

Desperation and Faith

Nearly five years ago, someone very dear to me, began to experience some serious health issues that affected her life in a dramatic way. It was the kind of thing that made it hard to sleep at night; it distracted me throughout my day; it made all of life have a kind of heaviness to it. It was a desperate situation beyond anything I had ever experienced before.

In this world, it is a matter of WHEN not IF we will confront something that feels desperate to us. This is simply the nature of life in a broken world. At times we are confronted by such challenging, hard, confusing, painful situations that we find ourselves experiencing a sense of desperation. It might be finances or a job situation that feels desperate. It might be your marriage; it might be your singleness. It might be a health concern that you or a loved one is facing. It might be depression or anxiety. It might be a sin issue that continues to drag you down. My guess is that more than a few of us would say that this is where we are right now.

When we find ourselves in such situations it can lead us down a path to despair and to giving up. Or, it can provide a great opportunity to grow in our faith. It can lead to growth if we respond appropriately to it and the appropriate response is faith.

Last week we started a series on faith. We are looking at passages in the gospels that reveal something about a life of faith. Particularly, we are seeking to understand issues related to growing in our life of faith. Today, we are going to look at three people that Jesus encounters all of whom were in desperate situations. I want to read and comment on each of these accounts and then at the end talk about some principles that we see in these passages about how we can respond to our desperate situations in ways that help us grow in our faith.

Story 1 – Woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:24–34)

The first story is in Mark 5. We read about a woman in a desperate situation. In the preceding verses we read how another man has asked Jesus to come and heal his daughter. It is while Jesus is on the way to that man's house that he encounters this woman. We will start reading at verse 24:

²⁴ And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. ²⁵ A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, ²⁶ and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse—

For twelve years this woman has suffered. She had sought help from the physicians and yet she was no better. In fact, her condition had grown worse. And she had exhausted all of her financial resources in the process. And because of her hemorrhage, she was also in a constant state of uncleanness that kept her isolated from community. She had lost her health, her finances and her experience of community.

²⁷ after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. ²⁸ For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well."

This woman hears about Jesus and what she hears is enough to move her to go to him. Most likely she had heard of some of the miracles that Jesus had done. And so she goes to him in faith. Now, her faith is mixed with some superstition. This idea that power was transferred to clothing was a common superstition of the day. Nevertheless, her faith moves her to go to Jesus with the hope that she would be made well. She presses into the crowd so that she can come up behind Jesus and simply touch his cloak.

²⁹ Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" ³¹ And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' " ³² And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. ³⁴ And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."

Jesus commends this woman for her faith. He says that her faith had made her well. Did she go to him with a faith that had everything sorted out? No. It was a faith mixed with some superstitious thoughts, but still she had faith and out of that faith she went to Jesus and He healed her. The flow of blood stops and she can feel in her body that she is healed.

But Jesus does more than just physically heal this woman. He could have let her just slink away in the crowd, but he doesn't let that happen. He looks around and sees the woman. And he says words to her that probably were as healing as the physical healing. He calls her *daughter*. She is no longer unclean and to be avoided. She is not an outcast. She is *daughter*. She is loved and wanted. And Jesus proclaims peace over her – wholeness!

Here is a woman in a desperate situation, who also knows something about Jesus and these two things drive her to action. She goes to Jesus in faith and looks for healing. And Jesus heals her. Her faith grows!

Story 2 – The woman whose daughter has an unclean spirit (Mark 7:24–30)

The second story is found in Mark 7. Starting in verse 24, Jesus encounters another woman in a desperate situation.

²⁴ Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. ²⁵ But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of the

Syrophoenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

This woman's desperate situation was that her *little daughter* had an *unclean spirit*. You can imagine the heartache and pain that this mom felt for her precious little child as she was tormented by demon.

Like the woman in chapter 5, this woman has also heard of Jesus. And what she knows about Jesus moves her to action. Though Jesus was seeking time away from people, she goes to him and we are told that she falls at his feet and she keeps asking Jesus over and over again to *cast the demon out of her daughter*. She is persistent.

Now, Mark draws our attention to the fact that this woman is *a Gentile* and at this point Jesus' ministry is focused on the Jews. But it doesn't matter to her. She is desperate. And so she comes in and pleads with Jesus to heal her daughter.

*²⁷ And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered and *said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." ²*

Jesus' words sound harsh to our ears, right? This woman knows that she is the dog in the comparison. But Jesus is not being harsh; he is simply testing her faith. Jesus' statement highlights the truth God had appointed that the Gospel would come to the Jews first and then later to the Gentiles. That's the principle that Jesus is stating. But of course, this was never a hard and fast rule because Jesus does minister to Gentiles in other places.

But the woman is not put off by Jesus' statement. Instead of a closed door, she sees an opening. Yes, the children get fed *first*, but if there is a first, there can be a second. And so in her mind if the little dogs will be fed later, then why not today? She is in a desperate situation and she knows Jesus can heal and so she tenaciously keeps looking to Jesus to grant her request. Her answer is an expression of faith.

²⁹ And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰ And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

When Jesus says, *Because of this answer*, He is praising her faith. Matthew specifically records that Jesus says, "O woman, your faith is great." And so in response to her faith, Jesus heals her daughter.

Here is a woman in a desperate situation, who also knows something about Jesus and these two things drive her to action. She goes to Jesus in faith and looks for Jesus to heal her daughter. And Jesus does just that. Her faith grows!

Story 3 – The blind beggar (Mark 10:46–52)

The final account we are going to look at happens as Jesus is making his final journey up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. We find this account in Mark 10 starting in verse 46.

*⁴⁶ Then they *came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

Bartimaeus has also heard something of Jesus. And what he knows about Jesus moves him to action. When he hears that Jesus is passing by he begins to cry out. The crowd tells him to be quiet! But the man didn’t care. He was desperate and so he *kept crying out all the more*.

*⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they *called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?”*

Jesus stops his journey and turns his attention fully to this man who everyone else wanted to ignore. Once Bartimaeus is standing in front of him, Jesus asks, *“What do you want Me to do for you?”* Jesus is checking for faith with this question. Jesus didn’t do works of healing without faith. Back in Mark 6 there is a passage that says that Jesus could not do any miracles in his hometown because of their unbelief (6:5). And so he is checking for faith.

And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” ⁵² And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

Bartimaeus expresses faith with a clear and bold request. And in reply, Jesus commends him by saying, *your faith has made you well* and then He restores this man’s sight. And Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem.

Here is a man in a desperate situation, who also knows something about Jesus and these two things drive him to action. He goes to Jesus in faith and looks for healing. And Jesus heals him. His faith grows!

Three people, three desperate situations, three responses of faith that moves them to action. They each go to Jesus and each one is helped and their faith in Jesus grows. Now, Mark is not giving us a 1, 2, 3-step approach for how to deal with our desperate situations. He records these stories because they reveal who Jesus is. Nevertheless, I think we can see some principles in

these accounts that can give us some guidance. And so I want to offer three principles that can help us when we are in desperate situations.

First, **responding to desperate situations in faith starts with knowledge about Jesus.** Each of these people knew something of Jesus. They had apparently heard of his healing power and his miracles. They didn't know Jesus well, but they had enough knowledge about Jesus that it led them to take action. They go to Jesus with their need.

Your ability to respond in faith in your desperate situation is going to be connected to your knowledge of Jesus. People can be in desperate situations, but if they don't know anything about Jesus, why would they go to Him for help, right? And so the starting point is knowledge about Jesus.

Think about what we know about Jesus just from these encounters. Whether He is on the journey to Jerusalem or whether He is seeking escape from the crowds, Jesus was interruptible. He took time for these people. He turned his full attention to each of these people. In these encounters we see His love and care for the individual. We also see His power. He heals. He cast out the demon. This is who Jesus is. The knowledge that we gain about Jesus from just these three stories can help us go to Jesus in faith. And yet, we have much more revelation about Jesus. The whole Bible is a revelation about Jesus!

If you want respond to your desperate situations in faith, it starts with knowledge about Jesus. The more you know Him, the more you will go to Him in faith. And the more you go to Him in faith, the more you will see His work in your life. Your faith will grow.

Now, you may not be in a desperate situation right now. If so, rejoice! But here's the deal, in this world it is a matter of WHEN, not IF, we will confront something desperate. And so often these are things come crashing into our lives without any warning. And so don't wait to get to know Jesus. Develop a life-style of getting to know him. How do we get to know Jesus? There are many ways, but two core practices are reading the Bible and prayer. This summer, we are encouraging you to read the Gospel of Luke. There are reading guides out in the lobby that you can pick up that gives you a plan to read through Gospel of Luke. Read it this summer. Let God's Word reveal Jesus to you.

And then take time to regularly to talk to God in prayer. Before you get up from your reading of the Bible, take a few minutes to talk to God about what you have read. Pause as you go through your day and make a connection with Jesus. Talk to Him about your day and what you are experiencing.

Of course there are other ways that we get to know Jesus, but these are critical practices. And as we do these things, we grow in our awareness of who Jesus is and such knowledge will help us turn to Him in faith when the hard times come. Responding to desperate situations in faith starts with knowledge about Jesus.

Here's the second principle: **Go to Jesus with your desperate situation.** We can't go to Jesus physically, but we can go. We go through prayer. We bring our desperate situations to him in prayer. We talk to Him about it. Go to Jesus with your desperate situation. He cares. He cares about you.

I'm not saying that if you have a medical condition you shouldn't go to the doctor or if you have a financial problem that you shouldn't go to a financial advisor. Of course do those things! But sometimes that is all we do and we don't go to Jesus. As well, sometimes instead of going to Jesus we simply try to numb the pain of our desperate situation. We turn to alcohol or media or working crazy hours or any number of things just to try to avoid the pain. Go to Jesus with your desperate situation. If we are going to grow in our faith, we have to go to Jesus.

Here's the final principle: **Jesus responds to your faith.** To the woman with the hemorrhage, Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (5:34). To the woman with the child with the unclean spirit, Jesus said, "Because of this answer go [in other words, because of your faith]; the demon has gone out of your daughter" (7:29). And to Bartimaeus, Jesus said, "Go, your faith has made you well" (10:52). Jesus responds to our faith.

There are a couple of interesting things that we see in the faith of these people. In at least the first account, it wasn't a perfect faith. The woman has faith, but it seems to be mixed with some current day superstitions. But she went to Jesus with the faith she had and Jesus responded to her faith. Go to Jesus with the faith that you have.

The other thing that we notice about their faith is that it was persistent and tenacious. The woman presses into the crowd. The Gentile woman doesn't care that Jesus' mission is first to the Jews. When the crowds tell Bartimaeus to be quiet, he cries out all the more. Persistent faith. Tenacious faith. That's what we see here. These people were in desperate situations and they know that Jesus could do something and so they go to Jesus with persistent, tenacious faith and He responds. Jesus responds to your faith. And when He does, your faith will grow.

Now, a point of clarification is important here. Jesus will always respond to your faith. He is always working to help you grow in your faith. But He doesn't always respond in the way that we think He should. He doesn't heal every disease. He doesn't change every difficult situation. Scripture teaches this. In Hebrews 11, which is a chapter about faith, there are all sorts of people who are commended for their faith – people who accomplished amazing exploits of faith. But at the end of that chapter it describes some people of faith who were mocked or imprisoned or stoned or put to death in horrific ways (Heb. 11:36-40). And the point that Hebrews 11 makes is that this world is not all that there is. God is at work doing what is best for eternity (Heb. 11:13-16; 39-40) and sometimes this means that how He responds to our faith is not exactly what we think we need.

Earlier, I mentioned the desperate situation that I began to experience about five years ago. That situation continues. I know Jesus can heal in this situation. I know Jesus cares about this situation. And so the best way I know how, I've been going to Jesus in faith. What I know about

Jesus joined with the depth of desperation that I feel has created a tenacious and persist faith in me. I keep going to Jesus. And, yet, so far the desperate situation continues. Jesus doesn't always respond in the way that we think He should. But I have no doubt that in the midst of all of this God is using this situation to cause my faith to grow.

None of us ever wants to find ourselves in desperate situations. But in this life, it is a matter of WHEN, not IF. And so when we find ourselves there, may we have the kind of knowledge about Jesus that moves us to go to Him in faith knowing that He will always respond to our faith.

Amen.