

Desperate for Christ
Mark 10:46-52 (07/26/15)
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Have you ever been in a desperate situation? Adrenalin rushes into your bloodstream, your heart starts pounding, your face goes white, and you're not sure what's going to happen next. When you are desperate you take extreme measures to escape or deal with a potentially deadly or at least dangerous situation. Three desperate situations come to mind. Carolyn and I were driving up the Pennyrile after eating at Ryans. She was napping and I was listening to R. C. Sproul when suddenly I opened my eyes and saw green grass. I had dozed and drifted onto the grassy median. Carolyn was sure we were going to roll. This was a desperate situation as I very carefully steered up the median back onto the highway. Desperate situations cause you to have laser-sharp focus. When the shooter stood up in the theater last week, it was a desperate situation. A couple who escaped described their desperate exit. They did not look back, but were intent on one thing – getting out of there. And then this week there was a car accident where a lady was pinned under a car. Police arrived and people seeing the situation poured out of a restaurant and in desperation mode lifted the side of the car for the poor victim to escape.

Mark 10:46-52 tells us about a desperate man. He's sitting along the road leading out of Jericho when he hears that Jesus is coming along, and he goes into desperation mode. His focus becomes laser sharp. The title of this message is "Desperate for Christ" and I believe we ought to all be desperate for Christ. If we aren't, we don't understand who God is, who we are, and what life is all about. We desperately need Christ, every day. Are you desperate for Christ? Let's look at five desperate things in our passage.

A Desperate Man – v. 46

Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road.

Jesus has spent a little time in Jericho on this last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There were two Jerichos, the old one where Rahab lived, where the walls came down, where Achan stole some gold and silver, and where David told his men to stay when the Moabites or Ammonites cut off half their beards. More recently Herod the Great had built a new Jericho with a lavish summer residence.

Here are a few quick facts so you can picture the situation. Jericho is about 850 feet below sea level, one of the lowest places on earth. Jerusalem is 2,550 feet above sea level. The walk from Jericho to Jerusalem was about 14 miles, all an uphill journey.

Jesus does two neat things in Jericho at this time. He calls Zaccheus down from the sycamore tree, saves him, and goes to his house for a salvation celebration. And now, Jesus gives sight to two blind men. Mark only refers to Blind Bart, but Matthew says there were two.

Now Jesus is leaving Jericho as a large crowd, maybe thousands, follows Him. They knew He was headed for Jerusalem, the center of his enemies and the nest of venomous vipers waiting to destroy Him. But they expected Him to go up there, destroy his enemies, and bring in the kingdom. So they are all excited as they walk along, trying to catch every word that comes from His lips.

But up ahead, outside the gates where all the riff raff and despised of the city sat begging, was this man named Bartimaeus, literally, "son of honor." He's a blind beggar. We don't know if he was born blind or if his blindness was from a severe infection of the eyes common in those days. As he sat there in the heat, you can imagine the stench and the buzzing flies trying to light on his face.

I can still remember as a child seeing a beggar in the back alley behind the market in Philadelphia. His face was purple, his eyes bloodshot, his clothes completely stained, and his saliva drooling from his lower lip. He held a paper sack while looking for something to eat from the garbage bins where scraps of the

meat, fish, and fruit stands in the market were thrown. Would Jesus have time for such a disgrace to the human race? Would Jesus have compassion for a blind beggar like Bartimaeus, of whom, surely, there were many!

So there he sits with his cloak laid out in front of him begging people for something, a penny or two, scraps of food, anything he could use to feed his hungry belly. He can't see and he has to beg. That's you and me. We're naturally blind, unless Jesus has given us sight. And we've got no righteousness. We're blind beggars. The first beatitude says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, people who have nothing to contribute to his kingdom, because theirs is the kingdom of God!" Blind beggars! That's our condition when God finds us and then gives us sight and imputes His righteousness to us! We're not better than this blind beggar! He's a desperate man! If you admit the truth about yourself, you are a desperate person, too. You may have a full belly, a nice home, and 20/20 vision, but you are in a desperate situation.

A Desperate Cry – vv. 47-48

48 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"When he heard!" Praise God that Bartimaeus hadn't lost his hearing. Blind people usually have highly sensitive hearing. He hears this growing din of the approaching hubbub of a crowd. Something's going on. He asked whoever might be near, "What's going on?" "Haven't you heard? Jesus of Nazareth is coming out of Jericho and He's headed for Jerusalem. Some are convinced He's going up there to bring in the kingdom!"

Suddenly blind and begging Bart's whole world shifts. He'd heard about Jesus of Nazareth, about all the conflict with the leaders, about how He had healed many people up in Galilee, including giving sight to blind people. He knew this. And when he heard Jesus was coming by, his heart fairly burst right out of his chest as hope flooded into this desperate man. Everything began to race in him. Bart had already heard enough about Jesus and he knew his Old Testament. He called out, "Jesus, Son of David!" Bart was no dummy!

Bart knew the Messiah would come from the line of David, that He would be the Son of David, coming to rule over His people Israel! So he probably knew other promises from Scriptures. Isaiah 9:6-7 promised a child, a son, the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the eternal Father, the prince of peace, and that He would sit on the throne of David and over his Kingdom and rule in justice and righteousness forevermore. Jeremiah 23:5 promised the Lord would raise up for David a righteous Branch who would rule as king over Israel. Ezekiel 34 and 37 guaranteed God's servant David would be king over Israel and be their prince forever! He probably even heard about the angel's assurance to Mary over thirty years ago (blind people have great memories), that Mary's child would sit on the throne of His father David! The religious elitists didn't believe that, but Bart did.

So he knew this was the Son of David coming with healing in His wings and full of mercy, forgiveness, eternal life, new life, new hope. He knew the Messiah was going to give sight to the blind. Isaiah 35:5 was just one of many that promised, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped." So what does blind begging Bart do? Sitting there with his dirty garment hanging off his shoulders and flies buzzing around his sightless face, he begins to cry out. No, he begins to yell out. No, the word cry is *kradzo*, used of a bird's shriek. He begins to scream or shriek out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This was the loudest he'd ever screamed.

But look at verse 48. The people around him growl, "Shut up, you blind old fool! You're embarrassing us. Jesus doesn't have time for you. He's on his way to Jerusalem to bring in the kingdom!" Does this deter Bart? Oh, you just have to love this. Instead of shutting up, this poor beggar just screams louder, all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" His moment has come; he is super-charged with hope, much like blind Fanny Crosby's hope when she wrote the song, "Pass me not oh gentle Savior." Bart shrieks

louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! I need you. Not only do I need you for my eyes; I need you for my guilt."

We are looking at a desperate man with a desperate cry! Nothing is going to stop him from getting Jesus' attention. What a picture of what our faith should look like. Don't let anybody or anything get in the way of you coming to Christ! Not friends, family, or the enemies lurking in your own heart. Don't listen to the crowd; they don't know what they are talking about. "You can't teach in this school believing that old hogwash about Genesis 1 and 2. Shut up or be gone!" People, we ought to all live our lives so desperately that we are always screaming out for Jesus! This is one of our great problems: we aren't desperate enough in our walk with Christ. We're too busy to see ourselves and our need. The reality is that we can't make it one more day, not one more hour without Christ's power and grace flowing into and through our lives. We desperately need Christ, right now. If we were more desperate, we'd be pursuing holiness and truth and we'd be loving on people and serving people like crazy!

A Desperate Response – vv. 49-50

50 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

Doesn't this just blows you right out of the saddle? "And Jesus stopped." He heard that faint scream through all the noise, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He heard one simple blind beggar. What kind of Jesus do we have, aye? Psalm 34:6, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." No matter what your desperate situation is, believe this and see this – Christ hears our cries! His ears are open to our prayers.

And even better Jesus says, "Call him here." We are talking about effectual calling here, people. Sproul says, "It's one thing when we call on the Lord. It's another when he calls on us." And who is He calling on here? Important movers and shakers? No, He's calling on a common, pretty much despised, blind beggar who's been sitting here by the road probably for many years, just eking out a living.

These messengers have a message for blind Bart. "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you!" Bart, the president wants to see you. Your teacher wants to see you. The coach wants to talk to you. "Look up, get up, and go up!"

So what does blind Bart do? He does three things. He throws off his cloak. He knows he won't be need that any more. It's that old cloak he used to spread out on the ground before him every morning, hoping some people with compassionate hearts would throw something on it. But now he leaves it behind. That's faith. When you go running to Jesus, you leave your old life behind. You will leave everything to get to Jesus. Bart jumps up! He hasn't done this for years. He springs to his feet like a five year old kid, and straight to Jesus he goes! Did someone lead him and his friend? It doesn't say. He "came to Jesus!" That's what matters!

Look at those three actions and apply them every day in your life. We are desperate people needing to get over there to Jesus! So every morning when the alarm rings, throw off those covers, jump out of bed, and go spend the day with Jesus! What does your day look like? Is there any desperation for Christ in your day?

Bart is a picture of a desperate soul as he searchingly makes a beeline straight to his Lord, the Son of David, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the One who has just called him personally, whom he cannot see, his sightless eyes sunken in a face flushed with expectation and hope.

A Desperate Faith – v. 51

And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!"

You've just gotta love this question. How would you answer it? Ask me for anything; it's a blank check. "Lord, change my wife." OK, that's not good. "Lord, change me." How's that? Remember what those two disciples asked for just a few days ago when Jesus asked them this very same question? "Give us the highest positions in your kingdom." Ridiculous out-of-line ambition.

Bart is desperate. He addresses Jesus as "My leader or personal Rabbi." What does he believe Jesus can do for him? How powerful does He believe Jesus is? "Rabboni, I want to see." I want to see your face, your earth, your sky, your people, my family! "I want to see!" Clearly Bartimaeus believes Jesus is Who He really is, the one able to do miracles no one else could do.

A Desperate Follower! – v. 52

And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

Better news never entered poor begging blind Bartimaeus' ears. "Go, you are a true believer. You already see with your heart. Now you will see with your eyes. I have saved you." "Well" is the Greek word *sodzo*, which means heal but also saved, and we don't doubt that Bartimaeus right here displays the marks of true salvation.

Immediately, with no surgery, no bionics, no implants, no wires into the sight portion of his brain, Bart could see. Jesus knew exactly how eyes work – He designed them in eternity past! A 68 year-old blind fellow from Forest Lake, Minnesota, recently had special bionic eye operation for a genetic eye disease. Somehow they plant electrodes in his retina and then he wears glasses hooked up to an onboard little computer and the glasses send signals to the electrodes that are planted in his retina. His vision isn't nearly like ours, but at least he sees something of his wife and family. It came at a hefty sum of \$400,000.

But here, instantly, perfectly, miraculously Jesus touches both of the men's eyes, and they instantly see! And the first face they see belongs to whom? Jesus! Fanny Crosby was blind and blessed the church with many, many hymns. Many allude to sight and seeing Jesus in them. One is "My Savior First of All." She talks about seeing that future bright and glorious morning and she'll know Jesus by the print of the nails in His hands. Bart looks up into Jesus' face and we can be certain his heart is overwhelmed with gratitude and worship. Desperate people become grateful people. Remember, he was blind, and a beggar. Jesus completely transformed his life.

Not only did Jesus give him physical sight, Jesus captured Bartimaeus as a lifelong follower. They say Bartimaeus followed Christ all the way to Jerusalem, witnessed His crucifixion, saw the resurrected Christ. Some say he became a leader in the early church; we'll have to wait until we get to heaven to do a fact check on that.

Luke 18:43 concludes this happy account so well: "Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God."

SO WHAT?

Let me conclude with three quick lessons:

1. Jesus has special compassion on people with special needs. Do you keep an eye open for needy, lonely people who need your compassion?
2. Encourage people with as much joy and enthusiasm as you can to go to Jesus.
3. Ask Jesus to make you a more desperate follower than you are. If you are a believer in Christ, you should be desperate for Him every day! Throw off those covers each morning, jump out of bed, and go get with Jesus! Don't just talk about it. Do it!