

## ***Blind Beggar Shouts to Jesus***

The scene has an elderly woman lying on the floor. She speaks into a two-way communication system to a safety dispatcher at the other end and says, “Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” If you’re a teenager or a young adult you can hardly hear that without laughing. I was in a mall in Florida where there was a specialty shop that deals only in sweat shirts, posters and mugs all of which say, “Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” There are hundreds if not thousands of jokes that have been spun off from this. Some of them are actually kind of funny. But it’s **not** a joke if you’re the one who has fallen and if you can’t get up.

There are jokes that go through our pop culture about AIDS, Alzheimer’s, poverty, starvation — even rape. Jokes are told about almost every difficult situation that comes in life. But there is also a lot of pain, a lot of despair, a lot of loneliness, fear and worry that accompanies our long list of human problems. Sometimes in our own journeys we discover our names written next to items on the list that we never could have imagined in advance, some disease or disaster that has become a major part of our lives and defines who we are. That’s why, sooner or later, we all identify with the man whose story is told in the last paragraphs of Luke 18. A man whose needs led him to a life-changing conversation with Jesus Christ and also gave him his little place on the pages of history. Luke 18:35-43 tells the story.

*As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”*

*He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”*

*“Lord, I want to see,” he replied.*

*Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received*

*his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

Now this unnamed man along the roadside to Jericho had multiple needs. As we read the story the most memorable part of it is that he was blind. But don’t forget that he was also a beggar. Which do you think he considered the worst? If he had a choice do you think he would choose to be rich and blind or poor and sighted? You say, “Wait a minute, that’s not a fair question” and I think you’re right. It is a good thing that we usually don’t have to make those kinds of choices in life because if we had to choose between disasters I’m not sure that we would have the wisdom to do so wisely.

The reasons that I ask the question are two: First, it impresses me that this man at the beginning of the story had two great needs: he was blind and he was a beggar. At the end of the story one need had been met, but he still had one need remaining. Apparently Jesus cared enough for this man to leave at least one of his major needs unmet.

The second reason I ask the question is because I think we all have multiple needs. Typically it’s the one at the top that gets our greatest attention. We’ve got physical needs, spiritual needs, financial needs, relationship needs — you know the list. And while the need at the top of the list seems to be all-encompassing, often defining who we are as

persons and how we relate to others, if by some circumstance that need is taken care of, we quickly move to number two on the list. On those

rare days when we get enough of a perspective to see the entire list, we discover that we have a lot of issues, a lot of concerns that work together into a complex long list.

I got to thinking about it and concluded that I don’t know anyone who has had all needs permanently met. Is that right? It seems to me that even people who have the good fortune of having their biggest problem solved always still have some other big deal in their lives. And I think it is probably a good thing because we need problems in order to

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remain humble, to keep growing, to keep us looking for Jesus. While it's true that needs can be virtually overwhelming in our lives, it is disastrous to have none.

God knows that needs bring us to him. He knows that if we ever wake up in the morning without a single need, we will give little thought to God. It takes the difficulties and circumstances of life to bring us to him. I think that is true within the life of a church. One of the things that we have long ago committed to here at Wooddale Church is relating to people in terms of meeting their needs. That's the one thing that we all have in common and so we have ministries to help people deal with their problems and their opportunities in life. We have support groups that have to do with loneliness, particular illnesses or with broken relationships. The list is a very long one.

The catalog of needs is huge but up front we recognize that we can't possibly meet all of everyone's needs. No church could do that. But what we really are trying to do is use pressing needs as a stepping stone to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ because that is really the greatest need of all in our lives. The fact is that someday on the other side of the grave it isn't going to make a whole lot of difference whether we are blind or we can see, whether we are rich or poor, married or single. Those things in the scheme of eternity really are quite unimportant. Our destiny is dependent on our relationship to God. So it is really the everyday needs that seem to be so important that become the stepping stones for us to have the greatest need of all met through Jesus Christ as Savior and as Lord.

The blind beggar heard a commotion and because he couldn't see what was happening, he asked those around him. They told him that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by. He realized at that moment that his opportunity had come, the window of opportunity for him had opened.

He was in Jericho — a rather obscure place, a place by which Jesus was not likely to come again. Jericho is a hot, humid place, 700' below sea level, about 35 miles or so south of the city of Jerusalem, on the way to nowhere. Actually it is on the way to the Dead Sea and the desert and people don't go there unless they have a very good reason. He figured the chances were that Jesus would never come that way again and if he was going to grab him, he

had to grab him that day.

This is hard for us to understand because our impression of Jesus Christ is that he is always available and always waiting in the wings and we will get to him when we have the chance. In our minds we think, "I'm pretty busy right now but maybe after graduation, or after I get a new job, when I'm older, or when I get through dealing with this illness, maybe then I'll get around to Jesus." Or, "I'm very busy right now but when things lighten up then I'll call him."

Have you ever wondered if the day would come and we would whistle for Jesus and he might not be there? What if the man on the road outside of Jericho's experience is closer to the truth for us as well? That Jesus comes by in life maybe once or at best twice and if we do not grab him when the window of opportunity is open, that we might not have another chance? The words the blind man called out to Jesus clearly communicated his faith. He said, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Now I know that for most of us "Son of David" means zero but it meant a lot to Jews in the first century because that was a nickname for the Messiah. By calling Jesus the Son of David, he was really saying, "Jesus, you are the Messiah. You are the one who has been sent from God. You are the one in whom I have faith."

I don't know quite what you compare that to but let's just suppose that tomorrow morning you're downtown in Minneapolis walking along the Nicollet Mall and you see a crowd gathering with TV cameras and lights and you turn to someone nearby and say, "Hey, what's going on?" The person says, "Don't you know? That's Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. He came to Minnesota because the primary election is on Tuesday." You immediately begin to shout, "Mr. President, Mr. President." Now the people around you would have a pretty good idea who you are going to vote for in this presidential campaign year and what you think the outcome will be just by what you called him.

So it was that when the man outside the city of Jericho shouted out, "Son of David, Son of David," he was declaring his faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior from God. But what I find fascinating is that his primary faith was not in what Jesus would do for him so much as who Jesus was.

Those who are really rich and those who are

really powerful have a problem in life because they are never quite sure why people like them. If you have millions of dollars to give away or you have the power to change a person's whole life around, whenever someone comes to you and snuggles up close and purrs loudly you can't help but wonder if they really like you for you or they really want what you've got. And because of that, many people with great wealth and with great power become rather cynical about life. Sometimes their only relationships are the relationships they have had for most of their lives because they can't trust anyone to be a new friend and they are rather skeptical about even their old friends.

Jesus must have suffered from the same thing. Word was out. He could make the lame walk, the dead live. He could speak like no one had ever spoken before to the point that thousands of people would line up to see him and press into a throng around him. He must have wondered, "Who has come to be fed, who has come to be healed, who has come to be part of some great political movement and who really cares about who I am?"

The man outside the city of Jericho really cared for Jesus, but when he shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me," the other people couldn't hear Jesus teaching anymore so they turned to him and said, "Shut up so we can hear Jesus teach!" But he wouldn't shut up. He was not going to let what they said or what they thought stop him from getting to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David. Nobody was going to stand between him and Jesus.

I think that is a great lesson for us — we should do whatever we need to do to get to Jesus and not let anybody stand in our way. Jesus heard the man and he quit teaching. I find it interesting that Jesus apparently thought doing was better than talking. Jesus asked that the man be brought to him. The man hadn't asked for either sight or money but Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

That's quite a question. Sort of like the genie in the bottle. There's a story about three men who were on a raft drifting in the South Pacific. They were desperate, dying of thirst and exposure. They came across a bottle with a genie in it. (This is not a true story.) One of them uncorked the bottle and the ge-

nie came out. He was a very happy genie because he had been seasick for thousands of years from bobbing around the Pacific and he was really glad to get out. Instead of offering three wishes to the guy that pulled the cork, he offered one wish to each. He said to the first guy, "You can have anything you want." The man said, "I want to be home in my own house in New York," and he immediately disappeared. So the genie said to the second guy, "You can have any wish you want." He said, "I'd like to be with my family, with my wife and children in California. Puff, he was gone too. The genie turned to the third guy and said, "What about you — what's your wish?". He said, "Well, I'm really lonely. I wish my two friends were back here with me."

Now if you had a single wish, one wish, what would you ask for? If you could ask for anything at all, not from an imaginary genie but from a real Jesus, what would you request? The man who was blind and poor did not hesitate at all. He said, "I want to see." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight, your faith has healed you." And immediately he received his sight. It was a miracle. A divine miracle took place. He could see.

I wonder what it was like and what he did? I wonder if his eyes opened so big they seemed as if they would burst out of his head. I wonder if he squinted because the light was so bright that he could hardly take it in. Imagine trying in a few seconds to

take in all of the sights of all of the things he had never before seen. I wonder if he stared straight into the face of the man who had made him to see. I wonder if he

looked long and hard into the eyes of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, who had had mercy on him. I don't know for sure, but my guess is that he had eyes only for Jesus.

It was a miracle. Some misunderstand what happened, what Jesus said when he spoke the words, "Your faith has healed you." There are those who have supposed that it was because this man had faith in healing that he was healing. But that's not correct. It was his faith in Jesus. Jesus is the one who healed him.

If you are blind or poor or have some other enormous need in your life, does this story mean that if

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you follow this formula, Jesus will fix you and you will be the way you want to be? Does it mean that if we hurt deep enough, if we shout loud enough, that Jesus will just stop whatever he is doing and cure our malady and make us the way we want to be? The answer is no. The question misses the point for it is neither our need nor our volume that gives us a cure. Rather, our need brings us to Jesus Christ and our shouts communicate our faith in him; then it is up to Jesus make the decision as to whether our need is met or our need remains unmet. It's up to Jesus to decide who will be cured and who will wait. Those who come to him in full faith trust him completely to make those decisions on our behalf. Those who insist that he's got to do it our way in our time, that he's got to use his powers to fulfill our dreams, really don't have the same kind of faith that the man who was blind and begging on the road outside of Jericho had.

Now I'm not sure I've said that very well, but let me tell you that it is a profound truth of the New Testament. Does it make sense? Do you get it? The kind of faith that led to the blind man's sight was the kind of faith which entrusted the problem to Jesus to decide. The story has what I would call a perfect ending. He received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. It's really kind of a triple ending: he followed Jesus; he praised God; and all the others praised God as well. Interestingly enough, only half of his problems were solved because he was still poor. He was still a beggar.

You may think it strange, but I've always had something of a fascination with the inscriptions on old tombstones. It seems to me you can learn a lot from the few words that were chosen to describe a person's life. I regret that modern grave markers are very small and flush with the ground with only enough space on them for a name, year of birth and a year of death. I think we have lost something in that.

At different times I have spent hours walking through old cemeteries in the United States and elsewhere, but most memorably out in Cape Cod cemeteries. It's fascinating to read the descriptions of these people who died in the early years of our nation's history. Generally, only the positive inscriptions remain because at that time they set the stones according to the character of the person — if they

liked the person they turned the writing toward the leeward side of the Cape and those they didn't like, they turned the gravestone toward the windward side so that the wind and sand would eventually erase the name and inscription. As I read the inscriptions I think to myself, what would I like to have written? What would you like to have written if all of life could be summed up in a sentence or in a phrase?

Suppose we were to imagine coming across the gravestone of this man whose story is told in Luke 18. If he had had a choice, which do you think that he would pick as the best description of who he was — “The blind man who miraculously saw” or “Here lies a follower of Jesus Christ who praised God and caused other people to praise God also”? I think he would rather be remembered not as a blind man who gained sight but as a sinner who followed the Savior.

What is your need today? I hope you have a big one. I hope your need or your needs and your problems are big enough, huge enough, to drive you to Jesus Christ. May you be delivered from problems so small that you can handle them. And when you call to him and he answers, may you follow him and praise God and cause others to follow him as well.

Let's pray. And as we pray, tell Jesus your need. Call to him in faith; trust him as your Savior; follow him as your Lord; praise Him as your God.

Oh Lord, we've seldom, if ever, said it. Thank you for problems. Thank you for our pains. Thank you for our needs. Thank you for the things in life that we cannot handle, which force us to call out to Jesus Christ and to trust him, for they are worth it. Anything is worth it to know you through Jesus Christ. Amen

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