

The time of Passover was approaching. Psalm 84 describes this time of year in Israel. It tell us that those who have set their hearts on the highways to Zion are blessed (Psalm 84:5ⁱ). That means that those who are planning of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem according to the demands of the Law to attend the sacred feasts are blessed people. The description tells us they go from strength to strength until each appears before God in Zion (Psalm 84:7ⁱⁱ). This tells us that the crowds traveling on the road grow larger and larger as they approach Jerusalem.

As they journey they would sing the songs of ascents which are Psalms 120 to 134. People from Galilee would travel south along the Jordan River to Jericho and then turn to the west at the northern tip of the Dead Sea and go up the Kidron Valley. It is a twenty-mile ascent of almost 4000 feet in elevation. Those from the south could come up the coast and cut across passing through the Emmaus road to Jerusalem. A small portion of this road is still visible.

At this point in Mark the countdown had begun. Our passage is most likely six or seven days before the crucifixion. Jesus had just warned His disciples of what they were facing.. ⁴⁶ *And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.* Mark 10:46 They were near Jericho and heading up to Jerusalem. The crowds that had gathered around Him during His ministry in Perea were following Him to the Passover (Matthew 19:1,2ⁱⁱⁱ). It would be like the lines at Disneyland 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 that Jesus was on.

Our passage takes place where a beggar could earn a good day's income. 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^{iv}). That would 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 (1 Corinthians 5:7^v).

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

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. 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.

The disciples could not understand what Jesus was saying when He predicted His suffering and death. This is contrasted with the opening of the eyes of this blind beggar. Too often we forget that the physical world is an analogy to the spiritual realm.

Mark tells us Jesus was leaving Jericho while Luke tells us Jesus was drawing near Jericho. It sounds like a contradiction, but the Greek term used for “draw near” is also translated “at hand”. I believe we can reconcile the seeming contradiction by using the other translation for the word, so it was near the city as Jesus was leaving. Pilgrims from the north also came to Jerusalem a week or more before Passover to prepare themselves for the feast. The town would have been filled with Levite priests waiting to make their journey for their day of service in the temple. Many beggars gathered at the city gates. This may have been just outside the gate on the southern side of the city.

⁴⁷ *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* Mark 10:47 Matthew tells us there were two blind beggars (Matthew 20:30^{ix}). Hebrew literature often truncates the story to focus on the one man who did the speaking. Luke does this in other stories such as the man possessed by the Legion (Luke 8:27^x; Matthew 8:28^{xi}).

Bartimeus expected it would be a good day for him with such large crowds on their way to the Passover. He could hear the chatter of women on their way to the well, the sound of squeaking wheels carrying loads of merchandise. Some of it he could identify by the smells as they passed. He found a familiar spot by touching the ground, laid out his mat, wrapped his cloak tightly around him to keep out the cool spring air, and began pleading for alms.

Something was different today. Young boys were running ahead of great crowd letting out shrill sounds announcing someone special was coming. The crowd swelled and began to invade his space. He grabbed a cloak that brushed against him to get the person’s attention and ask what was happening. The answer filled him with hope. The man answered that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

⁴⁸ *And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”* Mark 10:48 The blind man must have been familiar with the fact that Nazareth was a town of Davidic descendants. That means that Jesus (the name in Aramaic is Yeshua – meaning the salvation of God) is from the line of David. Rabbis and the prophets frequently referred to the coming Messiah as the Son of David. One of the eighteen benedictions in the Palestinian Talmud asks for mercy "on the house of David, of the Messiah of Thy righteousness." This is Jesus last healing miracle and the only time in Mark that someone calls Jesus by this Messianic title, Son of David. The blind man may have heard of Jesus' miracles. Though his eyes did not see, his heart saw an opportunity. Remembering that Isaiah predicted the Messiah would give sight to the blind, his heart began to race (Isaiah 42:6,7^{xii}). This was his chance! He began to shout at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Since Son of David had connotations of a militaristic deliverer^{xiii}, and Romans would have been near the gates of the city, the crowd tried to shush him up. Or perhaps his screams were ear splitting and they could not hear what Jesus was saying. One after another people told him to pipe down. But he knew if Jesus passed on by his chance to be healed would be gone.

What a cry he made! It was a cry of faith. With all the Scripture tied to that title, his cry was the same as asking God to be merciful (Exodus 34:6^{xiv}). A plea for mercy draws God's heart. Mercy is different from grace. Mercy means I do not deserve it, but I am asking in hope that God is a merciful God who wants to forgive and bless me if my heart is repentant and humbled. Like a little child in the previous passage in Luke, the beggar was placing all his hope and faith in Jesus to be merciful. I have told you before of my wife's cry for mercy when she was dying on a gurney and the miracle that followed.

Jesus had set His face determinedly toward Jerusalem and the sacrifice He would accomplish (Isaiah 50:7^{xv}). Peter's efforts could not stop Him (Matthew 16:22,23^{xvi}). The disciples' trepidation did not stop Him (John 11:8^{xvii}). But the cry for mercy caused Him to pause, for having mercy upon fallen humanity is the reason He came.

Is God merciful to those who recognize their need for mercy? The Divine Presence was above the *mercy* seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and the Temple. God's most mentioned attribute in Scripture is the word *hesed* that is translated as steadfast love or mercy. Moses told Israel, "*The LORD your God is a merciful God.*" Deuteronomy 4:31 David facing either the wrath of man or that of God, chose God because "*His mercy is very great!*" 1 Chronicles 21:13 I could go on and on for there are hundreds of references to God's mercy. But in many of those references, there is the condition of us being merciful to others and turning to the Lord (Matthew 5:7^{xviii}). His mercy does have qualifications.

⁴⁹ *And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you."* ⁵⁰ *And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.* ⁵¹ *And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."* Mark 10:49-51 Jesus hears our cries for mercy. The world may try to silence it, but He hears and calls out those who are pleading for mercy and causes them to be brought to Him. Notice that when the crowd said Jesus was calling for him, he sprang up and left his cloak behind. It was his most valuable possession and being blind meant he had a good chance of losing it. But he was full of faith and expectation. At that moment nothing else mattered.

Then Jesus asked the question that I believe the Spirit of God often asks us. Jesus could see that He was blind and yet He asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" We saw that question in verse 36^{xix} of this same chapter when James and John ask for positions in the future kingdom. He wants us to ask in faith exactly what it is that we desire. If it is a request to fulfil some desire that is not of God, He will not grant it, for He wants what is best for us (James 4:3^{xx}). He had to tell James and John that God had other plans than what they were requesting. If God does not answer our pleas, there is a good reason. We may not understand in this life, but we can trust that His plans are the best way for us. The blind man, whose spiritual vision was clearer than most in the crowd, voiced his urgent plea preceded by "*Raboni*", which is to say "Master or Lord". Other than Peter, Bartimeus is the only person to address Jesus with a messianic title before they arrived at Jerusalem. *Raboni* is only used here and with Mary Magdalene upon seeing the risen Lord (John 20:16^{xxi}). Bartimeus continued, "*Let me recover my sight.*"

What do you want Him to do for you? My answer is, “I want to see - to see things as God sees. I want to see through the illusions of this world and see the truth. I want to see the depths and riches of God's Word. I want to see more clearly how great His love is for me, for love begets love” (1 John 4:19^{xxii}), and to live in the light of His love. I would encourage you to think about your answer. What do you really want Him do for you? What Bartimeus wanted was physical sight. We all want our bodies to be healthy and function without pain. That is a normal human desire. But what do you want spiritually? This man wanted mercy and that resulted in him following Jesus. Would you take time today to write out your answer to Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

This blind man can represent every lost soul. John Newton wrote those famous lines, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.” In Helen Keller’s article *Three Days to See* she implies that it is better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing. When those who are spiritually blind to the truth of God and His love and justice realize their condition and cry out to God to see, their cry rises above all the praise in the world and reaches the heart of Jesus. He opens the spiritual eyes of the spiritually blind and gives them sight.

⁵² *And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.* Mark 10:52 Jesus gave the command but credited the healing to the man's faith. The man's faith was placed in Jesus. Instantly he could see. And the first thing he saw was the face of Jesus. His entire optical system worked perfectly. He would have had 20-20 vision. But even more importantly, he saw that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah and responded to that spiritual sight by following Jesus and glorifying God. It was a fulfilment of the promise in Isaiah 61:1^{xxiii} (Luke 4:18^{xxiv}) that the Messiah would give sight to the blind. Was he more elated that he could see or that he had found the Messiah?

Witherington comments that *it is always surprising to see who best responds to Jesus’ call on their lives, and bar-Timaeus turns out to be the best paradigm of a disciple that Mark offers us in this entire part of the Gospel. So it will behoove us to consider the qualifications that make him a paradigm: (1) He knows he needs Jesus’ help. (2) He persistently calls on the Lord for that help and will not be put off by those who try to silence him. (3) He knows that Jesus owes him nothing, for he asks for mercy, not for something he thinks is owed to him (contrast Jacob and John and the seats in the dominion). (4) He recognizes the truth about Jesus—he is indeed the messianic one, the Son of David. (5) He literally leaps at the chance to come close to Jesus and receive help. He does not wait for Jesus to come to him. (6) He asks plainly and directly for his wants and needs—to be able to see again, which of course means he had been sighted at some previous point in time. In short, he knows quite well what he is missing, and wants it back. (7) It is his faith in the right object of faith, Jesus, that heals and rescues him from the darkness. (8) Instead of being satisfied to be blessed and going back to ordinary life, he chooses to go forward down the hard road of discipleship, following Jesus. Bar-Timaeus has become bar-Theos (a son of God). As such, he provides us with the most winsome example possible of the beginning stages of discipleship.*^{xxv}

Luke tells us, ^{43b} *And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.* Luke 18:43b I can testify to this reaction of the crowd. I was only nineteen-years-old living

Texas in a small commune of about ten people. A blind man off the street joined us and lived with us for a few months. He trusted Christ as his Savior. He had a lot of fear of being attacked because of his blindness, so he carried a few non-lethal weapons. He slowly overcame his fear as we loved and cared for him. Then he began to worship with us in the evenings.

One night we were all really caught up in singing praises to God when he suddenly shouted that he could see. Looking at his face, none of us doubted that a miracle had taken place. No one had prayed for his healing. We were just worshipping God. When we heard and saw what had happened the worship went to a whole different level. When I read that "all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God," I can still picture the moment that man shouted, "I can see!" We were in awe of God, of His love and His power. We were on the mountain top with Jesus beholding His glory. You never forget those glimpses into the eternal. Jesus still opens the eyes of the blind, physically and spiritually. But the spiritual opening of eyes is the greater of the two wonders.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the people were praising Him for the resurrection of Lazarus, but their eyes could not see (John 12:17,18^{xxvi}). They were looking for a Savior from Rome, from physical conditions, but He had come to save our eternal souls. That is why He wept (Luke 19:41,42^{xxvii}). It was not for what He would suffer. It was because they were blind to the result of their choice (Matthew 23:37-39^{xxviii}). Oh, that the world today might see that its greatest need is not to be delivered from a virus, but from the virus of sin.

Do we see? Is all you can see this world and how it can meet your physical needs? There is a God who is merciful and gracious. Ask for that mercy. Ask for the Savior of the world to open your eyes so that you can see how great His love is for you. I know He will answer that prayer for we once were lost but now are found. We were blind but now we see.

Dear one here this morning. You are here by God's design. Do you recognize that Jesus is the Savior, that He is the One who can heal? If your heart is filled with believing faith will you call out to Him? Will you hear Him say, "What do you want me to do for you?" He can open your eyes of faith to see how great His love is for you.

Questions:

- 1 Describe this time of Passover on the roads to Jerusalem.
- 2 Why is Jesus going to Jerusalem?
- 3 What stirred anticipation in the blind man?
- 4 What was significant about his cry?
- 5 What did Jesus ask him and why?
- 6 What is the double meaning in Bartimaeus answer?
- 7 What is God's chief attribute demonstrated by Jesus?
- 8 What did Helen Keller imply about blindness?
- 9 What was the crowds' response?
- 10 Why did Jesus weep on Palm Sunday?

ⁱ **Psalms 84:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

ⁱⁱ **Psalms 84:7 (ESV)**

⁷ They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 19:1-2 (NASB)**

¹ When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ² and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

^{iv} **Exodus 12:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats,

⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

^v **1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

^{vi} **Matthew 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,

^{vii} **Deuteronomy 34:2-3 (ESV)**

² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.

^{viii} **2 Kings 2:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, "Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." ²² So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

^{ix} **Matthew 20:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

^x **Luke 8:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.

^{xi} **Matthew 8:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

^{xii} **Isaiah 42:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

^{xiii} "Son of David" in *Pss. Sol.* 17-18 refers to a militaristic figure like the original King David.

^{xiv} **Exodus 34:6 (ESV)**

⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

^{xv} **Isaiah 50:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

^{xvi} **Matthew 16:22-23 (ESV)**

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

^{xvii} **John 11:8 (ESV)**

⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"

^{xviii} **Matthew 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

^{xix} **Mark 10:36-37 (ESV)**

³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

^{xx} **James 4:3 (ESV)**

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

^{xxi} **John 20:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

^{xxii} **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

^{xxiii} **Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)**

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

^{xxiv} **Luke 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

^{xxv} Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 298–299.

^{xxvi} **John 12:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

^{xxvii} **Luke 19:41-42 (ESV)**

⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

^{xxviii} **Matthew 23:37-39 (ESV)**

³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”