
Bartimaeus and Prayer

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 27 October 2024

Jeremiah 31:7-9 • Hebrews 7:23-38 • Mark 10:46-52



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

“Teacher,” the blind man answered, “I want to see again.” (Mark 10:51)

This is the request Bartimaeus makes of Jesus, as Jesus goes by him in procession, on the way to Jerusalem. It is a simple thing to ask, but what a tremendous difference it will make in the life of this man. Bartimaeus asks the question out of his frustration and sorrow, but also out of his hope and faith that Jesus may be able to grant the request. And Jesus, very simply, with the power granted him by his Father, restores Bartimaeus’ sight. “Go,” he says, “your

faith has made you well.” And Bartimaeus jumps up and follows Jesus on the road.

This little story tells us a lot about prayer. How do we approach Jesus today? We approach him in prayer. Bartimaeus was able to see Jesus and hear his voice. We cannot, but Jesus is just as real to us as to that blind man long ago. It is important to consider just how he approached Jesus.

First, he was persistent. He had probably heard about Jesus and things he had done. He had probably heard about Jesus’ procession through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem for the festival. He sat himself down along the main road through the town so that he would not miss it. And when the procession came close, he cried out as loudly as he could, “Son of David! Have mercy on me!” (10:47) The others in the crowd tried to shut him up, but he would not be silenced. “Son of David! Have mercy on me!”

Note that he is calling Jesus the son of David, meaning not literally the son, but the descendant. Descending from David was a mark of distinction, and since David was a great king, and a great military general, to be called the Son of David was to reflect those attributes onto Jesus. Remember that many of the Jews in Jesus’ time thought that their salvation would come from the overthrow of the occupying Roman forces. Jesus did bring salvation — but not in that way. He came as a man of peace — peaceful, but still with great power to save.

Second, Bartimaeus knows what he wants. His request was no general cry for help or healing. He wanted to see. “Teacher, I want to see again.” No doubt there were many troubles in Bartimaeus’ life. He was poor. He was a beggar. He may have had no real home, apart from the streets of Jericho. But he had thought about this. To him the great thing, the thing that would solve many of his problems, was to be able to see. And that’s what he asked for.

In our own prayers, we too should consider carefully what we are praying for. Are we praying for recovery for a friend or relative? Are we praying that we get that new job we really want? Are we praying for peace in Ukraine? Let us be specific and bring our well-considered prayers to Jesus.

Sometimes, though, we are in times of despair or depression, and we cannot formulate our prayers as we would wish. In those times, the Spirit does help us. As Paul wrote to the Romans:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
(Romans 8:26)

The Spirit intercedes for us. Help is available when we don’t know quite what we want to pray for. But just as Jesus challenges us to think about the sometimes difficult parables he told, he also challenges us to think about what

we want to ask him. That is why he asked Bartimaeus what he wanted him to do for him.

Third, what are we praying for? Is it something that we need? Do we feel good about praying for it? Remember our Gospel passage from last week, when James and John came to Jesus? Jesus asked them the same question, “What do you want me to do for you?” and they replied:

“Grant us to sit, on at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”
(Mark 10:36-37)

Was this a proper prayer? Was it not two foolish men seeking glory for themselves, when what they should have been doing was giving glory to Jesus? This was not an honourable prayer, and if James and John had thought about it for a bit before asking, they would probably have realised how selfish their prayer was. By contrast, Bartimaeus’ prayer was for a deep need, the life-changing return of his sight.

God already knows what is in our minds and our hearts. God knows what we are going to pray for before we do it, and knows what is best for us. But God also knows that we do better to think through our own situation, whatever it is, and discover what we really need help with. We know that God answers prayers, not always in the way we expect, but in the way that is best for us. This is one way in which God shows us his love.

Not all prayer is intercessory, that is, asking for God to do something, or asking for something we want. Prayer is also giving thanks. If we have a regular routine of giving thanks to God in prayer — thanks for our lives, for our families, for this beautiful land, or anything else we are grateful for — then we will establish a relationship with God. Then the Holy Spirit will help us as we pray, and then we will have even more to be thankful for. In Jesus’ name, amen.