

“What Do You Want Me To Do For You?”

26 July 2020 - Led by Dr. Graeme Murdock

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 500 God Of Grace

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Lorraine Zipser

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 122

Hymn: IPH 192 There Is A Redeemer

New Testament Reading: Mark 10:46-52

Sermon:

In this short passage in the Gospel according to Mark, we read that Jesus, His disciples, and a large crowd of people were leaving Jericho. Jericho lies in the Jordan river valley about seventeen miles to the north-east of Jerusalem - which is where Jesus is heading. Jericho seems to have been a town of some wealth. It was home to Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector of short stature. It was also a town where many sought charity by begging, and it is not surprising to find beggars at the entrance to the town on the road to Jerusalem. We might reasonably suggest that some people spent their days begging at such a busy place, while others perhaps lived permanently on the margins of the town and survived in whatever shelter they could find at night. In this story we read of a man who was sitting by the roadside. He is begging and he is blind. This man's poverty and his disability are hardly coincidental. We know that prevailing attitudes in the society of this time could be harsh about the possible causes of blindness and of other disabilities and illnesses. In John chapter 9 it was the disciples who saw a man blind from birth and asked Jesus whether it was the man himself who had sinned or his parents that he had been born in this condition. Jesus firmly tells the disciples that their assumptions are wrong and healed that man.

This blind beggar at Jericho is named - and that is surely significant - he will become personally known to the disciples. We do not know the names of many people who were healed by Jesus, but we do know the name of this man; the 'Son of Timaeus' (Bartimaeus). He was a man who carried his father's name, whether his family was still alive but not able to support Bartimaeus, or whether they were no longer in contact with Bartimaeus we do not know.

So, there is the scene, a blind beggar, a large crowd, the disciples, and Jesus on the road out of Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. Then the action begins. Mark tells us that Bartimaeus 'heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth'. Bartimaeus was a man who relied on his hearing to understand what was happening around him. The shouts of the crowd perhaps alerted him to who was passing by, or perhaps Bartimaeus grabbed the arm of someone next to him; who is it, is it him? We know that Bartimaeus is sitting by the roadside and has the crowd therefore above him physically. Bartimaeus seized the moment or perhaps had been waiting in that spot, knowing that Jesus was in town and likely to leave that way. In any event, we know that 'he began to shout'. Amid a large crowd and sitting by the roadside, he

had to shout if he wanted to be heard. And someone neglected, marginalised within a community, who lived or spent his time at the physical fringes of his community and judged by many, was likely very used to being ignored and having his requests for help to those he heard passing by go unanswered.

And what he shouts is beautiful - it is spectacular. Mark says in v 47 that Bartimaeus heard that 'Jesus of Nazareth' was passing by. But Bartimaeus calls on another name; 'Jesus, Son of David'. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Bartimaeus recognises Jesus as 'the Son of David'. We know that Matthew's Gospel begins by revealing the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth- 'Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'. But Jesus is much more than the descendant of David through the generations (though He was), and more than born in David's town of Bethlehem (though He was). Jesus as 'the Son of David' also fulfilled the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7 when David was told that 'your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever'. And this prophecy Bartimaeus shouted had been fulfilled - the Son of David was the king of David's house and line who would reign forever, He was the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, and He was on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem that day (and when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem He would teach that very message in the temple as you can read in Mark 12).

So Bartimaeus shouts out that he recognises that the Messiah, the Son of David, the king who comes with all authority is right there, and Bartimaeus recognises the truth of the authority of Christ and says, 'have mercy on me' (or take pity on me from the GNT). The crowd now plays its part. The people around Bartimaeus 'rebuked him and told him to be quiet' (or scolded him). Who do you think you are; no-one wants to hear from the likes of you. Bartimaeus was perhaps well used to other people telling him to shut up, but he wasn't having any of it. So 'he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me'.

And here we notice the way in which this story fits with other stories in this chapter of Mark. Earlier in the chapter (v. 13) Mark recorded that 'people' (and likely many women among them) brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch them and bless them, but the disciples 'rebuked' them, just as the crowd now 'rebuked' Bartimaeus. Know your place- women and parents- don't think you are important enough that Jesus can be bothered with you or your children, the important men are talking. But Jesus disowns such views, and he insists on taking the children in his arms, puts his hands on them and blessed them. Then there is more bad news for people who think they are important coming in the next story. Jesus has just said that we must 'receive the kingdom of God like a little child' when He is approached by a wealthy young man who asks him 'what must I do to inherit eternal life' and then he tells Jesus that 'I have kept all the commandments since I was a little boy'. Jesus, full of compassion, tries to help this wealthy, powerful young man to see that salvation is not about arguing your own merits and achievements but seeking mercy from God- who alone makes all things possible.

So, back to Bartimaeus. He has shouted out to Jesus, the Son of David, to have mercy on him, and Jesus' response is instant. We read that he stopped along the road and called Bartimaeus over. The crowd (ever fickle) now encourage Bartimaeus - 'cheer up' they say, 'on your feet', 'He's calling you'. 'Cheer up'. Why did they tell Bartimaeus to cheer up: was it because they could hear the desperation in his voice, or was it because Bartimaeus'

emotions had overcome him as it seemed the moment was passing, Jesus was moving on, no-one had heard him, no-one cared?

This moment is very understated in Mark's account but perhaps all the more moving because of the matter-of-fact tone that he adopts. Bartimaeus jumped to his feet - jumped we note - and headed into the crowd towards Jesus. And 'he threw his cloak aside'. The cloak of a blind beggar - thrown aside. The source of warmth, protection from the elements, likely his most prized possession, possibly what he slept in each night, abandoned among a crowd of people by a blind man. Bartimaeus' faith that the 'Son of David', the Messiah, would have mercy on him was such that he placed all his hope, all his confidence, all he had, on getting to Jesus just as quickly as he could.

And then in v. 51 Jesus asks an utterly extraordinary question: 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus knows Bartimaeus' heart, and he has heard his profound and inspired cry to the Son of David and yet he asks, 'What do you want me to do for you?'. A question for Bartimaeus certainly but also a question that perhaps made a couple of people in the crowd suddenly stare at their feet. Just prior to this story, the disciples James and John had come to Jesus and asked (v. 36) 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask'. Jesus replied: 'what do you want me to do for you?'. Their answer was - for one of us to sit at your right and the other to sit at your left in your glory. This then started a row among the disciples, who were indignant with James and John and their request for precedence in the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not about thinking that you are important nor about wanting to be important in the kingdom. Surely in that moment, James, John, and the disciples took a step forwards that they never forgot in their understanding of how the kingdom of God works. It's not about people who think they deserve to be there, or who think they have earned the right to be there, let alone think that they should be given places of honour in the kingdom. We receive the kingdom like a little child, we cry out like a blind man, in response to the call of our Father we come seeking mercy. And please note well, when James and John gave their reply, Jesus did not turn round and say- I've had enough of you two, I'm getting some other disciples. No - they (and we) are on the road to Jerusalem with our Lord and Saviour, and we are making mistakes, and we are saying sorry, and we are learning, and we are following the Master.

Bartimaeus' reply is to the point in v. 51- 'What do you want me to do for you? 'Rabbi, I want to see'. Bartimaeus asked the Son of David for mercy and now for sight. And he is told 'Go', 'your faith has healed you'. So, faith leads to sight - we see how things really are, we see how much God loves us. And I do not for one moment downplay the importance of the physical miracle for Bartimaeus - that was what he asked for, or the importance of that healing and manifestation of mercy for the disciples, or for the crowd who witnessed Bartimaeus immediately gain his sight. The reaction in the crowd (and especially those who moments earlier who had told Bartimaeus to be quiet) can only be imagined. A moment of physical healing and a moment to change the hearts of all those who witnessed it- 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me too'. And what did Bartimaeus do- although he was told 'Go'- he 'followed Jesus along the road'. From sitting by the roadside, he now walked along the road to Jerusalem. That is likely why we know his name- the disciples had seventeen miles to walk ahead of them. I wonder whether James or John was the first to go over and tell Bartimaeus- you won't believe what we said when he asked us 'What do you want me to

do for you?' And when they arrived in Jerusalem, Bartimaeus saw the crowd testify to the truth that he had already declared at Jericho as the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus with cries of 'Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest.'

In this beautiful and encouraging story, we see how God reveals Himself to our hearts and in turn we recognise Jesus and place our faith and confidence in the Son of David. A God of love hears us as we respond and cry out for mercy. This loving God in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit speaks truth into our hearts and hears our cry for mercy and grace. And we perhaps too hear these words from our Lord 'what do you want me to do for you?' A patient and loving God says- talk to me, tell me what's on your mind, what's on your heart, what do you want me to do for you? Let's keep talking with our Lord. Don't be put off by the crowd. Think about Bartimaeus- his faith took him from fear and darkness into confidence and light. Maybe for you as you think about how to respond today to that question from our loving God 'What do you want me to do for you?', perhaps an answer comes immediately to mind, and perhaps it doesn't. That's OK either way - Jesus loves you and knows your heart. Maybe you have an answer and you think it might be a stupid answer- that's OK too, Jesus loves you and knows your heart. Jesus doesn't give up on people, think about James and John. The whole company of heaven is cheering you on. Jesus - where do I want the faith you have given me to lead me today? Let's pray for help to know what to ask. And know that a God of love and a God who is love is listening. We are not alone. God is with us. God is for us. And as, by faith, we follow Jesus along the road encouraged by the example of Bartimaeus we pray that the God of all mercy and grace will keep our eyes fixed on Jerusalem ahead, trusting our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who is with us on that journey to lead us home. And may all praise and glory be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, both today and forever. Amen.

Hymn of Reflection: IPH 486 Amazing Grace

Prayers for Others: Ken Gillanders

Announcements:

- Next week's service will be led by David Boyd.
- Tithes and offerings
- Any pastoral concerns, contact your elder or Stuart Ferguson.

Benediction: And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.