

Ready Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Kirk van der Swaagh

- [0 : 0 0] of his word. Bartimaeus started to put things together that he would need to carry him through the day. His room was a little more than a hovel, really, but it was to his advantage.
- It was small. See, that way he knew where everything was. It was his flask for water. It had a chip on the lip of it, but if he turned it around and drank from the other side, it didn't bother him.
- He had his rag, to wipe his face. Thankfully, he had a chance to wash it because it got filthy as he sat and people's dust was, people's feet stirred up the dust around him. He had a bit of food.
- His one and only cloak, that was already pretty threadbare when somebody left it beside him, but it was what he had. And his small basket. He must not forget the basket.
- Without it, there was no point in going out. At the end of each day, he was careful to put things back where they were supposed to be so that he could find them in the dark.
- [1 : 0 6] And in the dark is where they were, where they always were. His blindness had forced him to order his belongings carefully, a place for everything and everything in its place.
- In truth, he had little, so keeping things in order was not so difficult. He would feel his way to the spot that he always went to. He would walk carefully, slowly, being sure that there was nothing that had ended up on his familiar path that would cause him to stumble.
- And when he got to the spot, he would feel about with his feet to make sure that there was nothing on the ground. Then he would sit, arrange his items next to him, and put out his basket.
- Years of experience had taught him the spot just outside of his city, Jericho, on the road that led up to Jerusalem was the most lucrative of all that he had tried. He never received a lot, but the spot was his spot, and meager though the takings were, they were the best he had found.
- Perhaps it was because it was the road that led up to Jerusalem. Travelers heading up that long climb from Jericho to the holy city were maybe a little more conscious of their duty to be mindful of others in need.
- [2 : 2 3] And see, he knew right well that the law expected those who have were to give to those who have not, but there's the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. In his experience, people fulfilled the letter more than the spirit.
- Some days, there was virtually nothing to show for his efforts. People would drop something into his basket, but it was never an expression of generosity. Whatever it was, however, he thanked God for it.
- Since the accident many years ago, he had to throw himself on the mercy of God and God had not disappointed. He did not have much, but what he had, he was grateful for.
- He was still alive, still feeling the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the breeze, and for that he was grateful. In all honesty, gratitude for what he, well, what was now his lot was something he had had to learn.

It was such a freak accident. No one knew anything like it had ever happened before, but the fact that it had rendered him unable to see was devastating.

[3 : 31] He could no longer work. The betrothal that he had recently entered into was called off. Soon after, both of his parents who had him when they were quite old died. He was their only child, and so he was alone.

And as a result, much to his disappointment and embarrassment, he would have had to beg. He had to join the ranks of those who depended on the generosity of others.

It was not how he had envisioned his life unfolding. See, there was a time when he considered becoming a rabbi. He gave himself to the study of scriptures.

He listened intently as those more learned than he explained the ways of God. He was familiar with some of the debates that were generated among the different schools. In truth, it was all that bickering that led him away from that pursuit, but his love for the scriptures had not left him.

But then, there was the accident. It turned everything upside down. He had sought for understanding from the scriptures. Was the accident punishment for something he had done?

[4 : 41] Certainly, Job's friends would have said so. But try as he might, he could not discover what grievous fault he had done that would have brought this upon him. His was much like the cry of woe with the psalmist who had penned, All this has come upon us so we have not forgotten you and we have not been false to your covenant.

Our heart has not turned back nor have our steps departed from your way that you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. See, at first his faith had faltered.

He was angry with God. He could find no good reason why he should be made to live like this. However, in time, his confidence, his trust in the steadfast love of God grew.

He had clung to the word God had given to Joshua. He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. That word, it was his comfort.

It was his assurance. God had been true to his word. He was not forgotten. His daily takings were meager, but he was cared for.

[5 : 50] Whenever he thought back to how he had responded to the crisis, he was reminded of the psalmist words, when my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant.

I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you? Yeah. Yes, he had repented of his anger. God was continually with him. God had proven that.

However, it did not stop his yearning for deliverance. It was a yearning that rose up every day. And again, it was the scripture that had spoken to him that had given him that yearning, had given him life.

He heard it maybe for the first time, at least the first time, that that word made its way into his ear, a passage from the prophet Isaiah. It had come at a particularly discouraging time for Bartimaeus.

[6 : 50] The bondage of his blindness matched the bondage of his spirit. He so wanted to be free from it, to be able to lead a normal life, to be free, to move about as he wished, making his way without groping along in the dark.

It was dark. It was always dark. And the darkness had taken its toll. It had beaten him. He was despairing at the point of hopelessness when the words of the prophet flooded his soul.

Say to those who have an anxious heart, be strong, fear not, behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap like joy, leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. He listened as that passage was explained. The one teaching said that the whole passage spoke of the deliverance, the restoration, the joy and blessing that God would bestow on his people.

The remnant who would return to Zion, those who are redeemed would walk unhindered and in safety on their way to Zion through land that had been restored with lush vegetation and abundant water.

[8 : 05] And as they entered Zion, they would receive the comfort and eternal joy that only God could provide. The exiles had returned, but everything in that promise had yet to be.

God's people had been brought back all those years ago, but the fullness of that vision had not come to pass, but he longed for it. The eyes of the blind shall be opened.

Bartimaeus would pray, O God, when will that be? I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I would love to have my eyes open. What does it say, Lord?

He will come and save you. The Lord will come and save you. How often he had yearned for that coming of the Lord that would bring the opening of his eyes.

Then he heard something that brought understanding. It was the singing of the psalm that spoke of a king who would cause the kind of blessing that the prophet spoke of.

[9 : 06] They had sung, Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son. May he be like rain that falls and the mown grass like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish and peace abound till the moon should be no more for he delivers the needy when he calls the poor and him who has no helper.

Of course. For to be as the prophet envisioned it there first needed to be the coming of a king. A righteous king who would assume the throne of his father David.

That's the covenant that God made with King David. Your house, your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. It would be from one of his line whose presence and power would establish justice, bring peace, cause everything to be made right including the opening of the eyes of the blind.

There needed to be a king. This gave focus to Bartimaeus' prayers. His yearning would be satisfied. His deliverance would come when the king came.

The more he prayed, the more he meditated upon God's word, the stronger his faith became. He felt more and more like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season. His circumstances had not changed but any lingering hopelessness have been displaced by hope.

[10 : 27] There needed to be a king and if there needed to be a king then a king would come. God would see to that. Starting a few weeks ago, he began to catch bits of conversation as people walked by his spot on the side of the road.

Extraordinary things were being said of a man who had been going about the region. His name was Jesus. He came from Nazareth and though he knew that old saying, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

It seemed that something good had come out of Nazareth. To begin with, it sounded like this man, Jesus, caught with authority, not as the Pharisees.

See, as he had experienced, the Pharisees go on and on debating the finer points and technicalities of the law and come into conclusions that made the law even more difficult and frankly, unappealing.

But people were saying that this man taught in a way that was compelling, that showed the beauty of the law. If that was the case, then he understood why King David could say that he loved God's law.

[11 : 32] The law wasn't lovely the way the Pharisees and the scribes handled it, but when Jesus taught, apparently, people listened. Then it was a few days ago, three to be exact, when two men stopped right in front of him and had a long conversation.

He couldn't believe his ears. What he had heard was overwhelming. One of the men he recognized, his voice was very familiar. He often had been a kind word and never failed to leave something in his basket, but the other, he didn't know.

He had a different accent, one from up north in Galilee, and he was very animated. He was talking about this Jesus of Nazareth. He said that he had been following him for some time and had seen extraordinary things.

He was present when Jesus had fed a huge crowd of people from a few loaves of bread and a handful of fish. It was miraculous. He learned that after performing that miracle, Jesus told his disciples to take a boat to the other side of the lake and he would follow.

Well, the man speaking to his friend, he didn't have a boat, so he decided he would just head over to the other side some other way, but when he got there, he heard a rumor, and this was unfathomable to think about, that people said that Jesus had crossed the lake not in a boat, but by walking on the water.

[12 : 52] Walking on the water. He arrived, this fellow, in time to witness Jesus healing everyone that brought to him. Some of the sick just touched the hem of his garment and they were healed.

The authority he had over sickness was amazing. This fellow was so awed by what was happening, he just kept following Jesus no matter where he went. He saw him heal a deaf and dumb man.

He fed another huge crowd of people with next to nothing. He even saw him cast out a demon from a boy. Bartimaeus had hung on his every word.

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. What the prophet spoke of was happening. Strengthen the weak hands, make strong the feeble knees, say to those who have an anxious heart, be strong, fear not, he will come and save you.

Then the Galilean said something that caused Bartimaeus to weep. I forgot to tell you of this other time. It took place in Bethsaida. Maybe I wasn't supposed to, but I followed Jesus outside of the village and I saw it.

[13 : 58] It involved a man who was blind. Jesus took the blind man by the hand, let him out of the village and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything?

And he looked up and said, I see people but they look like trees walking. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly.

Bartimaeus held his hand, his head in his hands and he wept. His tears were tears of gratitude, wonder at the faithfulness of God, of his steadfast love for his people, of his faithfulness to his word.

He wanted to ask the men more about Jesus but when he looked up they had gone. In truth, he didn't need to ask anything more. He had heard enough. He knew that this was the king that he was waiting for.

This was the promised one. That was three days ago. The last three days have been days of intense prayer. This morning, though he put together the items he needed for his daily ritual and made his way carefully to the usual spot and sat down.

[15 : 07] He put out his basket but his mind was elsewhere. The king had come. The king had come. He was restoring the fortunes of God's people.

He was shining holy and divine light into the darkness. The darkness. What of his darkness? And just at that moment, he heard the noise of a crowd of people coming toward where he was sitting and soon he was surrounded by them.

What was going on? He tried to get someone's attention but a beggar. He's easily overlooked. He finally threw his hand down looking to grasp anything he could get his hands on. He grabbed the cloak of a man and he yanked it as hard as he could.

The man was annoyed. Hey, what are you doing? I'm sorry, said Bartimaeus. I just want to know what's going on. Please tell me what's going on. What's going on? The man responded, a miracle worker is coming this way.

Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. 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 many rebuked him telling him to be silent but he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

[16 : 16] And Jesus stopped and said, call him. And he called the blind man saying to him, take heart, get up, he's calling you. And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

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. 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. I hope you don't mind that I took the liberty of creating some back story for our brother Bartimaeus.

See, there were questions that I had about this. I wondered just how he came to respond so quickly when he learned that Jesus was passing by. Particularly, his use of this messianic title, son of David, that's striking.

It's the first time the expression is Jews in Mark's gospel and it's loaded language. The expectation of Messiah was high. It was high at the time. But I wondered how it reached to someone like Bartimaeus who was living on the margins of society.

[17 : 32] And why would he think that Jesus had the power to heal him? How or from whom had he learned what had been going on during Jesus' ministry? And why would the things that Jesus had been doing led Bartimaeus to believe that he was the Messiah?

Messiah. He's a beggar. And yet his calling to Jesus, he does so in a way that's pretty theologically sophisticated. He didn't just say, Jesus, I hear you can heal people, even blind people, would you heal me?

It was, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Have mercy on me. That's a phrase that is filled with yearning.

There's a history behind it. It isn't just let me see, but let me be free. Take pity on my estate. It's in your power, your remit, to do so.

Have mercy on me. And there's a placement of this incident in Mark's gospel. It's the last healing recorded in the gospel. It's just before Jesus begins that long ascent to Jerusalem and his crucifixion.

[18 : 39] Jesus declared to be the son of David at that moment. Prior to that ascent, that seemed vitally important. Soon, as Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, others will be using that title, Hosanna to the son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But they'll turn on Jesus, calling for his crucifixion. But I don't think we are to suppose that Bartimaeus was among them.

Many a commentator points out that Bartimaeus moves from sitting on the side of the road at the beginning of the encounter to being on the road at the end or as the Greek can be translated on the way with Jesus.

Bartimaeus became a disciple of Jesus. So Bartimaeus, a beggar, on the side of the road, the way that Jesus is going, joins Jesus on the road going the way that Jesus is going.

Now you may have noticed that the title of this morning's sermon is Ready Faith.

[19 : 48] Ready Faith. And why I titled it Ready Faith is because I want to highlight for the immediacy of Bartimaeus crying out for Jesus as soon as he heard he was passing by.

See, the opportunity presented itself and he seized it. He did so with humility but he took hold of that opportunity. Now I say he did it with humility because of the way he spoke to Jesus.

Jesus said to him, what do you want me to do for you? And Bartimaeus said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. Let me recover my sight.

It was a straightforward request but it wasn't a command. And commentators point out that the Greek text of Mark's gospel, the term translated in ESV as Rabbi is actually Rabboni.

And what's significant about that? Well, one commentator says the Greek is a more reverent epithet. Rabboni in available Jewish literature is seldom used with reference to humanity, practically never as a form of address.

[20 : 53] It's frequently used as an address to God in prayer, however. And its use here suggests Bartimaeus' estimation of Jesus. In humble trust, Bartimaeus asks not for wealth, power, or success, but only for sight.

He asks not to be superhuman, but simply human. See, Bartimaeus approached Jesus with faith, not demanding, but in his direct interaction with Jesus, he expresses that he knew who he was and that he believed in him.

So when I say that he took this opportunity, he seized it, it wasn't brash, it wasn't a name it and claim it kind of faith, it wasn't that.

It was a faith that was ready for the moment. And when that moment presented itself, it was exercised. See, Bartimaeus seizing that moment as he does follows a pattern that I think is important to note.

Now, I admit, I've taken liberty in creating the back story for him, but I think what I've offered is plausible given the details of the account. See, I suggested that the scripture played a primary role in his life.

[22 : 03] It was language from Isaiah and the Psalms that led him to see that it was the coming of the king that would usher in this new era. And contemplating these things moved him from despair to hope.

He trusted God would accomplish his expressed will and that will included his deliverance. And this created, strengthened, and sustained his faith. So as he learned about the ministry of Jesus, it was not difficult for him to connect what he had heard with what he knew.

So when Jesus came across this path, his faith was ready. It was ready to seize the moment and would not be dissuaded from it. See, that's a pattern that I want to highlight. Word, faith, opportunity.

Word, faith, opportunity. See, God speaks to us in his word. It tells us who he is. It tells us what he's doing in the world. It tells us who we really are and what we are to be doing in the world.

It's given to us by God because as you've heard from this pulpit many times, he loves us. We study it. We wrestle with it. We turn to it for answers and insight. It's always there.

[23 : 08] Offering truth and life. It is a sufficient guide for faith and practice worthy of attentive devotion. And as we do this, the Holy Spirit generates faith in us.

We begin to see the world, ourselves, our circumstances with different eyes. We are not just particles of matter being bumped around by impersonal and personal and purposeless forces.

Nor are we afterthoughts of the one who created us. No. The Holy Spirit opens up our ears and our eyes to the beauty of God's love for all that he has made. We're particularly struck, aren't we, by the love that God has for his people.

A love that expressed itself in the giving of his only son, the lamb that he supplied without spot or blemish, that would be sufficient to atone for sin once and for all. And our faith says, if he would do that, how will he, shall he not, also freely give us all things?

You see, we meditate on these things, and the more and more we do so, our trust in his wisdom and power and goodness grows. There's word, faith that grows from our meditation upon the word, but then there are opportunities.

[24 : 18] See, as we keep his word before our hearts and minds, we hear his call for us to live out our faith in and before the world. We live believing that he is who he says he is, and that he will do what he says he will do, and that what he does will be for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

This is the truth that we need to affirm each day so that our faith may remain ready. Ready. Ready to respond when the answer to prayer presents itself.

Ready when the long for door is finally open. Ready when an unexpected opportunity to advance God's wishes is placed before us. I think if we consider it, it's evident in Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac.

In Joseph's life, when he was finally brought from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream. when Moses hears a voice coming from a burning bush that calls and delivers God's children from bondage.

For Nehemiah, for Nehemiah, when he weeps over the state of affairs in Jerusalem and offers up his arrow prayer, when the king says, what are you requesting? Christ, and for the church when they come back and hear the apostles report.

[25 : 32] You see, such moments are seized because faith is ready. A faith that has been generated, strengthened, and sustained by God's revealed word.

A faith that has been tested. A faith that has a history of God's faithfulness. A faith that is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. This must have been the faith of Bartimaeus because when what he had hoped for came into view, he recognized it and he seized it.

His was a ready faith. If you'll allow me just for a few more minutes. I've been thinking about the project that's underway to redo the buildings here.

And I think it might follow this pattern. You know, what we have is God's word that tells the church to be present in the world. You might recall when the early disciples, the early followers of Jesus after Pentecost, they said they had favor with everyone around.

Paul talked about the church in Thessalonica, about how the word had sounded forth from them for the entire region. He didn't even do anything if they had been so faithful in proclaiming the gospel. See, the presence of the church in any community is part of God's purpose and plan.

[26 : 52] We see that in his word. And then we have reason to have faith because this church was maintained faithfully by the saints who were here. Few though they were, but they invested their time and money and kept this place open.

And it was ready for the bringing in of a whole other congregation, which I've heard was pretty timely. Because what was it? A few weeks after you had gotten here that something fell from inside the chapel and the sanctuary where you used to be and it crashed on the seats would have killed people.

You said, oh yeah, that's where they sat. But you came here and God in his mercy and grace knit you together. You became one new church. He had the approval of all the members of the churches.

He had the approval of the presbytery. Here you are. You're now in this place. So there's God's word saying what the church is supposed to be. We had faith that carried us through to this point of where we sit here now and now there's opportunity.

Opportunity because you're in a whole different neighborhood. A neighborhood that is just packed with people. A neighborhood that need to know Jesus. And part of the program of that project that you'll see up on the wall, nobody put me up to this by the way, I'm just sincerely about this, is that there's an opportunity that you have to actually create this kind of space that becomes an asset to the community that people look upon and say, oh I'm so glad that church is there and if it ever closed they would miss it.

[28 : 17] You're kidding me, really? Crow Road is gone? Oh no. It might not be that they all come to faith in Christ but they'll all come to have faith in Christ's people because Christ's people would be faithful.

Faithful to him and faithful to them. And so what I'm saying is that if we take this pattern that I tried to trace out, this idea that, yep, here's God's word saying this is what we need to do and faith brings us to a certain place but is it ready faith?

Ready faith that says yes. Yes, you know what? This is a challenge that costs a lot of money but we can see it needs to be done and when it's done the doors open up and some of a foretaste can be felt by the people around us of what God envisions for his creation.

So I want to encourage us as we pray about this, as we consider it, as you hear more and more about it, to take a cue here from Bartimaeus. His faith was ready and I've tried to explain how that could be.

I mean, how does this beggar know what's going on? Why does he call him son of David? How does he know these things? Well, perhaps it was like I said but the reality is is that what happened when Jesus walked by he seized the moment and he received his eyes.

[29 : 35] So I want to encourage us and I'm going to pray in just a minute and I hope you'll allow me to speak as I've just spoken about what's going on because I'm encouraged by it myself. I know I'm an outsider.

I'm one of those Americans. I understand all that stuff but the reality is there's a real opportunity a real opportunity that I encourage and I want to pray with you that we all step into it with ready faith.

Yeah? Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for what you did for Bartimaeus. We thank you for hearing his heart cry his desire to be free and how he learned had to learn must have learned from your word of what that really why he had the liberty to speak as he did to Jesus.

He just knew that this was his moment and he would not be pushed back from it. I pray God that we might see our lives held captive like that.

Captive by your word. Strengthened by faith that we receive from considering your word. Building up our confidence in who you are and what you're doing. And as we live out lives together here in this particular fellowship perhaps this is a moment an opportunity.

[30 : 50] Perhaps it is something that you've given to us like Bartimaeus to seize it and not be dissuaded from it. Well, Lord, that's a work of grace that you can only do and if it's appropriate then we put it into your care.

But we thank you, Lord. We thank you for the confidence that we can have that you are God there is none else and you are the one who leads and sustains your people. And will indeed save them.

And so to that end we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.