

Mark 10:46-52

“The Rich Man and Bartimaeus”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Next Sunday, we will be celebrating Reformation Sunday. On this day, we remember Martin Luther who declared that we are saved by grace, and he added the word alone. Luther and the apostle Paul and Jesus Christ himself experienced and preached against the ongoing temptation for us to believe that we play some role in our salvation. In today's gospel, Bartimaeus serves a good example for us of what it means to be saved by grace alone.

Going right along with being saved by grace alone, is the difference between believing that you are saved by the gospel, which is what Jesus will do for you, or if you need to help push your way to the finish line of salvation with the addition of your good works. The story of the Rich Man which was the gospel two weeks ago stands in great opposition to what it means to be saved by grace alone like Bartimaeus. These different doctrines of salvation are as prevalent today as they were in the time of Jesus, the apostle Paul or during the Reformation and again.

One good consistency is that Jesus is present in both the story of the Rich Man and the story of Bartimaeus. There are times when we attempt to eliminate Jesus completely from our salvation story. But that is about the only similarity between these two different encounters with Jesus that occur in the same chapter in the gospel of Mark. The rich man plays a more active role in his encounter with Jesus. When the rich man “sees” Jesus, he runs to Jesus and gets in front of him to speak to him. Bartimaeus, who is blind, can't see Jesus. Bartimaeus depends only on what he has heard about Jesus. He wasn't lame, but he doesn't even get up when he hears that Jesus is nearby. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus from where was sitting by the side of the road.

The rich man and Bart's first words to Jesus define the difference between the law and the gospel. The rich man asks the question, “What must **I do** to inherit eternal life?” The words, “I do” indicate that the rich man doesn't expect Jesus to save him by grace alone or maybe not by grace at all. The rich man wants to know what project Jesus could give him to be completed by his own effort to inherit eternal life. Bartimaeus on the other hand confesses that he **is** Jesus' project. Bartimaeus doesn't ask what he can do. He asks Jesus for the only thing that can save him, mercy. There is even a difference in how these two address Jesus. The rich man calls Jesus a good teacher. A good teacher surely would be able to give this man an assignment to achieve the goal of salvation. Bart, however, calls Jesus, Son of David. Bart had heard that Jesus, who was prophesied to be the Messiah who would be from the family of David was now near to him and he would not let him pass by him without receiving a blessing.

Martin Luther is sometimes criticized for adding the word “alone” after grace. However, Jesus did the same to the rich man when the rich man called Jesus a good teacher. Jesus responded that no one is good, only God **alone**. If the rich man didn't think he was perfect, at least he was pretty good since he had kept most of the commandments most of his life. The rich man assumed Jesus would give him some bonus points for his good behavior, but that assumption was destroyed when Jesus told him that God alone was good.

Jesus gave the rich man what he had asked for. The rich man asked for something to do, and Jesus gave him a short list of what he still had to do to inherit eternal life. He was to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor. This was not what the rich man wanted to see on the to do list from Jesus. He had maybe hoped that Jesus would have asked him to help some people with some of his wealth. Jesus knew that **the only way** for the rich man to know that Jesus was **the only way** for his salvation was to give away the one thing that he loved more than God, his wealth.

Now we return to the story of blind, beggar Bartimaeus. We learn from scripture that Bartimaeus only had one possession. His cloak. This cloak provided warmth for Bartimaeus on cooler nights or may have served as his pillow as he slept along the road. But this one possession of his likely also served as his offering plate or like a tin cup to collect the coins that people might toss his way so that he could live another day. Bartimaeus had one thing to his name and what does Bartimaeus do without a word from Jesus? When Bartimaeus gets up from where he was sitting after he hears Jesus call his name, he springs up leaving his cloak behind.

The rich man wanted to know what he could do for Jesus, but now Jesus gives the short, sweet word of gospel to Bartimaeus by asking, "What do you **want me to do for you?**" Jesus doesn't ask Bartimaeus if he had any coins left in his cloak to give in exchange for what he wanted from Jesus. Jesus didn't make any conditions before opening his offer wide open to Bartimaeus. Jesus didn't cooperate with blind Bartimaeus to give him at least a little something to do. Jesus wasn't afraid that Bartimaeus might ask for more than he could give. Bartimaeus asked Jesus, "**My** teacher, let me see again." Bartimaeus didn't call Jesus "good" teacher like the rich man did. Jesus was Bartimaeus' teacher alone and was going to give him whatever he asked for.

It is one thing to get exactly what you want without any payment, but Jesus never stops there. Therefore, whatever we receive from Jesus is called a gift. Sometimes what we ask Jesus for doesn't even resemble our request since Jesus knows what is best for us. Bartimaeus asked to see again, but when he received his gift from Jesus it wasn't only eyesight, but Jesus tells Bart that his faith had made him **well**. This word indicates wholeness. The Greek word that the word well comes from is **σώζω** (sozo) which is also the same Greek word for saved.

The rich man wanted something to do and was given only one thing to do. The law, no matter how small the task we are given to do, never gets done. The good news of what Jesus will abundantly do for you gives joy to the hearer. The responses of the rich man and Bartimaeus are also quite different. The rich man walks away from Jesus' grieving. Bartimaeus gets up and follows Jesus.

As I look out at you today, I see a congregation of Bartimaeus's. I doubt that any of you came here today because you have a lack of things to do and hoped Jesus would give you at least one more thing to do. Instead, the Holy Spirit has called you by name to this place knowing that this is a place where Jesus will pass by. And in case you have forgotten already, you have called out to Jesus for mercy twice as many times as Bartimaeus' did when Jesus came his way. It is called the Kyrie. Four times you called out to Jesus singing, "Lord, have mercy." And you will not stay here all day. You will do the same as Bartimaeus did after receiving a blessing from Jesus, today I will dismiss you by saying, "Go in peace, follow Jesus." and you will get up off your seat and go. Amen