

## A Blind Beggar

Rev. Saeyoung Park

Mark 10:46-52

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Good evening. As Michael said, my name is Sae Young Pak and I'm the Singles Ministry pastor here at Briarwood. And in about one week, it's going to be my wife and I's one year anniversary here. And believe it or not, it's already been a year and it's been a very quick year for me. I feel like time just flew by and certainly an eventful one.

And Michael, in that one year that I've been here, Michael, I think the prize goes to you. You've got the best pronunciation of my wife's name that I've heard thus far. Her name is Mik Young .

So it's a pleasure to be here and it's a privilege to bring God's word to you this evening. The Scripture reading for this evening comes from Mark 10: 46 - 52. And if I may just ask you to rise for the reading of God's Word as a simple sign of reverence.

<sup>6</sup> And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> 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!" <sup>48</sup> And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>49</sup> And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." <sup>50</sup> And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." <sup>52</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

One of the most cliché scenes in a romantic movie is the last minute airport scene where the man finally confesses his love to the woman just as she's about to board the plane. But before that became a cliché, there was the one that started it all. Nominated for eight Academy Awards and the winner of three, the classic drama that was both filmed and set during World War Two. Something tells me that this congregation in particular will know what movie I'm talking about. But it's Casablanca. Up. The story revolves around three characters Rick, who operates a cafe in Casablanca, his former lover, Ilsa, and her husband, Victor Laszlo, who is a resistance leader against the Nazi Germans. The drama of the movie, as you might imagine, is driven by the love triangle that these three share. And as the movie progresses, Ilsa gradually falls in love with Rick all over again. But near the end of the movie, the Germans have sniffed out Laszlo activity, and so he and his wife find themselves on the run. Now, Rick just so happens to come across a pair of transit letters to the United States. And so he takes the couple to

the airport where he plans to send them away. And at the airport, it finally dawns upon Ilsa that Rick does not intend to go with them and that he's risking his life to save theirs. And the two share a private moment in what has become one of the most famous romantic scenes in cinema history. And I'm going to try to channel here my inner Harry Reeder as I try to quote this classical scene. But Rick says to Ilsa, inside of us, we both know you belong with Victor. And if that plane leaves the ground and you're not with him, you'll regret it. Ilsa then protests and says "no" to which Rick retorts, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life. Then Ilsa was sad and tears swelling in her eyes said, but I said, I would never leave you. And looking endearingly at her, Rick says. And you never will. Ilsa, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that. And as she's now crying, the scene ends with Rick's famous words. Here's looking at you, kid. Then the movie ends with Rick watching the plane and watching his love fly off forever.

I think all of us have had at least one experience in life when we've had to make an important decision in the midst of a fleeting moment. Maybe it was the decision to go to this school and not that one. Maybe it was the decision to confess your love to that special someone. Or maybe for some of you for those of you who remember it, it was the decision to place your faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me draw your attention to the very beginning of our passage. Take a look at verse 46. *And they came to Jericho.* And no sooner have we been told that they came to Jericho, the very next phrase says. *And as he was leaving Jericho,* I want you to bear in mind that this entire passage takes place in a fleeting moment. Starting in Mark 10, Jesus will enter into Jerusalem, never to return to Jericho again. And so we have to conclude that for this blind man, this was the one chance that he had to meet his Lord and Savior. And I don't want to be overly dramatic about this, but I am compelled to at least make you aware that for some of you, if not here in this worship center, then for you watchers and listeners at home, this might also be the one chance that you have to meet your Lord and Savior. It might be the one moment in which the Spirit is moving in your heart. The one moment in which curiosity leads to longing. And longing leads to desperation. And if that's the case, can I just ask you to not let this opportunity pass you by because you have no guarantee that it will ever come again. Pastor Alistair Begg likes to say you cannot control when your conscience is awakened and stirred towards Christ or what the author of Hebrews, I say to you today, not tomorrow, but today if you hear the voice of God, do not harden your hearts. I hope that helps us get into the proper posture as we approach this passage. It's a short one, so I don't think you'll need any points to follow along. But before we get into the text, let's pray one more time.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we come before your word, understanding that in your word you have revealed yourself to us. We can look upon your face. We can marvel and bask in your glory because you have revealed it. And we thank you for that. I ask that as we

walk through Mark 10 that you might help us get a better sense of who Jesus was. We pray these things in his strong name. Amen

Verse 46. *And they came to Jericho, and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus s a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus was sitting by the roadside.*

You're, of course, familiar with the city of Jericho from the Old Testament. But technically speaking, the Jericho in the New Testament is not the same one as the one in the old. It was rebuilt some two miles south of where it once was, and only recently Herod had renovated it, making it into a kind of resort for himself.

Jericho was known as the City of Palms, sometimes as the City of Roses, because those two plants grew in abundance within its walls. It was located in the middle of the desert, but there were springs that fed into it, and when those springs dried up, water was pumped into the city by a network of pipes so that it was always filled with various plants.

It was a garden oasis in the midst of a barren wasteland. And so Herod had built a palace there to which he would retreat during the winters when it was cold back in Jerusalem, although separated from Jerusalem by only 17 miles, the difference in elevation, which amounted to about 3500 feet, led to drastically different temperatures. And so you can think of Jericho as Palestine's version of Florida.

Well, there's a great crowd that has gathered around Jesus and his disciples. Not only is Jericho a major city, but it's a city that has undoubtedly heard about Jesus's miracles. And it's also the eve of the Passover festival. And so it's filled with these pilgrims from all over Israel who had made a pit stop at Jericho on their way to Jerusalem.

So this great crowd has gathered around Jesus and his disciples. Now we're told that Bartimeus was a blind beggar. His blindness was probably the cause of his poverty. In those days, blindness would have been considered a sign of judgment from God. So, for example, in John 9, when Jesus encounters a man blind from birth, the disciples ask him, You'll remember this. *Who sent this man or his parents that he was born blind?* So that was their theology. The blind were viewed to be under a divine curse. And so in terms of the way that they were treated, they were treated as unclean as outcasts. Hence, if you were blind, you were most likely a beggar, unable to provide for yourself. And with no one else to provide for you. I should also point out for you in passing that within the Synoptic Gospels, Bartimeus is the only person who Jesus healed, who is named. And not only is he named, but he's referred to as the son of Timaeus. His father is also identified. And although we can't be certain about this, that seems to strongly suggest that Mark's readers would have recognized him.

I mean, why else would Mark mentioned him by name? You see, most likely, Bartimeus later went on to become a member of the early church. He was part of that original group of disciples who follow Jesus. And the end of our passage indicates the same for

Bartimeus that morning must have started like any other, waking up as usual, perhaps not to the light of the sun, but certainly to the warmth of it. He must have heard the town coming alive because presumably he had a keen sense of hearing. And so he gets up, pulls his cloak tightly about him, the morning chill still hanging in the air, and he starts tapping his way to the city gates, the place where there's the highest amount of traffic, the ideal place for a beggar. And when he gets there, he settles down in his usual spot by the roadside, Mark tells us, and he starts begging. But as he's getting into this routine, all of a sudden he sits up because he can hear off in the distance, a great crowd starting to gather. And there seems to be some sort of commotion surrounding a certain man. And Bartimeus has things to himself or he must be someone very important because the only time this happens is when Herod comes to town and lo and behold, he can sense that the crowd is headed this way. First come the children running ahead of the crowd, jumping and screaming and excitement. Then he starts to feel the robes of grown men rushing past him. So, he grabs one of them to their annoyance and he asks, What's going on? Who's coming? And the man says abruptly, don't you know anything? It's Jesus of Nazareth. And then he pulls his robe away and rushes off, and Bartimeus's makes his heart begins to pound. Jesus of Nazareth. I've heard of him. He's the one who heals the leper spots, makes the crippled walk, unplugs the ears of the deaf, loosens the tongue of the mute, and opens the eyes of the blind. I've heard of him. And as he's processing this in a split second, mind you, you can hear the crowd now in full force, rumbling past them. And he realizes that they are on the way out of the gate. This might be the only chance he's got. And so what does he do? Verse 47. *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.*

In the gospel of Mark, the verb to cry out is frequently used to describe either the crying out of those who are afflicted with disease or by demons, or to describe the cries of the demons themselves when they're confronted by Jesus. It's expressive of extreme pain and anguish. This is not normal shouting. This is frantic, crying. He has no idea where Jesus is. Obviously, he cannot see only that Jesus is somewhere in the vicinity. And so he casts out his voice into the darkness in desperation, but also in hope. As a matter of fact, this is the greatest hope he's had in his entire life. Now, some of you may resonate with blind Bartimeus. His you've heard of this Jesus from your church friends, from your family. You've heard the stories from the Bible. You know what they say of him and what he can do. But you can't see him, can you? You can't see God as part of the challenge of it, isn't it? How do I believe and trust in someone I can't even see? And perhaps for that very reason, more than anyone else, Bartimeus provides for us the perfect example of what we must then do.

So let's take a look at what he actually says. There's two parts to it. Son of David and have mercy on me. First of all, Son of David. This is the only time in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus is addressed as the Son of David. Many of you will know that Matthew, not Mark, but Matthew begins his gospel by emphasizing this very title that not only Jesus, but also Joseph, his father, was the son of David. And Matthew highlights that title to

make it clear that this child who was born was the Messiah. For the Jews, Son of David was functionally equivalent to Messiah or Christ. The Messiah was understood to be the heir to the Kingdom that was promised to David's son. Hence son of David, was an unambiguous messianic title. Earlier in Mark, 8, as the representative of the 12 disciples, Peter had confessed to Jesus, you are the Christ. And so, the disciples know that Jesus is the Messiah. But no other observers, no other listeners to Jesus's teachings, no other witnesses of His miracles, have understood his ministry, his words in such a way that they've concluded this must be the Christ. And so not only is Bartimeus the first person to address Jesus, as the Son of David, but as far as we know, he's the first person who is not a disciple, who has not been specially called, who has not received private tutelage to recognize Jesus as the Christ.

The second part of his cry is *have mercy on me*. In other words, he knows who Jesus is and he also knows who he is. He is pitifully aware of his condition. He knows that what he needs is mercy. He knows that he does not deserve to be healed. And he knows that he has no claim upon this Christ.

There's no reason for us to think that He would have understood his own blindness any differently from any other Jew. He is under a divine curse. His blindness is just punishment for a sin. He is deserving of his status as an outcast. He deserves to be blind, and he knows that what he needs is mercy. See, there's something wonderfully ironic here that this man who is physically blind, has greater spiritual sight than anyone else that we encounter in Mark, I think we could safely say even more so than the disciples themselves. In just the previous passage, for example, in Mark chapter ten, starting in verse 35, take a look. James and John had made the request to sit at the right and left of Jesus in His glory. They were spiritually blinded by their selfish ambition, by their desire for prestige and power, and in their pride they thought that they were entitled.

But in his humility, Bartimeus knows that he's not entitled to anything. Indeed, Bar Tomas exhibits that fundamental Christian trait in the very first Beatitude, where Jesus says Blessed are the poor in spirit. We've been going through the Sermon on the Mount in the morning services as well as during midweek, and we just covered this beatitude. The Greek word for **poor** can also be translated as **beggarly**, and that's because the verbal form of that same word was often used to describe the physical gestures of literal beggars of their timid, hunched over postures as they begged for alms.

Jesus says blessed are the poor or the beggarly in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Someone once bluntly asked Helen Keller, isn't it terrible to be blind? To which she responded, Better to be blind and see with your heart than to have two good eyes and see nothing. I want you to think about that. Better to be blind and see with your heart. And to have two good eyes and see nothing. For Bartimeus, blindness may have been a physical handicap, but it was also a spiritual aid. It allowed him to face himself in his true nature as a sinner in need of mercy, as one stricken by a curse under a divine displeasure. Yes, the theology of the Jews was wrong. There's no direct correlation

between sin and blindness. But the conclusion that that led Bartimeus to make about himself, was actually correct. He is under a curse, as are we all, and therefore he has no claim upon God. We would imagine that his blindness allowed him to develop a more fervent inner life, a more contemplative spirit with no visual distractions.

He must have heard of the stories of this man, Jesus, of all that he was doing, and he must have spent hours and hours and hours in reflection. I mean, what else is he going to do? He's a blind beggar. And little by little, he must have pieced things together. It must have clicked for him one day that this Jesus was the one of whom Scripture spoke.

And, you know, this applies not just to blindness, but it applies to every and any kind of affliction or difficulty, whether physical or mental or circumstantial. Don't get me wrong, blindness is a terrible thing. But if that blindness leads you to a greater understanding of God, if what you gain is greater than what you are deprived of, and if that deprivation is the means of your salvation or even sanctification, then wouldn't you call that good?

And isn't this what we confess? That God's sovereignty is greater than the greatest manifestation of sin, whether that's blindness or poverty or sickness or loneliness or death, so that he can take even those things and turn it towards his own good purposes and for your good. Verse 48 In response to Barton master's cry, many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but he cried out all the more Son of David have mercy on me.

Notice that his cries garnered no sympathy. Instead, we are told that they rebuked him, telling him to be silent. And here we are reminded of the way in which the disciples themselves had responded to the children earlier in Mark chapter ten, verse 13, they also rebuked them. In both cases, the rebuke is driven by a disdain for someone of lowly status trying to gain access to Christ.

And isn't that the case at times that the greatest barrier to Christ can be the church herself? There's a praise song that my previous church used to like to sing called Lead Us Back. And one of the verses goes like this –

Lord we fall upon our knees,  
We have shunned the weak and poor,  
Worshipped beauty, courted kings  
And the things their gold affords,  
  
Prayed for those we'd like to know –  
Favor sings a siren tune.  
We've become a talent show;  
Lead us back to life in You.

You know what's interesting is that in Mark, the previous candidate, to potentially become a disciple of Christ was the rich young ruler. And how did the disciples react

when the young man walked away dismayed? They were astonished, saying, who then can be saved?

If he's not good enough to be a disciple, then who is? See, it's not about how good you are, but it's about how desperate you are. And many rebuked him, but he cried out all the more. Son of David have mercy on me. Ironically, the effect of the crowd's attempt to silence Bartimeus is to further emphasize Jesus's title as the Son of David. It's almost as though God is using this blind man to proclaim the true identity of his son to the spiritually blind crowd. And imagine this scene with me. The rebuke of the crowd serves only to fan the flame of Bartimeus's persistence so that the more they try to silence him, the more he cries out frantically, hysterically, desperately.

Son of David. Son of David. Have mercy on me. And he repeats that again and again, not knowing if he can be heard over the roar of the crowd. Not knowing if Jesus is even still around. But he cries out anyways, as the people around him try to silence him all the more. And if you're actually imagining the scene, then you won't miss the fact that this is absolutely humiliating for Bartimeus – Here is a grown man screaming like a child in public with people telling him to shut up. But - the desperation of this blind man. Have we not seen this before?

We see it in Mark 2 and the friends of the paralytic who climb up a roof and dig a hole to get to Jesus. We see it in Mark 5 and the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years when she lunges out and grabs Jesus's cloak. We see it in Mark 7 in the Syro-Phoenician woman who begs Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, saying to him, Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And we see it in Mark Chapter nine when the Father cries out to Jesus on behalf of his demon possessed son, I believe, help my unbelief. See, throughout his gospel, Mark shows us what true faith looks like. It is always desperate, and because it's desperate, true faith is always willing to be humiliated. And it is always persistent. It does not rest until it receives the object of its desire.

But in order for you to become desperate, you have to first recognize that you've got nothing to lose. That without Jesus, you are both beggarly and blind. And returning to you, who might resonate with Bartimeus? Who struggles with the fact that you can't see God. This is what I'd like to say to you. It's very simple. Nothing profound. Don't give up. Continue crying out instead of the dark. Because what Mark shows us here is that God is faithful to answer. He will show himself to you in His Word, through his church, through his people. He will give you the eyes to see a Psalm 51:17 promises a broken and contrite heart. God, you will not despise.

That's exactly what we see here in our passage as well. Verse 49. And Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And they called the blind man saying to him, Take heart. Get up. He is calling you. You know, as you read through the Gospels, you have to love the way that Jesus handles certain situations, right? In one moment, the people are rebuking Bartimeus, as in the very next moment, Jesus stops and he says, Call him.

And we read. They called the blind man. Well, whose They? I like to think that it's the same people who are just rebuking them. So they're forced to eat their words and instead say, Take heart. Get up. He is calling you. Take heart. Get up. He is calling you. That must have been the most beautiful three sentences that Bartimeus ever heard. And can I just say Mark is not just recounting a story here. Those are words that he's saying to you.

James Edwards, commentator writes, how remarkable that the son of man allows the cries of a poor and powerless person to stop him in his tracks. And isn't that all the more true today, as Jesus sits enthroned in the heavenly realm, as he basks in the incessant praise and adoration of the angelic hosts as he receives their music. The sweetest sound that man has never heard. Holy, holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. It's a wonder that in the midst of that worship session of which He is the object of the worship he still hears your cries down here on Earth, and not just yours, but the cries of all the millions of brokenhearted who call upon his name. Son of David. Have mercy on me that the cries of a sinner halts the most holy one and that the king does as the beggar asks. Take heart. Get up. He is calling you

verse 50 and throwing off his cloak. Barton sprang up and came to Jesus. Part of me is throws off his cloak. That's an extreme gesture, I think for someone who's a blind beggar, his cloak would have been his only protection from the elements. The only thing that kept him warm through the night, safe from the desert winds. And yet he casts it off. You can sense his eagerness and his confidence, can't you? He doesn't need his cloak because he's about to see.

And Jesus said to him, verse 51, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go your way. Your faith has made you well. Jesus asks him, what do you want me to do for you? In some ways, that's a silly question, isn't it? What do you suppose a blind man would want him to do for them? Jesus obviously knows what me wants, but you see what Jesus wants is for Bartimeus to make the ask. And the same applies for us. God knows every care and concern before we even tell him. But he invites us to lift up our petitions Anyways, as Matthew 7 says, *ask and it will be given to you*.

But here's another reason for this question What do you want me to do for you? I want you to look in your Bibles on the same page. Mark 10: 36. This is the same exact question verbatim that Jesus asked James and John. What do you want me to do for you? But what a stark contrast in their requests. whereas James and John asked to be elevated to the right and left of Jesus in glory, all Thomas wants us to see. And once again, I quote James Edwards here, who makes an insightful comment regarding this contrast. He writes -- for the well, normalcy may seem the bare minimum, but for the ill and troubled normalcy is God's greatest gift.

I wonder if that isn't true for us, especially in America. We've grown so accustomed to our comforts, our pleasures, our luxuries that nothing God provides us satisfies. And



we're like spoiled little children, even in the requests that we make. God, God, God, please let me get into this school or let me get this job or let my business prosper.

And when things don't go our way, we throw a temper tantrum, We get angry and bitter. We stop going to church. We wonder if God even hears us. And isn't that the spitting image of someone who is entitled, just as James and John were? Do you understand? Seriously? Do you understand that you were once blind? But now you see, So that every moment after salvation ought to be dominated by gratitude.

This is the only thing Bartimaeus once. Let me recover my sight, he says, and Jesus responds. Go your way. Your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight. You know, I wish I was there to see Bartimeus' facial expression when he first opened his eyes. Now, bear in mind that up until this point, he's only ever heard of Jesus.

And as we already saw, based on what he heard, he believed this Jesus to be the Messiah, the heir to the throne of King David. And he knows that this great crowd has gathered around this great king. But when he opens his eyes and now he looks for the first time at a savior, and then perhaps he looks back at himself, a poor beggar. What a shock it must have been to see that Jesus looked no different than him, for he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty, that we should desire him. He was despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised. And we esteemed him, not Isaiah. Chapter 53, verses two and three. Have you seen this? Jesus. Have you seen my King? Who does not flaunt his pomp and power but looks more like a pauper who wears the beggar's cloak of sad humanity to make himself the slave of all in grace and charity. Have you seen this Jesus? Have you seen my king?

Well, have you? My wife and I don't yet have any children. But between the two of us, we have six nieces and nephews, which I've learned is nothing here in the South. But we've got six nieces and nephews and we've watched them grow up as infants, just as you've watched your children. And so you'll know that right around the age of one, babies will start to stand on their own two feet. And with the help of a prop, they can perhaps take a couple of steps. And then as they approach to, they'll be able to walk. Or rather, I should say, they'll be able to wobble. And when you watch them walk for the first time in their lives, you'll notice that every single baby is doing the same thing as they walk. They're laughing. And that's because for them, the physical sensation of walking is such a novel thing. It's the most exciting thing that they have ever done. How liberating must it be to be able to move from point A to point B without having to crawl or roll or be carried by someone else? I mean, walking is just the greatest thing for them. And so they're always laughing, even as they're wobbling.

And I imagine that may must have had a similar experience. Seeing might be the most ordinary thing that we can imagine, but not so for border. He must have gone to sleep each and every night, being hardly able to contain his excitement, waiting to wake back

up in the morning, to open his eyes once more and to watch the sunrise and illuminate a brand new world.

And I wonder if that's similar to what we experienced when we first accepted Christ, and even more so to what we will experience when Christ returns and the sun rises for the last time and will gaze upon the new heavens and the new earth. Bartimeus woke up to a new reality factory and not just physically, but spiritually as well for take a look at the very last phrase in our passage.

*And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.* Bartimeus followed Jesus on the way. But here's the question that you have to ask -- on the way. Where on the way is actually a recurring phrase in the gospel of Mark. It's a loaded phrase and it means on the way to Jerusalem. More specifically, it means on the way to the cross. So what perfect timing, because in just a week, Bartimeus will witness the horrors of the crucifixion. The victory of the resurrection, and the glory of the ascension. Bartimeus, followed Jesus on this way. And if you've come to the realization that you're not also on this way, then I'd like to just invite you to pray along with me in your hearts as we close now.

Join me in prayer,

O Merciful Father in Heaven I confess that I am nothing but a blind beggar. I have not the eyes to see Jesus and no riches to which I can cling. I am poor and do not deserve your grace but have mercy upon me O son of David -- opened my blind eyes. For there is nothing I want more than to see and behold your glory. Save me. Pray my gentle Savior by thy rich embrace.

Father, indeed, we all confess that we were once blind. But you called us out of darkness into your marvelous light. Once we were not a people. But now we are your people. Once we did not have mercy. But now we have received your mercy. Give us all the strength to follow you on the way. And may we walk upon this narrow path by the spiritual site of faith.

For it is in Jesus name that we pray. Amen.