



**WESTLAKE HILLS**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## "The Three-Fold Challenge of Pride, Jealousy and Ambition" Sermon Series: "The Way of Jesus" (#32)

Mark 10:32-52

By: Dr. Peter B. Barnes

May 23, 2010

**Mark 10:32-52**

(New International Version)

### **Jesus Again Predicts His Death**

<sup>32</sup>They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. <sup>33</sup>"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, <sup>34</sup>who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

### **The Request of James and John**

<sup>35</sup>Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

<sup>36</sup>"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

<sup>37</sup>They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

<sup>38</sup>"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

<sup>39</sup>"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, <sup>40</sup>but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

<sup>41</sup>When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup>Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

### **Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight**

<sup>46</sup>Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

<sup>48</sup>Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

<sup>49</sup>Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."

<sup>50</sup>Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

<sup>51</sup>"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

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

<sup>52</sup>"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

---

### **Introduction.**

A little boy was writing a letter to Jesus about the Christmas presents he badly wanted, and he wrote, "Dear Jesus, I've been good for six months now." But after thinking about it for a moment, he crossed out the words and wrote, "I've been good for three months." Then, after a brief pause, he crossed that out, too, and he put, "I've been good for two weeks." There was another pause, and that was crossed out as well.



Then the little boy got up from the table and went over to the little nativity scene that had the figures of Mary and Joseph. He picked up the figure of Mary and went back to his writing: "Dear Jesus, I've got your momma, and if ever you want to see her again....!"

There are times when we ask God for something that we think we can twist His arm into doing for us what we want. We seek to leverage God somehow to grant our request. In the passage before us this morning, we find three people who make a request of Jesus – James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and a blind man who was named Bartimaeus. One request was born out of ambition, and the other out of brokenness. Let's take a look at each of these.

### **I. The Request Born out of Ambition.**

Verses 35-45 parallel 9:30-37, which talk about the measure of greatness. If some of these words sound familiar to you, they are. You may recall we talked about this two weeks ago on Mother's Day. Both passages contain discussions about true greatness, and both come on the heels of Jesus' prediction about His passion and death. In a troubling way, both passages reveal just how spiritually dense the disciples really were. It seems they had a difficult time getting on the same wavelength as Jesus.

James and John, the Sons of Thunder as Jesus called them, were ambitious men, and they asked the Lord to do for them whatever they asked. When Christ inquired what that might be, their answer was they wanted the positions of highest honor when He came into His messianic kingdom. They wanted to sit on the right and the left of His throne, they wanted to serve as His next-in-command.

How do you think this made the other disciples feel? The jealousy and in-fighting must have been intense. Just a few days before, the disciples were arguing with each other who was the greatest, and now these two bozos try to make a preemptive request by asking to be named Jesus' vice presidents!

Our Lord countered their request with a question of His own. *"Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (38)*. In other words, "Are you able to go through the experience which I am about to undertake? Can you face being submerged into the hatred, pain and death which I will face?"

James and John responded with a confident, "Yes, we can," which revealed just how naïve they really were. These two disciples failed to comprehend what was involved in Jesus' pending suffering and death, and their pride and ambition set their focus only on themselves, not on the Lord at all. Jesus said they would indeed participate in His sufferings, but to grant them the privileged positions of the Kingdom was not within His authority. That decision belonged to the Father.

John Calvin, the great Swiss reformer and father of Presbyterianism, wrote: "This narrative contains a bright mirror of human vanity; for it shows that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ambition.... They who are not satisfied with [Jesus] Himself alone, but seek this or the other thing apart from Him and His promises, wander egregiously from the right path."<sup>i</sup>

Although Jesus had previously corrected the spirit of ambition and jealousy among His disciples in 9:35, it was still very much alive in them, and the other disciples were indignant with the two brothers. "Who do they think they are?! What makes them think they're so special?!" None of the disciples had comprehended in the least what Jesus meant when He spoke about His approaching death, so our Lord had to give them another lesson. In the Kingdom greatness is not achieved by asserting rank, but by offering humble service. The test is not what privilege I can extract, but what service I can render.

The climax to the passage comes in v.45, which has been a life verse for both Lorie and me, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."* In the Kingdom of God humble service is the rule, and even the Son of Man was not exempt from it. Our Lord did not come as a king whose every personal whim was to be catered to by His servants. Rather, He came as a servant Himself, and He provided His life as a ransom for our sin. The way of Jesus is the way of sacrifice and



service, and you and I are invited to join Him in this holy calling. Whenever we are full of ourselves, we can never be full of Jesus and service to others.

In 1970, the Beatles began work on a documentary intended to show how their music was made. However, instead of revealing the process of musical creativity, the film pulled the curtain back on a display of self-interest and bickering. The band members were more concerned about their own songs than the advancement of the group. Shortly after the project was completed, the group dissolved in disharmony and broken friendships.

It's an age-old problem, and Jesus knew that when the desire for personal advancement overrides concern for others, attitudes quickly become disruptive and divisive. To counteract this dangerous tendency Jesus said, *"...whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:43-45).

## **II. The Request Born out of Brokenness.**

The last of the miracles of healing in Mark's gospel takes place near the town of Jericho. Jericho was located 5 miles west of the Jordan River and about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Everyone was traveling through the town on their way to the Passover, and people had the habit of lining the streets to encourage the pilgrims as they went. It was sort of like the Capital 10K road race here in Austin where people line the streets and encourage the runners.

At the northern gate of Jericho sat a beggar named Bartimaeus. As he heard a crowd of people approaching, he asked what was happening and who was passing by. When he was told it was Jesus, he began to stir up a commotion and called out to the Lord at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those around him tried to quiet him, but he would not be stopped. The procession came to a halt, and Jesus told those nearby to call the man. Bartimaeus was brought before the Lord, and Jesus healed the man of his blindness.

I want you to notice four things about this miracle. **First, notice the persistence of Bartimaeus.** Nothing would stop him from coming face to face with Jesus. He was utterly determined to meet the one person He thought could help him. Are you and I as determined in our desire to meet with the Lord?

**Second, notice his response to Jesus' call was immediate and eager.** He cast off his outer coat, and he hurried to the Savior. Many people hear the call of Jesus, but in effect they say, "Wait until I have done this," or "Wait until I have finished that." "Wait until I'm older. Wait until I've had my fun." How immediately do you and I respond to the Lord's call when it comes to us? If the Lord is calling you today, don't put it off.

**Third, notice that Bartimaeus knew exactly what he wanted.** When Jesus asked him what it was, He said, "I want to see." All too often our admiration for Jesus is a vague attraction, but Bartimaeus knew what he wanted out of his relationship with Christ. Are you and I as specific in our requests of the Lord? Do we have a clear understanding of our need? And are we bold in declaring it before the Lord?

**And finally, notice that Bartimaeus was a person of deep gratitude.** Having received his sight, he followed Jesus. He did not selfishly go his own way now that his need was met. Rather, he began with his own need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty. I believe that is a great picture of the stages of discipleship.

Yesterday, around 50 of us from our church went to a Texas state prison and joined together in providing a picnic celebration for some of the inmates who are involved in the Christian discipleship program which the God of Hope ministry runs there. A number of the men in our church, like Lee Webber and Ken Wickham and Mark Charbonneau, have been involved with this ministry for a couple of years, and this was a special celebration two weeks before their graduation from the discipleship program. Here are a few pictures of the



picnic yesterday. We ate ice cream sundaes, we played basketball and volleyball and chess and tossed washers, and we had an opportunity to talk with the men and find out about their lives. The highlight of the afternoon for me was the singing of the inmates and the testimonies two of them shared. It was an amazing experience, and I was blown away.

What struck me most about these men was how much like Bartimaeus they were. Just like the blind man in our passage, there was no pretense to them, and they didn't try to manage their images, like the rest of us tend to. They are convicts; there was no getting around it. Their prison clothes said it all. And like Bartimaeus they know just how broken they really are and how much they need Jesus. They begin with their need for Christ, they move on to gratitude for all He's done for them, and they finish with loyalty to follow the Savior. It's the only thing they have going for them, and they know it.

I think of other people who have followed Jesus and how the turning point in their lives came when they had their props pulled out from under them. Joni Erickson Tada breaks her neck in a diving accident, and she turns to Jesus. Chuck Colson is sent to prison for his involvement with Watergate, and he turns to Jesus. John Newton, the composer of "Amazing Grace" almost dies in a storm at sea, and he turns to Jesus.

In a strange way, it is a blessing of God when your world falls apart, because that's when you really see your need for Christ most clearly. All too often you and I are like James and John, so full of ourselves, puffed up in our own estimation of what we have to offer God, looking to be big and do significant things. We want Jesus to help us live our best life ever, to borrow a phrase, to be the salt and pepper in the spice of our otherwise good life, thank you very much. By contrast, Bartimaeus and these inmates – they don't have a good life. They know they are broken, and they make every effort they can to get to Jesus. They are desperate, and only the Lord can save them. Only the Lord can save you, too, my friend.

### **Conclusion.**

Twice in this passage Jesus asked people, "What do you want Me to do for you?" It's a question He poses to you and me today. What do you want Jesus to do for you on this Pentecost Sunday in the power of His Holy Spirit? What is it that weighs on your heart at this hour that only the Holy Spirit can do?

As we come to the table of our Lord, may we make our way like blind Bartimaeus, like the inmates we met yesterday – acknowledging our need, being grateful for the gift of God's love in Christ, and ending with our pledge of loyalty to follow wherever He leads us. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 3, p. 417.

