

Blind Bartimaeus

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

So I want to invite you to go ahead and start turning in your Bibles. We're going to be in Mark chapter 10, verses 46 through 52. Mark 10, 46 through 52.

And as you're turning there, I just want to ask a question. We're kind of in the Christmas season now. And the question is this, what makes Christmas feel like Christmas for you? What are those traditions that your family does that if you were to miss them, it would just feel really weird? Or maybe it's watching a certain Christmas movie, like maybe it's A Wonderful Life or Elf or something. Or maybe it's joining in on some Christmas caroling or a candle lighting ceremony. Maybe it's getting together with certain family members. Or maybe it's avoiding certain family members for Christmas, right? Maybe you always open gifts on Christmas Eve, like my wife's family.

[1 : 05] Or maybe you grew up opening gifts on Christmas morning. I don't know. I remember growing up, my parents used to put a little trail of candy in the hallway leading to the Christmas tree.

But they'd always use masking tape to tape off the entryway to actually get to the Christmas tree where the presents were. It was almost like this hazmat zone. And they would block it up until the right time.

Well, we would wake up at the crack of dawn on Christmas morning, bust out of our rooms and gobble up all that candy trail. And we'd just sit there in front of that hazmat zone with candy slime on our faces just waiting for the moment.

You know, when it was time we broke through those tapes, it was a joy-filled moment. I'll tell you what. I'm sure you guys have some of those things, too. I know for breakfast, we always did three things.

Mom always made monkey bread, breakfast casserole, and fruit salad. Those three things. They were staples. And if you didn't have those things, it just didn't feel like Christmas.

[2 : 03] Things were off and weird. I know you guys have those things, too. And on the flip side of that, many of us enter this season knowing what it feels like when those things are off.

I mean, several of you have experienced the frenzy of moving to a new place and a new home. And you're trying to figure out new normals. Well, that first Christmas can really feel especially disorienting if you're at a new home in a new town.

Maybe you're far from family and friends. Or maybe this is the first time entering this season after losing a loved one. And that familiar face just isn't there. Strikingly absent.

And that loss is maybe sinking in a little more deeply during this time. Well, those feelings of incompleteness may be felt most acutely during this season.

But this morning, we're going to meet a character whose entire life is characterized by this gnawing sense of incompleteness. Well, this morning, I want to introduce you to a man named Bartimaeus.

[3 : 07] Every morning of this man's life, he opens his eyes only to experience another day of darkness. And while others are getting on the road to start their busy day, he fumbles his way to the side of the road to beg.

Blind, begging Bartimaeus. Well, his position next to the road really reveals his position and relationship to people.

He's low. He's just a speed bump for people to kind of get over or try to get around. No one's coming to see Bartimaeus. And he's definitely not going to see anybody.

He has nothing to contribute in life. His life is characterized by hopelessness, weariness, meaninglessness, isolation, and broken relationships.

This is a man who is incomplete. Well, this morning, we have the incredible privilege to open God's Word, to see God's heart towards those like blind, begging Bartimaeus.

[4 : 13] So let's read Mark chapter 10, 46 to 52. This is the Word of God. And 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 many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart. Get up. He is 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?

[5 : 23] 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. Although we may not be physically blind, I think we can all relate to blind begging Bartimaeus at some level.

Well, maybe you've experienced some sense of ongoing hopelessness. You desire change, but you're sick of every hope leading to a dead end.

It's disappointment. And you're weary of waking up day after day to the same dark reality. And maybe you're wondering what this life is for.

Maybe you have a lot of unanswered questions and wonder if there's any meaning to your life. Or maybe you've got secrets that you feel can never come out because you'd be branded and rejected.

[6 : 33] Instead, you sit on the roadside in the shadows of shame. Or maybe you feel the weight of broken relationships with people and perhaps even with God himself.

This morning, the Lord is inviting all those living in darkness to take heart and get up.

To those who are blind, Jesus offers you mercy this morning. If you understand what's being said today, Jesus will replace your hopelessness with hope, your weariness with renewal, your meaninglessness with meaning, your isolation with true fellowship.

I believe that the main point of our text this morning is very simple. Turn your eyes upon Jesus and receive mercy. We've got three points we're going to look at today.

Point one, our desperate need. Two, our shocking call. And three, our Christ-filled eyes. So let's look at the first one. Verses 46 to 48, our desperate need.

[7 : 37] Well, this is the last miracle that we're looking at performed in the Gospel of Mark. And the story of Bartimaeus closes a section of teaching and miracles from chapters 8 to chapter 10.

And they're really just two big ideas that are being covered in this section. Jesus is the Messiah and the cost of discipleship. He's been showing his disciples that he is the suffering servant and that we must follow him.

Chapter 8 began with a healing of a blind man and now it concludes with a healing of a blind man. And these two healings are intended to focus our attention on the content of chapters 8 through 10. So the story of blind begging Bartimaeus is really a capstone story following Jesus' vital teaching. So what did he just say? The last thing that he just said was the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now Jesus intends to punctuate his teaching here with a demonstration. Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem from the city of Jericho and this is where our story begins this morning.

[8 : 52] Now Jericho is on the road that leads to Jerusalem. Galilean Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem they would go around this area where the Samaritans lived since the Samaritans were considered to be these religiously cuckoo and unclean people.

They would cross around over the Jordan River and then cross back over right at Jericho in order to take this 20 mile leg up the steep road to Jerusalem. So the people who were walking along this route were doubly pious.

You think about this. They avoided the Samaritans that's point number one and then they were also heading to Jerusalem to participate in a religious festival the Passover. So double whammy super religious.

Now look at verse 46 with me. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples in a great crowd Bartimaeus a blind beggar the son of Timaeus was sitting by the roadside.

Well Jesus is walking along with his disciples and a great crowd. This is not Jesus joining a crowd rather this is a crowd joining Jesus. They're pilgrims who've been exposed to Jesus' teaching one way or the other and they're walking with him on the way to the Passover festival.

[10:02] So here's the scene. You got this rumbling crowd that's building up around Jesus. Some of them have come because of the novelty and they've seen something amazing and they're looking for something else. Others join because they've seen the transformation of loved ones and they've been healed.

Still others join because of Jesus' authoritative teaching and his puzzling parables. They're trying to figure this stuff out. The crowd just keeps growing in size and anticipation as Jesus moves towards Jerusalem and it's here that we're introduced to Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus is both blind and a beggar. It's true that a person can live a somewhat productive and normal life even if they're unable to see but just to be sure that we understand what kind of blind man this is it's clarified for us.

He is a beggar. All possibilities of a moderate disability and kind of a cozy life those are stripped away. This guy lives in perpetual darkness and since he can't see he has to be strategic in other ways.

He has to always be listening. He's got to plant himself next to foot traffic in hopes of experiencing some kind of generosity. Well most days Bartimaeus wonders if it's worth fumbling his way to the road headed towards Jerusalem.

[11:28] This is the path where the most pious Jews walk towards that holy city. However even the most pious could barely stand to flip him a coin. Not even those who were supposedly the closest to God could do anything.

Nor did it seem that they cared to do anything about his situation. Blind begging Bartimaeus though he cannot see ironically feels the shame of being an eyesore to all who lay his eye on him.

Hopeless weary meaningless isolated ashamed he sits in darkness day after day until one day he hears a rumble down the road.

He lifts his head to try to get a better read on that sound. Could you imagine what he's thinking in this moment? Could that sound be some pious pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem?

I bet he even wonders if he's going to eat today and he gets excited and he sits up and in his excitement he asks someone ahead of the crowd what that commotion is all about and the response is Jesus of Nazareth is coming.

[12:38] Well the word has gotten out about Jesus of Nazareth especially in that disabled community Bartimaeus had heard those stories he's been sitting on the roadside long enough to overhear how Jesus made lame men walk deaf men hear and blind men see.

Look at verse 47 and 48 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 and he begins to cry out what's going on in his mind in that moment?

I bet that crowd is wondering the same thing. Look at how they respond. They try to stifle him and that's really similar to the situation just previously where the parents they're bringing their children up to Jesus remember that?

Remember how the disciples responded then? Children had no value in society so they assumed they couldn't possibly be worth Jesus' time so they rebuked the parents and tried to turn them away.

Well in the same way here the crowd surrounding Jesus is annoyed that such a person of such worthlessness would try to draw Jesus' attention away. Who does he think he is?

[14:03] So they attempt to put him back in his place but it says that he cried out all the more. Why did he cry out? Well here's why desperate need caught a glimpse of hope.

You see desperation is not easily stifled when there's hope. I remember one time going on a trip with our family it was kind of a cold dreary day but we had been in the car for a while and everyone was getting really restless you know how those trips go.

So we pulled off a little mountain lake so we could walk around and kind of stretch our legs.

Elizabeth and I were getting snacks ready our heads were down next to the van all of a sudden we

heard a cry. We popped our heads up and we saw our oldest son Banner trying to help our daughter Elia and apparently they had been trying to throw rocks into that lake and they didn't realize that all the ground leading to the shoreline was like this mud bog because of the rain and Elia had waded into some deep mud and was basically stuck up to her shins and the harder she tried to get out the deeper she sunk.

She was experiencing desperate need in that moment. You better believe it Banner was trying his best to help her I think he had a stick or something he was trying to fish her out but that was not cutting it.

It was not going to work but I was able to kind of glob my way through the mud and I was able to pick up Elia and made that sound and when I did her boot stayed in the mud but the rest of her came up that was good and so I started to walk with her I dislodged her and I carried her back to the van and she was stuck like Bartimaeus she knew she had no way to fix that situation but that desperate need gave rise to the cry of hope and that's why in spite of the rebuke Bartimaeus is undeterred here he recognizes his desperate need he understands the plight of his situation it's a dead end he's exhausted all of his resources the only way out is hope outside of himself he needs rescue and he cannot do himself so the only thing he can do is cry out in dependence but not only is it important to see that he does cry out but we gotta ask why he cries out because this is a different cry than any other day he's not crying out for more money he's crying out for mercy look at the title that he uses when he cries out to Jesus why son of

[16:38] David here well this title is specifically used in reference to the long awaited Messiah centuries before God had made a promise to David that he would establish one of his descendants as a ruler forever psalm 72 depicts the son of David this ruler as the king who would deliver the needy and surely these words that we're about to look at animated the cry of Bartimaeus psalm 72 12-13 says this for he delivers the needy when he calls the poor and him who has no helper he has pity on the weak and the needy and he saves the lives of the needy so the desperate cry of Bartimaeus here to the son of David shows us something extraordinary Bartimaeus had heard those stories about Jesus and it's clear that he believed Jesus to be more than just a teacher and a healer Bartimaeus understood that Jesus was the Messiah so this cry was not an effort to get a few coins to live another day in darkness no this was the desperate cry of a man who knew his need was much greater than that it's been said that Bartimaeus was a blind beggar but what he lacked an eyesight he made up for an insight

Bartimaeus could not see with the eyes of his head but he could see with the eyes of his heart and though sitting by that roadside he stands in contrast with the rich young ruler and the spiritual leaders who put their hope and prestige and power blind begging Bartimaeus knew he needed real hope he needed Jesus so he cried out appealing for mercy his cry was from a genuine faith his cry was an acknowledgement of his deepest need pain and dependence so let me ask you a question have you cried out have you been gripped by your desperate need if you're weary of settling for temporary solutions to your life's problems you must stop this morning and ask if you're only collecting a few coins to treat the symptoms of the day or begging for mercy to be changed at the deepest level by the only one who can actually deliver you your greatest need is not a better house or a more fulfilling job or a place with conservative politics your greatest need is not an impressive resume or bucket list travel plans or well behaved kids your greatest need is to be saved from God's wrath against your sin we have rebelled against our creator and refused to follow him we've committed sins against one another and against God and we failed to love him with all that we are because of our sin we're separated from him forever and under his righteous judgment all other problems that we have flow from this central problem are sin before a holy God so how can we be moved beyond menial solutions we must see our desperate need and cry out to the only one who could do something about it J.C.

Ryle once described it this way what is the reason that men are so half-hearted in seeking Christ why are they so soon deterred and checked and discouraged in drawing near to God the answer is short and simple they do not feel sufficiently their own sins they are not thoroughly convinced of the plague of their own hearts and the disease of their own souls once let a man see his own guilt as it really is and he will never rest until he has found pardon and peace in Christ it is they who like Bartimaeus really know their own deplorable condition who persevere like Bartimaeus and are finally healed you you may be asking this morning but won't crying draw attention to my situation commentator James Edwards writes this the kingdom of heaven has been said is not for the well

meaning but for the desperate

Bartimaeus is desperate and his desperation is a doorway to faith well maybe you feel the desperation of your need and you want to call out but you're not sure if the risk is worth it maybe you've been burned before too many times and you're scared to trust and maybe you feel as though you've been too bad and God wouldn't possibly do anything for someone like you if you've ever battled with thoughts like these then let's pause and think about this next point together number two our shocking call Bartimaeus had laid it all on the line Bartimaeus screamed until his voice was raw I mean can you imagine the pregnant pause that he was experiencing would would he just be rebuked as his hope for rescue fades down the road well the next words in verse 49 are perhaps some of the most encouraging to anyone who wonders if they are too lost too far gone or too needy verse 49 begins with these words and Jesus stopped oh what glorious words those are [22 : 48] Jesus stopped what do those reveal about who Jesus is well these these words reveal the personal compassion of Jesus it's not like you're screaming at the referees on TV during the big game they're not going to change no matter how hard you scream at that TV no Jesus hears and he personally responds to the cry of this blind beggar by stopping and not only is this a picture of his personal compassion it's a picture of his particular compassion Jesus is not just making some kind of general stop that's pragmatic for him it's not like he's stopping at the gas station he's going to grab some chips while he's there that's not what's happened this is not a matter of convenience for Jesus on the contrary completely opposite he has nothing to gain from this stop but inconvenience there's only one reason that he's stopping here there's only one person that he is stopping for he does not stop because of what he can gain he stops because of what he can give he stops because of his great love for those who cannot help themselves if you struggle with knowing if God really hears you or if he would respond see the heart of

God towards you in these words he stops for the lowly he stops for those who have nothing to give but burdens he stops personally and particularly for you next I invite you to listen to what he says in the verse because after stopping he commands the disciples to call him well that's a shocking call for a number a number of reasons for one Jesus commands the very ones who were doing the rebuking only moments before to now do the calling it's almost comical isn't it you imagine that moment it's literally the verse before why did Jesus tell them to do this well I think it's because he's rebuking the rebukers he's reminding them of their place in the kingdom he's reminding them that this this is an upside down kingdom and it does not work the way that the world works they are not better than anyone else simply because they were called earlier no the reason they're in is because they too were down and out now they follow the king who is a servant

I think I think this is a word not just for the disciples in that crowd but for the disciples in this crowd as well we were not called to be Jesus's bodyguards he does not need us to guard his time or his reputation Charles Spurgeon put it this way suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they were to defend a lion a full grown king of beast there he is in the cage and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him well I should suggest to them if they would not object and feel that it was humbling to them that they should kindly stand back and open the door and let the lion out I believe that would be best the best way of defending him for he would take care of himself and the best apology for the gospel is to let the gospel out he did not call us to be his bodyguards he called us to be callers let's remember that we too are recipients of this same shocking call this should profoundly humble us and inspire us to call the Bartimaeuses in our lives the one at your workplace the one at your school at your grocery store maybe even sitting around your Christmas table

D.T. Niles once famously said Christianity is just one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread look at how they call the blind man take heart get up he's calling you I can only imagine the immense shock everyone was feeling in that moment the freshly rebuked disciples went from saying shut up to cheer up the unthinkable was happening here Jesus had stopped for this blind beggar and no matter where we may be this morning this shocking call is informative to us all as Trevin Waxham put it for those of us who are desperate and helpless Jesus' words of hope cut through the other voices that surround us and give us the boldness to come directly to him and for those of us quick to rebuke and slow to show mercy Jesus' words command us to stop squelching the problem and start offering the solution you see when Bartimaeus hears that he has been called verse 50 says throwing off his cloak he sprang up and came to Jesus this is not the drudgery of school on Monday morning now this this is the spring and the electrifying excitement of Christmas

morning he pops up this is a picture of eager faith he springs up and he throws off his cloak the very thing you think about it this is the very thing that probably keeps him warm at night and it's probably the basis for his begging during the day it defines his whole life so some leave their nets some leave their money

Bartimaeus throws off his cloak in joyful anticipation and comes to Jesus and then Jesus asks a really strange question in verse 51 what do you want me to do for you I'm not trying to be rude but it's like are you serious why are you asking that question of all questions that you could be asking why does he ask that is it not obvious why he's desperately crying out does he really not know if Jesus asked you that question what do you want me to do for you how would you answer well there's perhaps no more important question to be asked because the answer to this question reveals the heart

[29 : 37] David Garland helpfully wrote our answer to this question will reveal whether we want death or life whether we want to be healed from our blindness or selfishly want to use God to do our bidding and fulfill our own desires this question should sound really familiar to us it's the same exact question Jesus asked James and John if you're looking in your Bible just trace it back up to verse 36 what do you want me to do for you and what's their request grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory when contrast to the disciples request for power and glory the question gives opportunity for Bartimaeus to voice his faith and in humble trust he doesn't ask for wealth power or prestige he asks for sight he doesn't ask to be superhuman just asks to be human he places his hope in the only one he knows can rescue him and notice that this beggar is not drawing from his abundance of resources to ask

Jesus what he can bring to the team no Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with nothing but a request for mercy Gene Veith helpfully wrote this our Lord helps beggars there's an old saying in the world God helps those who help themselves I cannot think of a much more unbiblical and untrue saying God helps us not because we deserve it not because of who we are but because of who he is God helps those who cannot help themselves so what's the result here what does Jesus do for those who come to him in humility and dependence let's look at point three our Christ filled eyes verse 52 begins and Jesus said to him go your way your faith has made you well and immediately he recovered his sight well the words used for made you well they also mean saved it's the same words so this man was not merely receiving physical healing but he was also receiving spiritual healing

God opened the eyes of his heart to see Jesus as his spiritual savior prior to opening the eyes of his head to see him as his physical savior scripture points to this sense of vision again and again to help us understand what's happening to our souls when we cry out for mercy Psalm 119 18 says open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law not asking for literal physical eye opening he's asking for spiritual insight and Paul uses that language of sight in his prayer for the Ephesians saying having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you can you imagine that spectacular moment when light flooded into his eyes for the first time as his eyes were opened the first face he saw was the face of

Jesus his eyes were filled with Christ I remember when I was a recent convert in college I had insomnia I had trouble sleeping and one night in one of those sleepless moments for whatever reason I got a hold of a strobe light from one of the guys in our dorm this strobe light had this dial on the back that you could crank and you could control the intervals between the flashes of light and I remember I turned that dial down as slow as possible and the room I was in was pitch black it was so dark it actually made me a little bit uncomfortable but then all of a sudden flash of light and in that moment everything around me was completely illuminated I could see where I was I could see all the different things in the room it made sense of all of my surroundings and I remember thinking as a new Christian in that moment when that thing happened I thought

Lord this is you this is what you did to me I was in darkness and I was alone I was stuck in my shame I was cut off from you but you flooded my darkness with the light of Christ and that that's what happened to blind begging Bartimaeus his eyes were open and he experienced the light of life one of the things I found so moving in this last verse was the fact that Jesus began the sentence with the words go your own way but look at how this verse concludes after receiving his sight Bartimaeus followed him on the way so it appears that after Jesus opened his eyes Bartimaeus never wanted to take his eyes off of him again he had experienced life in the darkness and he knew his desperate need but now he'd been given not just new eyes but new life he used to be a blind

beggar sitting beside the road but he became a seeing disciple following

[35 : 37] Jesus on the road oh my friends I don't know about you I don't want to go back to the dark as one who's been called up from the roadside myself I have the joy of calling out this wonderful news to you this morning Jesus Christ is not waiting for you to get your act together he's not waiting for you to try harder he's not waiting for you to prove yourself to be worthy no he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many he walked from Jericho to Jerusalem so that he could take on the wrath of God reserved for sinners so that whoever here this morning puts their trust in him might receive his righteousness is that not good news as Dan Ortlin rightfully notes James and John asked Jesus for glory Bartimaeus asked Jesus for mercy God the father asked Jesus to lay down his life securing both glory and mercy for those who admit their blindness and cling to Christ he hears your cries for mercy

Jesus stops for the lowly the weak and the worthless he stops for those who have nothing to bring and he's stopping for you today take heart and get up all who are depleted alone and weary take heart and get up Jesus is calling you today and as we get closer to Christmas I can just imagine Bartimaeus standing in that crowd of worshipers and instead of his raw voice crying out for mercy he joyfully sings Christmas carols about mercy received and instead of his blind eyes searching the darkness for hope he stares at the light of his advent candle with a big smile on his face knowing hope has come and all of us blind beggars who have had our eyes opened by Jesus

Christ we can join our hearts with him in praise to God who kept this promise Isaiah 9-2 we read it at the front the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them on us a light has shown let's pray oh lord you are so kind to stop for blind beggars and this morning we rejoice in the light that floods our eyes the light of life that's in Christ we cling to you knowing there's no better way for us to be on except for the way following Jesus

Christ to the cross and then to the crown thank you for securing both for us all of our hope is in you not in ourselves we trust you we love you in

Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com