

Have mercy on me

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[0 : 00] God's Word in Luke chapter 18, picking up at verse 31. Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, We're going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him. They will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. He called out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him.

[1 : 06] When he came near, Jesus asked him, What do you want me to do for you? Lord, I want to see, he replied. Jesus said to him, Receive your sight.

Your faith has healed you. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Well, as we consider these verses from Luke chapter 18 together, I wonder what you would say is your biggest need, the most important thing that you require.

Those of us still waiting for our coronavirus vaccinations, we might well rank that high on our list of needs at the moment. Of course, we all of us need food and water.

We need shelter. Maybe your car's on its last legs and you can't get to work without it. You need a new car. Sometimes maybe we say we just need one good night's sleep.

[2 : 02] In our passage today, we meet this man with a very pressing need. He is desperate to be able to see. Then, of course, even more than today, to be blind is a really severe handicap.

He cannot support himself at all, certainly not support a family by any kind of gainful employment. He's reduced to begging at the roadside. His need is readily apparent to him, isn't it?

And Jesus comes and he meets that need. The man cries out for mercy, and mercy he receives. He receives his sight. And as we'll see as we work our way through, God's mercy meets that need and meets also his deeper need and that need that we all share, because we all need God's mercy.

So on that mercy we focus this morning, considering first a persevering faith in a merciful God, then the vital need for mercy, and then finally thinking about how we respond to mercy.

Persevering faith in a merciful God. A vital need for mercy and a response to mercy. So this persevering faith, first of all. Notice.

[3 : 17] Notice this blind man sees more clearly than most of the people that we've met over the previous verses. Even before Jesus restored his sight, this man saw the most important things.

He saw what he really needed. Just think back over these past weeks, these past verses. Who have we met? We met the Pharisee standing, praying, thanking God for his impeccable resume. And the rich young ruler who believed he'd kept all the commandments since his youth. And then most recently, the disciples who couldn't even see what was going on when Jesus was standing in front of them, telling them what would take place.

And now we meet this blind man. This blind man who sees. In contrast to these people who are blind to the true character of God, blind to the things stopping them coming to Jesus, blind to the nature of God's mission, in contrast to these people who are blind, we meet the blind man who sees.

He doesn't know who's walking down the road, but as soon as he hears, he knows what to do. He sees who Jesus is. You can tell that he knows who Jesus really is because people told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

[4 : 34] Jesus from the town of Nazareth, just a kind of plain, ordinary geographic description. Jesus, the carpenter's son. But blind Bartimaeus knows who that really is.

And he calls out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. See, he realizes that this Jesus from Nazareth is not just Jesus from Nazareth, but rather is the long-awaited messianic king.

He sees this is the anointed one, the king promised in 2 Samuel chapter 7, the king who was going to come and sit on David's throne, the king whose kingdom would endure forevermore, walking down the road in front of him.

He sees who this is. However it is that he's heard about what Jesus has been doing, whatever it is that he's been told, clearly he's put two and two together in his mind.

He knows the prophecies of Isaiah. Chapter 35 promises, in the coming days of the splendor of God, in the final age, the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

[5 : 40] These miracles promised to the prophet Isaiah, these miracles are happening now. A sign that the final age that Isaiah looked forward to, that final age has been inaugurated, has broken in to the present day in the person of Jesus.

Maybe even he's heard the reports that Jesus gave to the disciples of John the Baptist. Luke chapter 7, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

So we have the blind man who sees, and the others who do not. And there's a challenge to us, isn't there? A challenge as to whether we will be like this blind man who sees, who recognizes the reality.

Whether we will actually stop and see who Jesus is, or be like all those people who encountered Jesus, and yet lacked the wit to see what was before them.

Can you see the truth about Jesus? This blind man sees his need for mercy. But to my mind, there's more going on here too.

[6 : 53] Because do you see how the people respond in verse 39 when he cries out for mercy? The blind man sat at the side of the road, calls to Jesus, calls for help, and those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet.

Now why they do this, I guess we can't be quite sure, because we're not told their motivations. Maybe they're worried about Jesus' journey being delayed. Maybe they think Jesus is too important to be bothered with somebody so insignificant.

Maybe they want to keep Jesus to themselves. Maybe they don't want Jesus to give away the money they hope is going to buy their dinner to this beggar at the side of the road. Whatever the reasons, they haven't learnt, have they?

A few verses earlier, they were trying to stop parents bringing their children to Jesus. And here they are again, trying to stop this blind man attracting Jesus' attention.

For whatever reason, they don't think that this blind beggar is important enough for Jesus. They don't think he deserves mercy, do they? They don't think he should receive favour.

[8 : 01] But then that's the very nature of mercy, isn't it? It is favour shown precisely to the undeserving. It isn't the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Now poor old Bartimaeus, he is doubtless used to being treated as irrelevant, as an inconvenience. So when people rebuked him for crying out, that was probably a familiar experience for him.

It would have been easy for him to shut up, to hold his tongue, to sit quiet and wait for whatever crumbs might be offered to him. It would have been natural for him to do as he was told, but he doesn't, does he?

No, no, the second half of verse 39, he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. He is not going to be deterred. He refuses to be pushed into the background.

He persisted. He persevered. Why? Well, because he knew that Jesus was his only hope, didn't he? He knew that it was God's mercy that he truly needed.

[9 : 10] Yes, a few coins here and there, that might help to get him by, but what he really needed was to see again. What he really needed was to be healed. And this is how he demonstrates the faith that in verse 42 Jesus says has healed him.

Because he will not be silenced. In his desperation, he presses on to draw near to the only one who can meet his need.

He shows his faith. Now, it seems to me that in this interaction between Bartimaeus and the crowd, it seems to me there's a caution for us here.

That we would do well to ask ourselves to consider who it is that we're inclined to keep in the background. That we're tempted to push away from coming to God.

To whom we say, sit down, shut up. Jesus isn't for you. I wonder if sometimes we say it, perhaps implicitly, we say it to young children, that faith is for grown-ups.

[10:13] We say it in our actions, if not with our words sometimes. Or sometimes we say it to people who we think are too far gone for Jesus to be interested in them.

Or we say it to people whose company we don't really enjoy. People who actually we'd rather not see joining us at church or in heaven, for that matter. Or to people who we think have had their chance and have blown it.

We say, just keep back. Jesus isn't for you. We'll keep him to ourselves. And maybe we say it with our actions to people with disabilities today as well.

That's certainly worth us bearing in mind, isn't it, as we plan different events and especially if and when we come to organizing our own building. It's important to us, isn't it, to be accessible to everybody, to welcome all who might come.

So if you're aware of ways that we could be better at that right now, well, please speak to me, speak to any member of the deacon's corps. We don't want to be keeping people away. We don't want to be saying to people with our actions, with how we set things up, Jesus isn't for you.

[11:23] Keep in the background. No, we want to say come. We want to invite people to come and to hear Jesus. There's also the other side of the same coin, isn't there?

See, these verses, yes, they're implicitly rebuking those who exclude others from Jesus' presence. But also the other side of that is that these verses commend those who persist in spite of such obstacles.

That's what Bartimaeus does, isn't it? He persists despite the attempts to keep him back. And that behavior results in success, as it were. It is commendable for us.

Maybe that's been your experience. Maybe you have felt like there are countless challenges getting in the way of coming to Jesus. Obstacles, whether of your own making or put there by others or kind of just natural occurrences.

Whatever form those obstacles take, whatever their source, it seems to me that this passage commends persistence in the face of these obstacles. So folks, if you feel like other people are trying to keep you away, well, this is important enough to keep shouting.

[12:37] If you feel like circumstances are conspiring against you, well, this matters enough to push through no matter what. Why?

Well, simply because only Jesus can meet your need. It's that straightforward. We have to keep pushing through because this is the only hope that there is. To whom else shall we go?

Asked Jesus' disciples on another occasion. You have the words of eternal life. So if Jesus is the only one who can meet your needs, then it is worth any price, isn't it? It's worth persevering in the face of any obstacle.

It's worth casting aside anything that holds you back, anything that hinders you, anything that prevents you from coming. It is worth overcoming any challenge. This blind man, he shouted all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

He needs that mercy. We need that mercy. It is vital, isn't it? We have this vital need for mercy. He cries out. And when Jesus asks what he wants, verse 41, his reply, he wants to see.

[13:48] Of course he does. This is his presenting problem. This is the great need in his life. And Jesus meets that need. But it goes deeper than that too, doesn't it?

I think this man has a deeper need. And a need that we all share, that we all need mercy from God. Because I think that this man receives more than physical healing.

Amazing though the physical healing is, I think he also receives what we might call spiritual healing. He receives salvation. This seems to be quite often the case with Jesus' miracles, doesn't it?

That these two, the physical and the spiritual, are kind of wrapped up together. And maybe some who he healed are not to be numbered among God's elect, but most of the time it seems like there is salvation power at work.

Remember just a few weeks ago we saw Jesus healing that group of ten lepers and the one came back. And that was kind of the focus of the account that only one showed thankfulness, only one returned.

[14:49] But maybe you remember then too I said the leper's healing seemed to be more than physical healing. And it's that same idea again. It's that same word again.

This is the Greek word *sozo*. And just like the English word *save*, which is a fair translation of *sozo* in most cases, it has this base meaning, if you like, of physical salvation, of safe from harm, safe from death, safe from disease, rescue from a desperate situation, saved, safety.

Paul uses it, being saved from a shipwreck in Acts chapter 27, for instance. Saved from physical harm. But then on this physical base is constructed a kind of extended meaning, if you like.

That I guess is how in churches we tend to use the word *salvation*. Salvation from eternal death. Saved from judgment. One word that sometimes refers exclusively to physical safety sometimes refers to eternal safety.

And as my dictionary notes, sometimes means both at the same time. And therefore in the King James Bible, this verse reads, *thy faith hath saved thee*.

[16:01] It would seem, I think, somewhat bizarre to say that this man has enough faith for physical healing, but not enough faith for salvation in all its fullness.

I mean, he has this sense that he can't help himself. He has this sense that he's dependent on God's mercy, and that goes beyond the physical. He addresses Jesus as son of David.

So the first time Luke records Jesus being referred to in this way, he recognizes in Jesus not just a teacher, not just a miracle worker even.

He recognizes the long-awaited messianic king, the son of David, the one they've all been waiting for. Their last days have arrived. The hope of God's people down through the ages, it's being fulfilled.

And that is what this blind man aligns himself with. That's who he cries to for mercy. And it is that mercy of that Savior which we all need, isn't it?

[17:00] Whatever our other needs might be, many though they might be, however deep they might run, our deepest need, our greatest need is to come to God for mercy, isn't it? To come for the first time and to keep coming time after time because we need God's mercy day by day.

And so we come to Jesus, to the son of David, the one who is the author of salvation because what we need is found in him. And then when he meets those needs, how do we respond to that reality? How did the blind man in these verses respond? Well, he responds in the only way appropriate really, doesn't he? Verse 43, he followed Jesus praising God.

And what they'd seen, I presume the healing, the words spoken, the response, all of these things rolled up together, what they'd seen prompted the people, prompted the crowd to also respond in kind.

The man is glorifying God, praising him, and so too the crowd. This is the only reasonable response, isn't it? First we're told he followed Jesus. Now at its most fundamental about following Jesus means he stood up from his begging at the side of the road and he walked along with the crowd that was going by, says verse 36.

[18:26] We're told lots of times, aren't we, about these crowds that are following Jesus, following and listening to his teaching. And doubtless, this kind of wider group of disciples, this crowd, it ebbs and flows and expands and contracts as Jesus moves around.

You know, people hear and come and join the group and travel for a bit and people return home and attend to other pressing matters. This group is sometimes referred to as disciples. That doesn't always just mean the 12, disciples who follow after Jesus, but it is a very amorphous, ill-defined group of people who are listening to Jesus and following after him.

So at a minimum, when we say that this blind man followed Jesus, we mean he attached himself to that group for at least some period of time. That's the minimum. But I think in most cases when people follow Jesus, it means more than just attaching themselves to this group of listeners for a while.

It means an extended commitment. It means learning enough of Jesus' teaching to then go and live in accordance with what he says. It doesn't necessarily mean walking around with Jesus full time. It doesn't necessarily mean that. It seems fairly clear only the 12 did that kind of full time as it were, followed him for the duration of his ministry. Most people followed enough to learn and then went

home to live.

[19 : 53] But as they went back to their homes, it's fair to say that they were still following Jesus even as they kind of walked in the opposite direction from him. Not walking in his footsteps, but walking in his character.

Walking according to his commands, walking in his ways. The response to God's mercy for this man and for all of us, the response is to follow Jesus, isn't it?

And folks, he's not walking around on the Jerusalem road right now, so for you and me that has to be in that latter sense, doesn't it? To follow him by learning from him. Not by listening to him speak, but learning from him by reading his words, by considering what he said and what he's done and we consider that alone and we consider that together in community.

And then we live. Like all of those who follow Jesus, we follow not just by listening, but also by doing. And then for this man, alongside this following, or perhaps as an element of the following, we're told he glorified God and the crowds praised God along with him.

It's natural, isn't it? When we see God at work, surely it results in praise and worship. It flows out in thanksgiving.

[21 : 14] We acknowledge the infinite worth. We see the majesty, the power, the authority. And so in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions, we rejoice in what God has done in history and in our lives.

When we receive good gifts from his hand, then we praise God and give thanks. to him. And never more so. Never more so than when we reflect on the extent of what his mercy has won for us.

Our very deepest needs met by his infinite mercy and grace. Not just our physical needs, but our spiritual needs, our need to be saved from sin.

Back to the start of what we read from Luke 18 that we considered last week. The Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him.

They will flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again. This is how he saved us. He went to the cross. He bled and died to buy our pardon.

[22 : 18] How could we not praise and glorify him forevermore? Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we rejoice in you.

We rejoice in the mercy that you showed to a blind beggar on the side of the road. And we rejoice in the mercy that you show to this very day. A mercy that meets our deepest needs.

That meets not only our physical needs, but our spiritual needs. Our greatest need to be reconciled to our maker. O Lord, our God, we rejoice in the plan that you set in place even before you created the first man and woman.

You knew how we would be redeemed. You chose to show mercy to such as us. We are again in awe of what you have done.

We give you the glory. We praise you. We rejoice in you. Amen. Amen.