

Desperation

You Asked For It, Part 6

Luke 8:40-56

A reservations agent for a major airline was interviewed some time ago; she had worked for a number of years with the airline and had logged in more than 130,000 calls from potential customers.

What made the interview so interesting to me was the funny things people asked her as well as their responses to her questions.

She said that she had survived all of those calls without losing her sense of decorum or dignity . . . and they were put to the test every single day.

She remembers getting a call from a woman in Nashville who wanted to know why she had to pay for her ticket and couldn't just donate the money to the National Cancer Society.

That was challenging enough, but I knew I was in for difficult call when a man called to ask if we flew to exit 35 on the New Jersey Turnpike. I couldn't help him.

She'd dealt with one man who insisted on paying for his ticket by sticking quarters into the pay phone he was calling from. He just didn't understand why that wouldn't work.

Or the man in Minneapolis who didn't know there was more than one city in the entire South; or the numerous citizen adults who didn't know the difference between AM and PM. The woman who called to get advice on parenting; the man who asked if he could ride inside the kennel with his dog so he wouldn't have to pay for a seat; and the woman who just didn't understand – and asked question after question on why the airline was going force her to change her clothes – they had insisted, she said, that she would have to make a change between Washington and Chicago – and she couldn't understand why.

To top them all, there was the woman who said she wanted to fly to Hippopotamus, New York. After kindly assuring her that there was no city by that name, she became angry and irate and said “Yes, there is – Hippopotamus is a big city with a big airport, and how can you not know about it in your line of work?”

I kept my calm and asked, “Well, then, is Hippopotamus near Albany or Syracuse?” It wasn't.

I asked if it was near Buffalo. And she said, “Buffalo! That's it . . . I knew it was a big animal.”

This veteran agent and question-answerer said, “I've had 130,000 little battles, but I still end by saying, “Thanks for calling, and have a nice day.”

She deserves a medal.

We're about halfway through our series entitled, “You asked for it.”

And we've noticed the Lord's skill and diplomacy in answering questions; some were sincere, some were obvious, and others were attempts to trip him up.

Like, “*Teacher, why do you eat meals with tax collectors and other sinners?*”

Or, “*Tell me Master, just who is my neighbor that I'm to love?*”

Or the disciples, never catching on to 3 years of graduate education asking the risen Lord, “*Are you going to bring in the kingdom of Israel now?*”

You never hear, one time, Jesus responding to any of them with, “*Haven't you heard anything I said for the last three years?!*”

No, He graciously responded as our Model Master Teacher.

We've also looked at *two occasions* where Jesus was the one who asked the question – like our study of *Luke 17* where Jesus asked, “*Were there not 10 lepers cleansed? Where are the other nine?*”

Or His question to the disciples in *Luke 9* – “*Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?*”

Jesus didn't ask these questions because He didn't know the answers – He simply wanted to make his students think – and then He wanted to reveal deep truths in his responses.

That's the kind of question He's about to ask in *Luke chapter 8*.

Verse 41 opens with a man asking Jesus over and over again to come to his home . . . and for a very good reason.

Notice there at (Luke 8) *verse 41, And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house – and*

here's why – verse 42, for he had an only daughter, about 12 years old, and she was dying.

It would be easy to miss the desperation that drove Jairus to openly invite Jesus to his home for this reason.

We're told here that he was, literally, one of the *officials of the synagogue*. The word "official" can be rendered president, or ruler.

The presidency or rulership of a synagogue was an elected position for a lay leader.

He would have been a highly respected, highly visible, a successful businessman in the Jewish community.ⁱ

As a ruler, he was responsible for supervising the worship service, caring for the scrolls, exhorting the congregation to be faithful to the law; administering the care of the synagogue, and even selecting rabbis to teach on the Sabbath.ⁱⁱ

And he would have been very aware of Jesus, by the way, and what the Jewish leadership thought of Him.

Jairus would have been skeptical, if not cynical of this traveling prophet/healer with an outrageous claim to be the Messiah.

In fact, Jairus would have been aware that Jesus had only recently been thrown out of a synagogue nearby for reading scripture from Isaiah and then claiming to be the fulfillment of that prophecy – you've got to be kidding.

The members of that synagogue tried to lead Jesus to a cliff and throw Him off, but Jesus had miraculously escaped.

I say all of that to tell you that Jairus was no follower of Jesus.

But things have changed . . . now . . . he's desperate.

He has a 12 year old daughter – his only child – who was dying.

He'd evidently tried all the normal medical channels and none of them helped . . . his daughter had days, if not hours to live.

So get the picture – Jairus is at this moment, so desperate that he risks his public reputation, his position in the synagogue; his favor with the religious elite and everything else along with it.

Because none of that matters anymore . . . let the gossip spread like wildfire.

He meets Jesus at the dock in Capernaum and falls on his face and begs Jesus to come to his home.

Jesus is his only hope.

Maybe that's what people think of you – you threw everything away when you fell at the feet of

Jesus; but you had come to understand, by His grace and His gospel that He was your only hope between spiritual life and death . . . and none of that other stuff really mattered.

Jesus evidently agrees to go to his home. *Middle part of verse 42; but as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him.*

Keep that in mind, by the way, as we work through what happens next.

Verse 43 – And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone; 44. came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak. . .

Stop for a moment. Did you notice the desperation in these details?

This woman got sick the year Jairus' daughter was born.

Jairus and his wife have had 12 years of growth and gladness.

This woman has experienced 12 agonizing years, not just of sickness, but deep sadness.

Legend has it that her name was Veronica.ⁱⁱⁱ
We can't be sure.

What we can be sure of is her life of desperation.

The phrase, translated "*hemorrhage*", or perhaps, "*an issue or a discharge of blood*" is the Greek translation for menstruation, in Leviticus 15.

This woman was suffering from some kind of uterine bleeding and because it never completely stopped, she was considered perpetually, ceremonially unclean.

In fact, by the time of Christ, her disease was considered nothing less than the judgment of God and the conclusion drawn in the minds of her culture was that she was suffering this as a sign of some sort of sexual infidelity.

In fact, we know from New Testament times, the rabbis would have allowed, if not encouraged, her husband to divorce her upon those grounds and remarry.^{iv}

She would have been shunned, ostracized and barred from worshipping God both in the Temple and in the synagogue.^v

12 lonely years! And Luke adds his commentary as a medical doctor, in *verse 43 – she couldn't be cured by anybody.*

Mark, not a doctor, rather bluntly adds in his Gospel account that this woman not only *spent all she had on doctors, but they had only made it worse. (Mark 5:26)*

She had tried everything . . . everything had failed.

In her day and time, medicine and superstition often ran together.

The Talmud – the commentary written by Jewish leaders encouraged both.

In fact, one author pointed out that there were no less than 11 cures for this very problem. Some cures were potions and prescriptions, but other cures were superstitious folly. For instance, one read, “Take the gum of Alexandria the weight of a small silver coin; of alum the same; of crocus the same. Let them be crushed together, and given in wine to the woman that has an issue of blood. If this does not benefit her, take of Persian onions three pints; boil them in wine, and give her to drink and while she’s drinking, say, “Arise from thy flux” [In other words, “Be healed from thy flow”] If this doesn’t cure her, set her at an [intersection] where two roads meet, and let her hold a cup of wine in her right hand, and let someone come up behind her and frighten her, saying, “Arise from thy flow.”^{vi}

This is like someone trying to cure someone of the hiccups by scaring them . . . I tried that on my kids too. It didn’t work –they just hiccupped harder.

She has tried everything in the book . . . and none of it has worked.

Mark’s Gospel account informs us that she spent every penny she had.

Of course she did.

She knew she hadn’t been unfaithful . . . she knew this couldn’t be God’s judgment.

And no one believed her.

She spent 12 years – and every penny she had – asking God to take it away and reunite her with life!

But then, Mark’s Gospel adds, she heard about Jesus.

And this is where she and Jairus find common ground; they have nothing in common up to this point:

- He’s a leader in the synagogue
She’s ostracized from the synagogue
- He’s got an impeccable reputation
She’s lost her reputation
- He has a family
She lost her family
- He’s revered in society
She’s shunned by society
- He is the epitome of morality and the favor of God
She is a walking illustration of immorality and God’s disfavor
- He’s had 12 brief years of gladness
She’s endured 12 long years of sadness

And they both meet at that Capernaum dock on common ground – they are both in desperation – for both of them, its life or death – they are out of options – Jesus is their last hope – their last chance.

Maybe the reason you haven’t come to faith in Jesus Christ is because you have other options . . . you’re interested in what He has to say, but you’ve not reached that point of spiritual desperation where you cling to Him alone as the difference maker between life and death.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Jesus must be more than a curiosity.^{vii}

There are hundreds of people here, pressing all around Jesus – but only one hand will reach out in faith.

Notice *verse 44. She came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak . . .*

This fringe is a reference to a rectangular cloth slung over the shoulder of a Jewish man in these days with tassels attached at the corners.

In the book of *Numbers, chapter 15*, you find a reference to this blue fringe to be worn at the edge of the outer garment.

By the time of Christ had turned into the practice of wearing a small cloth, much like a scarf, slung over their shoulder, with blue tassels on each side – one of which would have been dangling at the back of Jesus.

The tassel was called a *kraspedon* – and that’s the word Luke uses here translated fringe.^{viii}

It represented a Jewish man’s commitment to keeping the law of God – and if anybody deserved to wear it, it was Jesus – He alone had never broken the law of God.

So this woman reaches out and literally clutches the *kraspedon* dangling at the back of Jesus. This was a daring act in public – in fact, it was an illegal act.

She’s not allowed to touch anyone. If she does, they become ceremonially unclean too – even if she touches the garment they are wearing.

So, she violates the law of uncleanness by reaching out and literally clutching that which represents the keeping of the law.

Why? She could have touched his back, or his robe just as easily – why risk being seen clutching the *kraspedon*?

I believe this is her hope – her prayer – that God would vindicate her sullied reputation and heal her body to prove that she had not been unfaithful to that law.

This is an act of utter desperation . . .

Notice in *verse 44 that she is immediately healed – her hemorrhaging has immediately stopped.* And she no doubt feels this healing change coursing through her body.

And no one notices as she attempts to slip away.

But at this moment, Jesus stops and asks what must have seemed to be the most ridiculous question He could possibly ask.

Verse 45. And Jesus said, “Who is the one who touched Me?” And while they were all denying it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You.”

He puts into words what everybody’s thinking – translated into common English, “Lord, are you kidding? What kinda question is that? People are squeezing us in every direction – they’re pressing in on You.”

Implication – Why in the world does it matter anyway that somebody touched you?

And Jesus responds, ***“Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me.”***

Now this doesn’t mean that Jesus lost power as if He were a battery that discharges energy. He controls the power of His divine essence; He is never less powerful one moment than at another.

You could translate this phrase, ***“I was aware that power had gone out from me.”***

That’s the idea.

In other words, Jesus knew the difference between being touched accidentally and being touched intentionally. Someone had touched Him with a hand of faith.^x

By the way, this interruption is creating quite a bit of agony in the heart of Jairus, right?

One author said that this is like an ambulance in heavy traffic.^x

Jairus needs to get Jesus to his home to heal his daughter. Every second counts. The crowd and the congestion have nearly driven him crazy.

He can’t some kind of interruption – and now the Lord stops – why are You stopping?! Who cares who touched you?!

Has it ever occurred to you that interruptions defined the ministry of Jesus Christ?

- He was interrupted while speaking and teaching to a crowd (Luke 5:19);
- He was interrupted while talking to His disciples (Luke 12:13);
- He was interrupted while sleeping (Luke 8:24)
- While praying (Mark 1:37)
- While traveling (Mark 10:46)

But here’s the convicting thing – to Jesus, interruptions were opportunities; to Him they were not intrusions, but invitations.

And He is modeling something for us as His disciples.

None of us move from one planned event to the next; real life and service to Christ is moving from one interruption to another; one distraction to the next; and every so often we accomplish something we’ve actually planned.

We need to learn as Jesus models for us, to make the most of unexpected interruptions . . . unmet expectations . . . unplanned events.

From our perspective Jesus is delayed . . . He’s absent . . . He must be unaware . . . He must not even care.

From His perspective, we have something new to see . . . something new to learn . . . something new to develop.

He has something to teach this woman as well – and a few things to square away for her own benefit.

She was done with Him – He was not done with her.

Notice ***verse 47. When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.***

Man alive – she’s trembling, but let me tell you, she has incredible courage.

This thing turns into a testimony meeting.

She explains her disease – implicitly her violation of the law – her hopeless condition and her desperation in reaching out in faith to touch Jesus – ***she declared in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him.***

And notice His response in ***verse 48. Daughter***

Stop . . . ***Daughter*** . . . the only person Jesus ever called by that name, recorded in scripture.

Daughter – your faith has made you well – cleansed – literally, ***saved you*** . . . now go back into life with peace.

She’s lost her family . . . she’s been alone for more than a decade.

Let me tell you something, Jesus says, “You’re family! You’ve got a new family now – you are now my daughter in the faith.”

And by the way, she’s been excommunicated for 12 years from where? The synagogue. And who happens to be standing there? The ruler of the synagogue.

Veronica, I'd like to introduce you to Jairus – the ruler of the local synagogue. Jairus, you can expect to see her coming Saturday . . . save her a seat . . . people are going to want to meet her . . . she's family.

By calling this woman forward, Jesus has the opportunity to announce her cleansing to her entire world – and the news will spread – she is no longer unclean.

Now just imagine you're following the ambulance that is carrying your loved one; if they don't get them to the hospital, your spouse or child or parent isn't going to make it. You're racing down the interstate right behind the ambulance praying with all your might to make it in time.

But suddenly the brake lights flash on and the ambulance slides to a complete stop – there's an accident ahead and the traffic on both sides of the interstate are at a complete standstill – the ambulance is completely hemmed in.

You sit there for 30 minutes . . . stuck.

Imagine sitting back there in your car, pleading for the traffic to lift and suddenly, the back door of the ambulance opens and one of the EMS staffers jumps out walks back to your car and says, "There's no need to hurry any longer – your loved one, unfortunately, just died."

That's exactly what happened here.

49. While He was still speaking – to his woman – someone came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." 50. But when Jesus heard this, He answered him, "Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she will be made well." [He evidently did because they continued on] **51. When He came to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. 52. Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep."** [Jesus is both telling the truth, while at the same time talking in riddles. He knows her spirit is more alive now than ever, but her body is lifeless – as if asleep; so Jesus says that she's alive – in referring to her spirit; but that her body is asleep – which was common in this day to refer to the deceased body as sleeping; He also doesn't want His resurrecting power to be on display publicly just yet

– hence the putting off of these people without an explanation. 53. And they *began* laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. [they didn't catch what He was meaning, but they did know death]

54. He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child (little girl), arise!" 55. And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat. 56 Her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

The crowd wasn't ready to know the full power of Christ. This was only for the parents and a few disciples.

But don't miss what happened here: Jesus led Jairus further, deeper than he and his wife could have imagined.

Jesus Christ took this ruler of the synagogue from believing that He was a healer, to seeing with His own eyes, that He was the resurrection and the life.

That He holds the power, not just over sickness, but over death.

That delay was the doorway into greater spiritual discovery.

He could have healed this woman much earlier, by an invisible hand – but she would never have met Him personally – and found spiritual peace along with physical healing.

Now . . .

You get to the end of this chapter and if you're still wondering if there's something more to learn, here's some more.

I love the way Kent Hughes puts it at the end of his commentary on this passage.

Here's what you learn - *Jesus can do anything!*^{xi}

Some of the deepest truths are found when we rest in His ability – when we wait and trust through:

- Unplanned interruptions – they are a part of His plan
- Unmet expectations – they are a part of His purpose

In the meantime, if He's ever delayed, He has already determined the reasons why.

And just like these two people here, we may not know exactly *why* until we see Him face to face.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/24/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Bruce B. Barton, Life Application Bible: Luke (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 220
- ii Ibid
- iii G. Campbell Morgan, The Great Physician (Revell, 1938), p. 170
- iv Morgan, p. 170
- v R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume 1 (Crossway, 1998), p. 315
- vi Ibid
- vii Barton, p. 221
- viii Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 163
- ix William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Luke (Baker, 1978), p. 4577
- x Hughes, p. 317
- xi Hughes, p. 320