

Jason Upchurch - The Good News Calls Us to Ask

Let me ask you something this morning to start off our time in the Word of God. Is there anything that you want in life but are ashamed to ask God for?

Or maybe you do ask God in the quiet of your heart, but you don't tell anyone else what it is because it seems silly or impossible or foolish.

Many of you know exactly what it is. You knew it the minute I said it. Many of you aren't sure. What's on your heart that is difficult for you to ask God for?

Do you want to get into that college?
Do you want that Lego toy?
Do you want the cancer to go away?
Do you want to see your family reconciled?
Do you want God to give you babies?
Do you want God to give you a godly husband?
Do you want God to save our spouse?
Do you want that job or promotion?
Or you want a different job altogether.
Is there a sin you wish God would just eliminate from your life?
Do you want to be able to see again?

There's a lot of things on our minds, a lot of things we want. The heart wants what the heart wants.

You say, well I can't get this on my own. No, but we have a God who reigns in the heavens and does all that he pleases. **Psalm 115:3**. And if you know Jesus then you know him.

Now, to be fair there are some things we're just too lazy to go get. Maybe we're too filled with fear so we don't go do them. Some of this is on us. But other things we know are wholly up to God.

What do you want? What are you willing to do to get it? Are you willing to ask?

In our passage this morning we have blind Bartimaeus. And he is given the opportunity of a lifetime. Jesus - God in human flesh - just happens to be walking down his road just outside of Jericho.

Bartimaeus is sitting by the roadside of Jericho. Jericho is the oldest city on the planet and the lowest city on the planet and it's just 17 miles downhill from Jerusalem. Matthew and Luke tell us he's sitting there with a friend who is also blind when Jesus and his entourage come walking by.

And he now has an opportunity to ask God for one thing. But there's a problem. God is busy. God is leaving town quickly headed to Jerusalem, and God is surrounded by thousands of people. What's a blind guy to do?

And our encouragement from Bartimaeus this morning is this: Boldly ask God for what you want.

James 4:3 says you do not have because you do not what? Ask.

James also clarifies that sometimes we ask with wrong motives. But we are called to ask.

Can I let you in on a little secret? God already knows what you want anyway.

Now, we're going to unpack this section and I think we're going to be encouraged by our brother in Christ, Bartimaeus. We're going to see this man in glory. And he is a model for us to follow our gracious Lord who loves to give what we ask.

Now, before we dive in, I want to step back and help us understand this section from a 30,000 foot overview. Because at first glance it's sort of a one-off healing by Jesus that maybe seems a little random or out of place in the flow of Mark's gospel.

I don't know what your Thanksgivings or family gatherings are like. Maybe during Thanksgiving you were together with friends or family and people were talking. And occasionally someone tells a totally random story and you're thinking "Well, that's...nice. Anyway."

And this story can feel a little like that because it's just plopped down in the middle of nowhere in the gospel, but it's really not. This story is nice, and is good, but it's also a great turning point in Mark's gospel and I think he tells it on purpose.

Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. He knows the fate that awaits him - his suffering death at the hands of the religious leaders and Romans. He's just given a masterful sermon about how those in his Kingdom are to be servants and slaves to one another. The next section is his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

And here sandwiched in the middle is a simple story of healing this man who is blind. So what I want to do is show you the significance of this little story in Mark's gospel. I think there's a lot more here than meets the eye. And then I want to spend most of our time considering this story from a very devotional perspective. I think Bartimaeus, our brother in the Lord, is a wonderful example for us to follow.

So let's talk about the significance of this little story.

1) Let's not miss the forest for the trees here: This is just an amazing miracle. In the Bible there are only a few times where someone who is blind is healed. We see a lot of lame people healed, lepers, demoniacs, so on. But actually not a lot of blind people are healed.

There's this man. There's the man back in **Chapter 8** when Jesus spit in his eyes and the man could see things like trees. Then Jesus did a second miracle and corrected his vision? There's the guy in **John 9** who was born blind and Jesus spit and made mud and put it in his eyes and told him to wash. He was healed and no one believed it was still him. There are a couple of others, but this is a rare type of healing. And any time there's something rare in the Bible we should see if there's something significant surrounding it.

2) Related to that, blindness and healing in the Bible is often used as a spiritual metaphor. And we see that here a little bit as well. The man who is blind physically, actually sees a lot spiritually.

And many who see physically, can't see a thing spiritually.

Think about this guy. He immediately knows who Jesus is. He is the Son of David. Why does he call him that? What does the son of David imply? It implies that he is the Messianic King.

2 Sam. 7:12 is the Davidic covenant. It's the promise of God to King David that God will raise up an offspring of David to have a Kingdom forever.

Blind Bartimaeus knows his Old Testament. He knows God's covenant. He knows Jesus, from Nazareth is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy to be king.

And in the very next chapter, what will happen to Jesus? He'll come into Jerusalem as Israel's king.

Bartimaeus also cries out for mercy. He understands his place in the economy of God. He's not demanding anything from God but begging for God's mercy. Not only does he understand that he needs mercy, but that Jesus is the only one who can give it.

He's not a victim, he's not entitled to anything, he is owed nothing. He simply begs for mercy. So although he may be blind, this is amazing spiritual insight. And it's insight that Jesus's own disciples don't really have right now.

By the way, almost every time someone in the Bible has some miracle happen with their eyes there is a spiritual lesson learned.

Think of Elisha and his servant in **2 Kings 6**. Turn back there for a minute. This will be fun. This is when the King of Syria in the north wanted to come and invade Israel. And Elisha kept thwarting his plans because God would reveal Syria's plans to Elisha and he would tell the Israel army. **Read 8-23**

So remember the point here is that blindness and healing is often used as a spiritual metaphor. And this is a pretty wild episode but I think you see that what happens with physical eyes is clearly related to spiritual things.

The opening of the servant's eyes to spiritual realities, and the closing of the physical eyes as a judgment of God. And even the mercy of God in the safe release of these enemy soldiers.

Remember when the apostle Paul was converted what happened to him? He was blinded for a few days. The Ananias came and miraculously restored his sight. Why? So that he could understand a spiritual truth: that he had been blind to Jesus, but now he sees - and Jesus in charge. Jesus is Lord of all.

There is almost always a spiritual lesson when someone is blinded or healed from the blindness.

So **back** in Mark's gospel...we see this is an amazing miracle, that this miracle shows the spiritual insight of the blind man and the spiritual blindness of Jesus's disciples.

3) This story serves as the end to the middle section of Mark's gospel.

So I think you know this but the chapters and verses of the Bible aren't in the original documents. But the authors often did divide up the books into sections. And what we have to look for clues for how they did this. Mark's gospel is divided up in 3 sections.

From **Chap 1-8** - it's all about Jesus and his ministry up in Galilee. He's doing amazing things, teaching amazing things, and his disciples are in awe and worship him.

Then from the middle of **Chapter 8** to the end of **10** there is a section.

It's in this section that Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. The final section is the final week of Jesus's life in Jerusalem from **Chapter 11-16**.

So we're at the end of this middle section from **8-10** where Jesus begins heading to Jerusalem. And the section begins with healing a blind man and it ends with healing a blind man. And in the middle Jesus disciples are absolutely baffled by who he is. It's almost as though they no longer understand Jesus. And there are 4 times where Jesus plainly talks about his suffering and death, and his disciples have no idea what to make of that. And the more he talks, the more confused his disciples are.

Look back at 8:22-26. Read

So we have this healing. Then notice the next section is the confession of Peter. Which sounds amazing, except that when Jesus tells the disciples he's going to suffer and die Peter tries to rebuke Jesus. It's all downhill from there.

We have the transfiguration in **Chapter 9** and he tells them about his suffering again in **9:9-10. Read**

He mentions his suffering again in **9:30-32** and again in **10:32-34**. And it's as though the more he tells his disciples the more spiritually blind they seem to be. And Jesus isn't worried about it.

And then we have this miracle which marks the end of this middle section. Jesus is no longer **talking** about his suffering and death, he's about to **enter** his suffering death.

So Mark begins this section of Jesus traveling to Jerusalem with the healing of a blind man, and ends it with healing a blind man and all in between there is spiritual blindness.

Why does he do this? I think it's to illustrate that only he can open spiritual eyes to understand who he is and what he's about to do.

And so we come to this final miracle on the way to Jerusalem. This act of mercy and grace toward our brother Bartimaeus before our Lord dies. And as much as there is significance in this event beyond the event, let's look.

Remember the big takeaway is to boldly ask God for what you want. Don't be ashamed to ask God.

And I want to just make 5 simple devotional observations.

1) When God gives you the opportunity you want, ask. Read 46-47

We've seen this many times in the gospels where people just win the lottery of life. But unlike the lottery it's not random. We saw this with the Garasene demoniac. We saw it with Jesus pulling up in a boat, healing a whole village and leaving again, the man with the withered hand.

And here in God's kind providence Jesus just happens to be walking through Jericho on Bartimaeus's street. And he's about to leave.

Like most of the stories in the middle section between chapters 8-10 Jesus is leaving. He's moving very deliberately toward Jerusalem like a man on a mission. He's charging through and no one is going to stop him.

Bartimaeus hears this huge crowd. He knows there is commotion and that's when he cries out. He's got one chance.

Sometimes God gives us the opportunity we want, it's staring right at us. We just need to do something about it. Here, all he has to do is ask. Open his mouth and spit out the words.

Some of the best advice I've ever heard in life is "If you don't ask, you don't get." Imagine if all that stood in your way between wanting something and having it was simply asking for it - why wouldn't you ask?

2) Boldly ask God even if others don't think you should. Read 47-48

I love this: he just starts hollering for Jesus to heal him. The word is *krazo* in the Greek and it means to cry out, to scream or to shriek. I mean he's blind, he one shot to get Jesus's attention. That's it. And Jesus is surrounded by a vast multitude of people. Remember it's almost Passover and so not only is there Jesus's usual crowd but there are pilgrim's coming from all over to celebrate the feast. So it's probably a larger crowd than normal.

And he heard the crowd which is why he asked what was going on. And now the crowd is there. He has one opportunity to get what only Jesus can provide and so he starts screaming like a mad man. That's the word. And it's weird. And embarrassing. And a lot of people - many - rebuke him for what he's doing.

Knock it off. This is bad. Leave Jesus alone.

No. This is desperation. This is his one shot. And he's not going to be silent he doesn't care what anyone thinks. He's screaming for Jesus.

Are you okay being embarrassing when you ask God for things?

You guys, this isn't a bad thing. This isn't a sinful thing. There's nothing wrong with his request. Many people had asked Jesus to heal them. That's what this guy is asking too, but he wants to make sure Jesus hears him.

Turn In Luke 11. There are 2 times in Lukes gospel where we are encouraged to pray persistently. Here's the first. **Read 11:5-13**

There's nothing worse than when you lay down in bed and lights are out and you're just about to fall asleep and you forget something. Maybe you forgot something in the car or left something on. So you get up to fix it.

But what if it's someone else who has a problem? And it's not even that critical. Imagine getting a call in the middle of the night from a friend who's just hungry and wants a pizza at 2am because their buddy came over? How rude is that?

You know what God says? Ask like that guy. Ask like that because God is not like some guy who just went to bed. God is actually like a kind father who wants to bless his kids.

And Jesus says not only will God give you what you want, he'll give you the Holy Spirit as well. If God would give you himself - the third person of the Trinity - what would he withhold from us?

Back in Mark - Go ask God for what you want and be persistent even if others don't think you should.

This would have been a publicly shameful thing. It's kind of embarrassing. Some blind man screaming for Jesus to heal him.

You ever been in a grocery store or a public place and someone starts making a commotion. And you just kind of shuffle away because you don't want to be associated with that person? No, this is so bad that many people aren't shuffling away, they're actually telling him to stop. Stop the screaming. Stop the craziness.

Well, we know who was right.

3) Ask God for mercy. Read 47

Just a small point here, but I think it's important. What this man wants is mercy. Usually when we think of mercy we think of salvation. No having our sins accounted to us.

I don't know if you ever played that game mercy when you were a kid. Where you 2 kids trying to bend each others hands backwards until someone says mercy. That's mercy, not getting what you deserve.

But here we might think, maybe he should be asking for grace. Grace is sort of the opposite concept: getting what you don't deserve.

But he says mercy. Which means he understands that not only does he not deserve anything from the Lord, but what he is getting he deserves. If Jesus didn't heal him of blindness, if he didn't cure him, this would not be unjust.

That's true with all of us. If God gave us nothing, he would not be unfair. We really do deserve nothing. We are sinful, wretched creatures. And if all we had was hell, that's exactly what we'd deserve.

But God gives us mercy. Mercy in Christ for salvation. Mercy in good gifts to us. Mercy in healing. Mercy in a job. Mercy in fresh air, warm homes, family.

Psalm 28:6-7 Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

When we ask persistently, we should still understand that all we might get is a mercy of God and never something we deserve.

4) Pray with confidence that Jesus wants to answer us. Read 49-51

Listen, just think with me for a minute. One of the reasons we're reluctant to ask God and ask him persistently is because we don't think he wants what we want. We think he knows better than us and so maybe our desire is out of line.

But just imagine for a minute he does want what we want. As a parent this happens all the time. I'm in the kitchen, there's some cool snack or food, kid comes up to me and starts the request.

Now, in the back of my mind I want the child to have the treat. I want them to be blessed. I made it for them, I want to bless them. And the child sees it and is stuck. Maybe they hint at the snack, maybe they look at it and say "I'm hungry" maybe they talk about how someone else got the snack.

You know what I want them to do? Just ask me for the snack. "Dad, could I have this cookie?" Why? Because I actually want to bless them.

Imagine the thing you want is actually the very thing God wants, too. And all you need to do is ask for it. Maybe you have to ask once. Or maybe you need to ask 1,987 times because God is teaching you persistence in prayer. But the answer is actually "yes."

Bartimaeus gets what he wants: A personal audience with Jesus. All of his screaming and embarrassing commotion has given him an audience before the Son of David, the king of the universe. "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus is asking for Jesus to serve him. And he's got one shot. And what he doesn't know is that Jesus wants exactly what he wants. Jesus's will is the same as Bartimaeus's will.

I was thinking about all the crazy things I've prayed for over the years. And when I list it it sounds silly. It sounds like some kind of Christmas list. But it's not silly. These are mercies that my God has given me because I asked.

I've prayed for cars, I've prayed for healing, I've prayed for salvations, houses, I've prayed for babies, I've prayed to not miss a ferry, I've prayed for all kinds of ridiculous things. Things that even when I prayed for them seemed trivial at the time.

But I have a Father in heaven who loves to bless me because I am his son through Christ. When we ask - if it's not sin and it's not something that will distract us from God - ask assuming that God wants us to have this thing.

When God gives you the opportunity, ask. Boldly ask even if others don't think you should. Ask for mercy, Ask with confidence that he wants to answer us.

5) Ask honestly in faith. **Read 51-52**

What do you want? And he blurts it out.

There was a time when I was driving years ago and I was thinking about something I really wanted. And I was considering whether or not to pray for it. Would it be too silly, was it a dumb thing. "Well, if God wanted me to have it he would just give it to me." And I'm going back and forth in my mind about even whether I should pray and then it occurred to me: God knows what's happening in my mind. He knows what I really want. And then I felt foolish for having this argument in my own mind in the sight of the omniscient, omnipotent God.

He already knows what I want. What he wants is me to just ask honestly. So I did. And I got what I asked for.

Now let me just qualify this by saying there's a whole bunch of things I've asked for that I didn't get. And it's not like Garth Brooks's Unanswered Prayers song where it worked out better that the answer was no. Maybe sometimes. But there are some things I've asked for and still ask for that I think would be good things and the answer, so far anyway, is no.

Or wait. Waiting is my least favorite answer which is probably why I get to do it so often because I need it.

But just ask honestly. And the epilogue here is beautiful. Bartimaeus gets what he wanted. His faith made him well. Jesus answered his deliberate, crazy, childlike faith.

And what's Bartimaeus do? He follows Jesus. He follows his King on the road to suffering. The road to victory.

Beloved, boldly ask God for what you want. Who knows, he might just give it to you. Exceedingly, abundantly more than we could ask or think.

Pray