

Great Questions of Jesus series

“What Do You Want Me to Do For You?”

Mark 10:46-52

Last Sunday we spent some time considering Jesus question: “Why do you worry so much?” and since last Sunday I’ve discovered that I’m not the only person within this congregation who struggles with worry. We are a congregation that needs to learn to trust more in God and praise Him for His goodness and faithfulness as an antidote to being consumed with the many needs in our lives. If worry is an area you struggle with I’d encourage you to go out to the church’s website and either download last Sunday’s message transcript or listen to it.

This morning we’re considering an equally important question that should cause to pause and think as well. And the question is: *“What do you want me to do for you?”* If Jesus were to ask you that question this morning what would be your immediate response? And a follow up question would be – is your response more geared to your comfort or the display of God’s glory in your life? I’ve listed those question at the top of your sermon note insert for you to prayerfully consider beyond our time together this morning.

That question is asked in the context of an encounter Jesus had with a blind man sitting on the side of the road begging for money to help support himself. The account is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke and I’m going to be reading out of the account found in Mark 10:46-52.

Read Mark 10:46-52

Note that our text says the Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city of Jericho. We know from what follows that they were heading to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover meal. This would be Jesus’ last trip to Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion.

As they are leaving the city of Jericho there’s this blind man named Bartimaeus and we’re told what his name actually means “son of Timaeus” (Timaeus would be his father which means *an honorable man*) – so Bartimaeus was known as the **son of honor or virtue**. Quite the significant name. And yet we discover that Bartimaeus’ life is not been one of honor or virtue – because he’s blind and in that culture it was widely believed that **blindness was the result of a curse from God** because of someone’s sin – either Bartimaeus or his parents.

And not only were you viewed as cursed by God, if you were blind, but you were also impoverished. They didn’t have any sort of government help for blind people and you couldn’t really go get a job. So, if you were blind your life was pretty much relegated to just what Bart was doing – sitting by the side of the road and begging for financial help.

So, day after day, he sits by the side of the road begging all day long for help. And while he’s sitting there he hears the commotion beginning to build from the large group of people traveling with Jesus toward Jerusalem. He likely asked someone what’s happening and he was told that Jesus was coming. This appears to be quite significant for this man. We’re not told specifics, but I’m pretty confident that this isn’t the first time he’s heard about Jesus. He appears to be aware that one of the signs of the Messiah coming would be that the blind would have their eyesight restored. And perhaps Bart had heard how, early on in his ministry, Jesus had stood up in his hometown synagogue, and claimed that he was the fulfillment of this prophecy (**Luke 4:16-19**).

Bart had likely heard of how Jesus not only healed blind people but he even once healed someone who was born blind. That was unheard of. And when the Jewish leaders intensely questioned the blind man who was healed in the hopes of discrediting his testimony to Jesus’ power, he was unshakeable and in frustration they finally declared that there’s only one answer as to how Jesus was able to do this – he gets his power from Satan. But to that the blind man boldly expressed what everyone already knew – *“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”* (John 9:32)

Apparently this incident of restoring the sight to a man born blind was a pretty big deal because when Lazarus passed away they were still talking about it and said, *“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept Lazarus from dying?”* (John 11:37) In other words, if Jesus could heal a man born blind then there’s nothing he can’t do.

With that backdrop, Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is about to pass by and he does what almost anyone in his condition would do – he begins to yell out to Jesus, hoping to get his attention and hopefully have Jesus do for him what he’s heard He did for others.

And as often happens during Jesus’ day, the crowd and even his disciples determine that Bart is not worth Jesus’ time and effort. He’s got far more important matters to attend to than bother dealing with a blind beggar. But before we come down to hard on these individuals, don’t we often tend to do that as well. We tend to make snap judgments on the type of people God should love and care for and who God obviously shouldn’t care for or make time for. And curiously enough the people God ought to care for are often very much like us and the people God shouldn’t love or pay attention to are those quite dissimilar to us.

That went through my mind last night during our barbecue and game night with The Vine. Last Tuesday I had spent time at the Teen Center inviting the kids to come to this event. I wasn’t sure any of them would come, but early on as the game night began, more and more of these kids and some of their friends began to show up and play basketball and carpetball. And as this was happening my heart was overjoyed but there was also a part of me that was curious how others from Knollwood and The Vine would react to this. Because this is outside of many of our comfort zones. I was quite curious if some of those in attendance would be put off by perhaps having our fun little BBQ and game night disrupted by others not like us. But everything went great and for me – outside of watching J.J. trying to act out **Tinkerbelle** during charades, having those kids there was the highlight of my evening. Because God actually drew these kids to this place and we were able to show them God’s love and generosity through feeding them and interacting with them. And as the evening came to a close they all came in and personally thanked me for inviting them to be a part of this. And I’m pretty confident that God was smiling the whole time with these kids being able to see God’s love displayed to them. And we were able to send them home with a whole lot of food.

Now, while the disciples and the crowd viewed Bart as undeserving of Jesus’ attention, Jesus didn’t feel that way. And Jesus instructed those very naysayers to call him to himself. Suddenly their whole attitude changed. And they tell him, *“Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”*

Now what happens next can be easily glossed over but let’s not miss it. It says Bart *“threw his cloak aside, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.”* Some commentators suggest that all beggars were required to wear a special cloak which designated them as beggars. I’m not confident that’s true, although it’s a fascinating theory. But if nothing else his cloak was quite likely what he would put in his lap to collect the donations people would occasionally toss his way. By casting his cloak aside he’s declaring that he’s done being a beggar. He’s fully anticipating that his whole life is about to change and he’s clearly excited about it.

And this truth applies to everyone of us as well. We’ve likely all got things that are keeping us bound from fully living the life Jesus has called us to live. It’s likely not blindness but perhaps it’s self-pity, or arrogance, or unforgiveness, or some form of addiction, a poor self-image or a poverty spirit (where you think you deserve to be impoverished all of your life), or prejudice towards others who are different from you and you think you’re somehow “better” or more loved by God than they possibly ever could. What’s your cloak that you need to throw off to fully embrace the life God’s called you to live?

When Bart comes to Jesus, Jesus asks the probing question we began this sermon with, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* At this point I can’t help but ask the question begging to be asked: “Jesus shouldn’t it be pretty obvious what this blind guy wants from you?”

But again, going back to my premise throughout this whole series. God and Jesus don't ask questions because they need some piece of information. They ask questions because we need to learn something. And I think the point to understand and apply here is that Jesus believes it's important for each of us to process inwardly and to express outwardly what we want from Him. Because it brings us to a point of a decisive decision. In this case it reminds Bart of what's defined his life up until this point and forcing him to decide if he really wants the change that's about to occur if his eyesight is restored. As James says, "*You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*" (James 4:2-3 (NIV)) And sometimes we don't ask God for the change because we're not ready to live with that change.

I have younger brother, Bob, who was born deaf and but now they can surgically give him the ability to hear. I asked Bob once if that's something he'd consider doing and much to my surprise he responded, "**No!**" And he was quite certain in his response. I was quite confused as to why he wouldn't have the surgery. And it had nothing to do with the cost of the surgery but rather had to do with the fact that if his hearing were restored it would mean a complete change of cultures. The deaf culture is what Bob has grown up in and is comfortable with that culture. If his hearing were restored He'd not longer be welcome in that culture and would have to adapt to our hearing culture. And that's not something he's interested in doing.

So, let me ask you – what change has God been prompting you to make in your life that makes you so uncomfortable you're not willing to step out and embrace? Perhaps it's sharing your faith in Jesus Christ with someone else. I was so excited last night to see some of you intentionally taking the time to talk to some of those young kids from the neighborhood who came to the Game Night. I could see for others that it was much more comfortable to stay safe talking with others from Knollwood or The Vine. But what change in your life is God prompting you to make that you're not comfortable embracing? Perhaps it's taking the time to talk to a coworker about some challenge they've been going through. Or perhaps it's forgiving someone who hurt you a long time ago and you've been hanging on to a grudge way too long. Or perhaps it's saying no to that sinful addiction once and for all that you've been struggling with. What cloak do you need to take off and say outwardly to God – this is what I want you to do for me so that I can fully embrace the life you're calling me to live.

In response to Jesus' question, Bart said, "*Rabbi, I want to see.*" Did you notice how he addressed Jesus during his yelling out for him and now answering his question. He first calls him "*Jesus, Son of David.*" "Son of David" was a recognition that Jesus was the Messiah. And now he calls him Rabbi (or teacher). He's recognizing that Jesus is worthy of following.

In response Jesus says, "*Go, your faith has healed you.*" In that declaration of the power of his faith, Bart joined the ranks of

- the woman who was bleeding for 12 years and touched the hem of Jesus' garment as one last act of desperation and was healed by her faith
- He joined the ranks with a man who had leprosy but was healed by his faith.
- He joined the ranks with a Roman officer whose servant was healed by his faith.
- He also joined the ranks of the four friends of a paralyzed man who was healed by their faith.
- And he joined the ranks with a gentile woman whose daughter was healed by her mother's faith.

Often Jesus would attribute people's healing to their faith in Him. And we also know that Jesus was unable to heal many in his hometown because of their lack of faith. It would appear that our faith in Jesus' ability to set us free from the things that keep us chained is a key to healing. And yet, there are several other times in which Jesus heals individuals without any reference to their faith. I think more importantly, the key is not people who necessarily "believe" in Jesus' ability to heal them but

it's people who've come to the end of themselves and realize their inability to set themselves free that Jesus responds to. As long as you believe you're completely capable to healing yourself and achieving the kind of life you were designed to live, then you're likely leaving Jesus out of your life. Oh, you might even come to church regularly and tithe but it's entirely possible that you've yet to come to the end of yourself and admit that you desperately need Jesus in your life. Jesus was never meant to be an add on or an assistant to help you live the life you desire. Jesus wants to be your life plain and simple. He wants your life to revolve around Him not Him helping you live your agenda for your life.

This spiritual blindness is the very issue that God is addressing in his letter written to the church at Laodicea when he says, “

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

*17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, **blind** and naked.*

*18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and **salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.***

(Revelation 3:15-18)

These individuals in the church in Laodicea were balancing their faith and commitment to Jesus with becoming wealthy which led to an attitude of independence from Jesus. The belief that I need Jesus for spiritual salvation but I can handle the rest of my life on my own. God declares that they've become spiritually blind. They need Jesus to touch their lives and eyes and cause a healing of their spiritual eyes. And some of us might very well need that as well. When we all came into this building this morning we were able to see. But the question remains – are you blind spiritually? It's possible that your success in elements of your life have tricked you into believing that you don't really need Jesus that much. And you've begun living your life independent of Jesus. In that case you'd be far better off being like Bart so that you'd realize how desperately you need Jesus for all of your life.

I love how Luke records the end of Bart's story. He writes: *Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.* **(Luke 18:43)**

His being set free from blindness not only caused him to praise God and follow Jesus, but his healing and his reaction caused many others to praise God as well. His healing became his testimony to the power of God in his life. In what ways are others seeing God's healing and freeing power in your life and is it leading them to praise God also.

Matthew 5:16 (NIV) *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

That's exactly what happened in Bart's life and God calls us to let those around us see that Jesus has set us free as well which should result in them praising and glorifying God. Is that happening in your life? Or have you become complacent in your salvation and nobody sits up and takes notice of your changed life and the power of God anymore? It's easy to become complacent. I want to end by praying for you that God would completely remove any blinders that have crept into our lives and steal from us the excitement of being in a relationship with Jesus and not seeing new and afresh everyday the glory and goodness of God.

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How would you respond if Jesus asked you, “*What do you want me to do for you?*”

Is your response more about

- a) your comfort or
- b) the display of God’s glory in and through your life?

What was the view of blindness in that culture?

Bartimaeus was not only blind but also _____.

How was blindness interpreted in that culture?

Are there any individuals or groups of people who you consider outside of God’s love? (be honest) If so, pray for God to open up your heart to them and to see them like He sees them.

What “*cloak*” do you need to cast off in order to be set free by Jesus?

Why did Jesus ask Bart what he wanted Him to do for him?

What change has God been prompting you to make that you’re uncomfortable with? Why don’t you want to change?

What part does your “*faith*” have in Jesus setting you free?

Define this healing faith _____

Is Jesus the Lord of your life or simply your personal assistant?

Are there areas where you’ve become spiritually blind to God’s greatness?

Is your life a living testimony to God’s greatness and faithfulness? How? (give specific examples)

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