

## What Do You Want Me To Do?

Mark 10:46-52

Back in seminary, one of the required classes we all had to take was titled “Pastor as Counselor.” On the first day, the professors who were team teaching the large class told us what they were going to do in the class. The seminary was on a quarter system at the time, so classes were only 9 weeks long. “We can’t teach you how to counsel in nine weeks, but we might be able to teach you to listen.” They said that because men have a tendency to jump to problem solving when listening to someone sharing a problem, and that’s not the best way to go when counseling. Instead, we learned how to use reflective listening, being able to repeat back what someone says to us. Only after we had defined the problem, understood what the person was telling us, truly listened to them, could we move on to problem solving.

That’s not only an issue in counseling. It can be an issue in relationships, too. When couples are talking, often the woman wants to just be listened to, while the guy wants to immediately jump in and solve the problem. I remember hearing someone give the advice to a newly married couple, that when a conversation begins, the guy should ask, “Do you want me to just listen, or do you want me to solve the problem?” Defining things like that at the beginning minimizes confusion and disagreement further down the line.

That seems to be Jesus’ problem in today’s Gospel lesson. Jesus asks a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” It would seem not to take the omniscience of God to need to ask that question. If that man is blind, he almost definitely wants to be able to see again! Jesus shouldn’t need to ask this question that he already knows the answer to.

But we need to take a step back and look at what’s happening to see why Jesus asks this question. In first-century Israel, blindness guaranteed only a life of extreme poverty, a life reduced to begging, lived completely dependent on the mercy and generosity of others. And unless one’s blindness was self-correcting, there was no hope, no cure in sight.

And so when blind Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is walking by, he comes and cries out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” But there’s a large crowd, and they don’t want this blind man to bother Jesus. They may be traveling with Jesus, but they have forgotten what Jesus came to do. They are blind to the needs of Bartimaeus, and they’re blind to Jesus’ plans and purpose.

As we’ve been looking at the messianic prophecies in Isaiah during the Sunday morning Bible class, we’ve seen this mentioned. Isaiah writes several times that the Messiah will bring sight to the blind. Jesus fulfills this prophecy multiple times. He begins his ministry by reading one of those messianic prophecies of Isaiah. “And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the  
captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the

attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus came to bring sight to the blind, light to those in darkness, to fix the effects of sin on the world.

Even when the crowds and disciples try to shut Bartimaeus up and make him go away, he cries out all the more until Jesus says, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he reveals what he believes to be his deepest need: “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus tells him, “Go, your faith has saved you.” And the blind man is healed, and he is saved, for by his bold request the blind man sees what others do not see: that Jesus saves and that Jesus gives more than you could ever ask (Mark 10:46-52).

When blind Bartimaeus cries, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,” this is the theology of the cross. He’s asking Jesus for an act of loving kindness for his less than glorious daily life. “What do you want me to do for you?” and he answers, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight” (Mark 10:51). His answer is something specific, a mercy, given to a poor sinner by the all-powerful Jesus, who came to make the blind see.

This isn’t the only time Jesus asks that question in this chapter of Mark’s Gospel, though. Earlier, Jesus asked the same question to James and John, after they had asked him a question. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to [Jesus] and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” Their response to Jesus was full of pride. “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and

one at your left, in your glory.’ Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you’re asking’” James and John wanted positions of honor and glory, power and prestige, but that was not what Jesus had to give. He only had to give a life of humility and service, of persecution and suffering and death.

Jesus did not do what James and John wanted him to do for them, but he did so much more than they asked. After healing Bartimaeus, he enters into Jerusalem, with the crowd waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna!” Jesus would see those who were blinded by their own pride and power, and they would put Jesus to death. As Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land, and everyone had trouble seeing. Yet Jesus rose again on Easter so we could all see what he had done for us on the cross, overcome sin and death once and for all.

How do you decide what to ask Jesus for? We can at least find part of the answer by looking at what we pray for, how we pray. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The most promising method of prayer is to allow oneself to be guided by the word of the Scriptures, to pray on the basis of a word of Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work.” We don’t want to become victims of our own emptiness, as James and John were. We don’t want to just use Jesus to fill the empty places in our lives. We need to be guided by the word of scripture, to grow in faith and sanctification. That growth may be painful, temporarily creating more emptiness in our lives, but that’s only so we can be

filled with more than we could possibly imagine.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks that. The question doesn’t come from the lottery, doesn’t come from the government, and doesn’t come from the credit card company that wants you in debt for their prosperity. The question was first asked by someone who showed His sincerity by giving His life for you. “What do you want me to do for you?”

Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, once said: "Better to be blind and see with your heart than to have two good eyes and see nothing." Bartimaeus saw with his hope-full heart, and Jesus healed him. Today, Jesus asks you the same question: "What do you want from me?"

We may have our own answers to that question, but Jesus gives us more than we could expect, more that we deserve, more that we could think we wanted on our own. Jesus comes to make you see! He comes to bring light into your life! He comes so that the works of God might be displayed in you. What a miracle! What a blessing.

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