

LORD, HAVE MERCY ON ME!

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ October 23, 2016



⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak

aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” ⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. (Mark 10:46-52)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

You don't have to drive very far along the bumpy, pot-hole ridden roads of Tucson to see a familiar sight. At many major interchanges there are homeless people, begging for money, begging for food, begging for a job. The sight of many a disheveled homeless person is enough to make people look the other way, drive on past, and not think twice about that person. In Africa, the sight was more common, except these beggars were placed around grocery stores and other places of commerce, and sometimes you could tell these people were crippled, they were blind, they had disabilities. And in much the same way as American counterparts, many would simply walk right by, ignoring the begging voices.

Oh, we make our excuses for why we do not stop. “They’re not worth our time,” “They made bad choices in life that led to this plight,” “They would just waste what I give them on booze or drugs.” And those excuses, for the most part, help to quiet our consciences. You know what? These thoughts are not all that unusual. For these are the same thoughts that ran across the minds of people in Israel 2,000 years ago. Jesus displayed these attitudes in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, as several Israelites wanted nothing to do with a disheveled lump of humanity. These are the attitudes that permeated society in Israel, when there were beggars sitting on street corners, hoping for a morsel of food to make it through another day.

The only thing that these beggars could ask for is mercy – compassion and kindness of others who could expect nothing in return. And as we ponder the story about a particular beggar, notice the similarities between these beggars and us. We are not in the same physical situation as blind Bartimaeus, but we do have the same reason to cry out, “LORD HAVE MERCY ON ME!”

1. Mercy to see
2. Mercy to follow

The story opens on the road to Jericho. Once more as a reminder, Jesus is gradually making his way toward Jerusalem. He has travelled from the northern country around the Sea of Galilee, he's crossed the Jordan River as he made his way south. And now crosses the Jordan once more, across from the city of Jericho.

Many of you might remember Jericho from the account when the Israelites were embarking on their conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua instructed the Israelites to march around the city seven times in seven days, and then on the seventh day they were to blow their trumpets, and by a miracle of God, the walls of the city came a'tumbling down. What many might not remember, is that Joshua proclaimed a curse upon this city and anyone who sought to rebuild it. Because of this curse, the original location of the city was never rebuilt. Instead, future inhabitants rebuilt a half-hour to the north-west. This was the Jericho Jesus entered.

Jericho was a very rich city. Its geographic location provided the perfect climate, Jericho was the winter home of kings looking to escape the cold elevation of Jerusalem. Springs watered the surrounding countryside, providing fertile ground for palm trees, sycamores and cypress. Rose bushes grew abundantly around Jericho with their perfume greeting visitors. The renowned Jewish historian Josephus described Jericho as a little Paradise. Jericho also lay at a crossroads of the great caravan road stretching from Egypt in the West to Arabia in the East. It is no wonder this was the last major stop for pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem for the annual festival of Passover.

Mark describes, **"Then they came to Jericho."** One other important event in the life of Jesus happened on this visit to Jericho, this was where the prosperous tax-collector Zacchaeus met Jesus and was changed. Jesus had spent the night at Zacchaeus' household, and was now setting out toward Jerusalem. A large crowd of people surrounded Jesus, eager to see what he would do next. A large crowd of pilgrims, likely making their way up to Jerusalem along with him. How many of these pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, truly realized they had the Passover Lamb standing right in their midst? Like the disciples, how difficult it was for these people to wrap their heads and their hearts around the words that Jesus had clearly pointed out to them time and time again. Instead they looked for the miracles, they looked for the spectacular, they looked for the bread king.

But what was it that stopped Jesus? There could have been any number of the touristy souvenirs or landmarks that could have caught Jesus' attention, but none of them did. Instead it was a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus was one of any number of beggars who crossed Jesus' path on his exit from Jericho. But it was at this time, and for this beggar that Jesus stopped. Mark writes, **"When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"**

How serious was Bartimaeus about being heard? Was this just a regular shout to try and get Jesus' attention? No, this was 'the shout at the top of your lungs because I'm so desperate to be heard' shout. This wasn't the shout of a person in the top of the first inning of a World Series game. This was 'the screaming of a fan at the bottom of the ninth, game 7, bases loaded' shout. Bartimaeus wanted to be heard, and he was.

When was the last time we cried out with that much passion? When was the last time we truly realized our need for mercy? We sang it at the beginning of our service (page 3 of your worship folders) – Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. Was this the cry of a sinner in desperate need for mercy, or was it the cry of a churchgoer following the service? It can be easy to glaze over that part of the service as unimportant, but don't. Realize why it is there, realize why you need to cry out for mercy, realize why I need to cry out for mercy.

Bartimaeus realized his need for mercy – but not only in the sense of granting sight to his blind eyes, he recognized his need for mercy from a Messiah. This is what his shout was all about, **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** Son of David was a title reserved for the Messiah, a descendent of great King David, a descendant who would reign not over territory but hearts. And so he shouted, **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** And lo and behold, Jesus heard him and stopped, **"Call him here."** The blind beggar immediately got up and stumbled over to Jesus. **"What do you want me to do for you?"** Jesus asked him. Bartimaeus may have thought it was obvious what he wanted, but Jesus wanted him to ask for it. **"Rabbi, I want to see."** **"Go, your faith has healed you"** and immediately, he received his sight.

Quite a story, right? But how closely do you see yourself relate to blind Bartimaeus? Or is it just a nice story once again showing Jesus what a wonderful person he is? How passionately do we cry, "Lord have mercy!" at the beginning of every service? How often do we really even feel the need for God's mercy? And maybe that's where the problem lies. If we were to only cry out for mercy when we "feel" it, then as long as our life is going well, we are just crying out empty words. But it doesn't matter what we feel, it matters what God's Word says, whether we feel the need for mercy or not, because of our sins, we do need mercy.

Then when life throws us a curveball, when unexpected medical bills come, when family issues heat up, when retirement savings crash down, when trouble comes knocking on your door, and you don't know where to turn, then, maybe "Lord have mercy!" takes on a more passionate tone. And so on those days, we may enter church and passionately cry, "Lord have mercy!" and we have God's blessed assurance that mercy is given, just like it was for blind Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus' sight was restored to him, but that wasn't the mercy he was after. The mercy he was after, the mercy that we are all after, could only be given by a sacrifice. A sacrifice of the perfect, blameless Lamb of God, as he marched up to Jerusalem.

This is the mercy Christ has given to us. We cry out to God "Lord have mercy!" and our financial problems may still be there, we cry out "Lord have mercy!" and our family strife might still be there, we cry out "Lord have mercy!" and our problems may still be present. But God's mercy is upon us, maybe not in the time or manner that we desire, but God's mercy for sins rests upon us and covers over all our problems.

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What did blind Bartimaeus do once his sight was restored? Was it just life as normal? I think not. The last sentence of our gospel records, **"Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."** Bartimaeus was overjoyed that he could see, and he wanted to follow the one who had given him his sight, he wanted to see the miracles he had heard so much about. But he would see much more than that. He would see his faith realized as he watched Jesus be rejected by the

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Jewish people and crucified on a cross. This is how much this mercy cost, this shows how much Jesus loved us.

Seeing the mercy of Christ in action, seeing the actions of Christ, taking time out of his schedule once more to purposefully talk and speak to this beggar, gives us a new perspective on how we view people we meet. It gives us a new perspective on showing mercy. It gives us a new perspective on what it means to follow him. We follow our Lord and Savior when we gather around his Word – be it in worship, Bible Class or at home. We follow our Lord and Savior by viewing those around us as Jesus did – sheep without a shepherd. We follow our Lord and Savior to the cross, when troubles come our way. Because of Christ's mercy upon us, we can have the peace of knowing everything is OK, we have the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven, we can have the peace of knowing we will be in heaven with God. May we share this wonderful news. Amen.