



The Circle Maker

Knowing what to pray for – What do we circle?

Mark 10:46-52

Introduction: Read Mark 10:46-52 (parallels in Matt 20:29-34, Luke 18:35-43)

“What do you want me to do for you?” This is the question Jesus asked of the blind man (2 men in the Matthew account) who stopped him on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. From our vantage point, the answer seems obvious and it is easy to wonder why Jesus would ask it. After all, blind people want to see, right?

Q: What do you think of this question? Silly? A trick? That it perhaps violates the old saw that there are no stupid questions? What do you think Jesus was trying to get from this question? How would the man’s life be changed if Jesus were to heal him? What would he gain but what might he lose? What might God expect of him once he was no longer “disabled”?

Q: What “infirmities” – moral, physical, or otherwise – do you wish God would remove from you? Are you ever a little reluctant to actually pray for complete deliverance? Why might that be the case? I confess that I often am such a reluctant petitioner. I’m kind of attached to my little, and not so little, sins and weaknesses. Like Moses, I can tell God, “But Lord, I’m not very good with words.” Sometimes it’s nice to have an excuse. And it can be pleasant to nurse and to cherish certain thoughts once in a while, can it not? As you grow in your Christian life, do you ever want to leave the door behind you open just a bit, just in case you might want to go back through it someday?

Read, consider, and discuss the following quotes:

“Have we never risen from our knees in haste for fear God’s will should become too unmistakable if we prayed longer?” C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

“If you are reluctant to pray, it just might be that you, like Adam and Israel before you, are hiding in the vegetation, ashamed to hear the rustling of the leaves that signals he is here.” Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ*

Q: What is the fear that Lewis is talking about? Have you ever experienced that reluctance to “go too far” with God and all this Christianity? What is this fear based on? Is it rational? Why or why not?

Q: What is the fear that Moore is talking about? Does this ever happen to you?

So Jesus forced the man to put into words what he really wanted when he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Background Study:

Jesus and his disciples (many, not just the 12) are traveling from Jericho “up” to Jerusalem for His last Passover feast, at which He knows that He will be arrested and beaten and crucified, and, not least important, raised to life on the third day. Twice already in Mark 10, He has told the twelve what will happen (verses 32-34, 45). The trip would be arduous in that day. Jericho is below sea level and the

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road up to Jerusalem has an elevation change of 3,400 feet in its 15 miles. According to NT scholar William Barclay, the trip would also be festive, with a definite holiday feeling. Almost everyone along the way who could not travel to Passover themselves would be lining the streets to watch the parade of pilgrims and to offer their blessings. Jesus was well-known by now, almost at the end of His earthly ministry. Every Jew and many Gentiles had heard of His teachings and especially they had heard of His miracles. So Jesus was certainly on display as He and His followers walked toward Jerusalem and He would have drawn a lot of attention along the entire route, but especially while still in the area of the city of Jericho. And this is where Jesus encounters Bartimaeus (and 1 other, according to the Matthew account) – “as Jesus and his disciples left town.”

Q: If you have been to Israel, have you been on that road? Or if not, have you walked back up from the Grand Canyon to the rim? That would be a comparable climb. Have you ever been at a parade when some famous athlete, politician, or dignitary was walking by? What was it like? What do you think it would be like to shout for that person's attention and then to actually be summoned to meet them?

Things to note:

- The absolute single-minded persistence of Bartimaeus. He knew what he wanted – to see Jesus and to beg for healing – and he would not be denied. Most beggars of that day would collect the donated alms in their coat or cloak, and that garment would be one of their most valuable possessions. Note what he did when Jesus called him: “Bartimaeus threw aside his coat (likely containing the day's “take”), jumped up and came to Jesus.”
- He knew exactly what he wanted – his sight. Not money, not pity, not even any spiritual blessing – He just wanted to see, a fact the Jesus drew out of him with His question.
- He addresses Jesus as *Rabboni* – “my rabbi,” one of only two times the word is used in the NT. The other is in John 20:16, and is used by Mary when she recognizes Jesus after the resurrection. He recognized Jesus as his teacher, his rabbi, even before he was healed, and this was a demonstration of his faith. Bartimaeus may not have recognized Jesus as God's Son (he calls Him “Son of David” which could mean Messiah), but he believed – he had faith that Jesus Christ could change his life!
- He followed Jesus. How long or how far no one has recorded, but I think he followed Jesus to Jerusalem, witnessed the crucifixion, heard of the resurrection, and remained a follower of Jesus the rest of his years.
- The differences in the Matthew and Mark/Luke accounts are not errors – they simply reflect different emphases by three different eye-witnesses. Mark and Luke do not say that there was not another healing of another blind man. They both want to focus on just one of the men: Bartimaeus.

Q: What can you learn from the single-mindedness of Bartimaeus in his approach to Jesus? Do you let the crowd or anything else stop you – career, family, money, hobbies, things, cherished sins, etc.? Do you share his conviction that only Jesus Christ can really heal you, change you . . . for eternity? Bartimaeus reminds me of a song we often sing at KCC, *Rescue*, by Eddie James. Think and reflect on some of those words. Bartimaeus believed them with his whole heart. Do you?

Q: Are you as specific with God in your prayers as Bartimaeus was with Jesus? God may not always heal us (think the Apostle Paul, Joni Eareckson Tada, etc.) of disease or injury, but Scripture tells us that He definitely wants to make us holy and more and more like His Son. So are you specific with God about what you want Him to change in you?

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Q: Is Jesus your *rabboni*? Is He (through study of His Word and biblical teaching and preaching) your #1 choice for spiritual instruction, or do you often go elsewhere first?

Conclusion:

Leonard Ravenhill was a famous English evangelist who wrote the classic book *Why Revival Tarries*. The 2nd chapter of that book is entitled "Prayer grasps eternity." In that chapter he writes:

"Poverty-stricken as the Church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

Closing question and food for thought: What could happen at KCC and in this area if KCC was filled with people who fasted and prayed for changed hearts, for holiness, for victory over specific sins and addictions, for our leaders and our enemies? What if even a tithe of our members were "agonizers," and "wrestlers," and "intercessors," and "fighters"? And is he right that "failing here (in prayer), we fail everywhere"?