

What do you want me to do?

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[0 : 00] Well, can we open our Bible again, please? Luke chapter 18. And tonight we'll look at the passage from verse 35 onwards. Jesus heals the blind beggar, and we know from another part of the Bible his name is Bartimaeus.

Let me just read verse 35 again. As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside, begging. Now, very often if you're watching a film, watching a movie, you come to a very dramatic part of the sequence.

And you know it's dramatic because the music changes and the music becomes very, very foreboding and very, very heavy. That's exactly what would happen in this part of the Bible, because we are reaching a period here which is incredibly tense.

And in fact, the original hearers of Luke's gospel would have felt the tension in the air. There's two things that make it really tense. If you look at the very first words there, as he drew near to Jericho. Now, Jericho was 16 miles from Jerusalem, and it was downhill all the way, and then you ascended up into Jerusalem. Now, the big thing in the Bible here in Luke's gospel, beginning at chapter 9, is that Jesus was on a journey.

[1 : 25] Chapter 9, verse 51, says that Jesus resolutely set out to Jerusalem. And again, if you notice the part of the Bible we read before this, Jesus foretells his death.

And so it says there that Jesus is going to be mocked and treated and spat upon, and then they are going to kill him. So Jesus knows he's going to die.

Jesus knows that this is a date with destiny, before the world even began. And these words, as he approached Jericho, tell us very, very clearly that it's now about to be.

This is a big moment in the life of Jesus. So that's the first thing that adds to the tension. He's just about in Jerusalem. He's just about at the place of his death.

A second thing that would have heightened the tension is the character that's introduced to us. It says a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

[2 : 30] Now again, the original hearers would have thought, oh, this is interesting. Because the blind people were part of just 5% of the population.

And they were known as the expendables. They were literally lower than the low. This is a society where life was cheap. This is a society where if you had any malfunction or sort of defective issue in your body or mind, then you were cast on the scrap heap.

Folk today say that Christianity can be a bit hardline and cruel. Folks, Christianity has brought light into the world. Christianity has brought compassion into the world.

Christianity has brought liberation into the world. Because the original readers, when they read this, they saw a blind man would have thought, we don't like this.

Because there he was, not just a blind man, he was at the roadside begging. I live in Edinburgh. Edinburgh is full of folk begging. There's all sorts of beggars there, just lying helplessly.

[3 : 45] And most of them have got mental health issues. Most of them have got tragic stories. I mean, nobody at the age of 12 thought, when I grow up, I'm going to be a beggar in Princess Street.

When I grow up, I'm going to get myself a big dog, and I'm going to sit outside in a dirty sleeping bag, sit outside Waverly Station in the pouring rain, and I'm going to beg. Nobody does that by choice.

Most folk have got addictions. Most folk have got issues. Most folk are there because life has not really been kind to them. And so that's the sort of reaction that folk would have had.

Ugh, a beggar. What's going to happen here? Now, I want you to notice a couple of ironies right away in chapter 18. The irony number one is that the rich young ruler, the rich man, doesn't get it.

But the poor man does. There's another irony. Earlier on in the chapter, verse 15 onwards, let the little children come to me.

[4 : 53] The children were there shouting Hosanna. The children get it, and the adults don't. The kind of lay people get it, and the Pharisees, the disciples even, the religious people, don't get it.

You see, these are the values of the kingdom. The values of the kingdom are topsy-turvy. The values of the kingdom are that the way up is the way down.

It's the exact opposite to the values that we have in our own society. So what we see here, even by way of introduction, is the great theme of the Bible, and that is that God is a God of grace.

And may I say that's probably the one thing that folk do not understand. That when we follow Jesus, when we're forgiven of all our sin, there is absolutely, 100% the free grace of God.

I had dinner recently with friends of mine, and one of my friends is into information technology. He's really big on this stuff, and I said to him, what exactly do you do?

[6 : 13] And his face lit up. I don't know if you have any friends, and you ask, what do you do? And they say, oh, I'm in IT. You haven't got a clue what IT is.

It's really something from Mars, as far as you're concerned. He says, I'm working on something that would be great for your line of work. I says, what is it?

He says, well, I work in what you call big data. And, you know, big data is huge today. You know, that is that every move you make is literally recorded.

We've got data on everything. Everything is recorded. And he says, my app could record how often you come to church, how often you pray, how many words you read in the Bible.

He says, imagine the application. He says, you get to the gate of heaven, and God simply says, show me your little USB thing, and he'll plug it in, and he can see immediately all that you've done.

[7 : 21] How many times you've gone to church, how many weeks you've attended, how many pages of the Bible you've read. It's all there. And you can get in.

Isn't that what most folk think that being a Christian is? Doing all that stuff. And I had to say to him, it's not like that.

It is an absolute free gift. God will give us grace. That's the way he operates. So let's just look at this passage.

I just want to notice two very simple things. Number one, I want us to notice the seeker, and then the saviour. Okay? Two point sermon tonight, not even a three point sermon.

The bad news is that two point ones last the same time as three point ones. So two points in our sermon tonight. And they're very, very simple. In the passage we see, number one, the seeker.

[8 : 25] And various things about the seeker. The first thing that interests me is the question. Verse 36. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

So he's blind. He's living in this dark world. He's sitting by the roadside begging. And he hears this commotion because Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

He's in Jericho. We know that this is going to be the last time that he's ever going to be in Jericho. And we know that Jesus was going to die in a few days time.

And so the seeker here asks the question, what is going on? Now, you take me to someone and I will tell you whether they're really smart, not by the answers they give, but by the questions they ask.

Because really smart people ask penetrating questions. And this may seem a pretty obvious question here. And the question is, what is happening?

[9 : 41] And maybe that's the question that you would ask. What is happening? Here you are tonight in this particular building listening to someone speaking like I do preaching from Luke's gospel.

And you think, what am I doing here? This is bizarre. If you told me 10 years ago, if you told me 20 years ago that I would be in this situation, but what I'm saying to you, I'm saying that you ask a verse 36 question, what does this mean?

What's going on? What, we call it providence. What has left us to this point in life? What is happening? So he is seeing here that this is an opportunity.

Don't you like that word? Opportunity. And so, what we have here is a blind man asks a question, what is happening? Because he is seeing an opportunity.

And so tonight, there's an opportunity. I moved house a few years ago, and we moved from a huge big house into a little house.

[11 : 04] And I began to dispose of a lot of my things, and I disposed of all my diaries. I got rid of them all. But before I ditched them, I looked at some of the diaries from 20, even 30 years ago, and I noticed appointments.

I had conversations with people, men and women, who wanted to talk about Jesus, who wanted to talk about serious things. So many of these folk have pursued that, and they're now disciples of Jesus, loving him and loving life.

Others are nowhere to be seen. What's the difference? The ones who moved on asked the questions and took the opportunities.

The others, they have gone into the night. And so we're seeing here the seeker. And there's a question, and there's an opportunity.

Not only is there a question, there's what I'm calling the sight. What did he see? Well, what did he see? Verse 38, they told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

[12 : 20] Okay, that's all. He's blind. He says, what's happening? And they say, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. The answer is interesting.

At least, I think it's interesting. He said, Jesus, son of David, have mercy upon me. Now, this was just a blind beggar.

He was an expendable. He had no education. He knew nothing. But he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. He knew the great tradition that King David, the greatest king that Israel had ever seen, was simply a prototype of a greater king.

He knew that King David was the Messiah, the one who would save the world. the only unique figure in history who would bring everything together and would bring salvation to the world.

Nobody told him. And this is the very first announcement of the Messiahship of Jesus in Luke's gospel. Now, we realize that this was counterintuitive.

[13 : 40] Who else saw this? If you read in Matthew 21, you read again that the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard the children shouting, Hosanna, son of David.

So, again, you see this paradox. The blind man sees and those who see are blind.

the children and the blind man see who Jesus is, that he is the son of David. Now, Bartimaeus didn't know much, but he knew enough.

Tonight, we may not know much, but we know enough to follow Jesus. He knew that of all the people in the world, this one man, this one man, is the one man who could reverse everything. Now, people today are looking for a Messiah. They are. They are looking for one figure who's going to change the world and they're looking for political Messiahs.

[15 : 00] Okay, the stock of Messiahs isn't very high just now, but that's what they're looking for. I was reading a letter the other day, it was a quote from The Guardian.

The Guardian newspaper, and it was about President Obama, a marvellous president, I'm sure, but many folk looked upon Obama as a messianic figure.

And, of course, there is no doubt he was a historical figure, he's a passionate orator, the very first African American president, an amazing man in so many ways.

This letter writer was cynical about Obama, and he wrote these words, he says, these people who are looking for a Messiah, they might spare themselves a lot of heartache by coming to terms with reality, and they might spare the rest of us a great deal of strife at the same time by keeping more to their own backyard.

The letter writer said this, get real guys, the cavalry are not coming over the hill, no one can fix everything. That's what a cynic says, the cavalry are not coming over the hill, and there's no one who can fix everything.

[16 : 25] The Christian response is, the cavalry died on the hill, and he can fix anything.

It's a really bold claim, folks, and the blind man gets it. You are the son of David.

People are looking for a Messiah today. folk out in the wider culture talk about the Gandalf principle. Gandalf, the wise figure in the Lord of the Rings.

We're looking for a Gandalf. We're looking for a wise man. We're looking for something, someone, that's going to bring it all together, and that's going to make sense of everything.

So these are the bold claims of Jesus. we see the question, we see the side, and in a sense the spiritual side of Jesus. And his request is really, really simple.

[17 : 35] I think one of the things that I probably have got to apologize about the church is that we make complex things, or we make simple things incredibly complex.

And I know I'm as guilty as anybody making the gospel, which is very, very simple, a complex thing. This man here reduces it down to the irreducible minimum, the thing that you need to be a Christian. What does he say? He says here, very simply, Jesus son of David, have mercy on me.

That's it. That's how to become a Christian. I have a hot point tumble dryer.

Well, when I say I have it, it's in the ownership of our family. I don't know how to work it, but we've got this hot point thing, and it's one of those machines that's been targeted.

[18:50] It's a fire risk. It could go and fire at any time. But they're going to replace it with a new one. And all you have to do is phone the helpline.

Well, I phoned the helpline last week, and I realised that I will have to take a week off my work to get through this helpline. So many hoops, so many people, so many things put on hold in the wrong department.

It is ridiculous. And isn't that what many folk think that becoming a Christian is? So many hoops go down the floor charts, this, that, the other.

Blindmarked to me, he says, no, no. It's saying to God, have mercy on me. me.

It's simple. Have we come to that point of need? And it is only a prayer away.

[20:01] No preconditions, nothing to offer, just mercy on me. you know what else is interesting here.

Verse 39, and there's always verse 39 people, and those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more.

Actually, the original says he screams all the more. He is persistent. The more they tried to stop him, those who were in front, or NIV says those who led the way, the more they tried to keep him quiet, the louder he got, and an almost frenzied thing, this is important.

He refuses to take the point of quiet submission. Do we have a sense of urgency and persistence?

Two months ago, I was heading to Greenock on a train from Edinburgh. Train stops at Queen Street Station. There are five of us in the carriage. The lady beside me collapses.

[21:30] Now, there's five of us in the carriage. She collapses. That leaves four. three of them look at me and basically they say, do something.

Now, my medical training is I have a higher in biology, I think, that I got a hundred years ago. And I've seen him doing stuff in the telly.

So, I held her wrist, felt for a pulse. There is no pulse. And even I know that this person has collapsed, there is no pulse.

And an official came up, a railway official, said, can you phone an ambulance? And the official said, I'm not authorised to call an ambulance.

ambulance. Now, I will not repeat the volume with which I shouted, get an ambulance.

[22:38] And still the jobsworth looked at me with his vacant expression until I said, well, I'll just call one myself.

And she said, oh, you can't do that. Well, 999, can you get to platform 4, Queen Street station?

We've got a situation. Why did I shout? Why did I persist? Why did I, a normal, quiet, demure person, insist on something?

Because it was an emergency situation. it was important. There was a sense of urgency and a sense of persistence. The blind man is saying, we're dealing here with an urgent situation.

They told him to be silent, verse 39, but he cried out all the more. He repeats the same thing, son of David, have mercy on me.

[23:48] Is there a job's worth telling you, shh? Is there someone saying, don't make a fuss, you'll get over it?

Folks, this is urgent. So we see the seeker. And that brings us to the second character, if you like, the saviour.

And there's an impact, even in verse 40, there's an impact. And Jesus stopped. I think in this passage, arguably these are the most beautiful words.

And Jesus stopped. There's an impact there, isn't there? It's a couple of things. We see here what I'm calling focused concern.

But this time Jesus is really popular. He's a celebrity preacher. There's a large crowd. He's surrounded by his disciples.

[24:57] People are asking questions all the time. There's this cacophony of sound. There's this melee of folk here. It's really, really noisy. What's going on in his own mind?

He's about to die. He's about to die in the cross of Calvary for the sins of mankind. He's about to go to that place where he's going to suffer an agonizing death.

And here's blind man and he stops and he listens. Now how important is that?

You've seen the royals haven't you? Working the crowd. And they are professionals aren't they?

How they just sweep along. And everybody's wanting a bit of them. Everybody's wanting to shake their hands.

Everybody's wanting to give them a flower. It's a bit like that here. Again the celebrity preacher. But Jesus hears in the midst of all the people perhaps thousands of people there is one person and he stops.

[26 : 06] Jesus cares for you and he knows all about you. When I was in school I had a French teacher who for three years called me Griffiths.

Griffiths. I said sir it's Meredith. And then the next day Griffiths. And for three years the good man called me Griffiths.

He just didn't get it. He got my name wrong consistently. Eventually I just agreed with him. In fact the kids, my friends called me Griffiths.

That was what they called me. He didn't, I got an impression he didn't really bother who I was.

Jesus stopped.

Now he's a blind man. It is interesting. Again I'm saying all these things are interesting. I find them interesting. I think I'm right in saying you may correct me afterwards that there's not a single instance in the whole of the Old Testament of a healing of sight.

[27 : 21] I think that's true. Because the healing sight was a mark, a specific mark of the Messiah.

So what's going on in this passage when he's healing the sight? And you see healings of sight in the New Testament are very significant because I think here that physical blindness equates with spiritual blindness.

It's tied up in being one of the marks of the Messiah. There's a physical need but there's also a spiritual need. So there's a focus concern.

But there's also a great question and I love verse 41. The question Jesus says to him is what do you want me to do for you?

Again, this question element, good questions are revealing smart people ask great questions. And that's the question we're asking.

[28 : 24] If you were to ask Jesus, isn't that how Christianity Explored begins? If you were to ask God one question, what would that question be? So one question movement.

But the interesting thing here is it's not us asking Jesus a question but it's Jesus asking you a question and me. What do you want me to do for you?

Now, here's another interesting thing. Every other religion, the gods expect you to do things for them.

the Hindu gods, the Roman gods. There's a great book by Don Richardson, Killing Fields, Living Fields, about Cambodia and a tremendous opening chapter there about a Hindu altar and the picture of these Hindu gods on a mantelpiece and the people in the house constantly feeding the gods.

The gods are insensual, they've got a huge appetite, they always want to get, get, get, get.

Whereas Jesus is the exact opposite, he does not want us to do things for him because he needs nothing, he's God.

[29 : 43] It's the difference. The son of man came to seek and to save. The son of man came not to be served but to serve and give himself a ransom for many.

And so he asked the question, what do you want me to do for you? What would you say? Well, I would say, well, could you arrange things so that I could win the lottery, I don't do the lottery, but one night if you could maybe, I could go in and get the numbers and maybe I can come up or maybe can you fix my personality, I don't like the way I am, can you fix others, what do you want me to do for you?

It's a great diagnostic question. And if the answer is, what I want you, Jesus, to do for me is wash all my sins away.

Give me a clear conscience. Unite me with you. It's a Humpty Dumpty question, isn't it?

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses, and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again.

[31 : 24] You say, come on, don't come to us with nursery rhymes. Isn't that a metaphor for the human condition? All the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put us together again, but he can.

What do you want me to do for you? It's like the man, another blind man, paralyzed man, rather, he wasn't blind, paralyzed, in the pool of Bethesda, sitting beside the pool.

Remember the question that Jesus asked there, do you want to be well? well? Now that's a profound question. Do you really want to be well?

Or are we quite happy the way we are? We see here, moving on, the final consequence.

What do you want me to do for you? He asked the Lord, let me recover my sight. and Jesus said to him, recover your sight, your faith has made you well.

[32 : 39] See the simplicity of it there. Have mercy on me and your faith, belief in Jesus.

And so his healing is brought about by humility, is brought about by need, and it's brought about by faith.

In verse 43, I love this, immediately, he recovers his sight, and this is what a Christian is, and followed him, glorifying God and all the people when they saw it, give praise to God.

I was teaching yesterday on personal evangelism with a group of people. This is it. This is exactly what happens. Someone becomes a Christian, they follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and it has a ripple effect, and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Folks, tonight, it's a simple message, isn't it? And we have here a very simple paradigm of a man who comes to faith and follows Jesus.

[34 : 08] Two applications. Number one, those of us who are believers, is this the story that we'll tell? Is this the simple story that we'll tell, this is what happened to us?

I once was lost, but now I'm found. I was blind, but now I see.

And what are, I don't know you, there may be some folk here who are not yet believers, and you're really thinking of it, and you say, David, how do I become a Christian?

You say, Lord, have mercy upon me. Is it really that simple?

Yes. Let's pray. Let's pray.