

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 10:46-52

Topic

A blind man's cries for mercy cause Jesus to come to a complete stand still on His way to the Cross

Title

"The Day the Earthmaker Stood Still"

Introduction

Have you heard of Omaze.com?

It's an online auction, but for charities, and it offers once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Omaze was founded by Matt Pohlson and Ryan Cummins, who were disheartened after attending a charity auction looking to sell off a special experience with Magic Johnson.

“We’re both lifelong Magic fans, and the idea of shooting hoops with him and going to a Lakers game with him was something we were both so excited about,” said Cummins. “But when the bidding started, the price rapidly fell far out of our reach and eventually sold for \$15,000.”

On the ride home that night, they realized that by doing celebrity experience auctions online, they could maximize profits for charities, while making the bidding and the chance to win available to everyone.

On Omaze the bid is always only \$10. You can buy as many \$10 bids as you'd like, but they are considered individual bids.

Here are two of their current auctions:

1. You can bid to share a pizza with Robert Downey, Jr., at his favorite New York pizzeria. Included is an exclusive screening of *Captain America: Civil War*; tickets to *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*, where Downey guests; and a four-night stay at a luxury Big Apple hotel.
2. You can bid to have lunch with Chris Pratt while visiting the set of *Guardians of the Galaxy II* and enjoying a luxury hotel in Atlanta.

In the most recently completed auction, fans won walk on roles in the next *Star Trek* movie. They will fly to the closed set of *Star Trek Beyond* and hang with the cast before hair, makeup, and wardrobe gets them into character for the role of a lifetime.

I got to thinking about once-in-a-lifetime meetings while studying our text. A blind man, stationed as a beggar on the outskirts of Jericho, hears that Jesus is walking through town on His way to Jerusalem.

Jesus would not be passing that way again. This was the Passover that He would be crucified in Jerusalem.

This was it for the blind beggar - a once-in-a-lifetime, now-or-never moment to meet Jesus. He cried out repeatedly and the Lord stood still.

As we work through this event, I want to explore what still causes Jesus to stand still, and what will encourage us, as His followers, to not sit still.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Stands Still When You Cry For Mercy, and #2 Jesus Still Stands Still While You Call Men.

#1 Jesus Stands Still When You Cry For Mercy

(v46-49)

KCRA Sacramento ran a story in 2014 about a couple who were going through our valley panhandling. The story was titled, *Self-proclaimed professional panhandlers net \$182 an hour.*

The title was a little sensational, and a lot deceiving. True, they made \$364 in about two hours; but they only panhandled for two hours. They weren't making that much as a daily hourly wage.

Stories like that fuel the false notion that all of the people out there panhandling are really millionaires.

A research team found that the typical panhandler in San Francisco's Union Square is a disabled middle-aged single male who is a racial minority and makes less than \$25 per day despite panhandling seven days a week for more than five years. Ninety-four percent used the meager funds they raised for food, not booze or drugs.

Let's try to set aside our opinions on contemporary panhandling so they do not influence our thoughts about the Jericho beggar.

Mar 10:46 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.

If you were a beggar in the first century, there was no deception. You were destitute, depending for your livelihood on the meager alms you'd receive from passers-by.

Passover was a profitable season for begging. In Exodus 34:23 we read,

Exo 34:23 "Three times in the year **all** your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel."

Passover was one of those times "all" the men came, so the roads would be full of both pilgrims on their way to the Temple and beggars soliciting alms.

We don't know if Bartimaeus was born blind, or if he had acquired blindness later in life. Everyday he would find his way to a spot in Jericho to beg. Three times a year he'd station himself strategically along the road, to intercept the pilgrims.

It's hard for us to enter in to the sad monotony and hopelessness of his suffering. Day after dark day, he depended upon the random generosity of others.

Mar 10:47 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!"

He "heard," meaning he was paying close attention to the flow of the crowd. After years of begging, I'm sure he could tell when a larger group, or a faster group, was approaching. He must have had a rhythm worked out for asking for alms - timing it just right so that he'd be noticed.

Suddenly there was an unusual commotion. It came to his ears that "Jesus of Nazareth" was leading His disciples, followed by a much larger crowd.

Have you ever seen a celebrity in a public venue? One of my pastimes at Disneyland is to be on the lookout for celebs. So is everyone else, and when you see one, you'll hear whispering or talking as people tell their party, "Look, that's so-and-so."

Something like that alerted Bartimaeus.

This wasn't the first Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus. We can't say for sure exactly what information he'd gathered from listening to travelers, but I'm guessing he knew Jesus worked miracles and was giving sight to the blind.

Bartimaeus also seemed to have developed an incomplete but accurate theology. He believed Jesus of Nazareth was "Son of David." It is a title for the one who would sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule over the Kingdom of God on the earth.

It's just my speculation, but I'd say that Bartimaeus fully expected Jesus to march into Jerusalem and sit on David's throne as King over Israel. It's what everyone expected. In just a few days, on what we call Palm Sunday, as Jesus would ride into Jerusalem, the crowds would hail Him as King.

I'm setting up for a comparison:

- The disciples, thinking Jesus was going to be King, all but demanded positions in the Kingdom of God, and the best seats on the thrones.
- Bartimaeus, thinking Jesus was going to be King, begged for mercy.

Peter had proudly declared to Jesus, "See, we have left all and followed You" (10:28). He asked for what he thought he deserved.

Bartimaeus asked for what he did not deserve - which is a good definition of mercy.

You know what makes you irresistible to God? Humility. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Humble yourself by realizing you deserve nothing from God. Don't do it with a "Woe is me" attitude, but as an honest appraisal of the fact we are all sinners with no hope of Heaven without help from the Lord - help which He is quick to provide when we ask for mercy.

More than one commentator likes to point out that Bartimaeus was not the only blind man on the Jericho road. Jesus' own disciples were far more spiritually blind than the beggar. His healing was a genuine miracle; but it also serves as a parable to those who have eyes but cannot see spiritually.

Mar 10:48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

How do you warn a blind man? "If you don't be quiet, *I'll trip you!*"

Warning him reveals a fundamental flaw in their thinking - a flaw Jesus had just pointed out a few verses earlier.

It reveals the desire to be served, rather than to serve others. The disciples, and the crowd, were riding the wave of blessing into Jerusalem. Why concern themselves with one blind beggar?

Bartimaeus had a great set of lungs. He'd only have a few moments to get the Lord's attention. He dialed it up to full volume.

Mar 10:49 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."

Occupied as He was with thoughts about the suffering awaiting Him in Jerusalem, and surrounded by the din of the crowd, Jesus heard Bartimaeus' cry for mercy.

Seriously, think of how distracted Jesus must have been. He had told them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again" (10:33-34).

With all of that weighing heavily upon Him, Jesus heard Bartimaeus, and He would respond to him.

"So Jesus stood still." The procession came to an abrupt halt. I'm sure some of those following had no idea why Jesus stopped. They hadn't seen Bartimaeus, nor heard him. They were too preoccupied with their own thoughts.

What preoccupies you? What is it that distracts you from seeing the real needs of those around you?

As believers walking along spiritually with Jesus on our way to the New Jerusalem, we need to be aware of the situation of most of the people in the rest of the world. You might ask yourself, "Who is the blind beggar I don't see?"

It might be an orphan... Or a child needing help in the third world... Or a concern for human trafficking... Or the support of missionaries on the field.

It could be here at home - teen girls and women pregnant and needing counsel... Or the homeless... Or recovering addicts.

The Lord wants to direct you to someone, or to some group. Ask Him *who* or *what* is crying out to Him for mercy, then get involved.

#2 Jesus Still Stands Still While You Call To Men

(v49-52)

In C.S. Lewis' beloved classic, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the one line I remember the most is, "Aslan is on the move!"

The great lion was putting things in motion to resolve the problem that it was always winter, but never Christmas.

Our God is on the move. His providence is directing history toward the remaining events prophesied in the Bible.

- Israel is in her land, surrounded by enemies, and with almost no allies. She is ripe for entering a treaty guaranteeing her safety. Trouble is, she will sign on the dotted line with the Antichrist.

- Technology is ready to serve the Antichrist when he is revealed. We report to you all the time about advances in biometrics that sound eerily like the dreaded Mark of the Beast.
- There are plans to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and priests are being trained to perform its rituals. That Temple will be the site of a pivotal event, as the Antichrist will enter it exactly half-way through the seven years, demanding to be worshipped.

We wait to be raptured prior to the Tribulation, and as we're waiting, we are to be hard at work. We've been commissioned to "Go!" through the world, making disciples.

Even with all that activity, I think we can safely say that Jesus "still stands still." The Son of David will never ignore the cry or refuse the faith of a sinner seeking mercy. In fact, God depicts Himself as waiting for sinners to respond. We call it God's longsuffering.

The apostle Peter was fond of the word longsuffering. In the two inspired letters he wrote, he used it three times:

1Pe 3:20 ... once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2Pe 3:15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation...

God's longsuffering means He is waiting to send His wrath upon the earth while we "Go!" making disciples.

He's standing still, in one sense, while we call to the lost with the message of the Gospel. Lost individuals along the roads we travel are like Bartimaeus.

Mar 10:49 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."

Call the blind man. What a great shorthand for our Great Commission.

To emphasize the lost condition of the human race, the Bible describes us as blind:

2Co 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

2Co 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

Not only is mankind blinded; we are in the dark, and we prefer darkness to light:

Joh 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Before you are saved, you are a blind man in total darkness. When a person is saved, they receive spiritual sight, and move out of the kingdom of darkness and into light:

Act 26:18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Call the blind man. It's our mission and privilege.

They said to blind Bartimaeus, "be of good cheer. Rise. He is calling you."

Christians have a flair for making the Good News cheerless. Recent research has revealed that a majority of unchurched Americans see Christians as judgmental homophobic bigots. I'd like to blame hostile mischaracterizations of Christians by the media, but 50% of respondents in that research study said they base their negative views on personal contacts with Christians.

The researchers said, "Many of those outside of Christianity... reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians."

I'm not saying all this to chastise us. Similar polls show that evangelicals like ourselves are perceived as being the most Christ-like of the bunch. The simple point I'm making is that we should be able to tell nonbelievers to be of good cheer because of the Good News we have to share with them.

A person can never be truly whole, truly satisfied, apart from a personal relationship with God. It's what you were made for.

In Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel brings Scuttle her bag of human treasures, hoping to learn what the items are, and what they are used for.

- The first one is a fork, which Scuttle identifies as a dinglehopper that he says is used to comb your hair.
- The next item is a smoking pipe which he says is a musical instrument called a snarfblat.

People live their lives thinking they are dinglehoppers or snarfblats when they are meant to be the children of God.

The Gospel makes people whole; it brings them to what they were created for. We must approach sinners with a heart, and a message, that says to them, "be of good cheer."

Next they told Bartimaeus "rise." Backtrack for a moment. Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and had some understanding of Who He was.

We would say that others had 'shared Christ' with him. We see him crying out for mercy, and his cry being answered, so that he can "rise" and go to Jesus.

It's a picture of grace operating on the human heart. In and of themselves, and apart from the grace of God, human beings can neither think, will, nor do anything good, including believe. But the grace of God prepares and enables sinners to receive the free gift of salvation offered in Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

Only through the grace of God can sinners believe and so be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, God extends His grace to all. The grace of God "calling" frees the will of a person to be able to respond, and come to Christ.

It frees you to be able to "rise," as it were.

Mar 10:50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

His "garment" is probably a reference to his outer cloak. You'd take it off to move faster - indicating Bartimaeus' eagerness to get to Jesus.

I think the garment represents something spiritual as well. Adam Clarke writes,

If every penitent were as ready to throw aside his self-righteousness and sinful encumbrances, as this blind man was to throw aside his garment, we should have fewer delays in conversions than we now have; and all that have been convinced of sin would have been brought to the knowledge of the truth.

Your salvation is often depicted using garments. Our own best works of righteousness we are told are nothing more than filthy rags. When we are saved, Jesus removes our filthy garment, and exchanges them for His own white robe of righteousness.

"He rose and came to Jesus." He did publicly what was happening privately. It's good to represent what the Lord is doing in your heart by coming forward, e.g., for prayer.

Mar 10:51 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."

In *The Lord of the Rings*, one of the ways the people of Gondor recognize that Aragorn the Ranger is really their rightful king is that he has certain abilities to effect healing. Their lore said, "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known."

Bartimaeus' request was a declaration that he believed Jesus to be the Son of David. The giving of sight to the blind was a sign only the rightful King would be able to perform.

"Rabboni" is a term of endearment, equivalent to calling Jesus his "Master." Bartimaeus was submitting himself to Jesus as His servant, as His slave.

This blind man understood, by faith, many of the things the disciples misunderstood, even though they'd been taught them directly by the Lord. Humility prepares the heart for insight and illumination.

I noticed a quote by A.W.Tozer as our pre-service slideshow scrolls. He said something like, "What we need is not more information, but transformation."

The disciples had the information, in over-abundance; but they were unaffected by it. Let's not be like them in that regard.

Mar 10:52 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.

Remember the genii in *Aladdin* - the Robin Williams one? He'd do something amazing, then say, "*Made ya look!*"

I wonder if Jesus ever said, "*Made ya well!*"

"Made you well" can, and probably should, be translated "saved." Bartimaeus was saved by the operation of grace on his heart, through faith, and this was evidenced by him receiving his sight.

It's sort of like the time Jesus told the paralytic his sins were forgiven. When the religious leaders objected, saying only God could forgive sins, Jesus healed the man to show He was God.

Bartimaeus "followed Jesus on the road." Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, which was about fifteen miles away, and Bartimaeus followed Him there.

I wonder if it was Bartimaeus' first Passover in Jerusalem? Sure, all male Jews were commanded to attend each year, but Jewish sources say this wasn't strictly obeyed in the first century.

And what if you were blind, and a beggar? It was certainly his first Passover in Jerusalem as a sighted person.

Did he later join the crowd that shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord"?

Was he there at the Cross? Did he stay long enough to hear firsthand about the resurrection of Jesus on the third day?

We can ask him one day - that's the beauty of it.

Your Bartimaeus probably won't be a blind beggar sitting on some road you're on. It will be a family member, or a coworker, or a fellow student. It could be a stranger you encounter.

It could be anyone, really, as you "Go!" With the Gospel.

The person's heart may have already been prepared by others sharing Jesus with them; or you might be the first.

You might meet with resistance; or they might be ready to receive the Lord.

The Lord still stands still as His longsuffering waits for sinners to repent.

I don't want to be over-dramatic, but I feel compelled to address any nonbelievers one final time. This could, for you, be the last time Jesus is presented to you. He could be "walking by" for the last time.

It is therefore somewhat urgent you cry out for mercy. He's here, and standing still.

Be of good cheer and rise.