

Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 11, No. 12: 11 April 2010

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HOPELESS DOES NOT MEAN HELPLESS!

Today's Bible Text: Mark 5: 21-43

Extracts:

While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." ... Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But ... He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years old. And they were overcome with great amazement [Mk 5: 35-36, 38-42]

Rosie Rittenbery is an 18-year-old student who lives in Brooklyn, New York.¹ On Thursday, 11 February, 2010, she was standing on a subway platform awaiting a Manhattan-bound train that was already in view. Suddenly, she passed out, somersaulted and landed on her back on the tracks. The train was near and Rosie was not moving. Other commuters simply gasped and remained fixed on their spots. Then from nowhere came Lance McGraw (23) who dashed into the tracks, picked up the limp Rosie, and got out just in time to miss the on rushing train! Rosie revived later in the hospital.

Rosie's case was a hopeless one. She was almost certain to be crushed to death by the coming train. Even much worse, she was not in a position to help herself since she was unconscious. But was she helpless? No! Help came from unexpected quarters in the form of a daring young man. Any of us could have been in Rosie's place. We may have passed out due to economic or emotional pressures, among others. We may have reached a hopeless point. But are we helpless? This week's study points us to the much desired help that we need.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Lance McGraw: subway Rosie Rittenbery Save," <http://www.postchronicle.com/blog/lance-mcgraw-subway-rosie-rittenbery-save/> , 18/Feb, 2010; and Charles Leaf, "Subway Survivor and Hero Reunite in Brooklyn," http://www.myfoxny.com/dpp/good_day_ny/subway-survivor-and-hero-reunite-in-brooklyn-100215 , 15 Feb. 2010

1. Introduction: The slippery slope to hopelessness

We can define a hopeless case as *one in which we no longer expect any respite or relief because we have exhausted all possible human options*. The general feeling is that it is all over. There is nothing humanly possible to do anymore. It is a long way from home but our destination is worse and uncertain. It is like a journey on a slippery slope which can be traced through the following stages:

a) *It begins at 'No cause for alarm!'*

At this stage, we are still surrounded by gadgets for support and security. We know that things are not going as well as before but we are able to shield problems away from others, especially close family members, colleagues and friends. The harmony between husband and wife is cracking but they can still put up a smile before their children and in the church. You are feeling pains in certain parts of the body but since they go away as soon as they come, there is no cause yet for alarm. The credit card bills are mounting but you still have a good job and you are far from retirement. There is as yet no cause for alarm.

b) *You unexpectedly run into an emergency*

You have not planned for the events that suddenly surface. For example, there is an earthquake or fire or flood and all your earthly treasures that you have built your security on are at risk. The doctor performed a routine medical test and has just suggested your urgent admission into the hospital. A pink slip (sack letter) has just been handed over to you and the job that you thought would always be there is gone because your employer's contracting business has been hit by an unexpected change in government policy.

You may have others to rely on at this stage since you can no longer take care of all your needs. For example, as the prodigal son was driven to penury and hunger, even to the extent that nobody would give him pig's food to eat, he said to himself, "How many of my father's servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am not worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your servants.'" He returned to his father and, before he could open his mouth, his father had embraced him and welcomed him back [Lk 15: 11-32]. Take the example of Joseph's brothers in Egypt. After their father had died, they became afraid that Joseph was going to avenge their sin against him for selling him into slavery as a teenager. Rather than agonize in endless fear, they summoned courage and went to Joseph. They fell on their faces at his feet and said, "We are your servants." Joseph was moved and he told his brothers, "Do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your

little ones.” He comforted them and spoke kindly to them [**Gen. 50: 15-21**].

However, we all may not have those kinds of help. Instead, we are pushed to the next stage on the road to hopelessness.

c) *Desperation sets in!*

At this stage, everything has failed. The human gadgets that we have trusted all this while are gone or have failed. Alcohol and drugs have not helped matters. Yoga has not worked. Pride and self-deceit have been exposed. There are only two options left- suicide or help from a higher source! That was the situation that faced the people that came to Jesus. They had reached the state of hopelessness.

2. Hopeless cases came to Jesus

In this week’s study, we shall examine two cases: the woman with the issue of blood [**Mk 5: 25- 34**] and the death of Jairus’ daughter [**vv. 22-24, 35-43**]. Both cases shared the following circumstances:

a) *Both were hopeless cases*

Under the Law of Moses, a woman who is in her monthly period is regarded as unclean until her discharge of blood stops. During the period, whatever or whoever she touches is regarded as unclean. On the eighth day, she brings sin and burnt offerings to the tabernacle of meeting where the priest sanctifies her before she can return to the congregation [**Lev. 15: 18-23, 29-30**]. If the discharge of blood extends beyond the customary period, “all the days of her unclean discharge shall be to her ... as the uncleanness of her impurity” [**vv. 25-26**]. The woman in our story “had an issue of blood for twelve years.” She “had suffered many things from many physicians (and) *spent all that she had, and was no better, but, rather grew worse* [**Mk 5: 25-26**]. That was a hopeless case. No human being could help her and she remained an outcast from her family and community.

Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue and his twelve-year-old only daughter was at the point of death [**Mk. 5: 22, 42; Lk 8: 42**]. The chief priests and scribes, rulers of the synagogue, were among the greatest critics of Jesus. For example, they were the ones that questioned His doctrine, conduct and healing methods, even alleging on one occasion that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons [**Mk 3: 22**]. For one of them to throw away “restraints” so to speak and openly come to seek Christ’s help suggests that he had reached a hopeless point. To make matters worse, people came from his house soon after to tell him not to

trouble Jesus any longer because his daughter had died [Mk 5: 35]. His case had become hopeless.

b) *But they did not become helpless!*

The woman with the issue of blood knew her options. She could go with religion and keep herself away from the crowds because she was unclean. A woman that had bled unstopably for twelve years was as good as dead. This option would hasten her death. Instead, when she heard about Jesus, she threw all caution to the wind and followed her heart. She was faint and frail but she was not faint-hearted! She plunged into the crowd around Jesus, saying, “If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be healed.” She did and “immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction” [vv. 27-29]. *Her faith turned a hopeless and helpless case around for her good.*

The same faith best explains the miracle that Jairus received for his daughter. When he was informed that his daughter had died and he should no longer trouble Jesus, he could have started weeping like most of us. To comfort him, Jesus assured him, “Do not be afraid; only believe” [vv. 35-36]. When Jesus came with Jairus to his house, there was a “tumult” as sympathizers “wept and wailed loudly.” His daughter was dead; that was final and what else could anyone do? But Jesus told the mourners, “Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping,” *They ridiculed Jesus* [vv. 38-40]. I can imagine them saying, “Are You crazy? Can’t You see?” For those mourners, it was a hopeless and helpless case.

Jesus simply put the doubters outside, took the dead girl’s parents and the three disciples that accompanied Him there (Peter, James and John), and went into where the girl lay. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Little girl, I say to you, arise [*Talitha, cumi*]. Immediately, she rose up and walked out to the amazement of the doubting crowd [vv. 41-42]. *Jairus’ faith turned a hopeless and helpless case around for his good.*

The above two cases suggest to us the following *principles* for turning hopeless cases into major testimonies:

- *Go for the unexpected extraordinary!*

A popular saying is that if you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you have always got! You have exhausted all human options and it is obvious that there is no solution from that angle. Why should you continue to listen to worldly advice to keep trying more “experts” or counselors or professionals? That was what led the woman with the issue of blood to waste money on physicians for twelve years

until she was made poor. To continue looking for more doctors could have led to her death. So, she went for the unexpected extraordinary and looked for Jesus. In like manner, Jairus forgot his status among the leaders of the synagogue and looked for Jesus. Following his religion would have sent his dear daughter to her burial instead.

There is a problem that is eating you up right now. You know that you have no human answers any longer around you. However, you know where to go and get it. Swallow your pride and cut your losses. Go with God! Jesus has assured that whoever comes to Him, He will by no means cast out [**Jn 6: 37**]. Therefore, rather than die in your fears, doubts and tribulations why not confess your sins and give your life to Christ. Your culture or religion may forbid you to do so but what have they done to alleviate your hopelessness? For once, think of yourself and take care of your own personal needs. Later, you can sort out your relationships! In fact, your miracle and testimony will make that easier.

- *Make faith your GPS!*

GPS (Global Positioning System) is a space-based radio navigation system that provides reliable positioning, navigational and timing services to users on earth on a continuous worldwide basis.² If you have a GPS device in your car, all you need to know are your departure and destination points. By following the voice prompt and the screen, the equipment navigates you effortlessly. In like manner, you should make faith your spiritual GPS that enables you to reliably navigate your way out of the turbulence on a continuous basis.

Do you know how many levels of crowds the woman with the issue of blood had to beat to reach Jesus? The Gospel of Luke records that “the multitudes thronged Him” [**Lk 8: 43**], that is, they crushed Him! At the outer ring were the curious onlookers or those following for more bread from His miracles. Closest to Him were His protective disciples, especially members of the inner circle, Peter, James and John. Yet, the pale and frail woman did not give up. She pulled and shoved and dodged until she could touch His garment. It was her faith that kept her going. That was why Jesus said to her, “*Daughter, your faith has made you well*” [**Mk 5: 34**].

Jairus was on the verge of losing his only daughter [**Lk 8: 42**]. Therefore, he was not about to look for Jesus at night as Nicodemus, another ruler of the Jews, did [**Jn 3: 1**]. Instead, he came boldly and fell at the feet of Jesus, with the huge crowds as witnesses of his desperation for Jesus’ help. We are told that he begged Jesus “earnestly” to come with him to lay hands on his daughter so that she could be healed and live. When people

² Global Positioning System, <http://www.gps.gov>

from his house came to inform him not to trouble Jesus because his daughter had died, the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid; *only believe*” [Mk 5: 36]. That again confirms that faith is the spiritual GPS on your way out of hopelessness.

The road may be long and rough; the results may look uncertain, but your faith should sustain you until the help from the Lord comes. After all, has faith not been defined as “the *substance of things hoped for*” [Heb. 11: 1]? That is the heart of the matter!

3. Conclusion: Let the hopeless come to the Helper!

In the evening of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples, “I will pray the Father and He will give you *another Helper*, that He may *abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive*, because it neither sees Him, for He dwells with you, and *will be in you*. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” [Jn 14: 16-18]. That is a double-decker promise! Jesus is the first Helper. The Holy Spirit is the other. So, when you no longer conform to the world but are transformed by the renewing of your mind [Rom. 12: 2], then you become the temple of God and of His Spirit [1 Cor. 3: 16]. By that Spirit, you can accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour [1 Cor. 12: 3], which qualifies you to become the child of God [Jn 1: 12].

Armed with such faith, you are ready to deal with hopelessness. As you walk by faith, you are able to glory in tribulations which produce perseverance. Perseverance produces character which in turn produces hope, the “hope that cannot disappoint because the love of God has been poured in [your heart] by the Holy Spirit” that has been given to you [Rom. 5: 2-5]. Your hope may appear dim but it is not dead. Your weeping may only endure for tonight but joy comes tomorrow morning [Ps. 30: 5]. The “Sun of Righteousness” will arise with healing in His wings [Mal. 4: 2] to provide you light at the end of the tunnel of your hopelessness.

Don’t be hopeless because you are not helpless!