

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?

Mark 10:46-52

I'd like to tell you the story about a young man named Chad. He comes from a small town—let's call it Smithville. Smithville lost its general store when Wal-Mart moved to the county seat fifteen miles away. But they still have a grain elevator in Smithville. And the men meet each morning at the corner café to solve the world's problems and moan about the wet fall and all the beans that didn't mature properly.

Chad is the product of a "normal" Iowa family. His parents have a farm, but Mom works at a nursing home and Dad does income tax on the side. They are so busy with work that they seldom seem to talk to each other. What Chad sees in them is that it is important to work hard and do your best.

Chad did well in high school. He did take time from his studies and chores to play in the band and make All-State, but otherwise he needed to concentrate on his studies to get a scholarship. His guidance counselor suggested that he pursue engineering at Iowa State. Chad's parents think that is great. So Chad enrolls at ISU. He finds that calculus and physics are overwhelming. He is not used to struggling so hard just to pass on his tests. He begins to wonder, "Is this what I want to do?" But he also knows how hard his folks are working to pay for his tuition. So he tries harder. He takes Math 165 again and gets a better grade. But the grind is too hard for him. He has to call and tell his parents that he is switching to marketing—and it will take him an extra three semesters to get done.

Chad gets involved in a relationship with a young woman. She gets pregnant. What will they do? How will he tell his folks? But she gets an abortion.

Chad becomes a senior. Now he has to get serious about a job. He interviews, sends out resumes, and takes in every lead he can get through the university. But no one is hiring. Meanwhile Chad has met another young woman. They feel that they are right for each other. He gives her a ring. Even though he doesn't have a good job offer, they decide to get married.

He gets a job driving a delivery truck. She works at a day care. They hang up pictures in their tiny apartment, which were taken at their wedding. At first life seems great, but with their jobs they see so little of each other. Finances are tight.

Then a friend arranges for Chad to get an interview with a business firm. He gets a "real" job. Chad feels that his worries are over. But the job is demanding. He finds that just as with his parents, he is so involved with work that he doesn't spend much time with his wife. Having children only complicates things. But Chad works harder. He gets a promotion. He's able to buy a house and buy nice things for his family.

Now Chad finds himself stuck at work. He never wanted to work with the business, but he has a family to support. His kids are now in high school, and he finds that he cannot relate to them. He is so busy working to keep them in new jeans, buy them the latest electronic game, and get a boat to use on the lake. His marriage is strained. And he hears from the doctor that he has high cholesterol. He made it through college by trying harder. He got a good job by his persistence. He got a promotion for all those extra hours at work. He endures his unhappy marriage by staying in there. So shouldn't he just try a little bit harder this time?

There is a story of another man. He is born blind in Palestine, not Iowa. He is blind. There is no Braille, or schools for the blind, or social agencies to help him. He isn't even a deduction on someone else's income tax form. All he can do is beg. His problem isn't just physical. People believe that a person like him is blind because either he or his parents did something wicked and are now being punished for that sin. People avoid him because they are afraid it could curse them. All this man can do is beg and hope that a few generous souls will drop him a few coins. This man's name is Bartimaeus.

So who would you rather be—Chad or Bartimaeus? Chad has his problems, but he's able to get by through working a little harder and applying himself a little more. Bartimaeus is helpless.

Wouldn't you rather have some control of your life than be a helpless beggar?

Let's add a new element to the story of Bartimaeus. I quote to you from Mark's Gospel, "As Jesus and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth . . ." Jesus enters the picture. Now let us compare the stories of Chad and Bartimaeus. Who would you rather be?

Now let us suppose Jesus came to Chad—and to you and me. What would Chad ask for? A better cholesterol count? A happier marriage? A new job? What would you and I ask for? A passing grade in physics? A date with that young woman? A pay raise? A good report from the doctor? Do we expect, as Bartimaeus did, that Jesus can take care of our ills; or are we like Chad, expecting only that we will have to handle our own problems? What do we want from God?

Bartimaeus was healed from his blindness. Chad still has his bad blood work, his strained marriage, and his dead-end job. Why was Bartimaeus healed, not Chad? Think of how easy it would be to believe in Jesus if we were healed—if suddenly we got a surge of intelligence to ace that test or an anonymous gift of \$20,000 to pay off our debts or a miraculous healing from arthritis. Our story and Chad's could be like Bartimaeus', but our stories don't seem to end like his. So why should we ask God for anything when Jesus says, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

That's why we need to listen to what Jesus said to Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus as "Son of David," and "Rabboni." You don't just call anyone those names. They were titles for the Messiah, the promised one of the Old Testament. That is why Jesus asks, "What do you want Me to do for you?" that Bartimaeus says, "I want to see." Then Jesus says, "Your faith has healed you." It is a completed action. Bartimaeus was already healed before he could see because he had faith in Christ Jesus.

That is where it can stand for Chad—and for you and me. The God who asks, "What do you want Me to do for you?" is the same God who has

already come to us in Jesus and given us everything on the cross. When Jesus told Bartimaeus that he was healed, Jesus was talking about Bartimaeus' living relationship with God. That wasn't something Bartimaeus did. It was God's gift to him. Even before Jesus of Nazareth had come to Jericho, Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus' ministry. He knew the Old Testament prophecies. God's Word had already worked in him faith to believe in Jesus. And that is the gift God has given to us. The difference between Chad and Bartimaeus is not in the miracle of restoring sight. The difference is faith, the faith to stop insisting we can get by with a little more effort and put our trust in Christ.

This is Reformation Sunday. When Martin Luther died, his last words were, "We are all beggars." When we realize that we are beggars like Bartimaeus, then we will stop trying to make it on our own. Then we can look in faith to Christ. Jesus asks us, "What do you want Me to do for you? Get you a passing grade? Win you that trip to the Bahamas? Take away the flu season? Land you that big date? Take you to heaven when you die?" If that is all we want, we are really missing out. No, we can ask, "Christ Jesus, we don't want just this or that. We want nothing less than the Kingdom, nothing less than life with You." Then we can hear our Savior say to us, as He did to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has healed you."

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