his employment, his health even his life. Like this woman's disease, sin is also degenerative. Her disease was slowly killing her, draining her strength and very lifeblood from her body. That's how sin works in the human heart, starting at first perhaps almost imperceptibly, but sapping our strength as it continues, leading toward a slow yet certain death. Like this woman's illness, sin is a hopeless problem apart from the Lord. Try as we will, we cannot extricate ourselves from its clutches. Like climbing up an icy slope, we seem to make progress for a while, but then slip and fall back to the bottom. We may compare ourselves with others and think we're not so bad. But when we recognize we must compare ourselves with God in His absolute holiness if we want to be accepted into His heaven, we despair. There's no human remedy. We're defiled by our sin; we need to be cleansed but can't cleanse ourselves. Nothing we try can rid us of our guilt.

Everyone dodged her because she's considered ceremonially unclean but this huge crowd gave her a big chance. In the crowd she's unnoticed. If she'd been noticed, religious people in the crowd would have been very angry with her. But with the pressing crowd, she could get close to Jesus, to quietly come up behind Him. It had been twelve long years and she's desperate. As Jesus passed by, she reached out with her trembling hand and closed it around the edge of His cloak, perhaps one of its four tassels.

You'll see orthodox Jews today with tassels on their clothes. The tassels were to remind a Jewish man, every time he dressed, he was to obey the Law. As she touched that tassel, she felt healing coursing through her body, and knew she was healed. She probably was ready to quietly slip away, never saying a thing BUT Jesus slams on His brakes. Everything stops! *And Jesus said, 'Who was it that touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround You and are pressing in on You!' But Jesus said, 'Someone touched Me, for I perceive that power has gone out from Me.'* And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before Him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. *And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'*

I'm so thankful Peter was one of the disciples. Everyone is thinking it, but Peter pipes up and points out the obvious. Always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. If there's any disciple I can identify with, it's Peter.

But Jesus knows what's going on. He knows what this desperate woman has done, that in her infant faith, she's grabbed the fringe of His clothes. He could have ignored her, after all, there's an emergency, Jairus' daughter needs Him. But this is so Jesus. I love the *interruption* of Jesus. There's never a bad time to come to Jesus. You'll never cry out to Him in prayer and get a busy signal. He'll never say, "Can you please call back later, I've got Billy Graham on the other line?"

Couldn't Jesus have just let it go? Why point her out? With fear, she comes trembling before Him, and falls down at His feet. This is the second person in this passage to fall at the feet of Jesus.

I believe Jesus wanted to grow her faith. Her faith was desperate, bordering on superstition. He anchors her faith in Him. It wasn't touching His garment that brought about her healing, it was her faith. Then, He goes public with her healing so her shame is over. Her healing would also encourage Jairus who'd soon hear his daughter had died. The woman's twelve years of suffering are over. The Christ who'd healed her would help Jairus. She's a testimony to the power of faith.

Most importantly Jesus welcomed her to His family. *'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'* This is the only time Jesus calls someone *"daughter."* She probably was older than Jesus but her faith hasn't just healed her physically, more important, it's healed her spiritually. Her faith is infantile but it's enough. Before she'd been alienated, now she experiences the grace of adoption. She can go in peace because she has peace with God.

I've met folk who wonder if they're truly saved because they didn't say the "right thing" or understand repentance or regeneration. God takes us where we're at. He loves to take our muddled, infant faith and bring about salvation. The healing takes place because she has faith, not because she has enough faith.

When Sir James Simpson (**picture**), the inventor of chloroform was dying, a dear friend said to him, "You will soon be resting on His bosom." Sir James humbly responded, "I don't know as I can do that, but I think I have hold of the hem of His garment."

Her story reminds me of so many who go to counselor after counselor with no relief because their core problem isn't physical, it's spiritual. Only the Great Physician has the cure for our greatest ailments – *sin and guilt*. You can't talk them out or even medicate them away. Sin must be forgiven, guilt must be removed. Only Jesus can do that. She's beyond human help. So are we spiritually. We can't fix ourselves. We have needs we can't solve. We struggle with a habitual sin, broken relationships, areas of personal weakness which leave us feeling defeated. We need Jesus. We must grab ahold of Him in faith. In our hopelessness, He's our only hope. Is that you today? My friend, come to Jesus in faith. Grab hold of Him. Trust His promises.

Like this woman, He will heal you. He'll heal you totally. He'll heal you freely. She couldn't and didn't have to pay for it. And she was healed instantly. Salvation is not a process, it's an event.

**3. Sometimes we ridicule and reject Jesus because we don't believe He can do what He says.** *"While He was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, 'Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.' But Jesus on hearing this answered him, 'Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.' And when He came to the house, He allowed no one to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. And all were weeping and mourning for her, but He said, 'Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead."*

Put yourself in Jairus' shoes for a moment. He's taken a risk, he's a leader of the Jews but it's his only child, his baby girl. He doesn't care what it costs. He's done everything right. But there's a crowd. Some stranger with another need causes a delay and his baby dies. It's too late...or is it?

Dear friend, the message of the Cross, the message of the Church is hope! *"Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher anymore."* This is a hopeless world. I wonder what Jairus was thinking. He never says a word but there must have been a seed of faith, some hope because he still takes Jesus to his home. He and the little girl's Mom go in with Jesus to the little girl's room. He doesn't say, "Forget it, Jesus. You let me down! It's too late."

Jesus says to him, *"Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well."* Jesus is making clear to Jairus, that even in the face of death, trust Him. Mark it down. Faith and fear always stand in opposition. How about you? Are you facing a "dead situation" today? Jesus is saying the same thing to you, "Trust me. Just trust me." Will you?

By the time they arrived at Jairus' home, the scene was a mournful circus. Jews would hire professional mourners. Because Jairus was a synagogue leader, they no doubt had brought the whole team to weep and wail. Jewish people in that day lost no time or energy in showing their grief. The body of the deceased would be washed, anointed and buried that same day.

This is an important warning for all of us. We believe death only comes for the old. This child is only 12. Young person are you ready to meet Jesus? Parents, are you evangelizing your own children? Tomorrow may be too late.

Jesus takes command of the situation, telling the crowd the little girl isn't dead, she's merely asleep. Of course, from our perspective, she was dead. Her spirit had left her body but to Jesus, death was just sleep. That's a continual image throughout the New Testament to describe the death of a believer. I've got lots of loved ones and friends who are asleep in Jesus. I can't wait until that Resurrection Morning when the One who said, *"I am the Resurrection and the Life"* (John 11:25-26) will awaken them once for all! For the believer, it's never "Good-bye," it's only "Good night, I'll see you in the morning." But that's not what the crowd believes, *"And they laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead."* Can we do a brief sidebar of "crowdology?" ***The problem of crowdology.***

**a. The crowd is fickle.** It is rarely wise go along with the crowd. Look back at verse 40, *"Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed Him, for they were all waiting for Him."* The crowd always loves a good show. It doesn't take a lot to gather a crowd. Pull a few rabbits out of a hat and you'll get a crowd. Many Christians fall for the temptation of popularity.

**b. The crowd is a barrier.** What kept Jesus from getting there in time to save her life, *"As Jesus went, the people pressed around Him."* The pressure of the crowd squeezes Jesus out of too many of our lives. Why do we feel we must live in certain houses, drive certain cars, wear certain clothes? The pressure of the crowd. It's very subtle but we all feel the squeeze.

Let me illustrate this. When you see someone using a flip phone in a smart phone world, **(pictures)** does the thought cross your mind, "How do they use that old thing?" We feel the pressure and the crowd becomes a barrier.

**c. The crowd is cynical.** *"And they laughed at Him..."* Jesus' words turned grief to amusement. That's not an unusual response in Scripture. How do you feel when people laugh at you? "You're not a Christian?" "You still believe in monogamy...virginity?" "You read your Bible?" "You believe in God...that He created this world?" The crowd laughs and mocks and ridicules. Even Christians are frequently contaminated with cynicism and don't even know it. Someone talks about living by faith or what Jesus is doing in their life, inside we're going, "Yeah, right!" But it doesn't end there.

**d. The crowd is hateful.** In a short period of time, the same crowd which had been waiting for Him, that had crowded Him and laughed at Him...will be screaming, "Crucify Him." If you do not go along with the "crowd," they will hate you, too. Jesus warned us, *"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (John 15:20).

We must follow Jesus' example, we must learn and must teach our children to stand alone. Scan the pages of biblical and church history and you'll see a common thread. Those who are used and blessed by God know how to stand alone...against the crowd.

**4. Every time Jesus meets death, He defeats it.** *"But taking her by the hand He called, saying, 'Child, arise.' And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And He directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but He charged them to tell no one what had happened."* There are two vital truths that we need here.

**1) Jesus is always willing to help.** Have you ever called someone and they had the ability and resources to help you with a crisis or real need...but they wouldn't? That's not Jesus. He owes Jairus nothing. If anything Jairus might have been an enemy, at least not a supporter. But Jesus is always there for us.

**2) We must believe.** This the difficult one for us. We have great faith...for someone else's problems. But when it's our child who's dying, when it's our need – we struggle to trust the Lord. Hebrews 11:6 *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."*

Can you hear Jesus' gentle voice as His words fall on the child's cold, dead ears? Can you see her eyes blink, dilate, flutter into focus? The first thing she sees is the face of Jesus! And then the wet cheeks of her Dad and Mom.

I love this! Jesus is so practical. He raises her from the dead and the first thing He tells them is "get her something to eat." Not, "Well, now she needs to memorize the Lord's Prayer and say it 20 times a day."

Resurrection is a picture of the way Jesus saves lost sinners and raises them from spiritual death. The Gospels record three such resurrections, though Jesus probably performed more. Each time, the person raised from the dead gave evidence of life. The widow's son began to *speak* (Luke 7:15). Jairus' daughter *walked* and *ate* food, and Lazarus is *freed* of his grave clothes (John 11:44). When we as lost sinners are raised from spiritual death, you can tell there is new life by our speech, our walk, our appetite, and our "change of clothes" (Colossians 3:1-11). You can't hide new life!

### **Conclusion: What do you do When Your Rope Breaks?**

A man named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day. He accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet. He couldn't hang onto the branch forever and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So Jack began yelling for help, hoping someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something. "HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? HELP!" He yelled for a long time, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice. "Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?" "Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!" "I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?" "Yes, but who are you, and where are you?" "I'm the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere." "The Lord? You mean, GOD?" "That's Me." "God, please help me! I promise if, you'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life." "Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's get you off from there; then we can talk."

"Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully." "I'll do anything, God. Just tell me what to do." "Okay, first let go of the branch." "What?" "I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go." There was a long silence. Finally Jack yelled, "HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"

My friend, there is no else up there! Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (John 14:6). Some of us have to hit rock bottom before we will finally look up and cry out to God in desperation. *You'll never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. When Jesus is all you have, then you will know that Jesus is all you need.* If you're weary, if you're tired, if you're discouraged, if you need a fresh start, if you know your life is going nowhere, if you want your sins forgiven, if you want to know God, then drop what you're doing and run to the cross. Run to the cross! Don't delay, don't put it off, and don't make any excuses. Drop everything and run to the cross of Christ. Lay hold of the Son of God who loves you and who died for you. Lay all your sins on Jesus. Trust him and Him alone as your Savior.

**When Your Rope Breaks** He's there! Waiting to catch you in His tender arms. Whatever your burden, whatever your heartache – His grace is enough!

Jesus doesn't need us but we desperately need Him, and He's there for us!