

Seeing the King

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[0 : 00] Well, last month it was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and so there was a bank holiday. We were all off school or work to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. And all the coverage over the weekend was good to see, but my favourite was a lovely story that I heard came from the Queen's former Royal Protection Officer, a man called Richard Griffin.

And he told the story of how once when he accompanied the Queen on a walk, a picnic near Balmoral, they came across two American tourists who happened to be in that part of Scotland. But the tourists didn't recognise the Queen. They just thought she was just some old woman walking along the hill. And so after a conversation, the tourists and the Queen and her Protection Officer, the American tourists said, Oh, so how long have you been coming here?

And the Queen said, Well, I've been coming every year, every summer for over 80 years. And then he was thinking, Oh, okay, so you must have met the Queen then, if you've been coming up to Balmoral all these years, not realising that he was in fact talking to the Queen.

And as quick as a flash, the Queen said, Well, no, I haven't, but Dick here meets her regularly. And so the man said, Oh, you've met the Queen. What's she like?

[1 : 20] And he said, Well, she's got a really good sense of humour. And so the man said, Okay, he gave his camera to the Queen, to get the Queen to take a picture of him with this Protection Officer.

And then they swapped places, and then these American tourists got a picture with the Queen, even though they didn't know that it was the Queen. And then off they waved goodbye, and that was it.

And the American tourists, completely oblivious to who it was they were talking to, who it was that they had their photo with. They could see the Queen, but they couldn't really see the Queen.

They saw her, they spoke to her, they had photographic evidence that they were with her, but they still didn't recognise her. They didn't know the true identity of the person whose presence they were in.

And as we look at this passage in the Gospel of Mark, we see a similar kind of thing happening. Because there's a kind of blindness that people can have when it comes to Jesus Christ.

[2 : 23] where people think they know about Jesus, think they understand Jesus, but they don't really see him for who he is. And so if we were to look at the context of our Bible reading this afternoon, there's a contrast between two people, James and John, who were disciples of Jesus.

There's a story about them before this one. A contrast between them and this man, Blind Bartimaeus. And we're looking at the story of Blind Bartimaeus this afternoon.

And so Jesus' disciples, they had been with him, they had seen him do all these miracles, they'd heard his teaching, and yet they still had failed to see Jesus for who he is.

They failed to understand why he came, and they failed to understand what it means to follow him. They were still learning. Their eyes, in a sense, were still closed. They were blind. They failed to see. They didn't understand.

And interestingly, Jesus had already rebuked them. For their lack of sight. He'd said earlier in the Gospel of Mark, Do you have eyes, but fail to see? And ears, but fail to hear?

[3 : 33] And so having said this to them, we now get this miracle, which is the second miracle, of a blind man being able to see. Changing from blindness to sight.

So Bartimaeus receiving his sight is actually the last healing miracle in the Gospel of Mark before Jesus dies on the cross and is raised to life again. And so it's significant because the disciples still needed to see and understand who Jesus is.

And here's the irony. The irony is, this blind guy, Bartimaeus, can see more than Jesus' disciples can see. He can recognize who Jesus is, and then at the end of the story, he ends up following

Jesus for himself.

And so this section in the Gospel of Mark, the focus is on seeing Jesus and understanding what it means to follow him. And, you know, for all of us today, we need to be careful that we don't fail to see Jesus.

That we don't miss him. Because when we see him for who he is, and understand why he came, the right response that we should make is to then follow him.

[4 : 47] And so I'd like us this afternoon to look at three things. They'll be up on the screen. First of all, the call of Jesus. Second, the compassion of Jesus. And third, the commendation of Jesus. So we're just going to work through these.

The call, the compassion, and the commendation of Jesus. First of all, the call of Jesus. Jesus is making his way towards Jerusalem, and then we're introduced to this man, Bartimaeus.

So let me read what it says. Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples together with a large crowd were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

Now what is interesting is that Bartimaeus is the only person whose name to is healed in the gospels. Mark explains that Bartimaeus means son of Timaeus.

[5 : 53] I guess it's a bit like McDonald. Donald is the son of MacDonald. So Timaeus, Bart, not as in Bart Simpson, but Bartimaeus is the son of Timaeus.

And Mark describes what he's like. He was a blind beggar. He couldn't see. He had no eyesight. And yet, when he heard that Jesus was coming, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

So he seized his opportunity and he cried out to Jesus in his desperation. Now we don't know how Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus before this, but shouting son of David indicates that he knew who Jesus was.

Because the words son of David refer to the Messiah in the Old Testament, God's chosen king, spoken about all the way through the Old Testament part of the Bible.

And David was the most famous king of God's people in Israel's history. And God had promised that the Messiah, that his king, would come from David's family line.

[7 : 01] So one of David's descendants would be the Messiah, would be the king. And he would come and he would rule God's kingdom forever. And so Bartimaeus recognizes that Jesus is God's promised king, his Messiah.

One Bible commentator says, What Bartimaeus lacks in eyesight, he makes up for in insight. And so by crying out for mercy, Bartimaeus is well aware that he deserves nothing from Jesus.

But because of who Jesus is, in his blindness, he confidently cries out because he knows if Jesus hears him, that Jesus will do something.

And yet some of the crowds don't think that he's worthy of Jesus' attention. He's just a nuisance. He's causing a disturbance of the peace. But he shouts all the louder, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And so he's desperate. But he's also so sure that Jesus would respond to his cry for help. And Jesus did.

[8 : 09] And that's why the story here shifts from the focus being on Bartimaeus to the focus being on Jesus. And so we read, So just see how Jesus called Bartimaeus.

First of all, he stopped. Now the original could read that he stood still when he heard Bartimaeus call. In other words, the desperate cry of this blind man stopped Jesus in his tracks.

And so despite this large crowd surrounding them all, Jesus stops and gives his attention to one man. Jesus heard him.

A bit like the way, if you're a parent, a parent can always tell the cries of their baby. Even if there's like a hundred other babies in a room, they always hear their baby cry.

Our eldest boy, Joshua, he's 17 now. He doesn't cry so much now. In fact, ever. But when he was young, he cried the loudest cry. And we could tell in a play place, sit down, try and have a coffee, read a book.

[9 : 24] Ah! That's Joshua. We're going to see if he's okay. And he always was okay. But it's like that. Jesus here, his ears are attuned to blind Bartimaeus' call.

Now, remember where the story comes in the life of Jesus. Jesus is on his way to the cross. He is on a rescue mission. He came to save. And yet Jesus stopped.

The son of David, God's Messiah King, the Savior stops, and he gives his undivided attention to one man. Jesus stopped everything just for him.

He heard his lone voice crying out when everybody else told him to shut up. And then Jesus called him when everybody else rejected him.

And that's why the call of Jesus is so strongly emphasized here. Bartimaeus is called three times. So it says Jesus stopped and said, call him.

[10 : 30] Then, so they called to the blind man. And then, cheer up on your feet. He's calling you. Now, there's more to this invitation than meets the eye because it's an invitation that results in Bartimaeus following Jesus.

So just listen to Bartimaeus' reaction. Verse 50 says, throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. Now, I guess if you're blind, your cloak is quite a valuable possession.

If it's cold at night, it is your cloak that you can wrap around yourself to keep warm. And yet here is Bartimaeus. He shoots up like he's spring-loaded because he can't get to Jesus quickly enough.

Jesus called him and so he came. And so before we move on, let's not miss the response of Jesus to Bartimaeus because you might feel or you might think that Jesus isn't aware of what is going on in your life.

Or that Jesus is just too busy to be interested in somebody like you or like me. And yet we know that Jesus loves everybody. Jesus loves the world.

[11 : 40] But he doesn't just love the world or everybody in some kind of general, distant sense. It's clear here that Jesus responds to people in a personal way.

Not in a general way. Jesus sees beyond the crowd of people to Bartimaeus. And Jesus also sees beyond the crowd of people in this world to you and to me as individuals.

Jesus will never overlook you. Never. If you cry out to him. And so the call of Jesus means he wants you and me to go to him.

That's why he's calling. And so that leads to a second point. The first point, the call of Jesus. The second point, the compassion of Jesus. And it shines out brightly here.

Just like it does in every single encounter of Jesus with somebody in the Gospels. And so Jesus asks Bartimaeus a question. He says, what do you want me to do for you?

[12 : 47] And it's actually the same question that Jesus asked James and John earlier. Verse 36, chapter 10. It's the same question. What do you want me to do for you?

But Bartimaeus' response is completely different from the response of James and John. Because while Bartimaeus was pleading for mercy, James and John want status.

James and John want to sit next to Jesus in glory, whereas Bartimaeus just wants to see. And the very fact that Bartimaeus asks for mercy here and asks for sight, he believes that Jesus can give it.

So James and John, they thought they deserved honor. They thought they deserved recognition from Jesus. And yet Bartimaeus knows he deserves nothing from Jesus.

James and John approached Jesus with some sense of entitlement. We want to sit next to you in glory. Whereas Bartimaeus, whose name actually means son of uncleanness, he approaches Jesus with a sense of unworthiness.

[14 : 01] And so we should be asking, well, what's the right way to approach Jesus? Is it to demand glory or is it to plead for mercy? Do you think that God somehow owes you?

Do you think that God ought to reward you for the kind of life that you've lived? Or do you realize that God owes you nothing? Bartimaeus pleaded for mercy and he received his sight.

So there is our answer. He's expressing his faith in Jesus. But before we get to his faith, and that's what we're going to finish on, before we get to that, this episode shows us something remarkable about the compassion of Jesus.

Because it's not a story mainly about Bartimaeus. It is actually a story about Jesus. I think we can easily read the Gospels and the narratives and the stories, and we can jump quickly to the question, where am I in this story?

Or who do I identify with? And of course, there's always something for us to learn about ourselves in every story in the Gospels. But the reality is that we are not in any of them, whereas Jesus is in

all of them.

[15 : 21] And so we've got to be careful not to let our gaze be too quickly distracted away from Jesus. Because Jesus is the story, and so the Gospel writers want us to clearly see him.

And here, Jesus called to Bartimaeus and his compassion for Bartimaeus tell us really what Jesus is like, don't they? Jesus is full of compassion. He's full of compassion for individuals like Bartimaeus, which means he is full of compassion for individuals like you and me.

And so don't think that the Jesus who is presented to us in the Gospel of Mark or any of the other Gospels is different from the Jesus that we can experience today.

Today, we don't get a Jesus who's somehow more distant, less personal, less caring, and less compassionate towards us.

No. Jesus is the same for you and me now as he was for Bartimaeus back then, as he will be for you and me in the future.

[16 : 29] And so, like me, I'm sure you're moved by the tender care of Jesus for this one blind beggar. But we should know that it's the same gracious character, the same compassion that Jesus has here, that he has for you and for me.

I said, please don't fail to see what blind Bartimaeus was able to see. Because this Jesus, the one that Bartimaeus needed, is the same Jesus that I need, that Catherine needs, that you need.

And so just to apply this at a deeper level, I wonder whether some of us need to be reminded of who Jesus is and what he's like. Maybe because of your present life experiences or what you're going through right now, maybe you're actually feeling desperate.

Maybe like Bartimaeus, you feel left out. You feel like everybody just tells you the whole time to shut up and they don't care about you at all. They've written you off and rejected you.

They're against you. And so you might feel worthless. You might feel helpless, just like Bartimaeus did. But what do you do in that kind of situation?

[17 : 46] Well, the one thing you should do is cry out to Jesus, the one who is full of compassion. For you, just like he was for Bartimaeus.

Because what we see here is that Jesus never ignores us. And just as Jesus heard Bartimaeus, do you somehow think that Jesus' ears will be deaf to your cry or my cry?

Of course they won't. And just as Jesus stopped for Bartimaeus, so he listens when we call on his name. Because Jesus understands your situation, my situation.

And he not only hears our desperate cry for help, Jesus is the one who can meet our deepest needs in life. We can't meet them ourselves.

Nobody else can. Only Jesus can. And that's why he came. And so Jesus responds to us because he has compassion for us. And so this story isn't about Jesus meeting our felt needs, like the need for sight here in blind Bartimaeus, or anything else.

[18 : 54] It's about Jesus meeting our deepest needs in life. That's what this is about. And so that takes us to our third and our final point. First, the call of Jesus. Second, the compassion of Jesus.

Third, the commendation of Jesus. Jesus commends Bartimaeus for his faith here. So verse 52 says, Go, said Jesus, your faith has healed you.

Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. So how should we think about Bartimaeus' faith? Is it the quantity of his faith? Is it the quality of his faith that results in his healing? So like if you have enough faith, or if you have strong enough faith, then you'll be healed. And that is how some people think often, that you need strong faith, or you need a lot of faith to make things happen.

So if you're praying to be healed, for example, and the healing doesn't happen, you may think, well, it's maybe because I didn't have enough faith, or my faith wasn't strong enough.

[19 : 58] But that's not what's going on here. It's not as if it's Bartimaeus' faith that healed him. No, it was Jesus that healed him.

It wasn't the quality or the quantity of his faith. It was the object of his faith. What was the object of his faith? It was Jesus. And so he cried out to Jesus because he believed Jesus could heal him.

And so he was healed, not because of the strength of his faith, but because of the strength of the one his faith was in. Only Jesus could give Bartimaeus his sight.

And he did. And he gave it to him in an instant. And that's because there's more going on here. It isn't just that Bartimaeus was able to see, as amazing a miracle that is, blindness to sight.

Because when Jesus says your faith has healed you, the word for healed can also mean saved. And so it reflects this Jewish understanding between physical wholeness and salvation, seeing the person as one entity.

[21 : 07] And so there's a spiritual as well as a physical sense here in what's being said. So he's been made a well by Jesus in every possible sense. So physically and spiritually, sight and salvation.

Because when Bartimaeus asks for mercy, he doesn't just receive his sight, he receives salvation too. Why? How do we know? Well, at the end, what does he do?

He goes and he follows Jesus. He ate on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, but he also follows Jesus on the road of discipleship.

Because this miraculous change from blindness to sight parallels his desire to follow Jesus. In fact, I think Mark here presents Bartimaeus as a model disciple.

He gets what Jesus' disciples don't get. He shows what it means to follow Jesus when the disciples still can't see it. Remember how he was introduced.

[22 : 10] He's a blind beggar who sat hopeless and helpless by the side of the road. How does the story end? He's on his way with Jesus, following him. Total transformation from blindness to sight, from being out of the way to being on the way, from desperation to discipleship.

He is a beautiful illustration of what it means to be saved by Jesus Christ. He asked for mercy and he found it.

And so he models what it means to cry out to Jesus for mercy, to respond to the call of Jesus, and to experience salvation from Jesus.

And so as I close, let's just apply this whole message, this whole passage, by asking the question that Jesus asks James and John and Bartimaeus.

What is the question? The question is, what do you want me to do for you? So what do you want Jesus to do for you?

[23 : 15] Because the answer to that question for all of us will reveal the deepest desires of our hearts, just as it did for James and John, just as it did for Bartimaeus.

Your answer and my answer will tell us what we want, what we desire more than anything else in life. And so James and John wanted status for themselves.

They wanted honor and fame and glory. That's what they were living for. And that's what they wanted. And so their answer proved just how blind they were, except they didn't even realize it.

And so they show us just how blind we can be too to our deepest needs in life. Because the reality is that we are nothing more than blind, helpless, desperate beggars, even if we're not aware of it.

We might think that we can see clearly when it comes to life. We might think that we've got all the right priorities in life. We might think that we've got it sussed when it comes to knowing about Jesus, when in fact we're lost.

[24 : 29] And we can just be groping around in the dark, trying to find our way. And yet the problem is, that kind of life means there's nothing that we can do ourselves to stop it.

We are blind to the good news of Jesus. And so like Bartimaeus, the only thing we can do in our blindness is cry out to Jesus for mercy.

And perhaps you have never done that. Maybe you've lived to age 10, 11, 12, 13, 80, 90, 100.

And you have never cried out to Jesus Christ for mercy. Well, the reason Jesus came is because we all need mercy.

We need mercy because of our sin against our loving Creator God. Because without mercy and forgiveness for our sin, we will be separated from God forever.

[25 : 32] And that's why crying out to Jesus for mercy is the only right response to Jesus Christ. All the other responses are wrong. Because when we do cry out to mercy, when we do cry out to Jesus, Jesus shows us mercy.

He offers us compassion. No matter what we've done or what we fail to do, Jesus will receive anyone who calls on him.

Why? Because his death on the cross forgives our every sin. And so if you've already experienced the compassion of Jesus Christ and you know his mercy, then you will want Jesus to show that mercy to other people.

If Jesus has given his life in our place for our sin, my place for my sin, then we want others to come and know him too. Where his experience, our experience of his compassion for us will spill out and

we'll want to show compassion to others.

And so we won't walk past people in need like the crowd did with blind Bartimaeus. We will do what we can to help people. Yeah, in practical ways if it needs practical help, but the greatest need of every person is to see Jesus for who he is and to cry out to him for mercy.

[27 : 00] And so Jesus calls all of us to follow him. And when we do follow him, we will want others to follow him, to say to people, just like the people said to Bartimaeus, cheer up on your feet.

He's calling you. Isn't that the best invitation anyone could ever hear? Jesus calls you. He is waiting for you.

And he will do for you, not necessarily what you want, but he will do for you what you need more than anything else. He'll show you mercy and he'll forgive your sin.

It's telling us, go to Jesus. Follow Jesus without delay. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 04] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.