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“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?”

Luke 18:35-43

? {Lk 18: 41} **“What do you want me to do for you?”**

{Heb 4:12} Christ Jesus asks this in our text. **“The word of God is alive and active,”** so he is asking us the same thing.

Before we give an answer, let’s reflect on the question itself. **“What do you want me to do for you?”**

{Job 37:16} Coming from a mere mortal with limited knowledge this is usually a straightforward request for information. But it is evident that the Son of God knew the answer to this question before he asked it.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

{Mt 20:28} Said to a superior by a subordinate this reveals readiness to execute a command – perhaps without reservation. But though the Son of Man “[came] to serve” he was not subservient to any created being.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

{Mk 8:12} Spoken by a mythical genie, this guarantees the fulfillment of three wishes. But when some Pharisees demanded that Jesus prove himself with a miracle he said, **“Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to”** you.

? **“What do you want me to do for you?”** On Messiah’s lips this is not a request for information. It is not compliance with a command. It is not the magical fulfillment of wishes. *What is the Lord asking us?*

□ Please turn with me to Luke 18:35-43.

■ In verse 35 Christ is on his way to Jerusalem where **“the Gentiles... will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him”**; but **“on the third day he will rise again.”**

■ The road will take Jesus through Jericho. As he approaches that city, someone “[calls] **out**” (verse 38) **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

■ {Mk 10:46} According to verse 35 that someone is **“a blind man”** who is **“sitting by the roadside begging.”** (Mark reports that his name is Bartimaeus.)

★ First, Bartimaeus catches our eye because he is blind.

His eyes do not work. The guy is incapable of physical sight. He rises in darkness, dresses in darkness, stumbles around in darkness, lives in darkness, and lies down in darkness.

His disability is not just physical. Until he is married, an adult male is only half a man. Until he fathers children, he has no future. But no woman in her right mind says “I do” to a blind man! So unless Bartimaeus got married and had children before going blind, he never will.

{Jn 9:2; NIV Study Note} He is an object of pity and scorn. John describes an encounter between Jesus and another blind man in which the disciples ask: **“who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** They have been taught that suffering is always a direct result of specific sin. No doubt, people who meet Bartimaeus blame him for his blindness.

★ Second, he catches our eye because he is begging.

Actually, this is to be expected. Bartimaeus begs because he is poor. He is poor because poverty is the inevitable consequence of blindness for everyone but the super rich. Begging is the only option available to him.

This is not middling hardship or minor deprivation; it is crushing, grinding poverty. Bartimaeus has no financial cushion and no safety net. He exists hand-to-mouth. If passersby give him enough money he will eat today; if they don't, he will go hungry.

First century Jewish theology recognizes that some people are needy through no fault of their own – but that category does not include the disabled poor. The presumption is that Bartimaeus' poverty is a punishment for wrongdoing just like his blindness.

★ Third, he really catches our eye because he addresses the Lord as the **“Son of David.”**

{Mt 12:22-23} Someone called Jesus by this title one time before now. It was after he healed a **“demon-possessed man who was blind and mute... so that he could... talk and see.”** Even then the crowd was uncertain: **“Could this be the Son of David?”** they wondered aloud.

■ In contrast, our blind beggar shouts it out with conviction, in a loud voice. So loud that in verse 39 the people **“[rebuke] him and [tell] him to be quiet.”** Instead, **“he [shouts] all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”**

“Son of David” is an OT title. It validates the kingship of David's descendants and accentuates the royal authority of the coming Messiah. Bartimaeus has

uncommon insight! He perceives that Jesus is David's legitimate heir, and possibly the Messiah.

■ Verse 40: In response, **“Jesus [stops] and... [asks] him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”**

And we are back to where we started. What is the Lord asking Bartimaeus? What is he asking us?

¶ It helps to read our text with the parallel accounts in Matthew 20 and Mark 10. Those narratives are almost indistinguishable from this one (except that Matthew states that there were two blind men, not just one). In all three the question is identical: Matthew 20:33, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** Mark 10:51, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** Luke 18:40, **“What do you want me to do for you?”**

The substantial difference is in their contexts. Matthew and Mark pair their report with an incident that Luke omits.

¶ In Matthew 20:20-21 and Mark 10:35-36 the disciples James, John and their mother say to Jesus, **“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”**

The Lord asks, **“What is it you want?” “What do you want me to do for you?”**

He says it to the sons of Zebedee and a few verses later to Bartimaeus. This is no coincidence!

{2 Ti 3:16-17} Remember, **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all**

God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

? *How is this Scripture useful? In what way can it equip James, John, Bartimaeus, and us “for every good work”?*

¶ {Mk 10:37} Well, the request of the sons of Zebedee is, **“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”**

¶ Messiah’s response in Matthew 20:22 and Mark 10:38 is, **“You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”**

¶ {Mt 20:25-28 [Mk 10:42-45]} Next, he gathers the Twelve and cautions them all:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The disciples’ vision of superior status and domination of others is skewed. It is not in harmony with Christ’s vision for the kingdom of God.

He does not promise to award them the places of highest honor. Instead, he opens their eyes to their sin and worldliness.

■ As for Bartimaeus, his request is in Luke 18:41: **“Lord, I want to see.”**

{Lk 4:18-19} Elsewhere, Luke chronicles Christ’s first sermon in Nazareth which was his ministry manifesto. He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and read:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the
prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
To set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s
favor.”**

{Lk 4:21} Then he boldly announced, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

{Lk 7:19, 22} Some time later, two disciples of John the Baptizer came to ascertain whether Jesus is the Savior. He replied, **“Go... report... what you have seen: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”**

Giving sight to the blind bringing good news to the poor is at the heart of Christ’s ministry. It is in harmony with the culture of God’s kingdom.

Bartimaeus’ vision of receiving sight from our merciful Savior is right. It is in harmony with Christ’s vision for the kingdom of God. .

■ And so the Lord declares (verses 42-43): **“Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”** He is healed, and he “[follows] **Jesus, praising God.**”

✎ The outcomes of these conversations are quite different, but the question is identical: **“What do you want me to do for you?”** Not only so, it has the same function each time: to open our eyes to our own motives, priorities and hopes; and to give us a vision for conformity to Christ in his kingdom.

{Heb 4:12} On Messiah’s lips **“What do you want me to do for you?”** is not a request for information, compliance with our command, or the magical fulfillment of wishes. This **“word of God...penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart....”** It uncovers and lays bare our souls so that we can be changed.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Christ Jesus asked this of James and John. He asked it of Bartimaeus. He is asking it of us.

- ? *How will we answer?*
- ? *How will he respond?*
- ? *How will our lives be changed?*