

How Badly Do You Want to Get Better?

Mark 10:46-52

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There was a guy in my previous church who would close his eyes at the start of every sermon and keep them closed until the end. When I first noticed him doing this, I became unsettled and insecure. No matter what I did, his eyelids remained closed. One day, after a service, he came up to me and said, “*Nice sermon, pastor.*” I was just about to ask him how he had enjoyed his nap when he made a comment on something I had said in the middle of the message. He must have noticed the disbelief on my face so he then said: “*I close my eyes during the sermon because it helps me concentrate.*” I remained skeptical because he did this for the 13 years I was there! But I guess he could have been telling the truth...some of the time.

I’d like to invite you to do the same right now. I know its risky because for some of you this is an open invitation to catch up on your sleep! Please close your eyes and put your hands over them as well. Imagine that you are completely blind. We’re going to hear three different sounds and I’d like you to identify each one without opening your eyes.

- Sounds of nature
- Sounds of babies laughing
- Sounds of a crowd walking by

Our focus today is on a man who was born blind. Because he couldn’t see, all of his other senses were heightened. One day, as he was sitting by the side of the road, he heard a loud crowd passing by.

Please turn or click to [Mark 10:46-52](#) as I read: ***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. ⁴⁷ 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!” ⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ 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.”⁵² 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.

Last weekend we learned how to improve our serve by monitoring our motives, preparing for problems, elevating others and by embracing the example of Jesus. As Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem, He is headed out of Jericho when He encounters a blind man named Bartimeus. Bart goes through four different stages of spiritual growth that will help us go from blindness to belief to boldness to blessing.

1. Recognize your blindness. Look at verse 46: *“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.”* Jericho is a well-known city in the Bible. In the Old Testament we read of the Israelites marching around its walls. There’s even a song that helps us remember – *“Joshua fought the battle of Jericho...”* Or as one young boy sang it, *“Joshua fought the battle of Geritol...”* We’ll all fight that battle sooner or later!

Since Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level, it has a tropical climate. The town is known as an oasis because of its fresh water spring and was called, “the city of palm trees” and the “place of fragrance” because of all the roses and cypress trees. How cool that the *“Rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley”* shows up in this city! It was in Jericho that the pilgrims gathered to make the final leg of the journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Passover feast. It was the last “rest stop” on the way to the capital.

It’s at this point we’re introduced to a man named *“Bartimaeus.”* The prefix “Bar” means, son so we know that he is the son of Timaeus. His name in Aramaic means, *“defiled and unclean.”* In Greek, it means, *“honor.”* Bart is the son of defilement *and* dignity. That reminds me that we all have great worth *and* we are unworthy. Everyone matters to God *and* everyone is messed up. Friend, don’t ever think you are worthless because you are made in the image of God. But you *are* unworthy because of your sinfulness.

We’re told that he is both *“blind”* and he is a *“beggar.”* Blindness was a very common problem in Palestine. Generally, one who was blind was never healed.

While Leviticus 19:14 establishes that God's people were to care for the blind, there was a cultural and religious stigma against those who couldn't see. We see this in John 9:2 regarding another blind man: ***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”***

Many thought blindness was a consequence of sin and therefore they were often mistreated and marginalized. Bart was relegated to a life of begging and is a picture of someone who was *helpless* and *hopeless*.

Without Christ, we are all in the dark. 2 Corinthians 4:4 states that ***“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...”*** We are spiritually blind and we are beggars because there is nothing we can do to change our situation on our own. Listen, before you can see spiritually, you must first recognize that you are blind. You will never seek the Savior until you first see that you are a sinner.

2. Respond with belief. We begin with blindness and then move to belief. Check out verse 47: ***“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!’”*** In Luke's version of this account, the man hears the crowd and asks what's going on. He could tell this was no ordinary Passover pilgrimage. When the crowd tells him that the commotion is because of ***“Jesus of Nazareth,”*** they are identifying His hometown. That's like someone saying that I'm from Wisconsin. That tells you a lot -- I like brats, cheese curds and the Packers -- but it doesn't tell you everything about me...I also like the Badgers.

Notice that the crowd is just focusing on his earthly heritage but when Bart bellows out he calls Jesus by His divine title: ***“Jesus, Son of David...”*** The name ***“Jesus,”*** means, *“Savior”* and ***“Son of David”*** refers to Him as the long-awaited Messiah. It's a title of power and authority and recognition that He is the fulfillment of a covenant prophecy made some 1,000 years earlier to King David.

When Gabriel gave God's message to Mary he called on this covenant with David in Luke 1:31-33: ***“And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”***

When blind Bart confessed Christ as the Son of David, he was responding with belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Every Jewish person would have known that one of the accompanying signs of the Messiah's arrival was the healing of the

blind as taught in Isaiah 35:5. When John the Baptist wanted to make sure that Jesus was the promised and anointed One, he sent someone to ask Jesus for his credentials. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 11:4-5: ***“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight...”***

Bart first recognizes his blindness and then responds with belief. He knows *who* Jesus is and *what* He can do for Him. Do you know who Jesus is? Notice that Bart’s belief is personal: ***“...have mercy on me.”***

3. React with boldness. Bart knew that he needed help because there was nothing he could do on his own. And so, he called out to Jesus, the Son of David, for mercy in verse 47. In the first part of verse 48 we see that the crowd of people is bothered by the blind and believing Bart: ***“And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent...”*** The word ***“rebuke”*** is very strong and has the idea of *“sharply punishing.”* The tense tells us that they *“kept rebuking repeatedly.”*

I love the second half of verse 48: ***“...but he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”*** This is the second time he ***“cried out.”*** This is a very strong word that was used for the cry of a raven and is also translated as, *“to exclaim and clamor.”* This guy was really bold and courageous! He chose to not listen to the crowd and shouted out even louder than the first time because he didn’t want Jesus to get away.

It’s interesting that he longs for ***“mercy”*** from the Messiah. He doesn’t cry out for justice but for mercy. Actually, we have to be careful about asking God to give us justice...because we might just get it. I don’t want justice in my life because if I received what was just I would be sent to Hell. What I want is mercy.

The word mercy is used over 200 times in the Bible and is so rich that we need a number of synonyms to understand its depth: *lovingkindness, goodness, favor, pity* and *compassion*. It’s been defined as *“bringing help to the wretched and exhibiting compassion for the miserable.”* It’s easy to confuse mercy and grace but here’s a way to keep them separate - *Mercy is not getting what we deserve; grace is getting what we don’t deserve.*

I wonder if you and I have this same kind of boldness and courage when it comes to calling out for divine help. Maybe we don’t because we don’t really understand our condition of *blindness*. Or maybe we don’t because we don’t *believe* Jesus can really do anything about it.

Many of you have been following the ministry of our Go Team partners, Paul and Roxanne Wilson in Mexico. They have been dealing with a long legal battle regarding the camp they are running. The camp legally belongs to the ministry of El Monte but the courts have ruled against them. Just last month, the final ruling came down that they needed to vacate. I decided to call Paul Tuesday morning. The first thing I did was ask how they are doing. He responded with one word: “*Amazing!*” They are so humbled by the worldwide concert of prayer that is taking place for El Monte.

He then told me that out of prudence, they all had started packing their belongings because they didn’t know when they’d be forced off the property. God then led Paul to Psalm 37 so he called a meeting with the entire staff of about 30 people and said that he believed God was calling them to “*exercise faith in the face of risk.*” He shared that he thought they should stop packing and boldly believe, in the face of insurmountable odds, that God was going to allow them to keep the camp. They took a vote and it was unanimous. This was a very risky move because it means that they could lose everything if they’re forced to leave.

Paul then shared something that gave me spiritual goose bumps. It appears that some literal angels looking like security guards showed up at the gates to their property in response to their bold cries for mercy! I wish I had time to tell you more but suffice to it say that when they boldly prayed for mercy, something amazing happened. Paul sent another update on Thursday calling us to continued prayer. I loved the last sentence in his email: *Equal joy if we go or if we stay!*

As a result of Bart’s bold request for mercy, verse 49 says, “***And Jesus stopped...***” The Savior stood still. Rememer that Jesus is resolutely set to go to Jerusalem but a cry for mercy causes the Creator of the universe to stop in His tracks! One commentator writes: “*The cry of wretchedness was far sweeter to Him than their shallow hallelujahs.*”

Can you imagine how the crowd must have felt, especially those who had rebuked Bart? I picture everything getting real quiet. People are looking at Bart and then at Jesus. And then Jesus commands, “***Call him***” to some guys (maybe the same ones who had just rebuked him). By the way, Jesus could have gone over Himself but he chose to use messengers. Likewise He wants to use us as messengers to get His message of mercy out to those who are miserable. That’s what Pete and Jen are doing in India. We have a natural opportunity on Easter weekend to ask people to come to one of our services.

They head over to the side of the road **“and they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart. Get up; He is calling you.’** To **“take heart”** means, **“to have courage and to be of good cheer.”** It’s kind of funny how their attitude changes, right? Earlier they told him to shut up and now they tell him to cheer up. These messengers then give this miserable man a message: **“He is calling you.”**

We see more about Bart’s boldness in verse 50: **“And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.”**

- **He threw off.** This cloak was all he had but he left it behind to get to the Lord. He may have done it for a practical reason because he didn’t want to trip over it. This reminds me of Hebrews 12:1: **“let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.”** This cloak also may have been used to collect shekels and represented his past life. Friend, what are you willing to lose in order to find the Lord?
- **He sprang up.** This blind man leapt to his feet, which was unusual because blind men don’t usually jump.
- **Came to.** It wouldn’t have been enough to just throw off and spring up. He needed to actually come to Christ. Luke tells us that some in the crowd helped to bring him to Jesus.

The question Jesus then asks Bart is tender and very touching. Look at verse 51: **“What do you want me to do for you?”** Jesus knew what Bart wanted but He asked the question for Bart’s sake – and for the crowd of people who had gathered around. I love his answer: **“And the blind man said to him, ‘Rabbi, let me recover my sight.’”** The word for **“rabbi”** is **“rabbonni,”** which can be translated, **“my Master.”** It’s a very personal profession of faith. This is so different from how James and John responded – they wanted seats and success, Bart wanted sight and salvation.

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Have you ever put into words the cry of your heart? Have you ever verbalized your deepest needs? Have you ever shouted out for mercy to have Jesus save you from your sins? If not, Jesus is waiting for you to *recognize your blindness, to respond with belief, and then to react with boldness.* James 4:2 says that we **“have not because we ask not.”**

That then leads to the final result: we receive a *blessing.*

4. Receive your blessing. In verse 52, we read, “*And Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well...’*” This word for “well” is the word for “saved.” Here’s a spiritual principle: *Jesus is always moved by a cry for mercy.* Because Bart believed and put his faith in Jesus, he received his sight.

Verse 52 ends, “*And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*” I love how this healing happens immediately. Do you know that you can be saved immediately? Notice that Bart goes from sitting on the road to following Christ on the way. In a similar way, we are not saved in order to sit. When we’re converted, we’re called to accompany Christ. Those who put faith in Him must also follow Him.

The blind man seized the moment. Jesus would not pass through Jericho again. Jesus is passing by right now in your life. This is your moment! If you don’t take it, you’ll miss something extraordinary and your spiritual blindness will continue. Just as the crowds tried to keep Bart from Jesus, so too the crowds in your life are trying to keep you from Him. Don’t listen to them. Stand up. Be bold. Go against the grain. Let go of your security blanket. Cry out for mercy and healing.

What’s your next step? Jesus is asking you a question: “*What do you want me to do for you?*” How badly do you want to get better?

- Recognize your Blindness
- Respond with Belief
- React with Boldness
- Receive your Blessing

Communion

I invite you to close your eyes again... imagine that it is about a week later and you are one of the disciples. You’re going from a crowded and noisy street, up some stairs to a room where a dinner is being served. There’s chatter and clatter. Smells of roasted lamb and fresh bread. Your mind goes back to memories of past Passovers when you hear Jesus say these words from Luke 22: ¹⁴ *And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.* ¹⁵ *And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...”* ¹⁹ *And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in*

remembrance of me.”²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.