

Faith that Saves

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[0:00] Isaiah chapter 35, starting from verse 1. The desert and the parched land will be glad. The wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom.

It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts, be strong, do not fear, your God will come.

He will come with vengeance, divine retribution. He will come to save you. 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. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

[1:02] In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness. It will be for those who walk on that way.

The unclean will not journey on it. Wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast. They will not be found there.

But only the redeemed will walk there. And those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them. And sorrow and sighing will flee away. Tonight's New Testament reading comes from Mark 10, verse 46-52.

Starting from verse 46. Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.

[2:06] When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

Jesus stopped and said, call him. So they called to the blind man, cheer up on your feet, he's calling you. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him. The blind man said, Rabbi, I want to see.

Go, said Jesus, your faith has healed you. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, I think there will probably be some dog lovers among us.

So you may be familiar with what I'm about to say. But there is a dog show in England, which has been going on for many years, more than a century, by the name of Crufts.

[3:13] Yes? Anyone not familiar? Familiar? Yes? Yes? Michelle? Yes? Okay. Anyway, for those of you not, what happens each year is that they crown an overall winner for the dog that is considered to be best of breed.

And so for this year, it happened I think last weekend or something, it happens to be Bruin. Now he's a clumber spaniel. I've never heard of that before, but there you go.

Quite a new breed. Beautiful dog, don't you think? Now, just in case you're wondering, the winner last year was a Whippet picture. I think it's Italian, so that's why it's got that name, which I don't know whether it's Wichia or something like that.

And then, just so that you can see a few more, here are some of the other winners from previous years. Not bad looking, eh?

Now, just as the name best of breed indicates, the winners are models of what the breed should be like, right? They are judged according to certain standards.

[4:23] So, the proportions, the facial and other features, and of course, the grooming and health of the dog. It's what all the other dogs in the breed should aspire to, you know?

As this winner walks around and struts its stuff, all the other dogs will be looking and go, wow, you know, I need to trim my hair here or there or whatever. Now, the reason why I'm saying this is that, as we've been going through Mark, the question for us to consider today is, what's the image of a model believer as portrayed in Mark?

If, let's say, there was a best of breed for Christians, what are the features, what are the characteristics that God might be looking for? Now, if you've studied the Gospel in its entirety, including the passages that we've been looking at in previous years, you will actually see a consistent picture emerging.

So, we'll get to Bartimaeus, who is our main character today. But before we do, I'm actually going to do a bit of a survey of the other examples in Mark, good ones as well as not-so-good ones.

And then we'll see at the end why Bartimaeus is included, right at the end here of Jesus' teaching ministry, just as he's about to enter Jerusalem.

[5:46] So, looking at the outline, the first point is, examples then of people whom Jesus blesses as exemplars of the faith. So, we begin all the way back in Mark 2, where there were four men who brought a paralyzed friend to Jesus.

And because the entrance was blocked, they lowered him down from the roof. And when Jesus saw that, he eventually responded in Mark 2, verse 5, saying on the next slide, well, this is what Mark says, when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, of course, Jesus healed the man as well, but he first attended to his greatest need, that of having his sins forgiven, and therefore being saved.

But notice there why Jesus responds. It is when Jesus saw their faith that he said to this man. So, that's the first example.

The second one is found in Mark 5. In actual fact, there are two healings that occur in close succession here. So, Jesus was first approached by Jairus, a synagogue leader, who has come to ask Jesus to heal his daughter.

[7:07] And so, on his way there, what happens was that another woman, who was bleeding for 12 years, who has been bleeding for 12 years, she touches Jesus' clothes, and she is immediately healed.

And Jesus immediately noticed, and so he turns around to her, and in front of her, says in verse 34, after a bit of exchange, he finally says to her, daughter, your faith has healed you.

Go in peace and be freed from your suffering. Now, just at that point, news comes from Jairus' house that his daughter has died, and so everyone presumes that it's too late for Jesus to go and save her.

But then Jesus says to Jairus, in the next couple of verses, in verse 36, he says to Jairus, do not be afraid, just believe. And then, of course, he goes on to raise her from the dead.

Now, I hope you're beginning to see the pattern here, aren't you? That all these people that Jesus heals, they may be different, male, female, prominent members of society, or outcasts, but the one common theme that runs throughout is that of faith and belief.

[8:23] And so that's the case when we've come to the current series that we've been looking at later on in Mark. And in particular, the one example we looked at a few weeks ago, this time Jesus was coming down from the mountain after the transfiguration, and here the disciples come to him with a boy who was possessed by an impure spirit.

The disciples had been given the authority to heal, and yet they could not do it. And so eventually, Jesus says to the father of the boy, in Mark 9, verse 23, on the next slide, everything is possible for one who believes.

And immediately, the boy exclaims, or the boy's father exclaims, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. And so again, in all these cases, the healing hinges on the faith of the people involved.

Now by contrast, we're going to look at then examples in the second point of lack of faith. The first one is back in chapter 4 of Mark, and this time Jesus is in the boat with his disciples during a storm. And when the disciples found him sleeping, I mean, they were afraid that they were going to drown and all that, they awoke him to say, don't you care if we drown? And Jesus remonstrates with them, and then says in verse 40, why are you so afraid?

[9:44] Do you still not have faith? Again, that same word. And here Jesus says, still have no faith, because he expected them to have faith.

They'd seen his power, they'd heard his teaching, they should have understood, and yet they still did not believe in Jesus. Not at that point, of course, but later on.

Now later then, Jesus comes home to his town of Nazareth, where there was opposition. And what we find is a summary right at the end of that account, where Mark says, in chapter 6, verse 5 and 6, that Jesus could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

why he was amazed at their lack of faith. And so again and again, we see, isn't it, that it is faith, or in this case, the lack thereof, that was the issue.

Come again to Mark chapter 6, where we have another incident, this time involving the disciples again. They witness Jesus walking on water, and they are terrified. Now Jesus calls out to them, telling them not to be afraid, but then Mark reveals the reason for this.

[10:56] He says, the disciples were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves, their hearts were hardened. And so you can see on the next slide there, that they had witnessed Jesus' power.

Most recently, it was the feeding of the 5,000, and that's why they talked about the loaves. And yet they didn't understand who Jesus is, that he was the Son of God.

The reason? Not because they were dumb, no, but the reason given was because their hearts were hardened. Or, to put another way, they lacked belief.

And finally, we come to an incident with the crowd after the transfiguration, where, again, Jesus, they were confronted, they confronted Jesus to ask why the disciples couldn't drive out their impure spirit.

And Jesus actually begins by saying, in Mark chapter 9, verse 19, you unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you?

[11:59] How long shall I put up with you? So, Doris, I think we might be a couple of slides ahead. Either that or skip the slides. Okay, I left a lot. Sorry about that. But if you go there, Mark chapter 19, Jesus, in his exasperation, says to them, you unbelieving generation.

Again, it is the question of faith, isn't it? Now, why am I going through all these examples? Because I want to try and show that consistently throughout the Gospels, and indeed in the other Gospels, the key focus of Jesus and the Gospel writers is the question of faith.

Yes, time and time again, it's what the people recognize Jesus to be and then how they respond that matters. Yes, often in the context, it's in the context of a miracle, a healing, or impure spirit, but the miracle itself is not the main point.

Jesus wasn't just performing the miracles to ease the suffering of the person. His goal was to demonstrate who He is, that He was God, He is God Himself, and therefore, I am able to heal, and more than that, to save them completely.

And in the last two chapters, over the last few weeks, this question comes into sharp focus. If you go back to that story about the rich man who came to Jesus to ask, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[13:28] Well, He eventually walks away, and that's when the disciples ask, who then can be saved? And of course, as I said, the answer was already given earlier in the example of the little ones, that Jesus was angry with the disciples trying to shoo away.

Mark also demonstrates this by all the other people that are being mentioned today, that these little ones that Jesus speaks of are the ones that show faith, and therefore are healed, are saved, are welcomed into God's kingdom.

The other thing that we looked at over the last two or three weeks is that Jesus has also been speaking about not just who God will save, but how God saves. And three times since chapter 8,

He has been predicting His own death, that He will be handed over to the authorities to be killed, to be hung on the cross, only to be raised again.

So, how will Jesus save? By dying for us on the cross, so that He can then give us eternal life because our sins are forgiven. He pays the price for our sins, and then gives us the life that He has. And so, when we get to Bartimaeus today, his story, his narrative, fits into this pattern, this motif. He's one of the little ones that we're meant to say, we're meant to identify that Jesus welcomes into the kingdom.

[14:59] And then, of course, as I said, we will also see why Mark chooses to put this story about Bartimaeus right at the end here, just before Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Alright, so that's a bit of a long intro, as it were, or context. But with all that said, let's look at verse 46, which is now on the next slide. And the scene here is in Jericho, which is some 25 kilometers from Jerusalem.

And if you want a sense of that, that's about the distance between the Melbourne CBD and Mitchum. Alright? Doncaster, I think, is a bit closer. So, certainly, you can ride that in two hours. I've done it. but, if you wanted to walk that as well, I think you could walk that in 25, 25 k's, you could walk that in a day. So, it's a day's journey from Jerusalem.

So, let's read verse 46. Then they came to Jerusalem, as Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.

[16:04] So, we have an image, don't we, of Bartimaeus, a poor man, destitute, begging, relying on the goodwill of others to live, to survive.

So, he has nothing to offer. But, when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

You see, Bartimaeus may be a beggar, and he may be blind, but he's not ignorant of the current affairs of his day, was he?

He's kept up with the news, including about Jesus, and his miracles, and teaching. And whereas others tend to call Jesus teacher, or rabbi, Bartimaeus calls Jesus the son of David.

Now, Mark only records Bartimaeus doing this in his gospel. In the other gospels, there are a few others who do the same, but they all tend to be people that need Jesus to save them.

[17:12] The other instance we'll get to next week when Jesus enters Jerusalem, and the crowd calls him by the name son of David. And the reason why Bartimaeus uses that phrase is because the son of David is a title for the Messiah.

It's the one that the people expected that God would send to save them. And so, Bartimaeus here is not just calling out to Jesus, he's recognizing him as God's chosen Messiah.

He may be physically blind, but he's got more insight, actually, than a lot of others, including the disciples. For him, Jesus isn't simply a teacher, he's the Messiah.

And yes, some of you will tell me that Peter, in a moment of divine revelation, also calls Jesus the Messiah in Mark 8, but Peter, in his subsequent actions and words, actually reveal that he doesn't quite fully get it.

On the other hand, Bartimaeus not only recognizes Jesus rightly as Messiah, he also responds correctly by pleading for mercy. And he's not doing this half-heartedly, but doggedly, persistently.

[18:27] because when the others tried to shut him up, he refused to stop. Verse 49, Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And look, again, if you've been joining us for the last few weeks, there are echoes here, isn't it, of that incident where the disciples were shooing the little ones. here, the crowd was shooing Bartimaeus.

But in both cases, they were thinking, this poor beggar, these little ones, they're not worthy of Jesus' time. But you know, Bartimaeus, he's not deterred because he's desperate, isn't he?

I'm sure you've seen some movies before where, you know, that someone is stranded on a deserted island. The one that comes to mind is Tom Hanks in Castaway.

Yeah. And you know, they're there, you know, eating coconuts or whatever they can find. And then one day, a ship or a plane passes by, right?

[19:35] And it's very far away. You know, and you know when you look at that, it's just too far for Tom Hanks to be, you know, shouting and waving to attract their attention.

But he does so anyway, isn't it? And he even keeps doing it, right? Even after the ship has sailed or the plane has passed, he's still willingly trying to wave the plane down or lighting whatever fire. Why does he do that? Because he thinks in the plane or the ship that that's his only hope of salvation, right? Even though realistically, as he looks at it, it's probably futile.

Now, Bartimaeus probably feels that way, although he probably believes that Jesus can save him. Nevertheless, he knows that Jesus was his only hope. He's not going to be shut up so easily as a result, is he?

And of course, Jesus did hear him. Being Jesus, he probably already knew before Bartimaeus called out. But in verse 49, Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And so they called to the blind man, Cheer up.

[20:46] On your feet, he's calling you. They're probably thinking, Wow, it's his lucky day. But it's not luck, is it? What Jesus was rewarding was his faith.

So verse 50, throwing his cloak aside, he jumps to his feet and came to Jesus. What do you want me to do for you, Jesus asked him. The blind man said, Rabbi, I want to see.

Go, said Jesus. Your faith has healed you. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Now, if you look at my outline, the bullet point there says that Bartimaeus was saved, even though the text says Jesus healed Bartimaeus.

And that's because the Greek word can mean both healed and saved. And I think in the context of Mark, as we've been looking at, and in this particular passage and the surrounding context, it is clear, isn't it, that Bartimaeus wasn't simply healed by Jesus, but he was also saved because of his faith.

He's just like the little ones that Jesus spoke of that can enter God's kingdom because he and they were dependent on him. And you know, when we read that phrase that he followed Jesus along the road, it should bring back as well a reminder of what happened at the very start of Mark because there, Simon and Andrew, James and John, remember, they left their nets and followed Jesus.

[22:20] And along the way throughout the Gospel, Jesus continually talks about what it means to follow him. Now, in the case of Bartimaeus, all he left behind was probably his cloak, right?

But you have to think that that's probably the only piece of garment of any value for him, right? He probably had nothing else. And of course, what he was also leaving behind was his place of begging, you know, his familiar spot right outside Jericho where he knew that he would get people giving him money.

And for all we know, this is just a guess, that is probably also the very place that he laid his head each night, right? Now, interestingly, Jesus commands Bartimaeus to go.

But what does Bartimaeus do instead? He follows Jesus. And here's where I think we have the reason for why Bartimaeus' account occurs right here before Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Because for Bartimaeus to follow Jesus meant that he too was going to be going to Jerusalem, right? Following Jesus, Jesus was going to Jerusalem.

[23:39] And next week, we'll read about the people that line the streets as Jesus enters Jerusalem, shouting, Hosanna, which means God saves, Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to the Messiah, the rightful King of Israel.

And I want to compare now this story then with the reading that we had in Isaiah 35 because I think if you read that, there are just so many strong echoes and parallels between this story and what's being said in Isaiah 35.

And so if you want to turn back to there, 714, you can, but hopefully the verses will be on the slides as well. I want to look specifically at verse 5, 6, 8, and 10. So verse 5 says, And so at first glance, you can see Bartimaeus fits the bill, doesn't he?

The eyes of the blind were open, that's him. Shouting for joy, that's probably him too. Then verse 8, Now, if you go back to Mark and you read another version, a more literal translation of Mark 10, verse 52, let's say the ESV, what it actually says there is that Bartimaeus followed Jesus, not along the road, but on the way.

The same words that are in Isaiah 35, verse 8. And when you go to verse 9 and 10, what is revealed is that those who walk on this way are those whom the Lord has saved or redeemed.

[25:36] So verse 9, But only the redeemed will walk there, and those that the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing, everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. And here's another question, another connection. What's another word for redeem that starts with R?

Ransom. Yes? And what did Jesus say last week in Mark chapter 10 and verse 45? That he did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom, to redeem many.

And that's what Jesus is going to Jerusalem to do, isn't he? So that those that the Lord has rescued and redeemed will then be able to enter into God's kingdom, all of which is portrayed symbolically in Isaiah 35 and the Old Testament as people coming to the city of Zion.

Because that's God's dwelling place, his place of rule, where there is singing and dancing, gladness and everlasting joy, where sorrow and sighing will flee away.

[26:54] It's a picture of people being forgiven, isn't it? Of people being made whole. I mean, we're not blind, we're not lame, not many of us. Some have poor eyesight.

But it doesn't matter. There's a picture of those who are broken, who need healing, spiritual healing, who need restoration in their lives, isn't it? And so Bartimaeus' story is really a glimpse of what fulfillment in Isaiah 35 looks like.

As those whom God has ransomed, God has redeemed, enter his kingdom and follow Jesus along the way, the way of holiness. You know, friends, if you speak to people that are maybe not Christians or whatever, many people would think that the mark of a Christian is someone who's a good person, who is morally upright.

They do what the Bible says. They come to church faithfully every week. And yes, in a sense, that's what Christians do do, right? I mean, the last thing we want after we become Christian is to continue to do wrong things and to sin.

But we need to recognize that such obedience is to be a response to faith in Jesus. Because it is actually possible to keep obeying the law without believing in Jesus.

[28:20] We saw that with the rich man, didn't we? He said that he kept God's law since he was a boy. And yet, he could not find salvation in God's kingdom.

Why? Because he did not do it out of faith. He had other gods in his life. He didn't serve God alone. So if I can go back to the analogy of the dog show at the start, if there was an equivalent of crufts for Christians, what do you think we should judge a model Christian by?

Or put it another way, what do you see in your own life, if you believe in Jesus, that is the mark of the Christian that God desires you to be? Do you look, for instance, at first, at all the things you've done, your acts of service, your ability to teach the Bible, your ministry experience?

Or is it your spirituality, the fact that you just never skip a daily devotion every morning? You wake up, seven o'clock, do your devotions for half an hour at least, before you go to work or have your breakfast?

Or is it the amount of time that you spend studying the Bible? Now again, please do not hear me wrong, right? These are all good things, please keep reading your Bible, keep coming to church, keep serving.

[29:49] But they are evidence of our growth as Christians, isn't it? If they arise from our faith, then they are the fruit of the Spirit. And as the word fruit implies, there are good things that result from something else, the product of God's work in our lives.

Conversely, it is actually possible, isn't it, to do good works outwardly without the inner transformation of the Spirit. As I said, the rich man was a prime example, but so were the Pharisees.

You know, they obeyed God's commands. Of all the people in those days, they were the ones that spent the most time at the temple, at the synagogue. And yet, they lacked the one thing that truly mattered, and that was faith in Jesus.

And when I say faith in Jesus, I don't mean just the intellectual belief that, oh yeah, Jesus is the Son of God. When I say faith in Jesus, I mean dependence on Him, fully trusting and relying on Jesus for everything that we have in life.

It is Bartimaeus and others like him that show us what it means to be able to enter God's kingdom. Because Bartimaeus, he pleaded for mercy, knowing that it was only by God's grace that he would be saved.

[31:10] And I think many of us who have been Christians for a while, we know this. We know that when we first come to become a Christian, we put our faith in Jesus, we put our trust in what He's done for us on the cross, and our sins are forgiven.

The challenge then now is to keep continuing to do that for the rest of our lives. because otherwise we are tempted to live this life as a Christian under our own strength, like the rich man, rather than Bartimaeus.

So when life is good, we need to remember that it's not about our effort, isn't it? But we need to be humble in thanking God because all good things come from Him.

If life, however, throws us a curveball, then we actually recognize, no, God is the one who will sustain us. He will get us out of whatever we're in at the moment.

It is not solely on our own strength that we have to solve our own problems. As a result, we can learn then to let go of things and not feel like we have to be in control of our lives, or that if we don't, the balls will drop because God is the one that's in control.

[32:24] And then, of course, that also means that we can forgive because justice then is not in our hands, but in the hands of a sovereign God.

This week, King Lee and I, so King Lee, our new MTS apprentice, we went and visited two elderly saints down at St. John's. And the two of them are two different people.

They're at a stage in life where actually attending church is really a challenge for them. And, you know, they're actually physically no longer capable of doing many things.

And they've been Christians for a long time, so what they've had to give up is all the types of things that they used to do in church, in serving God. But despite them seemingly not being able to do much for God, I would say without hesitation that they bear all the marks of a true believer in Jesus. If there was a cross for Christians and they were entered into that competition, I think they would be pretty high up the short list. Yes, they had godly character and all that, but it all stems from still having a joyful dependence on the Lord.

[33:45] Not just for their salvation, but for everything else in their lives as well. And you know, when Jesus looks upon them, he doesn't see two people that are no longer useful to him.

Instead, what he sees are two people deeply precious in his sight, whom he has ransomed, and who, like Bartimaeus, is still wholly relying, trusting, and depending on him.

Now, I know many of us are, by contrast, still a bit young and sprightly compared to them. So, yeah, please don't stop serving God and all that.

You can still do that. Keep doing it. But we need to be careful, isn't it? Not to let ourselves think that it's those things that we can do for God that is of value to him that saves us, that makes us a model Christian.

But actually, it is our continued dependence on Jesus. Yes, for our salvation, but actually, as a result of that, for every other thing in our life, that we're looking to Jesus, knowing that God is the one that we need to plead to for mercy, and of course, God, by his grace and abundant mercy, he will.

[35:08] He will look after us, and he will save us. So, let me pray and ask that we will continue in this, even as we've started. If, however, today is the first time you heard about the good news of Jesus, this is the good news, that it is not because of what we do that we can enter and have eternal life, but rather, it's already what Jesus has done for us.

And the attitude we need to have is to come humbly, to depend on him to be saved, rather than to think we need to do this or that in order to find salvation.

Let's pray. Father, we rejoice at the work of your son who died to ransom us so that we depend on him for our salvation.

We rejoice at the work of his spirit in our lives so that we are able to follow him, continuing to depend on him for everything in our lives. Father, help us.

Help us to live by faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.