

Blind as a Bart 9-4-05

Matthew 20:29-34 (NIV)

²⁹As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. ³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" ³¹The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" ³²Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³³"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." ³⁴Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

The countdown had begun. This story is most likely six or seven days before the crucifixion. Jesus had just warned His disciples of what they were facing. They were leaving Jericho and heading up to Jerusalem. *²⁹As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.* The crowds that had gathered around Him during His ministry in Perea were following Him to the Passover. (Matthew 19:1-2) It would be like West Fork on a holiday weekend, one steady stream of people on their way to celebrate the Passover. Josephus estimates that 2 to 3 million people gathered for Passover. Many of them would be taking this route.

This was the place a beggar could earn a good day's income. After all, the number of people passing by increased the opportunity to receive responses to his pleas. This is why the beggars sat in the city gates. The people had their shortcomings in mind, for they were about to choose a Passover lamb. (Exodus 12:5-6) That might make them even more likely to be generous. Little did they know that the Passover Lamb for the sins of the world was walking in their midst. (Hebrews 7:27)

Jericho was of special significance to Jesus. It is on the north end of the Dead Sea. One of His ancestors, Rahab, was converted here when Joshua and the Children of Israel took the city. (Matthew 1:5) It was sometimes referred to as the City of Palms. (Deuteronomy 34:3) Elijah healed the spring of this city. It still flows with fresh water to this day. (2 Kings 2:21-22) It is presently occupied by Palestinians. It is still an oasis in the desert with many palms.

Blindness was all too common in that day. Babies' eyes were often infected at birth, and having no knowledge of antiseptics, it would soon cause blindness. In the Jericho area was a special balsam plant that was used to treat blindness. These two blind men would have just been a few of the many blind people there. Mark tells us the name of one of them, Son of Timaeus, or Bartimaeus. (Mark 10:46) He probably did so because Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus and would be recognized by many of the readers of Mark's gospel as one of their brothers in Christ.

³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Commented [notes1]: ¹ When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. Matthew 19:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Exodus 12:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Hebrews 7:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, Matthew 1:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ³ the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Deuteronomy 34:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ²¹ And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. ²² So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake. 2 Kings 2:21-22 (KJV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. Mark 10:46 (NIV)

Not having sight, these two men relied on their ears. They heard a unique opportunity was approaching. The man they had probably heard about from travelers from the Perea region, was coming. They probably heard stories of His healing people. They may have even heard suggestions that He could be the Messiah. Their desperate need was about to be met because the only One who could meet it was about to pass near them.

I hope everyone this morning recognizes what these men came to understand. When they cried out "Lord, Son of David" and asked for mercy, they had come to accept something everyone in desperation needs to know. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the only One that can have mercy on you. (Hebrews 4:16)

By calling out to the Son of David, they were declaring that they believed Jesus to be the promised Messiah. They knew He was from Nazareth. Nazareth comes from the Hebrew word Netzor, meaning branch, and specifically, the branch of David. It is quite possible that the inhabitants of tiny Nazareth were all Davidic descendents. That is why, knowing He was from Nazareth, they would call Him, Son of David. We can only speculate how they came to the belief that He was the Messiah, but it may have been a prophetic word from Isaiah that foretold of the Messiah giving sight to the blind. (Isaiah 35:5) I imagine they heard of blind being healed and since that was their focus, they made the link with the prophecy and believed.

By asking for mercy, they recognized they did not deserve healing. Mercy is receiving some good thing that by your actions you have shown you do not deserve. The Jews of that day believed that afflictions were the result of some sin that they or their parents had committed and that it was therefore their lot in life to suffer for those sins. (John 9:2)

There are those of you here this morning that have desperate needs. It may be emptiness, loneliness, illness, conflicts, or any kind of difficulty in life. First you must realize Jesus is passing your way. There are times in life when we know the power of the Holy Spirit is present. Just the fact that you are here this morning, when our sovereign God ordained for this passage to come up, means that Jesus is passing your way. His Spirit has been working in your heart. (Acts 17:27-28)

Then, like those blind beggars, you must believe that Jesus can meet your need. I'm not talking about your wants, but your needs. The Apostle Paul said that God would meet all our need in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19) Your need may be for grace to endure your loneliness, or it may be for friend to come alongside and encourage you. It may be to be cured of your illness or grace to endure it as you are drawn closer to Him through it. Either way, it is Jesus that meets the need. No one comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws them. (John 6:44) We must realize how desperate we are.

The balsam plant didn't meet their need. The world has all kinds of solutions to your need, but Jesus is the only real answer. Jesus told the woman at the well that

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Isaiah 35:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" John 9:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Acts 17:27-28 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:44 (NIV)

whoever comes to the well will thirst again, but the water He gives becomes a well that springs up into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14) We must recognize that the world's solutions leave us in need of more.

Commented [notes14]: ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
John 4:13-14 (NIV)

But there is one more thing we must recognize. For Jesus to meet our need, He must have mercy upon us. We don't deserve His mercy. (Luke 17:10) The very definition of the word implies it is undeserved. Somehow in this demanding world of our day, we feel that we should not only have our needs met, but all our wants too. Commercials tell us "Treat yourself!" "You deserve it!" and "What are you waiting for." "No payments until April of next year." But these men knew they deserved nothing. Now they may have thought so for the wrong reasons. They thought it was their parents' sins, when in fact we don't deserve mercy because of our own rebellion against God. (Romans 3:23) We must have a change of attitude and realize God owes us nothing. We are the ones indebted. And then we can see that to ask Him for anything is to request that He have mercy on us, put our sins behind His back, and give us what we do not deserve. That is the humble reality of the situation. (Romans 9:16)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."
Luke 17:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.
Romans 9:16 (NIV)

These two blind men were asking for mercy, not money or clothes or shelter. They realized that was their greatest need. That is a cry that touches the heart of God. Their prayer is like that of the publican that prayed, beating his breast and saying, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13-14) God responds to brokenhearted pleas for mercy. (Psalm 85:7; Joel 2:13)

Commented [notes18]: ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'
¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
Luke 18:13-14 (NIV)

³¹ *The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"* Imagine that! Followers of Jesus tried to shut up these desperately needy men. Well, remember their mindset. They thought these men were justly suffering for their sins or that of their parents. Since they were blemished by blindness, they were considered unfit to enter the Temple to worship. They were the lowest wrung of society, "So just be quiet and stay in your place. We are trying to hear the Master."

Commented [notes19]: ⁷ Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.
Psalms 85:7 (NIV)

Even with the Spirit of God indwelling us today, we can have the same selfish attitude. We look at some of the people coming out of New Orleans and feel sorry for their pitiful condition. Our mistake is that we think they are more spiritually needy than we are. If we would measure our spiritual condition by the standard Jesus set with His life, we would see we are all equidistant from where we should be. We forget the joy in heaven when one sinner comes to Jesus, and we forget that God loves to take the last and make them first as a trophy of His grace. (Luke 15:7)

Commented [notes20]: ¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.
Joel 2:13 (NIV)

But they shouted even louder! Good for them! They wouldn't be silenced by the opinions of men. They wouldn't let others' selfishness keep them from calling out to Jesus. They refused to give up. If the crowd was telling them to be quiet, He must be near. The Scriptures say to call on Him while He is near. (Isaiah 55:6) This was their chance! Instead of being discouraged, they were encouraged to persist with

Commented [notes21]: ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.
Luke 15:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.
Isaiah 55:6 (NIV)

greater energy. If you recognize that He has come near to you this morning, it is your time to cry out from your heart to Him. Don't let anyone hold you back.

It is very possible that Jesus heard them the first time they cried out. He often waits to answer, and that encourages us to express how desperately we need His help. It stretches our faith. It teaches us endurance. It helps us to turn our whole attention toward what really matters. It makes a greater witness when He answers. Don't be surprised if God holds off His answer to your prayer until the last minute. (Habakkuk 2:3) I've seen it time and time again. I don't know if I ever get used to it, but I do recognize that His timing is the perfect timing. Don't be discouraged when the answer doesn't come. Shout louder! Persevere! (Deuteronomy 4:29) Just taught us to pray and never give up. (Luke 18:1)

³²Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. How I love to hear that expression! Will you hear it this morning from Jesus? Of course, Jesus already knew what they wanted and what you want. He was encouraging them to express their need. I've heard the same thing from the Spirit of God. I imagine many of you have at one time or another in your life. It ended up being my call into the ministry. I came with a desperate need, to know God's will for my life. I came requesting mercy. I knew that I did not deserve anything from God and that if I were God, I'd never grant the request of person like myself. Yet, God had mercy and made me a trophy of grace. If we will be still, if we will humble ourselves, and recognize our desperate need, we will hear Him say to us, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Philippians 4:6)

In this same chapter, Jesus asked the mother of James and John, "What is it that you want?" (Matthew 20:21) He didn't grant her request. It was a prideful request. It was a request that ignored God's will in preference to personal position and satisfaction. Just because we hear Him ask us what we desire, doesn't mean He will grant our request. James tells us we ask and receive not because we ask with the wrong motives. (James 4:3) Whether or not He grants our request depends on the condition of our heart in asking.

³³"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." To these two men, the mercy they requested was a healing of their sight. If He had done it for others, certainly He could do it for them. Often our most desperate requests are for healing, our own or that of a loved one. God doesn't promise us freedom from physical affliction because it can be an instrument to draw us to God. (Psalm 119:67) Of all the blind people in Jericho, Jesus chose to heal these two men. We have seen some of the reasons why, but there is one more in the next verse.

³⁴Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us of the compassion of God. (Psalm 145:8-9) He hears our cries. His heart hurts when we suffer. Our God is not a calloused God that ignores the pain of His creation. He is a compassionate God that hurts with us. (Hebrews 4:15)

Commented [notes23]: ³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. Habakkuk 2:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: ²⁹ But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. Deuteronomy 4:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Luke 18:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: ²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." Matthew 20:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. Psalms 119:67 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: ⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. ⁹ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. Psalms 145:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

Jesus healed in a number of ways. Sometimes He merely spoke the word. Other times He asked the person to do something. Sometimes He even did something, but the most common form of healing was by His touch. His touch makes everything He contacts whole. Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark that this man's faith had saved him. (Mark 10:52) The Greek may even imply salvation. He believed Jesus was the Messiah, the answer to his need.

Commented [notes32]: ⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Mark 10:52 (NIV)

The healing of Bartimaeus, resulted in discipleship. His affliction had drawn him to seek out Jesus for help. His healing enabled him to follow Jesus. Healing produced fruit for the kingdom of God. That was surely one reason that Jesus responded to their cries.

It is amazing to me how much blindness there is in the world today. So many are as blind spiritually as Bart was physically. People will make a stand for one thing or another and then say something completely contrary to the logic they just professed. They will site a source as the reason they believe something and a minute later declare the source is not always valid. They will declare there are no absolutes, which in itself is an absolute. They will denounce selfishness and demand their way. They will cry intolerance, but are intolerant of you because they perceive you to be intolerant. Their minds are made up and they don't want to be confused with facts. They deplore our simple Christian minds that just believe by faith and then they state opinions that have no evidentiary support. The bottom line is, it's okay for them to hold popular beliefs without evidence but not for you to believe something because it's in the Bible. But that is to be expected. Until they come to Jesus for sight, those things make perfect sense to them. (2 Peter 2:14)

Commented [notes33]: ¹⁴ With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! 2 Peter 2:14 (NIV)

At the same time, we can be just as blind. We can profess to be a follower of Christ and yet never recognize how much we need Him on a moment-by-moment basis. We can be so blind that we don't recognize how desperately we need mercy. It is difficult to ask for your sight when you think you can see.

Walking in the light, walking with spiritual sight, is to take everything to God. It is to walk with openness to the Spirit's conviction and encouragement. It is to see when we fail and are needy and to run to the One who can have mercy on us. It is also to recognize when we are walking in Him and enjoy freedom from condemnation. It is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

Commented [notes34]: ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14:17 (NIV)

Are you on the road this morning where Jesus is passing? What is your need? Will you hear Him say to you this morning, "What do you want me to do for you?" If your answer is a humble request for His mercy, and it is His perfect time, don't let others discourage you. Keep asking. Receive the goodness of God to meet your need in the way He knows is best.