

Encounters with Jesus

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Preacher: Rev Donald Morrison

[0 : 00] Now we turn back for a while to the passage of scripture we read in Mark's Gospel and chapter 10. And we'll read again from verse 46.

And they, that is Jesus and his disciples and the entourage following him, 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.

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. And then he rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

But he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. Amen. And may the Lord bless that further reading of his word.

In this particular passage of scripture, we're introduced to two different men. Two men who come from opposite ends of the social spectrum.

[1 : 16] One of them is well off, he's wealthy, he comes from a governing family, and the other one is a poor beggar and is blind and dependent upon other people to give him something as they pass by from the generosity of their hearts.

And both of these different men have a meeting with Jesus. And one of them, sadly, he goes on his way heavy of heart because he finds himself unable to take Jesus at his word and to do what Jesus tells him to do.

But the other goes on his way gladly, rejoicing, because Jesus has restored to him his sight. So I want us to look first of all at the rich young man.

And we often know him as the rich young ruler. And Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give us an account of this particular man who came to Jesus.

And it's only when we put the three accounts together that we know three things about him. That he was wealthy, that he was from a ruling family, probably a synagogue ruling family, and that he was young.

[2 : 38] And when we consider from the point of view of the world, this man had absolutely everything. He had everything that people longed to have.

He had his youth. We don't know whether he was good looking or not, but he had his youth. We assume that he was fit and that he was in good health. He was from a wealthy family.

He had influence. And it's unusual for somebody who is young to have influence, but he was also wealthy. When I go to the dentist, I sometimes pick up one or two of these magazines, hello, and you scan through the pictures.

And you have photographs there of people who look extremely handsome or beautiful and glossy. And invariably they're very wealthy. They move in the upper echelons of society.

And many people would long to rub shoulders with them, would long to have what they have. But we can only look at them and admire them from a distance.

[3 : 43] But this man had it all. He had youth, and who does not want to be young again as we get older and we're not able to do to the same strength the things that we once did.

When I used to come to Lewis on my holidays, when I was younger, I used to go out and climb all the hills in New York and fish locks that were many miles away across the moors.

The moors are not quite as capable to do that now as I once was. But I have the memories. This man was wealthy.

And this man came from an influential family. He was the rich young ruler. He had it all according to the world. And yet there was an emptiness inside him.

There was an emptiness here that the things of the world simply could not satisfy. But he was a man of discernment because he recognized that Jesus was the one who could give him that which he desired.

[4 : 45] And the question he poses to Jesus is quite interesting because he says, What must I do to inherit eternal life? And for him, his position in society would have been one that he inherited.

He didn't have to struggle. He didn't have to work his way up the ladder of promotion. It came to him. It dropped into his lap. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

And he must have thought to himself, Or just as the things that he had had fallen into his lap. Then perhaps eternal life was also something that he could inherit.

But he knew that he had to do something. He had to do something in order to inherit eternal life. And Jesus, looking at this young man, perceived that there was something that had a hold of him.

There was an idol in his life. There was something that prevented him from giving himself fully to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that was his wealth.

[5 : 50] Because we read in Psalm 22, when Jesus had told him what he was to do, Disheartened by the saying, He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

It could be that he saw his future security in his possessions and in his wealth. And we cannot blame him for that, because there weren't pensions in those days.

You couldn't go to social security and get a bit of a handout if you were feeling hard up. He had wealth at home. Probably there was a strong room. It went into that strong room.

You might have opened the chest, and there might have been a considerable amount of money. That was what he was depending upon for the future. But Jesus perceived that that wealth had a hold upon him.

And it could be that day by day he went into that inner room, and he opened the lid of the chest, and he ran his fingers through the gold coins, and he counted it to make sure that it was still all right, because his future depended upon it.

[6 : 55] But if we are to come to Jesus, then we have to let go of the things of the world. We have to let go of those things that have a hold upon us. Jesus will not allow any idol to come between us and between him.

And that's why he said to this young man, to go sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.

The treasure in heaven was not so much through his selling everything he had and giving to the poor, but it was in following Jesus, because Jesus is the pearl of great price.

Jesus is the treasure in heaven, and only through trusting in Jesus can we enter heaven and enjoy eternal life.

But before Jesus addressed him concerning his wealth and the idol that had a hold of him, the man said, What must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus pointed him to the commandments.

[7 : 59] He pointed him to God's word. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud.

Honor your father and mother. And quick as a flash, he said, Teacher, I've kept all these since my youth. He kept the commandments. He didn't even pause to examine whether he had fully kept the commandments as he should.

Quick as a flash. Yes, I've kept them all since I was a youth. But it's a reminder to us that eternal life does not come through keeping the commandments.

Eternal life does not come to us through attending a place of worship, no matter how regularly. Eternal life will only come to us through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I wonder have we ourselves this evening come to trust in Jesus. I would hope that the majority of you would already have come at some time in the past to trust in Jesus.

[9 : 04] But I'm sure there are some of you here tonight who have come here and you've come under the word and you've listened to the faithful preaching of the gospel. And yet you're still strangers to God's grace.

And this man went away sad. He went away sad because he was unable to do what Jesus told him to do. And at the end of the day he was sad because he was unable to trust Jesus.

Jesus told him that if he did this particular thing and followed him he would have a treasure in heaven. A treasure that would never be taken from him. A treasure that no thief could break in and steal.

No moth or rust destroy. But the problem with this young man was that he was unable to take Jesus at his word. He could go to his house. He could open the lid of the chest.

He could see the coins that he had. But what about this man? This dusty man who had just come on a long journey with his way up to Jerusalem.

[10 : 07] And yes he'd done some miraculous things. But can I really trust this man? Will he deliver? And he was unable to take Jesus at his word.

And God in his amazing grace would gladly have received this young man into his kingdom. But he preferred his security. He preferred to find his security in the things of this world rather than in Jesus.

He clung to a worthless idol. And he forfeited the grace that could have been his. We read that in Jonah. Amazing that Jonah deep under the sea in the belly of a fish said those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

And he was a man who was forfeiting the grace that could have been his. Because he was unable to take Jesus at his word. In Proverbs chapter 11 we read that wealth is worthless in the day of wrath.

Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath. But righteousness delivers from death. Righteousness delivers from death.

[11 : 22] And so this man went away. And we might compare him with that woman who had the alabaster jar containing a very expensive ointment called nard. It was indeed a very expensive ointment.

And it could be that she saw her future security in that ointment. And if she needed a doctor then she could sell a little bit of it and get the money she needed to pay the doctor or whatever.

But she took that jar and she just tipped the lot out on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because she saw her future security not in a jar of perfume but in a man.

In the Lord Jesus Christ. The only one who can at the end of the day deliver eternal life. And then Jesus turned around to his disciples and he gave them that amazing statement.

How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And there's a proviso here. The Bible never condemns wealth. The Bible never condemns wealth.

- [12 : 29] Because the Bible reveals to us men who had extraordinary wealth. But it didn't come between them and their worship and their service of the Lord.
- They knew how to handle it. They knew that it was the gift of God. And that one day they would leave it behind. Because we bring nothing into the world and we will take nothing with us.
- God is not condemning wealth. God is not condemning wealth.
- And so Jesus came out with this amazing statement. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.
- People have wrestled with that statement. They've tried to find a way around it. But what Jesus is talking about is the impossibility of you and I or anyone getting into heaven by our own efforts and by our own good works.
- [13 : 57] But as Jesus says in verse 27, With man it is impossible but not with God. For all things are possible with God. And then Peter began to say, See we've left everything and followed you.
- And then Jesus tells his disciples that yes you have given up a lot to follow me. But what you will receive in return is far far more and far far better than anything that you have given up for me.
- And Jesus could have added, Look at me. What have I given up for you? I've given up the glory of heaven. I've given up the glory of the angelic host. I've come down here into this dark and sin sick world.
- I've taken to myself a human body. And in a few days I will be going to the cross. And I will be giving up my life. I will be shedding my blood for men and women like you.
- If you think you've given up a lot for me, imagine what I have given up for you. In order for you to enter into heaven and enjoy eternal life.
- [15 : 03] And so God can do what we ourselves are unable to do. And the disciples are saying here, Well who then can be saved?
- And the answer of course is that by our own efforts, nobody can be saved. Whether they're rich or whether they are poor. And here from verse 46 on, they were introduced to another man.
- A man who, as I said earlier, was at the other end of the social spectrum. He was poor. He was blind. He didn't have possessions other than his cloak. Perhaps the cloak was the most precious possession he had.
- We don't know much about him. But of these two men, if we chose to be one of them, we would, I'm sure, rather be the rich young ruler than be blind Bartimaeus.
- But as we'll see, blind Bartimaeus was physically blind. But spiritually, he had a very clear vision. Because he perceived who exactly the Lord Jesus Christ was.
- [16 : 07] And he called to him that Christ might give him that which he desired. In the Beatitudes, Jesus does not say blessed are the poor. There's no blessedness in being poor.
- There's no blessedness in having to go to a food bank who depend upon others for handouts or sleep in a shop doorway in Prince's Street in Edinburgh. What Jesus says is, blessed are the poor in spirit.
- Poor in spirit, because they recognize their own sin. They recognize their own need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are the poor in spirit.
- The man or woman who sees their need of God's grace. A man or woman who desires to know Jesus. A man or woman who recognizes that their own righteousness is as filthy rags.

And so here was a man. He was poor in the things of this world. And he was poor in spirit. And he recognized his need of Jesus. I wonder, can we identify with blind Bartimaeus?

[17 : 15] Blind Bartimaeus. Now if somebody was to, if you were to go out into the streets perhaps of Stornoway or Inverness and ask people, well, who is this man Jesus?

Or who was this man Jesus who walked on this earth 2,000 years ago? And you might receive a variety of answers. Some people will say, well, yes, he's the Son of God.

He's the second person of the glorious Trinity. He is the Christ. He is the Messiah. But others might say, well, he was just one of a long line of good men who came into this world, who has left an indelible mark upon history.

And others might say, well, he is a man whose time has passed. We've now moved on. We're into a different age. Back in the 1960s, there was a musical, I think it was called Hair, and I never went to see it.

And one of the songs was, this is the dawning of the age of Aquarius. You see, from an astrological point of view, the Christian age is the age of Pisces.

[18 : 23] Pisces is the fish. Fish was the symbol of Christianity in the early days before the symbol of the cross. And when the new age sort of dawned upon us in the 60s and into the 70s, people who went in for this kind of thing said, well, the age of Pisces, the age of Christianity is coming to a close.

The age of Aquarius, this new and wonderful age, is dawning upon us. It will break in at the millennium. This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius.

Christianity has had its day. This man Jesus, yes, he's done wonderful things. He's left us some memorable sayings. He did all sorts of extraordinary things.

But he belongs to the past. There's a new and exciting and wonderful future dawning upon us. But you know, nobody bothered to tell the angel Gabriel.

Because the angel Gabriel, when he came to Mary, said that she would have a son. And that that son would mount the throne of his father David and of his kingdom, there would be no end.

[19 : 34] It would be an everlasting kingdom. Not a kingdom that would be eclipsed by any other kingdom. Not a kingdom that would come to an end at the millennium. But a kingdom that would endure forever and ever.

And we must ever pray that thy kingdom come in Scotland as it is in heaven. Thy kingdom come in the United Kingdom as it is in heaven.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. And here this blind man, we're told in Luke's gospel, he's sitting there, he hears the commotion, he hears the noise of a crowd of people approaching him.

And he asks what's going on. And they say, well, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Jesus is man from Nazareth. This man who's done extraordinary things.

And there were many people called Jesus in those days, in that part of the world. And so Jesus of Nazareth identifies one specific Jesus.

[20 : 37] Not Jesus who came from Bethphage or some other place. But Jesus of Nazareth. And blind Bartimaeus straight away is filled with excitement.

He doesn't cry out, Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me. He cries out, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And why did he cry out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me?

Why did he not cry out, Jesus of Nazareth? Because this man, blind as he was, had a clear spiritual vision. And he recognized the reality of who Jesus was, that he was the Messiah.

He'd been sitting there in the dust. And I'm sure he went regularly to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And unlike other people who had to make a living, sitting there he perhaps meditated more than most upon the scriptures.

And he came to the conclusion that everything that he heard this man Jesus doing indicated that he was none other than the Messiah. That he was the Christ.

[21 : 44] He was the one we read about in Isaiah 35. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. And people in John 7, they were arguing about Jesus. Was he the Christ? Was he the Messiah?

And somebody said, well, when the Christ comes, will he do any more than this man has already done? And we'll find in Luke chapter 4, when Jesus began his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth, the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me.

Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted. To proclaim freedom for the captives. And release from darkness for the prisoners.

And Jesus said that that was fulfilled in his own ministry. And Bartimaeus was a prisoner. He was a prisoner of his blindness. He lived in a darkness.

[22 : 50] And he recognized that this Jesus was none other than the Messiah. He knew his Bible. He knew his scriptures. He meditated upon it.

And he came to the conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than Jesus, the son of David, the rightfully anointed king of the Jews.

The one whom the Magi, the wise men, had traveled over a thousand miles. That he would come and bow down and worship and give gifts to the one who was born, the king of the Jews.

And this was him on his way up to Jerusalem. And he cried out, Jesus, have mercy on me. Jesus, have mercy on me.

And at first of all, it seems that Jesus ignored his plea, nor ignored his cry. People were telling him to pipe down. This man, Jesus, he's important.

[23 : 50] Don't trouble him. Don't bother him. But the more they rebuked him, the more he cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

And you know, Jesus doesn't want half-hearted followers. He doesn't want people who are going to come to faith and then fall away, like the seed that fell on rocky ground, or the seed that was choked by the weeds because of the things of this world.

Jesus wants people who will follow him right until the very end. And so Jesus heard this man crying out. But Jesus wanted to know that he was serious in his faith.

And then Jesus stopped and he said, and people said, take heart, get up. He's calling you. His cloak, probably the most valuable thing he had. And yet he threw it aside.

What would keep him warm on a cold night other than his cloak? He didn't have the money of the rich young ruler to go and buy another cloak. But coming to Jesus took priority over everything else.

[25 : 00] And he threw his cloak aside. And he came to Jesus. And Jesus asked him, what do you want me to do for you? Lord, he says, let me recover my sight.

Let me recover my sight. Which tells us that he could see at one time in the past. It's not that he was born blind. He could see. And now he was blind.

Maybe a disease of some kind had damaged his eyes. And he sat there thinking of the things that he had seen when he was younger. And he wanted to see again.

And Jesus gave him that which he wanted. And he restored to him his sight. And this man, when his sight was restored, he found himself standing in the presence of the Messiah.

He was standing in the presence of the man who had ascended the throne of David. The true king of Israel. The lord of lords and the king of kings. And what did he see?

[26 : 00] Did he see a man in beautifully lavish robes? Did he see a man stepping down from an ornate chariot? Did he see a man surrounded by courtiers and armed guards?

No, he saw none of that. He saw a man in dusty robes. A man drawing near to the end of a journey. And we might ask, was he disappointed?

No, he was not disappointed. He rejoiced. He rejoiced at the sight of Jesus. And my friend, when you come to know Jesus, you also will rejoice.

You will never be disappointed. Coming to know Jesus and follow him doesn't mean to say that everything is going to run smoothly for you for the rest of your days.

You might go through hard times. You might face persecution. You might, even in the future, lose your job because you believe in certain biblical ethics, biblical morality, which goes against the grain of what this country is moving towards.

[27 : 06] Jesus doesn't guarantee a smooth ride. But when you come to know Jesus, you will rejoice. You will rejoice because you have a treasure in heaven.

You will have something that nobody can ever take away from us. And so Jesus went on his way. This man recovered his sight and he followed him on his way.

And Jesus commended him for his faith. Jesus commended him for his faith. And you know something? When Jesus left Jericho, he went up the mountain road to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and a week later, he was nailed to a cross. And he never came that way again. He never passed through the gates of Jericho again.

And if that man had let the opportunity pass, he would have spent the rest of his days blind and filled with remorse. That he had met with Jesus, but he had listened to the crowd.

[28 : 11] And he had let Jesus pass by on his journey. You do not know whether you will see tomorrow. You do not know what opportunities await you in the future.

Today is the day of the Lord. I don't suppose any of you have ever heard of a man called Andy Mohan. But at the beginning of July, it was the 30th anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster.

And Andy Mohan had an amazing story. He was trapped in the accommodation module. And nobody could get out because of the fire.

Because of the explosion on that oil platform. And most of the men sat there expecting to be rescued. But nobody could possibly get near them.

Nobody would be able to rescue them. And Andy Mohan realized that the only way out was to do something for himself. And he ran from one exit to another. And every time he went outside, there was a fire that prevented him from getting to the edge of the platform and getting to safety.

[29 : 23] And suddenly there was a tremendous crash. And the jib of one of the cranes had fallen. And it formed a bridge between the entrance to the accommodation module and the edge of the platform.

And he and three men grabbed the opportunity. And they went hand over hand across the jib of that crane until it came to the edge of the platform. Their hands were badly bumped.

And I'm sure their bodies were bumped too. But they were able to jump into the sea. And they survived. And not long after, the jib of that crane fell away. And the opportunity was gone.

Gone forever. For the men who remained in that accommodation module. Because shortly after, they perished. But there was a way. And they would not take it.

But Andy Mohan did. And this man, blind Bartimaeus. He took the opportunity that Jesus was passing by. And it could be that for some of us here tonight, Jesus is passing by for the last time.

[30 : 29] He might not come this way again. Please do not let the opportunity slip by. But cry out to the Lord. Lord, have mercy upon me.

Lord, have mercy upon me. The Son of David, have mercy upon me. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. And to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

In other words, persevere. Cling to Jesus and refuse to let him go. Remember, Jacob wrestled with the Lord and said, I will not let you go until you bless me.

And the Lord did bless him. And I hope and pray that you also, tonight, will know the blessing of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior and Lord.

[31 : 31] Amen. May the Lord add to us his blessing to these meditations on his word. Amen.