

**Mark:
Lord, Have Mercy**

Mark 10:46-52

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Now turn with me to Mark's Gospel, and chapter ten, and beginning at verse 46. It is the story of "Blind Bartimaeus".

Now, this is a story that occurs in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. It occurs not just here in Mark, but also in Luke, and also in Matthew. And it's one of those stories in the Gospels that has been, and continues to be, the source of some difficulty as far as harmonizing all three of these accounts. The story here as we find it (and we'll read it in a moment in the Gospel of Mark) has Jesus leaving Jericho when He comes across Bartimaeus. In Luke's Gospel, it appears as though He's coming into Jericho, not leaving Jericho as here. And then, just to make things wonderfully contrived for us, the Holy Spirit, in inspiring Matthew's account, has not a named individual, Bartimaeus, but actually has two blind men, none of which is named. Well, of course, if there are two, then there's one, so that's not such a great problem. But it has been a source of some difficulty in the past: why does Mark have Jesus leaving Jericho, and why does Luke have Jesus entering Jericho?

Well, I spent a bit of time—actually a fruitless and a waste of time—reading all kinds of modern commentaries. I must have 20, 25 commentaries on the Gospel of Mark, and I went through every single one of them, especially recent ones. And lo and behold, none of them made any reference whatsoever to this issue! And I somewhat suspected, and I e-mailed Dr. Waters (who's—I think—my eyes not good enough, but I think he's sitting up there in the gallery) as the fount of all knowledge on New Testament matters, and he confirmed my suspicion. And it's a very sad suspicion: that modern commentaries, even from evangelicals, don't bother with this because I think they regard this as irrelevant. So what, if there are some discrepancies in the Gospels? But if you and I affirm inerrancy, we believe the Bible is inerrant, and these Gospel accounts are inerrant, then there is indeed something of a problem here that we need to address, and we need to try and get some kind of answer to. Sometimes in these things we can't give an answer, and we rest assured that when we get to heaven and we know more than we know now, an answer may be forthcoming.

In this particular case, the answer seems to lie along geography, and something of archeology, because if you study these things, there were in fact two Jericho's. Those of you who have been to Israel, as I have, if you've been to Jericho you'll come across the fact that there are two—and if archeologists are correct, there are actually three—sites called Jericho. There is an “old Jericho” and there is “new Jericho”. And possibly what we have is that Mark is telling us He was leaving Old Jericho, and Luke is telling us that He was entering New Jericho...and they are separated by about half a mile or a mile or so, and that would seem to be an explanation that at least I can live with and sleep content at night, knowing that my affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture hasn't in the least bit been torn asunder!

Well, that aside, let's turn now to Mark's Gospel, in chapter ten, and beginning to read at verse 46.

And they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, the 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 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?’ And the blind man said to Him, ‘Rabbi, let me recover my sight!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘God your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him on the way.

Amen. And may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

I want to focus tonight on, first of all, Bartimaeus; and then, secondly, on Jesus.

I. First of all, this man Bartimaeus.

Now, there's this man. (Matthew has two blind men. Mark is only interested perhaps in just one of them, and he only refers to this one. He's the one, after all, that the story is focused upon.) And he's sitting beside the road (the road leaving Jericho), I suppose not unlike the occasional man that you might see here in the city—bereft of good clothing, maybe sometimes holding a cardboard box cut out, “Homeless - hungry.” I suppose our reaction to that can often be mixed for a variety of reasons, and I imagine that the reaction to Bartimaeus over the years had been something similar. He's sitting beside the roadside, and he has a cloak, and before him, perhaps, part of the cloak is stretched out, sitting on the ground, and part of that cloak is stretched out on the ground, and on it, perhaps, some

coins...passers-by throwing down a coin or two, just enough to buy him some bread and food to eat.

This is Passover. In the next chapter it's the triumphal entry as Jesus goes to Jerusalem. It's Passover time. Passover was an occasion when tens of thousands of people, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of people...some conjecture Jerusalem would triple in size during Passover...many of them would come by Jericho. Jericho is to the east of Jerusalem, about 15 miles, about 800 feet below Jerusalem. When you're going to Jerusalem, to Zion, you're going up hill, of course. Many of them coming from the north would come down on the eastern side of the River Jordan and cross over towards Jericho, and up towards Jerusalem, in order to avoid going through the Samaritan District. Others, Diaspora Jews from the Far East, would make their way that way towards Jericho as the entry point towards Jerusalem. Hundreds, thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people would pass along this road in the course of these days.

It was like Christmas for Bartimaeus. Perhaps he would make enough money during these days to last him for several weeks, perhaps even months. This is how he had lived. We don't know if he had been blind from birth. Perhaps he had been. He was a beggar in a day without any kind of Social Security system of governmental proportions. This is how he would survive. Others like him, crippled, would be brought by members of their family and placed there in the morning, early in the morning, at dawn, perhaps, in order that the crowds passing by would give him something.

And he overhears the conversation. (You know, blind people often have an acute sense of hearing.) And he's listening to the conversations, and the conversation is about this man Jesus of Nazareth. He's in Jericho! He's coming towards Bartimaeus! What has he heard about Jesus of Nazareth (or, to be more precise, Jesus the Nazarene, the text says)? It's hard to know how much Bartimaeus knew about Jesus. Had he heard stories about a miraculous birth thirty years ago? Had he heard that at the age of twelve this Jesus of Nazareth, as a boy, had come down to Jerusalem and gone to the temple and astonished the Scribes and the teachers? Had he heard, perhaps, that up north in Galilee He had called twelve disciples together, and they had been following Him, and they'd traveled throughout the regions of Galilee and performed astonishing miracles? Had he heard little snippets of what Jesus had been teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? He might have heard that Jesus on one occasion had walked on the Sea of Galilee, had stilled a storm; a Gadarene, a demoniac, had been brought back to his right mind, a man called Legion; that in Capernaum a daughter of a wealthy ruler called Jairus had been brought back to life after she had been pronounced dead. And had he heard that in Bethesda they had brought a blind man to Jesus, and Jesus had spat on his eyes and the man had been healed?

And now this man, this Jesus of Nazareth, is there, right in front of him! He could

hear the crowds, and within a stone's throw—maybe even closer—Jesus, this miracle worker from up north in Galilee, He's right there! He can hear His voice, and he realizes that a moment has come, is passing by him that may never pass by him again: an opportunity to do something, to say something, and it has to do with this man, Jesus the Nazarene.

So he shouts out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” You can imagine it: He's sitting there, his head is going back and fro... he can't quite lock on where Jesus is, he just knows that He's there somewhere in the crowd...and he's shouting, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

If you'd lived in these days, or just before these days, you would have heard in deeply religious circles the expression “Son of David.” It would mean different things in different settings, but for Bartimaeus it looked as though what Bartimaeus is saying is [that] this is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy with regard to the Messiah.

Now, I don't know how much of the Old Testament Bartimaeus knew. We're told so very little about his background, but he knew enough to know that there was a promise, there was a story that had been passed down from generation to generation, that had been taught in temple and in synagogue: that One would come of the lineage of David—a king, ruler, a messiah figure—who would deliver His people. And maybe Bartimaeus was familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah in that thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, that song of praise and joy: that one of the things that would occur when Messiah would come, when the Son of David would manifest His rule and kingship, would be that the blind would be enabled to see.

You remember when John the Baptist was in prison, and he lost his assurance. And he sent some disciples to Jesus to ask if He really was the Messiah. And you remember what Jesus said to those disciples? “Go and tell John what you see and hear.” And one of the things that they saw was that the blind had received their sight in fulfillment of that prophecy.

So, what does he do? What does Bartimaeus do? Verse 47: “He began to cry out....”; verse 48: “He cried out all the more....” He wasn't going to be stopped.

Now, there were some who tried to shush him up. There were some who thought that he shouldn't be making this commotion, particularly when Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. His faith in Jesus would overcome all these obstacles. He wasn't going to cease until he had received an answer. He wasn't concerned about what others were thinking: that he was a nuisance, that he was embarrassing. There were those who would try to prevent him from having fellowship with Jesus.

When I was converted, I was eighteen years of age, and I had been converted about two days or so, and I went to the local Anglican church. And I remember the words of the vicar as I told him after the service that I had been converted.

And he put his arm around my shoulders and he said, “Derek, too much religion is a very bad thing!”

This man would not be silenced. This was his opportunity. Something momentous was passing by. This was his opportunity. You know there are moments like that, God-given opportunities when Jesus is passing by. This man believed. He found himself a beggar. He had nothing to offer Jesus. He's poor, he's destitute, he's in need. And what does he do? He takes his troubles to Jesus, and he cries out, “Have mercy on me!” He wasn't claiming his rights. He wasn't claiming his status. He wasn't claiming his privileges. He didn't have any. He didn't come to Jesus and say that Jesus owed him something. He didn't come with a list of complaints about how hard life had been, and how unfair that he should be blind. He simply cried for mercy. He simply cried for mercy.

I wonder, as we were singing that hymn—you can blame me, I chose it!—the one in the bulletin. This is a Presbyterian hymn if ever you saw one! “Lord, I deserve Thy deepest...” Well, Brad said, “Wrath”—and I say “Wroth” “...my heart is vile, my mind depraved, my flesh rebels against Thy will. I am polluted in Thy sight, yet Lord, have mercy on me still!”

Why do we sing hymns like that? Because they're true. Because that's what we are. Like Bartimaeus, the only thing that we can say in the presence of Almighty God is, “Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.” It's grace that he asked for. It's grace that he pled for. He didn't ask for what he deserved, he asked for grace. He didn't come saying, ‘This is what I think is owed me.’ He didn't come saying, ‘This is what I can give to You, Jesus.’ This is Bartimaeus, poor, blind, needy beggar at the side of the road, pleading mercy from Jesus Christ.

II. Well, let's look in the second place at Jesus.

I want you to see several things about the way Jesus responded to Bartimaeus, and they're overwhelming.

The first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus didn't answer him immediately. It may not be that obvious, but it's there. This man had been crying out for a while. They had been trying to silence him. Jesus didn't respond on the first shout. Why is that? It's not, I think, that Jesus hadn't heard him on the first occasion. I think, from all that we can discern from this passage, Bartimaeus belted it out at the top of his lungs. He wanted Jesus to hear him. But He doesn't respond until verse 49. Why does Jesus do that? Why does He allow this blind man to get all worked up? Why doesn't He respond to him straightaway? We want to say, don't we, that Jesus hears our prayers and our cries before we've even uttered them? Isn't there a wonderful example of that in the Book of Daniel in the tenth chapter? Remember his praying? And an angel is sent to him immediately, but he takes a while to get there because he finds himself in a spiritual battle, and Michael has

to come in order to win that battle, and eventually the angel comes and puts his hand on Daniel and reassures him that his prayer is heard.

Why does Jesus make us wait? To make us more appreciative; to make absolutely sure the reason why we're coming to Jesus in the first place.

When I was twelve...my grandfather died when I was seven. He had a marvelous record collection. I've told you something of this before. For a twelve-year-old it was Aladdin's cave! It was Paradise! He had several hundred, perhaps three-, four-hundred LP's. And when I was twelve, I summoned up all my courage. I went to my grandmother (who really had very little appreciation of these LP's, I thought as a twelve-year-old)—and I summoned up the courage, and I said to her, “Can I have them?” And she said, “No.” But what she did was, she said, “If you come every Saturday afternoon and you cut my grass and weed the garden, I'll give you one every now and then.” (And it was every “now” and more “then” than now!) I remember—oh, I must have been fourteen or so—when I finally inherited the double album of Brahms's *German Requiem*, which I had coveted for almost two years, and I treasured it. I absolutely treasured it.

Jesus is making Bartimaeus wait. He's making him wait.

Do you notice—and it's wonderful—that Jesus stops? Many rebuked him...look at verse 48: “Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but he cried out all the more”; and verse 49: “And Jesus stopped....” Imagine if this were a movie, and the camera now would be fixed on Jesus' feet, because all of a sudden He has come to a stop, and all the crowd that are following Him out of Jericho towards Jerusalem have all come to a standstill; and there's a moment, I imagine, of silence, and all you would hear is Bartimaeus bellowing in the background, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The cry of a desperate man has brought Jesus to a stop. Isn't that a marvelous thing? That the cry of a desperate man has brought the creator of the universe, the Lord of glory, the Son of God, to a stop? He's heard his cry. The Lord of glory is standing still for this man.

And then He calls him, and then He says to him the most astonishing thing: “What do you want Me to do for you?” The answer is obvious! Of course he wants his sight! But Jesus wants Bartimaeus to vocalize it. Isn't that one of the most remarkable questions that you will ever hear? The Lord of glory saying, “What do you want Me to do for you? What do you want Me to do for you?” James and John had asked if one could sit on His left and the other on His right, and Jesus had said, “It's not mine to give.” But what will this man ask? What will Bartimaeus ask? Jesus comes to Bartimaeus, and He says, ‘Bartimaeus, name it! Just name it! What do you want Me to do for you?’

And what would you say? For perhaps as long as Bartimaeus could remember,

the one thing that he wanted more than anything else was money to buy food, but that's not what he wants. "Let me recover my sight." I want to be able to see. And Jesus heals him, like that! In an instant, with that immediacy that Mark so much loves, that is so characteristic of the way Mark writes his Gospel. "Your faith has healed you." Bartimaeus' faith in Jesus as the Son of David, Rabboni, says to Him, 'My Master!' The only other person who uses this term is Mary Magdalene in the resurrection story in John 20. Faith is the instrument that healed him: faith not in itself, but faith that is rooted and grounded and lodged in Jesus Christ. Bartimaeus knew that this man, Jesus the Nazarene, could provide him with something that would change his life entirely.

You understand that when the Gospel writers include these miracle stories, they do so because they want us to see that in these miracles there are signs of the kingdom, and signs of the King. And here is the King, here is Messiah, here is the Son of David demonstrating His power.

At one level, of course, this is a story about a blind man receiving his sight, but you understand there's another story here. There's a metanarrative, if you like, here. And Jesus is going to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem He will be betrayed, and in Jerusalem He will be crucified, and He will be crucified on behalf of sinners. He's come to rescue those who are blind and those who cannot see! The Messiah is here! The Mediator is here! The One promised in Genesis 3, the seed of the woman that would crush the head of Satan, He's here! And these signs and powers and wonders are insignia of His deity; they are the paraphernalia of His majesty. And Bartimaeus had a glimpse—just a little glimpse—of it, and he can see spiritually, and he can see physically.

You know, Jesus never went this way again. He would never be in Jericho again. He would never be on this road again. If Bartimaeus had heeded the people who were telling him to be quiet, if he had allowed Jesus to pass, he would have been without mercy forever.

Now, it may well be this evening that Jesus is passing by you in the gospel, in the preaching of the word, and in the singing of that hymn, so dour as it was, exposing our sin and our depravity and our need of mercy.

It may well be, my friend, that Jesus is passing by you tonight. And Jesus hears your cries as you say to Him, 'Lord, I, too, am lost; and I, too, am blind; and I, too, cannot see; and I've tasted of the broken cisterns of this world and they've all come up empty.' And I say to you, you go home tonight and you fall on your knees. And without hesitation, you tell Him, you tell Him that you're lost and guilty, and poor and wretched, and blind; and you say to Him—and you keep on saying to Him—'Lord, have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!' Tell Him you want to be a Christian. Tell Him you want the assurance of saving faith in your heart. Tell Him you want to be a child of God and an heir of glory. Tell Him you want your sins forgiven, your guilt wiped out. Tell Him you want to be born again.

And you see that last verse: "...he recovered his sight and followed Him on the way." Isn't that beautiful? He followed Him to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, you know, he was blind! You'd think the first thing he'd want to do was to go and say hello to his father or his mother, or his brothers or sisters, or people that took care of him on a day to day basis; or he might want to see at last what Jericho actually looked like. But his entire gaze is fixed on Jesus, and he's following Him along the road that was leading to Jerusalem. He followed Him along the way.

Do you know that hymn? - "Lord, I was blind, I could not see in Thy marred visage any grace; but now the beauty of Thy face in radiant vision dawns on me...the beauty of Thy face in radiant vision dawns on me." Oh, may it be so for you, dear friend, tonight, as you turn to this same Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and who promises us in His word that they who cry to Him for mercy, He will in no wise cast out.

Let's pray together.

Our God and our Father, we thank You for these beautiful stories of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and we pray for anyone amongst us on this Memorial weekend who may well be in darkness and have no light, who may well be spiritually blind, their eyes never having been opened. Lord, hear their cry this evening and bring them to see the marvelous light and glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

Please stand, receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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