

What Do You Want Me to Do?

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] You'll find in the pews the Black Pew Bibles and I encourage you to open that at page 823 to the reading from Mark's Gospel, Chapter 10. And for those visiting, so you know we're preaching our sermon series over the last month and a half and through till Easter from Mark's Gospel.

So we're looking at the last part of Mark, Chapter 10 today. And I'll pray for us as we come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, you've caused all of the Bible to be written to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ.

And we pray today that you will bring about that purpose in our own hearts and minds and lives that we may be wise, saved and followers and disciples of him.

Amen. Beggars are a public nuisance. Well, that's what most people think about those who beg in the streets. When the Brisbane Commonwealth Games was on, they cleaned it up by moving all the beggars and the homeless out of the way, especially where the TV cameras would be and especially on the route of the marathon.

I've not heard that sort of furor in Melbourne. Maybe they're doing it but a bit more quietly and surreptitiously or maybe they've chosen the marathon to run through Turack and Brighton and places like that, I think.

[1 : 22] But, of course, in other cities, well, including Melbourne, where tourists come, beggars can be a real sort of downer for the tourist trade. And so there's always problems in places like London and New York, sort of keeping the number of beggars off the streets so that tourists don't feel threatened and intimidated.

If you've been to London, you know that almost every subway or tube underpass around the place, there's always somebody sitting, begging, occasionally busking, trying to get money.

Of course, there are worse cities in the world for finding beggars. I remember being heart-wrenched in Phnom Penh some years ago. The number of beggars who have lost arms or legs or eyes or whatever are begging in a country that is poor and ravaged by warfare where there's very poor social security and so on.

It's the same when I was in Beijing teaching last year and you'll see it around other cities of the third world in Nigeria and Cairo and Jerusalem as well. Obviously, for many with physical handicaps, loss of limbs, blindness, loss of eyes and so on, and certainly in countries that are struggling economically and have suffered from war and drought and famine.

Of course, beggars want to be and need to be in the most public place. So you don't see people begging in little suburban cul-de-sacs or courts.

[2 : 51] Nobody walks along the street. Their bowl at the end of the day or the end of the week would remain empty. Beggars need to be in the centre of trade or tourism where people pass by.

That's their best chance of getting any money from those who pass by. That's why, of course, there's such a tourist problem in some ways in some of these cities in the world.

It's why in the first reading from Acts chapter 3 that it's in the temple precincts that Peter and John come across a man begging who is lame. You won't find him in a little out-of-the-way suburban Jerusalem street where no one goes.

The temple precinct is where everybody goes. That's where the crowds are. It's the equivalent of being outside Flinders Street Station, I suppose. And so that's his best chance for getting some money from the passers-by.

And another similar place would be on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, especially in the lead-up to one of the major festivals or feasts. For in the days of Jesus, as still for Jews today, in the major feasts, people would gather together to celebrate.

[3 : 59] And in Palestine of Jesus' day, many of those major feasts, like Passover tabernacles, were pilgrim feasts. And people would come from Galilee in the north, from the Jordan Valley, from other areas even outside the boundaries of Israel and Palestine, to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

And these events in this story in Mark chapter 10 happened about perhaps a week to two weeks before the celebration of a Passover festival.

And so there were crowds on the road. We're told that as Jesus with his disciples was going down the road to Jericho and now from Jericho up to Jerusalem, there are crowds there.

They're going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. That's what Jesus is doing, going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. And there'd be significant numbers of people on the road heading to Jerusalem for the feast.

And this man is on that road, or by the side of it at least, begging. That's where the crowds are. And probably this is occurring early in the morning, as people set out from Jericho, where there was a reasonable town and lodgings, to try and get as much of the journey, if not all of it done in a day, up to Jerusalem, or at least to the outskirts of Jerusalem, where there are other places to stay.

[5 : 17] The road was notorious for bandits. It's where the parable of the Good Samaritan is set on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, where the bandits would hide out in the hills.

It's a pretty rough area. Even today, you can still go on that old Roman road from Jericho to Jerusalem, a fairly windy and very barren area. You can imagine with the twists and turns in the road, if you weren't in a big crowd, it could be, well, quite dangerous.

And so no doubt, early in the morning, before the heat of the day, quite a crowd would gather and head off together for safety and escape of the heat, and to try and get to Jerusalem or most of the way in one day.

This man, who's a beggar, is blind. He's sitting by the wayside or by the side of the road. And he's heard that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

And so he cries out for mercy. We're told his name, it's Bartimaeus. Literally, that means the son of Timaeus. The reason we're given his name, apart from the fact that that is what his name was, is no doubt because he was a known person.

[6 : 32] And it gives us a sense of reliability and authenticity about this account. It's not just an unnamed, unknown person who was healed as though the story could almost be a little bit of urban myth.

This is a real person with a real name. He's known by people. And no doubt when Mark wrote this gospel 30 years later, it implies, I think, that Bartimaeus was known, still known, maybe even still alive, most likely, in fact.

And so there's a sense of you can check out this story for yourself. It's got a ring of truth and authenticity about it. And when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is approaching to walk past, he shouts out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

He's probably heard of Jesus. Even though Jesus has largely been up north in Galilee, several hours walk and a couple of hours drive away, really, if you had a car in those days, the fame of Jesus has spread.

As you read the stories in the gospels in the Bible of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we keep reading that people have come from far and wide to hear of Jesus. In an earlier part of Mark's gospel, they'd come even as far as Tyre and Sidon, well outside the land of Palestine in what is today Lebanon and Syria.

[7 : 55] And people have heard of Jesus' fame. Jesus has not long before this healed a blind man. Up north in the north end of the Sea of Galilee at Bethsaida, one of the major towns right on the tip of the northern tip of that Sea of Galilee.

And no doubt there are people who've already come through Jericho heading up to Jerusalem. And so word has come. Here's a blind man. Hey, blind man, you should hear about this Jesus up north who's healed a blind person.

Word would have spread. Indeed, on an earlier visit to Jerusalem, maybe a year or two before, Jesus has already healed in Jerusalem a blind man. Told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam and his sight would be restored.

That was in John's gospel, chapter 9. So no doubt this blind man, this blind beggar, has heard of Jesus. And so is excited. He's probably been on the side of the road since the early hours to make

sure that he's there when Jesus walks past him.

But of course beggars are a public nuisance. And so the response to this beggar crying out of the crowd around him is that they sternly ordered him to be quiet.

[9 : 03] Shut up, you beggar. They might have been the Jericho traders who didn't want to sort of dampen her on their trade prospects selling their fruit and wares as the crowds would walk past.

Maybe it's the town council wanting to give Jericho a good name or something. Maybe it's just that all these pilgrims going up to the festival are fairly excited.

There's a buoyant atmosphere. They may well be singing some of the Psalms of Ascent in the Book of the Psalms. And this seems to sort of put a dark cloud over the events.

But if you've been to one of these cities with lots of beggars, you know they don't give up easily. You know that they'll keep asking. They'll keep tapping their plate on the ground. They'll keep thrusting it in front of your face.

They'll keep banging on your car window. And Bartimaeus is not going to be silenced by those who tell him strongly to shut up. And so in verse 48 we read, But he cried out even more loudly, Son of David, have mercy on me.

[10 : 12] Jesus hears his words. And he takes the initiative to do something about it. Jesus, we're told, call or gets the other people, call him here.

Whether that's his disciples or the residents of Jericho who've already told him to be quiet. And the response of this blind beggar is dramatic. Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. The sense is he's either got his cloak around his shoulders for warmth or perhaps over his lap to catch the money in. And he jumps up, throwing it off, and goes to Jesus.

There's no slow, careful action here because he's blind. He's eager to come to Jesus. Even it seems leaving his cloak behind, which would double as his blanket at night and his coat during the day.

One of the most precious possessions, really, a poor person would have in the ancient world. Jesus asks him, what do you want me to do for you?

[11 : 25] We might think it's obvious because we know the story goes on to talk about his sight being restored. Jesus, though, is asking a legitimate question. Firstly, in effect, his question is saying, I am at your service.

What would you like me to do for you? In the very preceding paragraph, which we heard about last week here, we're told there, in Jesus' own words, about himself, that he is the son of man who came not to be served, but to serve.

And here, he is serving, asking, what would you like me to do for you? It's the sort of question a waiter might ask us at a restaurant or a hotel staff member might ask us if we're living there.

That is, somebody who is serving us. What would you like me to do for you? But this is a beggar. The sort of scum of the earth, the person that they've just told to shut up, get out of the way sort of stuff.

But Jesus has also just said earlier in this chapter, whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. And here is the one who is the first, the greatest, the king, the Messiah, who is stopping to serve a beggar.

[12 : 55] Here is Jesus of Nazareth with huge public acclaim, about to enter Jerusalem to the adulation of the crowds. We'll see that next week in the next passage.

And he stops to serve a beggar, one that others have told to shut up, a public nuisance. But his question is also legitimate because he wants to know, are you asking for money?

That's after all what he's asking everyone else. He's begging by the side of the road for money, maybe a bit of food. What do you want me to do for you? And that question is almost the same as a question he's asked in the preceding paragraph as well.

For if you remember last week, Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection and James and John, two of his disciples, come up to him and they ask him, Lord, will you give us whatever we ask of you?

And he says, what do you want me to do for you? In effect, the same question that he asks Bartimaeus. James and John want glory and status and privilege, the seats at the left and the right of Jesus in glory.

[14 : 04] They are self-serving, self-seeking as we saw last week. Here is Bartimaeus, the beggar, asking for mercy.

I think we're meant to see a contrast between the disciples and Bartimaeus. Those who have much, in a sense already, in following Jesus, wanting more for their own selfish gain.

Bartimaeus, the weak of the earth, wanting mercy. And as he says to Jesus, his sight. Bartimaeus is a man of faith.

His faith has come, no doubt, from what he's heard about Jesus of Nazareth, along the grapevine, and so on. He's heard of his healing power, it seems. Notice how he calls him son of David, the only person in Mark's gospel that calls him that, although as Jesus enters Jerusalem, as we'll see next week, they say, blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.

To call Jesus son of David is to acknowledge that he is the Messiah, the long-awaited descendant of David who will bring about the glorious kingdom of God.

[15 : 21] And notice how he has cried, have mercy on me. That is not just a request for money, not just a request for sight. The cry or plea for mercy is heard many times in the book of the Psalms.

Always it is addressed to God to have mercy to deliver from a predicament, from the hands of an enemy, from illness, for forgiveness, from failings and sins, but always addressed to God.

So when Bartimaeus, this man of faith, cries out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me, he is confessing his faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the son of God, as well as the son of David.

And Jesus answers his request, go, your faith has made you well. He says, I want to see again. And Jesus says, go, your faith has made you well.

There's no touching his eyes to heal them. There's no going washing a pool of Siloam to heal them. Jesus speaks and he's healed.

[16 : 39] Powerful word. I mean, those of you who are doctors, imagine as you're sitting at your doctor's surgery and you've got your sick patient over there coughing and spluttering or whatever's wrong with them, go, your well.

I wonder whether you'd bulk bill for that. A powerful word, isn't it? To be able to speak and his sight comes back.

No operation, no magic, no touching, no herbal cure, no command to go and do this and this and this and then maybe your sight will work. He speaks.

It's that powerful voice of God that the Bible so clearly shows us in all sorts of different ways from beginning to end. God speaks and it happens.

He created the world that way. He heals that way. Jesus calls forth dead Lazarus from his tomb that way. Come forth and out he comes. He's alive again.

[17 : 44] As the first hymn that we sang today said, he speaks and listening to his voice new life, the dead receive, the blind can see, the deaf can hear a powerful word of Jesus Christ and he's told your faith has made you well.

Literally, your faith has saved you. More than just physical healing is implied by that. That is, you are a restored person not only physically but spiritually, restored in your relationship with God.

Like the man who was paralyzed in that famous story who's lowered through the roof by his four friends because the crowds around the house, they cut open in the thatch of the roof a hole and they drop their friend down on a stretcher and Jesus says to him not get up and walk initially but your sins are forgiven.

Came here to walk he might as well have said. But Jesus is demonstrating there that getting up and walking is the sign of spiritual salvation not just physical salvation.

salvation. That is, it's a whole salvation that Jesus is on about. So to here the implication is for Bartimaeus. Your faith has saved you not just because now you can see physically but because mercy has been given to you.

[19 : 04] And how does Bartimaeus respond? We're told that he immediately regained his sight. No slow rehabilitation or recuperation process and he followed Jesus on the way.

That's the sign of his salvation you see. Not just that he can see but that he follows Jesus on the way. From a man who is helpless sitting by the side of the way going nowhere he's now a restored man walking on the way following Jesus to Jerusalem.

And in this Bartimaeus is a recipient of what the Old Testament promises in the prophet Joel whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And Jesus is the Lord whose name has been called upon.

Jesus son of David have mercy on me and now he goes saved as the Old Testament promises. Mark's gospel is written like the other gospels to urge us to follow Jesus.

Here in this final miracle of healing in this gospel is the example of how to respond to Jesus Christ to follow him. Literally for Bartimaeus that means walking up the road to Jerusalem and in a few days time he no doubt is part of the crowd that sees Jesus on a donkey heading into Jerusalem with the palm waves being waved the clothes on the ground over which the donkey will walk and he no doubt is part of the crowd singing Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord he is the one maybe for his first ever time who sees that glorious temple of Jerusalem and the beauty of the city as they come over the Mount of Olives down into it he's one who's acclaiming Jesus as he follows him but follows him to die on a cross that's where Jesus is heading as we saw in the passage last week the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many for the full salvation of

[21 : 18] Bartimaeus like for you and me and the other disciples is not just to have our illnesses healed to have sight given when we're blind but it's to be ransomed freed from the tyranny of our own sin and failing achieved by Jesus death on the cross and that's where he's heading and that's where Bartimaeus is following Jesus has only just in chapter 8 said those who want to follow me must take up their cross to follow me and Bartimaeus we're told is following Jesus on the way as Jesus heads to his cross in Jerusalem but all of this here at the end of chapter 10 and into chapter 11 is part of a bigger picture in the Old Testament there is a glorious picture of the exiled people of God coming back to God it's a picture of the desert blooming it's a picture of those who are ill healed it's a picture of

God himself come to save it's a picture of of the people of God redeemed and restored coming to Zion to Jerusalem and all of those features we find in these verses last week's passage today's passage and into the arrival of Jerusalem at the beginning of chapter 11 in Isaiah 35 it looks forward with eager anticipation to the restoration of God's people from exile in Babylon we read the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees say to those who are of a fearful heart be strong do not fear here is your God he will come with vengeance with terrible recompense he'll come to save you then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy for waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of waters a highway shall be there and it shall be called the holy way the unclean shall not travel on it but it shall be for God's people no traveler not even fools shall go astray no lion shall be there nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it they shall not be found there but the redeemed shall walk there and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion that is

Jerusalem with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall be shall flee away in that wonderful picture we see what the story of Bartimaeus is on about this is God who's come to save as that Old Testament prophecy said there's the encouragement in those verses from Isaiah be strong do not fear which is virtually what what actually Bartimaeus is told by the people who go to call him be not afraid take heart we have here the blind thou seeing it's a picture of the glorious redemption and restoration that Jesus came to bring and he invites those all of us to follow him as those who are ransomed by his death on the cross freed from our sin forgiven for our sin to go with him to Zion with joy and gladness and singing and that's what happens at the beginning of chapter 11 as they arrive in

Jerusalem with singing and joy and gladness but turned over within a week as Jesus dies on a cross it's not prophecy unfulfilled though the real fulfillment lies yet in the future these events are the anticipation of the fulfillment of that prophecy yes there's a blind man who sees and there are others who've been healed yes there is the arrival in Jerusalem with joy and gladness and singing and yes God has come to save but the fullness of that yet awaits us the Bible ends with the picture of a new Jerusalem a gloriously and forever perfect city where perfect righteous purified and cleansed people alone are its citizens they are ransomed by the death of Jesus Christ they are wearing white robes they've been washed in the blood of

Jesus his death on the cross to forgive them they are righteous how is it possible without cost for us paid for by Jesus death how do we receive it by calling on the name of the Lord to be saved Jesus son of David have mercy on me beggars are not a public nuisance they ought to remind us of how we are to approach God not by claiming a right not by boasting in our good deeds not by relying on even something like baptism not by relying on religious practice not by relying on our own morality

or goodness but like

[27 : 18] Bartimaeus as beggars pleading with God for mercy for we cannot save ourselves nor can we contribute to our salvation but simply with empty hands outreached to God Jesus son of David have mercy on me but a cry of faith knowing that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved God God■■■■ let's come to