

September 19 Lesson 3 (NIV)

## Praise by Expecting and Following

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:46–52

Background Scripture: Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43

### Mark 10:46–52

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “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.

#### *Key Text*

*“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”—Mark 10:51*

## Celebrating God

Unit 1: God’s People Offer Praise

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. Mercy

B. Lesson Context

I. The Blind Beggar (Mark 10:46–48)

A. Daily Pleading (v. 46)

B. Disturbing the Peace (vv. 47–48)

Blinded by Culture

II. The Merciful Master (Mark 10:49–52)

A. Jesus Calls (vv. 49–50)

B. Jesus Makes Whole (vv. 51–52)

Faithful in Death

Conclusion

A. Lord, Have Mercy

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Aramaic

Air-uh-may-ik.

Balaam

Bay-lum.

Balak

Bay-lack.

Bartimaeus

Bar-tih-me-us.

Bethlehem

Beth-lih-hem.

Galilee

Gal-uh-lee.

Hiel

High-el.

Jericho

Jair-ih-co.

Moab

Mo-ab.

Nazareth

Naz-uh-reth.

Rabboni

Rab-o-nye.

## Introduction

### A. Mercy

We define mercy as “an act of compassion toward someone who is in need.” Mercy by definition is not earned; it is freely given, without compulsion. We may ask for mercy in a stressful situation, but true mercy is not compelled. It is granted.

My city has a Mercy Hospital and a Mercy High School, both the work of a religious order known as the Sisters of Mercy. This group began in nineteenth-century Ireland to provide relief to poverty-stricken girls and women. Since its beginning, the Sisters of Mercy have founded schools, universities, and hospitals all over the world. Most of these feature the word Mercy prominently, not allowing this foundational Christian purpose to become neglected.

Today’s lesson features a man whose life was wretched. But when he knew the Son of God was nearby, he immediately asked for mercy. He understood his need, his helplessness, and his possible healing through Jesus.

### B. Lesson Context

Blindness was a familiar condition in the ancient world, with the Bible itself using some form of the word blind dozens of times. The Papyrus Ebers, an Egyptian medical text of about 1500 BC, identifies various diseases of the eyes and suggests numerous remedies. These take the form of potions—ingredients of which are decidedly not prescribed today! In some cases, Egyptian physicians were advised to paint the mixture on the eyes of the patient, using a bird’s feather.

As with many supposed remedies, healing may have occurred in spite of the treatment and therefore given the impression of effectiveness. But from our current vantage point, there was no reliable cure for blindness in Jesus' day and little understanding of its causes.

Many believed that blindness was a curse from God for some type of sinful behavior. The sins of the parents were thought to affect their children, causing them to be born blind (see John 9:1–2). The ancients knew that some diseases could leave a sufferer with damaged vision or blindness (see Leviticus 26:16). Such outcomes we now know may result from diseases like malaria or measles. In other cases, blindness might be the result of injury or could be progressive with age (such as cataracts or macular degeneration; the last line of Ecclesiastes 12:3 uses figurative language to describe failing eyesight).

In all cases, blindness was economically and socially debilitating. For example, blind men could not serve as priests (Leviticus 21:16–18). Those afflicted with blindness had little opportunity for employment and were reduced to begging or depending on family support to survive. The Jewish law forbade taking advantage of the blind (Leviticus 19:14; see Deuteronomy 27:18), but no amount of legal protection could restore sight. The parable of the great banquet includes blind people as among the most unfortunate (Luke 14:21; see also 14:13).

Blindness and sight in a spiritual sense are important themes in the book of Mark. When questioned on the meaning of the sower parable (Mark 4:1–20), Jesus revealed that there would be people who saw what Jesus did but would not understand the good news he brought (4:12). Later, when Jesus was in a boat with the Twelve, he chastised them for their failure to understand his person and mission, saying, “Do you have eyes but fail to see” (8:18). Mark, the author, left the question open-ended so that his readers might answer it too. In essence Mark asks: “Have you read about Jesus this far and still don't see who he is or understand the spiritual lessons he is teaching?”

## I. The Blind Beggar

(Mark 10:46–48)

### A. Daily Pleading (v. 46)

46a. Then they came to Jericho.

Jesus' encounter with the blind Bartimaeus took place during Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem for Passover. He left Galilee (Mark 9:30) and crossed the Jordan River to the east side (10:1), a region now referred to as Transjordan.

Moving south, down the valley, Jesus and his disciples re-crossed the river near Jericho. From there they were poised to begin the uphill trek to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32), a trip of about 15 miles with a rise in elevation exceeding 3,300 feet.

Jericho shows up a few times in the New Testament, primarily in the parallel Gospel accounts of Matthew 20:29–34 and Luke 18:35–43. The city is mentioned much more frequently in the Old Testament (examples: Deuteronomy 34:1; 2 Kings 2:4; Jeremiah 39:5). This is especially true of the days when Israel's wanderings in the desert were ending. While the Israelites were camped across from Jericho, King Balak of Moab called Balaam to curse the people. This backfired spectacularly (Numbers 22–24). The walls of Jericho fell gloriously because of God's help (Joshua 6:2–25).

The city wasn't rebuilt until the time of Ahab's reign (874–853 BC). And in fulfillment of the curse that Joshua pronounced (Joshua 6:26), King Hiel's firstborn and youngest sons died when the king rebuilt the city (1 Kings 16:34).

46b. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging.

As usual, Jesus was accompanied by his disciples. The large crowd consisted of Jewish residents of Galilee making the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (Mark 10:32). Perhaps some intentionally accompanied Jesus while others were just making their trip as usual.

All would leave Jericho via the western road. This made for a high-traffic area that was an ideal site for someone begging for money. Matthew's telling of this encounter features two unnamed blind men sitting by the roadside (Matthew 20:30). Mark focuses on the one whose identity is known, Bartimaeus. Bar is Aramaic for son of (example: Barnabas means "son of consolation"; Acts 4:36).

At least one Bible concordance translates the word Bartimaeus as "Son of the Unclean," but the verse before us simply clarifies that his father's name was in fact Timaeus. It would make some sense to translate that name in terms of

uncleanness, given the restrictions on blind men in Israel (see Lesson Context). Even so, the name Timaeus is closely related to the concept of “honor” (Mark 7:10).

#### B. Disturbing the Peace (vv. 47–48)

47a. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth,

Jesus’ reputation clearly had preceded him; Bartimaeus was aware of Jesus’ reputation as a miracle worker and healer (examples: Mark 6:54–56; 7:36–37). Hearing that this was Jesus of Nazareth made a difference, since the name Jesus (Hebrew: Joshua) was not uncommon. Though Jesus had been born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4–7), his parents lived in Nazareth and had returned to that town when Jesus was very young (Matthew 2:22–23; Luke 2:39). Throughout his life, therefore, Jesus was known as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Mark 1:24; 10:47; etc.).

47b. he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus was not concerned with social decorum, for he knew this opportunity may never come again. Rather than be quietly content with the city’s enjoyment of a celebrity rabbi passing through, Bartimaeus began to shout. As he did, he focused on a very different aspect of Jesus’ heritage by using the phrase Son of David.

At its most generic, this address acknowledged Jesus to be a descendant of the greatest king in Israel’s history (Matthew 1:1, 6). More importantly, this is a messianic title (example: Mark 12:35). The same acclamation was repeated few days later when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem to the excitement of a great crowd (Matthew 21:9).

The words of Bartimaeus reveal a heart that entertained a glimmer of hope that the one who had mercy on other blind people, expressed in their healing, might choose to heal him also (example: Mark 8:22–25). Jesus’ healing ministry had caused a sensation in Galilee (Matthew 11:1–5; etc.). It marked him as much more than a teacher.

Luke teaches that the capacity for restoring sight was a fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, marking Jesus as that person (see Luke 4:18–21).

Furthermore, Luke singles out curing blindness specifically in his listing of the

mighty works of Jesus, showing how impressive such a cure was considered to be (7:21).

48. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Not a few in the crowd thought Bartimaeus was rude, too aggressive, or otherwise socially inept. Perhaps they were embarrassed for him because of his bellowing.

But before we judge the crowd and put ourselves in a position of superiority, let us think about what we feel when an otherwise peaceful walk around the block is interrupted by a loud homeless person requesting help. The Passover pilgrims were on a spiritual high, perhaps ready to sing some of the joyous “psalms of ascent”—ancient songs that celebrated the long climb to the temple (example: Psalm 122).

But Bartimaeus would not be quiet as many thought he should. Rather than accommodate his scolders, he yelled even louder, shouting directly at Jesus. He didn’t change his plea but repeated exactly what he’d already been shouting, as though he was never interrupted: Son of David, have mercy on me! The scolding of the crowd resulted in the opposite of its intended effect!

## II. The Merciful Master

(Mark 10:49–52)

### A. Jesus Calls (vv. 49–50)

49a. Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up!

Jesus’ actions and words quickly changed the tone of the crowd (see Mark 10:48, above). Rather than view the blind man as a nuisance to be silenced, they changed their reaction to him to one of kindness. They apparently realized that by the man’s securing Jesus’ attention, a potential blessing awaited him.

The Greek imperative translated cheer up occurs seven times in the New Testament, here and in Matthew 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 16:33; and Acts 23:11. A near synonym occurs an additional six times, in 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8; 7:16;

10:1–2; and Hebrews 13:6. The contexts are always those of boldness in terms of doing something.

49b. On your feet!

The first imperative is immediately followed by a second. Telling Bartimaeus to get on your feet reveals his seated or prone position as a beggar (compare Matthew 9:5–7; Mark 2:9–12; Acts 3:6–7). This detail adds drama to the incident. The man had not been standing and amplifying his voice. Rather, he had been sitting or lying on the ground, forcing his voice to cut upwards through the noise of the crowd walking past. His cry to Jesus must have been loud indeed!

49c. He’s calling you.”

This phrase wraps up a four-fold echo. First, Bartimaeus had called out to Jesus; then the crowd had called to Bartimaeus for silence; then Jesus called for a personal audience with Bartimaeus; and finally the crowd communicated Jesus’ calling to Bartimaeus. Though at this point members of the crowd could have tried to impede not only the blind man but also Jesus, they chose instead to announce Jesus’ calling as he commanded it (contrast Luke 18:15–17).

Similarly, we today are called to call others to Jesus (Matthew 28:18–20). Though we hope not to stand in the way of those who seek Jesus, sometimes we can be going along our contented way and lose sight of the lost around us. At those times, we must hear Jesus’ command to issue the invitation to approach him.

50. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

The man’s garment was his outer cloak, perhaps what he was sitting on. It would be his most valuable possession. For him to toss it aside showed his eagerness; every action in this verse indicated faith. Bartimaeus expected Jesus to grant him mercy and remove his blindness.

B. Jesus Makes Whole (vv. 51–52)

51a. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

Jesus’ question was not posed from lack of knowledge. Most likely, it would have been evident to everyone in the crowd that Bartimaeus, by appearance, was blind. Even if the crowd was unaware, it’s impossible for Jesus not to have known



since he had divine insight (compare Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Luke 6:8; 9:47). Jesus' question was intended to prompt Bartimaeus to verbalize his need and his faith.

51b. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

Bartimaeus's answer was straightforward. In receiving his sight he would no longer be an object of pity, a blind man begging for small change, dependent on others to lead him.

Bartimaeus lacked physical sight but had spiritual eyes that saw clearly who Jesus was. For Bartimaeus, Jesus was the prophesied "Son of David" (Mark 10:47–48, above), the Messiah promised by God.

Bartimaeus's spiritual insight led him to believe that Jesus could heal him from his physical blindness. Others with perfect physical eyesight were spiritually blind to the true identity of Jesus (see Matthew 23:13–26).

We may note in passing that Jesus was addressed by various designations of respect in the pages of the New Testament. The most common of those was "Teacher" (example: John 11:28). Another common address of respect was "Lord" sometimes meaning no more than "sir" (example: John 5:7). But the translation Rabbi in the verse before us is not in the category of "sir"; rather, the underlying Greek is the word Rabboni. John 1:38 and 20:16 help us by explaining that both Rabbi and Rabboni mean "Teacher."

52a. "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you."

To become healed may have more than physical implications, though that is often the primary sense of the word (examples: Mark 5:28, 34; 6:56). The underlying word in the original language can also be translated "saved" (example: 13:13). This saving can be from death (example: 15:30) to be given new life (example: Luke 9:24).

Jesus was more than a healer; he came as the Savior. He can save people from physical maladies, but more importantly he also saves souls from sin (Mark 8:35; etc.). In the Gospel of Mark, the mocking crowd at the crucifixion challenged Jesus to come down from the cross. When he remained nailed to the wood, they scornfully shouted, "He saved others ... but he can't save himself" (15:31), thereby revealing a complete misunderstanding of what was happening.

The pattern for Jesus' healing miracles in Mark includes the requirement for a display of faith. Some men believed in Jesus so strongly that they dug a hole in a roof to bring their paralyzed friend to him (Mark 2:1–5). A desperate mother approached Jesus to heal her daughter (7:24–30). The father of the demon-possessed boy, confessing his faith as well as his doubts, brought his son to Jesus for healing (9:23–24). Faith was essential in all these accounts.

52b. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Although Jesus had just said “Go” (previous half verse), Mark ends the story of Bartimaeus by having him join Jesus along the road. An interesting contrast is Mark 5:18–20. There a man healed from demonization desired to accompany Jesus, but Jesus forbade him.

## Conclusion

### A. Lord, Have Mercy

The restoration of a blind man's sight was a great and merciful miracle. But in the larger context of the Gospels, Jesus encountered many who were spiritually blind, having unresponsive hearts that refused to recognize or honor him. Our journey with Jesus begins when we realize we are blind and on the side of the road, sidelined and desperate. It's at that point when we allow Jesus to make us whole. Then we join him, joyfully walking and learning as we go. This is a timeless picture of discipleship (Matthew 16:24; John 14:6).

When we consider the necessity of faith, we learn some things about Jesus—and about ourselves. In the instance of today's text, as in those that came before, Jesus honored faith. The faith of Bartimaeus was very simple: he believed that Jesus was willing and able to help. The man was not questioned about what he knew or believed about the coming Messiah. Neither was he queried regarding exactly what he meant when he called Jesus “Son of David” (Mark 10:47–48) or “Rabbi” (10:51). Neither his doctrines nor motives were called into account (contrast Mark 10:17–18; John 6:25–26; James 4:3).

When we are in crisis and see no relief, we may say “Lord, have mercy” without thinking about the import of these words. Yet this is a prayer, imploring God to notice our pitiful situation and provide relief. In that regard may we take a lesson from Bartimaeus, being willing to call on the Lord when the crowd has a different

agenda. May the eyes of our hearts be opened to see Jesus clearly and obey him fully (see Ephesians 1:18).

### B. Prayer

Father, reveal to us our own blindnesses so that we might be spiritually whole. As you extend that mercy to us, may we do likewise to others. Open our eyes, Lord, and let us see you clearly so that we may follow your Son as he would have us to. In Jesus' name, the one who cures blindness, we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Physical blindness is temporary; spiritual blindness is eternal.