

## **Do Not Pass Me By**

Now they came to Jericho. *As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 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!" Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.*

In the American war of independence, Colonel Rahl was a commander over some German soldiers that fought for the British empire against the Americans. One night, Rahl was playing cards, when a messenger brought a message on a letter stating that they had seen the American General, George Washington, crossing the Delaware river and gathering his troops. Rahl didn't read the letter. He wanted to finish his card game. He put it in his pocket. Only much later, when the game was over, did he read it and realise the seriousness of his predicament. But it was too late. Many of his men were killed, and the rest were captured. His procrastination was his undoing.

Procrastination is not only the thief of time, it is also the thief of souls. When all men one day stand before God, I wonder how many will be those who had planned to come to God, thought that they would some day come to Christ, but never did.

We, who live in a city with abundant products, shops with shelves full, things that can be ordered and delivered at any time, might mistake our experience as a consumer with our experience as creatures before their Creator. What if knowing God is not like a Facebook invitation that you can send at any time? What if Christ and His offer of salvation is not something that will always be there for us, to be accepted or rejected in our own time? Perhaps a relationship with God is not a product on a shelf to be taken at will. Perhaps Christ's call may come to us, and a window of mercy open, which if rejected, shuts. What if that is the case?

What if God is not like a service provider, desperate to get our business? What if He is more like a rescuer, who comes to us and extends a hand, which if refused, might not return? How should that affect our view of faith?

We see in this passage that if God approaches you and calls you, the appropriate response is not procrastination, apathy, delay? If God confronts you with your need and extends His strong arm of mercy, then faith responds with urgency, not banking on tomorrow or the next day.

In the account of Bartimaeus, we have a crystal clear picture of what faith is to be. Right through this Gospel we've seen who Jesus is and what faith in Him looks like. I fear that there is a very lazy, sloppy, even self-centred faith that thinks Jesus Christ is a product that you can browse and choose to take whenever you want to. But this passage teaches us that saving faith is nothing like that. Bartimaeus gives us three acts of saving faith.

Perhaps today you say that you already believe in Jesus Christ. This passage gives you the chance to compare yourself and your faith to a biblical example of saving faith. Perhaps today you are on the fence, not sure if you should commit and become a Christian or not. This passage will show you the right response.

### **I. Saving Faith Will Seize the Moment**

*Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 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!"*

Our Lord is making his last stop before heading to Jerusalem. He comes to the city of Jericho, where, as Luke's Gospel tells us, He calls Zacchaeus the tax collector who comes to saving faith. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the call of someone else at Jericho – blind Bartimeus. Matthew actually tells us Bartimaeus had a companion. Mark tends to summarise and focus, and like he did with the account of the demon-possessed men of Gedara, he focuses on one man.

Only Mark gives us his name, and it may be that he was one of the early members of the young church, when the Gospel of Mark was written.

There were actually two Jerichos, an old ruined one, and the new rebuilt one. This might explain why the Gospel accounts seem to differ on Christ's arriving or departing Jericho.

It was the custom that if there was some kind of procession, some wedding party, or some celebrating group, that all the inhabitants gathered in the streets to see them and welcome them. You can imagine that as word comes that the controversial miracle-working Jesus is coming through, a great crowd would have come out and accompanied him. Some curious onlookers, some sceptical critics, some who were suspicious, some parents holding up their children, so they could say they had once seen the great prophet from Galilee, tradesmen, mothers, children, soldiers - all making up a crowd of onlookers.

Sitting by this road was Bartimaeus. This was not an age filled with Braille and guide dogs and audio tapes, and all kinds of helps. If you were blind, much of the work in an agricultural society like Israel's, was impossible for you. So you became useless to society, and a virtual castaway. You depended on sheer pity, on people feeling sorry for your plight and giving to you. Your life was not spent in productive, fruitful work, nor in relationships with wives and children and friends. Instead, you situated yourself where you would be seen by most people. There you sat, your skin bronzing in the harsh sun of Israel and cracking in the cold winters. There your muscles began to weaken as you seldom worked with your hands, or walked, but simply sat. There the kicked up dirt of the road began to coat you, as you lived your life listening to approaching and receding footsteps. A dreary, monotonous life of perpetual waiting, and then every time saying the same words to those anonymous footsteps: "Have pity on a blind beggar." "Alms for the blind."

The only colour in Bartimaeus' life would have been the arrival or departure of some interesting group - a Roman delegation, nobles or kings come to see Herod, pilgrims from far north Galilee, with their funny accents, come up for the feasts.

By now Bartimaeus knew how to find out who was coming to Jericho, probably some sighted friends or familiar shopkeepers, maybe those he'd buy his food from with his few copper coins gained from begging. When he'd hear their voices, he'd ask them what the occasion was, or who was coming along. And on this occasion, they tell him that the great prophet from Nazareth, the one some say is Messiah, is coming through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem.

After three years of public ministry, very few people in the land did not know the name Yeshua. By now he was a folk hero, discussed at mealtimes, a topic of debate at family gatherings. Everyone knew of his mighty miracles - lepers cleansed, demons cast out, deaf and dumb people healed. In fact, just twelve miles away, in the town of Bethany, Jesus had raised a man called Lazarus from the

dead. Bartimaeus had heard people who had seen Lazarus. He had heard that Jesus had restored sight to blind people. One man was born blind, and Jesus had healed him in Jerusalem – word had spread. The Pharisees had actually excommunicated the man because he'd become one of Jesus' disciples.

Being a beggar, Bartimaeus had a lot of time to sit and think. He's thought about this Jesus. He'd heard accounts of not only what he had done, but what he had taught. He'd heard of how the rabbis opposed him. But in his heart, he'd made up his mind who this Jesus was. For him, there could be no doubt that this was the promised Messiah, Jesus was the Christ.

In an instant Bartimaeus knew what this meant. He did not have the freedom of other men – freedom to walk around the countryside, following whomever they wanted to. He could not find Jesus, much less follow him, in his blind state. Someone would need to bring him to Jesus, or Jesus would need to come to him. And now from the commotion, he knew Jesus was coming his way.

There are crowds around Jesus, chattering, talking, and making all the noise that hundreds of feet make on pathways. He is sitting. He does not know exactly where Jesus is, he can only hear increasing commotion. This may be his only chance. Jesus might never come this way again.

What would you do? If this is your only chance, if you can do nothing but call out. I would make such a noise as to be heard above all the crowd, I would be a siren, a shrieking, piercing, alarming voice that no one could miss. I would make sure that if this is my one opportunity to speak to Christ, then I would not make my voice just one more chattering voice in the crowd. I would not risk being drowned out by noisy, pointing, laughing people. What have I to do with them? My only hope, my salvation, my hope of seeing again, my hope of new life is passing this way, past the spot I have sat at days without number. I have only a few seconds before Jesus has passed this spot and gone out of my reach and grasp forever. My voice must be like a bee-sting, it must pierce, bite, annoy, anything but blend.

So Bartimaeus did just that. He cried out, a word that comes from the idea of a raven's croaking... and his cry was not a normal cry.

He cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

“Jesus”, he says – he's not just shouting to anonymous almsgivers. He's addressing Jesus. And he then gives Jesus a title that appears for the first time here in Mark. This is a technical term for Messiah. When questioning the Pharisees, Jesus asked, “What do you say about Messiah? Whose son is He? And they said, “the son of David.”

In Matthew 12:23, we read “*And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”*”

Bartimaeus is saying something that all the sighted people have not been bold enough or clear enough to say: Jesus is the Messiah.

Here's the request: Messiah Jesus: have mercy on me! Pity me! Show compassion to me! He used a word which has found its way into countless Christian songs through the ages: *elyeison*. He hasn't specified what kind or shape or form that mercy should take. He is simply saying: You who have the grace, and the power and the authority, help me.

He seized the moment. How many people you meet today who will tell you that they are planning

to become Christians some time in the future. Not now, they say, they will get serious and committed in the future. Teenagers tell you they'll come to Christ in their twenties. People in their twenties tell you they'll trust Christ after they've seen the world and settled down. Young marrieds tell you they will surrender once they have kids. And so it goes.

Forever banking on the future, forever putting off what Christ commands today. Solomon warns us about procrastination:

*Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer; And gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep— So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man. Proverbs 6:6-11*

You see, Jesus taught in other places that there is sometimes a cut-off to God's invitation. He told the story of a wealthy man who invited guests to a wedding feast, who all made excuses. And when they said no, he simply invited others – replaced their seat at the table with others.

He told the story of some foolish young women who were not ready for a wedding procession, and procrastinated. And when the bridegroom suddenly came, they were not ready and had to buy oil for their lamps and ended up locked out of the feast. These are images of people who miss the feast, and miss the joy, because they procrastinate, or make excuses, or do not come when called.

See, we must seize the moment.

*For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Ps 32:6*

*Isa 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:*

Delayed obedience is disobedience. It is arrogance to think we will have the luxury of choosing Christ whenever we want. Who promised you tomorrow? How do you know this is not the last sermon you will ever hear? How do you know that tomorrow, or in one year, your heart will have grown so cold and hard to the things of God, that you will cut yourself off from mercy forever? You don't know. What you do know is that you have the opportunity today to be saved.

Bartimaeus seized the moment. His saving faith had another characteristic.

## **II. Saving Faith Will Not Be Silenced**

Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus cries out, and he makes so much noise, that many tell him to be quiet. Amidst all the noise of the crowds, his noise is so piercing and alarming that it is intensely annoying and disturbing to most people. They warn him to be quiet. They shush him and probably shout at him.

Now Bartimaeus can hear not only an increase in footsteps, but voices shouting back at him to be quiet. Not only has he not stopped Jesus, but he is being told that he is a nuisance, a pest, an annoyance.

If it isn't discouraging enough to be blind, and not know where Jesus is and what is going on, now all the sighted people are telling him to stop crying out, and to go back to being a quiet beggar.

What would you do? Time is slipping away. A few more steps and Jesus will be out of earshot. Should you do what the crowd says? Should you please man, and stop being such a nuisance? Should you just be quiet?

Bartimaeus did not do that. He cried all the more. It became a shouting match. When they tried to shout him down, he shouted louder. As they tried to intimidate him, he became more forceful.

Saving faith is not a weak, timid thing. When God is calling you, faith will seek until it finds. Jesus told more than one story to illustrate this. He spoke of a corrupt judge, who did not judge properly and when one helpless widow came to him to beg for justice, his only reason for listening to her was because she was so relentless and vigorous in her pursuit. He told the story of a friend who only suffers the inconvenience of a late night visit by a friend, because that friend persists and keep seeking.

A few weeks ago we saw another example of this in the Canaanite woman, whose daughter was demon possessed. Even though she was met with initial silence, even though the apostles wanted her to go away, even though Jesus told her He had come to the Jews first, she persisted.

Jacob wrestled with the Lord Himself, and even after being nearly disabled, he hung on for dear life, saying, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

It seems God delights to include these accounts in His Word. He wants to illustrate that while faith is total trust in Christ and Christ alone, total trust is not passive and weak, and apathetic. Saving faith runs after the Lord it needs. Saving faith clings to the Christ it needs. Saving faith reaches and grabs the Lord it depends on.

What will it take to turn you from Christ? A few objectors? Some hostile family members? The warm blanket on the lap of your reputation, your culture, your friends? Will you really sit there with the few copper coins of this world in your lap while Jesus passes by? Is the familiar enough to keep you seated? Or will you ignore your objectors, lay aside your comforts and obstacles? Will you seek and refuse to be stopped?

Saving faith seizes the moment. Saving faith will not be silenced or stopped. But saving faith has a third characteristic, that we see in what happened next.

After all the shouting, something happens that silences everyone.

### **III. Saving Faith Will Boldly State Its Need**

*So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.*

It is quite a thing when God in the flesh is halted. God the Son stops in His tracks. What brings Jesus to this standstill? Nothing less than the urgent, persistent, fervent cries of this man. What a comfort to know that God is not unmoved by heartfelt, agonising cries. He hears, and from man's perspective, He even seems to stop, to change direction. He responds. As lightning is drawn to water, so grace is drawn to fervent faith.

*The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. (Ps 145:18)*

Jesus commands the man to be brought to him. Suddenly, those who were telling the man to be quiet, are now his comforters. They tell him to be encouraged, to get up, because Jesus has called.

Once he hears that, he throws aside the garment that he would have used to wrap himself in and to collect the few coins that were given to him. I imagine him almost springing up, his skinny legs finding adrenaline-like strength, throwing off the garment and sending coins tinkling down onto the path. He stands, not knowing exactly which way to face and some hands guide him through a parting in the crowd, up to Jesus.

The next voice he hears is the voice of the man he had imagined and heard about – the Messiah. “What do you want Me to do for you?”

Why did Jesus ask the man what he wanted? His first cry had been only for mercy. It might have meant a cry for alms, for money. But for the sake of those listening, and for the sake of teasing out the man's faith, Jesus asks him. He wants him to be explicit, to boldly state what he believes Jesus can do, and what he wants to have Jesus do.

When God calls you, He is just as much asking you, What do you want me to do for you, to find out if you know your real need. Some might say, Lord give me health. Some might say, Lord give me riches. Lord, solve my relationship problems. What saving faith will say is, Lord forgive my sins. Open my spiritually blind eyes to your beauty and glory. Give me new life in You.

And the man, who already believes Jesus is God's Son, the promised Messiah, asks for nothing less than a miracle. “My sight, let it be restored.”

You wouldn't ask that of a rabbi or a priest, or a lawyer, would you? No point in asking people like that. They can't help. But if you already have faith that this is the Messiah, you can ask him what is not humanly impossible. He calls him *rabboni*, which means, my master, my teacher.

And to that, Jesus says – your faith has saved you. Faith was not the efficient cause of his healing- God was the efficient cause. But his faith was the instrumental cause. Faith brought such an act of God to him. The word that Jesus uses here for saved means more than physical healing. The man had been delivered from spiritual darkness, from spiritual deadness, to see who Messiah is, before He had even seen what He looked like.

In a moment, light and colour and shapes and depth perception come flooding in. He sees the very human face of the Son of God looking at him. He sees the mercy and grace and joy in his face. He sees the bewildered crowd looking on.

He made a choice. He was now going to use his restored sight to follow the Saviour. Jesus had been teaching about discipleship and here is one more disciple. He will leave it all behind and follow the Lord. Perhaps he will be among the 120 in the upper room just two months later. Notice how once his eyes were opened, he followed. True conversion brings a desire to follow.

Saving faith states its need.

By the standard of Bartimaeus, what is your faith like? Have you come to Christ and stated your

need in the clearest way? Have you refused to be stopped or silenced ? Have you seized the moment?

*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 2 Cor 6:2*