

## **“What Do You Want?” – Mark 10:46-52 – October 28, 2018**

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Our lesson from Mark’s Gospel begins with Jesus passing through the town of Jericho, the last stop before he and his disciples reach the city of Jerusalem, some 15 miles away. On his way out of town, Jesus had once again attracted a rather large crowd that was following him out of the city, probably due to him preaching and teaching. They bustled all around him, trying to get close. A man who was blind sat on the side of the road near the gate, as was the custom of beggars. Being near the gate, the center of activity in and out of town, he had a better chance of collecting enough coins to survive. His cloak was stretched out in front him. It was upon this cloak that people would toss coins in response to his begging. This cloak was his livelihood and possibly his only significant possession.

As a beggar, the blind man had no worth, no status in society. He was lowly, impoverished, and since he was blind, it was assumed he was a sinner. But despite his lack of social worth, Mark names him. His name is Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Translated his name means “Son of the precious or worthy one.” (William Loader, *First Thoughts*) Rather ironic, considering his precarious situation. There was nothing precious or worthy in being seen as a blind beggar.

Bartimaeus somehow learns that Jesus is coming by. He has heard of Jesus, and with a boldness born of desperation, he calls out above the din of the crowd, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Now if anyone in this crowd had been paying attention to the teachings of Jesus they might have immediately made way or eagerly brought Bartimaeus to Jesus. After all, the last shall be first. To be a leader one must put the needs of others before one’s own. This would have been a great time to put that new teaching into practice.

But instead, the crowd tries to quiet him. They cut him off, believing him to be of no worth. He has no right, no claim on Jesus. They order him to keep still. But instead, he cries out even louder than before. “Son of David, have mercy on me.” By using this title, Son of David, Bartimaeus knows who Jesus is. Despite his visual blindness, he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, with ancestral ties to the great King David.

As I was reading this particular verse, I wondered if there are times that we keep people from having access to mercy through Jesus. Is this an instance of the “in crowd” mentality? Those of us who are already followers of Jesus, do we ever try to silence the cries of those on the “outside?” Do we hold back mercy because of our own tendency to judge the worth of another? Making assumptions about others, saying, “Those people don’t deserve to be helped. They made their bed, and they need to lie in it.” We judge people by their appearance, by their mental status, by their action, by their beliefs, by their sexuality, by their age, race, intelligence, political

party, and on and on and on. Like this crowd surrounding Jesus, do we try to silence the cries of others, because we think that because they're not in the inner circle, they don't deserve mercy?

Or maybe we see it this way. People on the outside try to get a piece of Jesus, and we greedily try to keep him for ourselves. We cannot conceive of the limitless nature of God's grace and mercy and we forget that there is plenty for everyone. Sometimes the church gets so caught up in its own identity, its own pursuits, that it puts up an impenetrable barrier. Do we barricade ourselves behind these walls, seeking sanctuary against the harsh reality of a world where homemade pipe bombs are sent through the to targeted individuals out of hatred? Do we lock ourselves away, intentionally remaining blind to the daily vitriol in our society that inspires senseless gun violence against others who worship God in another tradition?

Do we grasp onto Jesus, yet fail to speak out against attitudes and actions that clearly go against his embrace of all people, no matter their position in society? We become numb to the anger and hate, or we hide from it, because facing the reality of it means acknowledging our own culpability.

We have gotten so used to the brokenness of our world, we struggle to imagine anything different. Almost becoming fatalistic in our outlook and resigned to what has become the new status quo.

In Mark's Gospel, the crowd was in essence telling Bartimaeus, Jesus is too important and too busy to be distracted by your need. Just accept your status and situation, but don't bother us with your problems. Keep quiet and let Jesus focus on the important stuff.

But Jesus hears Bartimaeus call and without hesitation tells some in the crowd, "Call him over here." Those who would have silenced Bartimaeus are suddenly tripping over themselves to bring him to Jesus. They hurry over to him and exclaim, "This is your lucky day! He wants to see you!"

Without hesitation Bartimaeus jumps up and tosses aside his cloak. Now that seems an insignificant detail, but the cloak was his security. It provided not only warmth for his body, but was the garment upon which he collected the coins of his begging. It was an important part of his identity as a blind beggar, but when Jesus called to him, he tossed it away without a second thought.

Bartimaeus, blind though he was, rushed forward to greet Jesus. And Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" There are two points I'd like to make about this statement. The first is, that Jesus didn't make any assumptions about this man. Perhaps it would have been obvious,

here's a blind beggar, heal him, or at least toss him a few coins, maybe give him a meal, say a little prayer for him and send him on his way. But Jesus allowed the man to speak for himself. He let him have his dignity. He let him make the decision. What do you want me to do for you? What is your true need?

And the second point is this. If Jesus healed Bartimaeus, no longer could he beg for his livelihood. He had a pretty comfortable situation, not an ideal way to live, but he held onto a prime location at the city gate. He was recognized by the locals, and could rely on the coins tossed his way. But Bartimaeus did not just want to get by. He sought wholeness. He didn't want a quick fix, he wanted to be made whole. He wanted to be healed of his blindness. He wanted to be able to see the world so that he could be a part of it, rather than live in the shadows on the outskirts. Unlike the disciples, he understood what was truly important, and that was what he sought from Jesus.

Just prior to this passage in Mark, James and John came to Jesus with a request, he asked them this same question, what do you want me to do for you? And remember how they responded? Did they seek wholeness? Did they desire to be healed of their spiritual blindness? No. Instead they sought glory and honor. They wanted to be seated next to Jesus in the coming kingdom. They got it wrong. Blind Bartimaeus got it right. He asked Jesus, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus responded, "Go. Your faith has made you well." And Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

And this section of Mark closes with an example of what true discipleship looks like. The story of Bartimaeus is less of a healing story and more of a call story. Bartimaeus sought Jesus. He was ready, and so Jesus called to him. He quickly jumped up, tossed aside his cloak, his security, and he came to Jesus. He addressed Jesus as both Son of David and as teacher. He knew who he was and he wanted to be taught by him. Unlike James and John, he sought a new way of life. He wanted his eyes opened – both physically and spiritually.

To us then, the question from Jesus is the same – What do you want? What do you want me to do for you? This might require a little bit of soul searching on our part. Are we caught in some spiritual blindness? Do we even know what we want or truly believe that Jesus is willing to give it to us? Is something holding us back from seeing the world through the eyes of faith? Are we willing to look inside ourselves to see what we really need, go to Jesus and ask him, and then be willing to hear what he has to say?

Jesus stands ready to answer our deepest need. But his way is not a path to glory. He doesn't promise an easy road, but when we walk with him, we will never walk alone. By following him, by trusting that he knows us and understands us better than any other, we can be assured that

he wants each of us to be free of our spiritual blindness and to experience a wholeness that only he can give.