

Conversation with Bartimaeus

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. What we're doing as a church is we're looking at a series called Conversations with Jesus! And we're looking at how Jesus interacts with the people he comes across and the people he speaks to and asking what does that mean for us as we chat with people, as we look to him as our example and as we long for the world around us to know him and to learn to love him and live for him and have hearts transformed towards him. And today we are looking at Blind Bartimaeus and if you've got a Bible with you or an app on your phone and you want to read along then we're in Mark chapter 10 and I'll give you a second or two to find that.

While you do that I'm just going to pray for us. Father God we love you, we long to hear from you by your spirit and we thank you for this word you've given us. Would you help apply it to our hearts by your spirit that we might see you more clearly and love you more as we hear your voice.

You know the mics are important but we don't really care about my voice God, we care about you speaking to our hearts and you bringing transformation for us and we invite you to do that just now. Amen.

So here is an encounter with Jesus and Bartimaeus and before we get into the scriptures there I wonder an honest kind of reaction in your head on this, I'm not going to ask you to share them but I wonder what your reaction is when you encounter someone begging or someone asking for spare change on the street.

You know imagine you're walking up Livvy Centre and there is someone maybe under that little bridge just near the bank or somewhere just saying can you spare some change mate? Because I reckon you've got, you're probably one of about 10, maybe 20, I'm not sure, different reactions that you might have.

[1 : 48] For some of us, a good friend of mine, he was always prepared for someone asking him for money and he usually didn't have much cash on him but he always amazingly carried a Mars bar in his rucksack he was a student at the time just so he had something to offer someone and said listen this will give you some calories.

I always thought wow that's pretty prepared isn't it? Or I wonder if you're one of those people who just, you know some people I know will get right down beside someone and say kind of hey I'm whoever, what's your name?

You know are you a bit like me? One of those pocket patters who just goes like that. I don't carry cash normally, I'm a bit of a techie geek so I usually pound my phone and I kind of somehow feel obliged to make sure that they know that I couldn't possibly have any money anywhere on my person.

I heard a few of you giggle like you know that feeling too. Or you might be someone who actually your gut reaction is like why aren't you working? Like go get a job or someone who thinks wow I wonder what happened to you?

Or I wonder where this money is going? I know that's quite a common reaction, that sense of what are you going to do with it if I do give you some money? Is it going to go to good or is it going to go to bad? But the thing here is when we encounter someone who's begging basically we're likely to have one of them a wide range of reactions.

[3 : 01] And that's what we see here in scripture that we're about to read is Jesus when he encounters someone whose whole life is basically it's necessary for Bartimaeus to be begging because he can't make progress by himself.

He's sitting by a road needing help. So let's read that together and it's we're in Mark 10 46 and we'll read up to 52. So it says 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 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. Jesus stopped and said call him. So they called the blind man cheer up on your feet he's calling you.

Throwing his cloak aside he jumped on his feet and came to his feet and came to Jesus. What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him. The blind man said Rabbi I want to see.

[4 : 09] Go said Jesus your faith has healed you. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Just before this if you were to look a little bit back in Mark 10 you would find some stories about grabbing hold of things.

And this will matter in just a moment. Before this just within the same chapter you've got the rich young ruler. That guy who came to Jesus and said what must I do? And Jesus says fulfill the law and he says I've done it. And Jesus says okay then go and give away everything you've got and come follow me.

And he doesn't give away everything he's got and he doesn't follow Jesus. The weight is too much for him. He can't imagine what it would be like to let go of all the many things he has. You've then got another story of grabbing hold of things in James and John who come to Jesus and basically Jesus asked the same question interestingly.

What do you want me to do for you? To two of his disciples. And they reply let one of us sit on the left side and one of us sit on the right side when you are in glory. Because they imagine glory looks like kingly rule and being in charge and lording it over everyone else.

And they're saying make us the top people. Like left and right. We want up there with you Jesus.

And Jesus says I mean I'm paraphrasing clearly but man you have not a clue what you're asking.

[5 : 28] Like you're trying to grab hold of glory but I'm going to die. I'm going to go into death. And then he says if you want to be the greatest you must be the least. You've got these two stories of grabbing hold.

Grabbing hold or keeping hold of stuff. Grabbing hold of glory. And then Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus has almost nothing. He's a beggar.

But I want you later, we'll get to that point again a bit later, I want you to spot where he lets go. And what he lets go of. Because I think these stories aren't put like this as an accident. I think he's a picture of what it looks like to truly follow Jesus.

So he's sitting by the roadside and he is poor as poor can be. There's no care packages in this time, in this place. There's no assistive technology that will help him understand what's going on around him.

Notice he hears Jesus arrive because he clearly can't see him. And people are used to telling him to shut up I think. Because he would have been seen as the lowest of the low. He would have at best have been a religious failure who God has caused this illness on in the eyes of many.

[6 : 34] Or an outcast who couldn't live in his own way and had to beg for other people's money.

And it's no surprise they tell him to shut up when he starts shouting. Because he's on the side, quite literally.

The road is here and he's beside it as people come and go on their important business. He's an unimportant person. But we see some things that happen when Jesus turns up.

And I reckon, I loved hearing Artem share about the Busy Project. Because I reckon he sees some of these things happen. When Jesus gets involved in people's lives, things start to change.

And we're going to look at the way Jesus makes people noisy. We're going to look at the way Jesus gives people dignity. And we're going to look at the way that Jesus puts people back on track. And the first thing is when Jesus turns up, quiet people get noisy.

This guy is used to being lower than everyone else. Overlooked by everyone else. Not involved in their important business. And yet, he recognises Jesus in some way. And he shouts, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

[7 : 38] Son of David is a sign that he recognises Jesus as the Messiah. So, there's an interesting thing there. Loads of other people are totally blind to the importance of Jesus.

Even his disciples at points. And yet, Bartimaeus, he knows Jesus is the man that will save. He gets what Jesus is about.

I don't understand how or where or why or what. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit. But he says it twice. He won't be shut up about it. He says, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. He recognises Jesus' power to change his life.

And he recognises Jesus' identity. He is probably a guy who's just used to saying, can you spare some change? Who changes his whole shout to be, Jesus, I need you.

I remember, I wonder if you do too, when you first, if you follow Jesus, if when you first followed him, whether you were like that.

[8 : 39] That first cry of saying, Jesus, I need you. I remember, I mean, many of you would say I'm currently very annoying. But I remember being even more annoying, I imagine, when I first got saved.

Because I just couldn't stop both talking to God and be like, I get the attention of the creator of the world. I mean, how mad is that? But also talking to other people about him.

Because I get the attention of the one who created everything. How mad is that? And I found myself just wanting to talk to people all the time about Jesus. And be like, man, you don't know him. How is that possible?

And I found myself getting really noisy. You won't believe when I was 17, 18, before I got saved, I was one of the quietest people you could meet. I know if you know me, that seems ridiculous because I talk far too much. But it's true.

Like, I became noisy because I found Jesus. And I had discovered the best thing that could happen to me. I had a voice of gratitude.

[9 : 35] I was like, he gave me all of this. Or the voice of hope. I don't have to fear death. Or the voice of prayer. Like, I get to ask him for stuff. Or the voice of sharing. I get to share him with other people and see their lives transformed.

In Bartimaeus, I think he's probably quite a quiet guy. He's pretty downtrodden and used to being rejected. Suddenly it's, Jesus, I need you.

I want you. Like, have mercy on me. You can change this. Our voice sometimes gets shorter. Our sentences are shorter.

Our speaking to him can become rarer if we get jaded or time gets tough or we just get busy. And our requests can become thinner. Even when we've found that great joy in knowing Jesus, it's possible to not shout out to him enough.

I wonder. Have you lost your voice? Have you got a bit croaky in your relationship with him? When did you last cry out to him and say, please get involved in this difficult situation?

[10 : 41] Or maybe you haven't ever done that before. And for the first time, you need to see him for who he is. Both Jesus, the one who saves and has a plan and a future for you. And that he hears you.

That he's willing to listen. That he wants you to cry out to him. Have mercy on me. Help me. Help me in this situation. Help me in what I'm dealing with. He wants to be cried out to in every area of your life.

Whether you know him now or not, he went to the cross for you so that you might have the freedom of a son and daughter of God to have a voice that he will hear.

And a little side note on that is that I'm never surprised when people who don't yet know Jesus get a bit noisy about him, even in quite negative ways. I've kind of learned over time to realize that when people start asking even really difficult questions about Jesus, often it's because the Holy Spirit is knocking at the door of their heart.

And I just want to encourage you. Maybe you haven't lost your voice. Maybe you're talking about Jesus or you're displaying his goodness in the people he's put you with. But don't be discouraged if people around you start prodding and poking a bit with their questions.

[11 : 49] Or quiet people previously just get a bit inquisitive or a bit, maybe even slightly aggressive in their questioning. Often when the Holy Spirit turns up, people get a bit rattled and they start kind of thinking, oh, this is a bit threatening almost.

And I just want to encourage you. It may be that they're on the verge of saying, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And you're just seeing a bit of the kind of stuff, the mess that goes on around that.

Because he's at work in the world. The Holy Spirit's doing this, revealing Jesus to people. When Jesus turns up, quiet people get noisy. Sometimes we lose our voice.

So we need to turn to him afresh and say, Jesus, have mercy on me. Help me live for you and be loud for you, louder for you. The other thing that we see happening is when Jesus turns up, those who've been overlooked, they get dignity.

Now, we kind of live in quite a world that thinks dignity and kind of care for the oppressed is important. And in a moment, we'll look at the fact that's actually Jesus's values that we now live in and don't even realise it to a high degree.

[12:51] But there are some really significant things that he does in this that would have been really shocking if you were the crowd. Partly, that's why I think they tell the guy to shut up. Jesus, first of all, notice he stops.

And he hears that he's... I'm trying to find it here. But he basically, he stops. He says to the guy, get up on your feet. And he asks him what he wants from him.

Those would have all been pretty shocking in the culture of the time. There, people would have looked at him and thought, you should have been stronger. You should have been more moral. You should have been better. You should work harder. Your blindness is something that you deserve in some way.

Or you're not powerful like us, so who really cares about you? And in fact, Jesus is heading towards the cross ultimately on this journey. And yet, he stops. He gets the guy on his feet.

And he asks him. He doesn't just heal him. Jesus must have known, right, what this guy needed. I mean, it's pretty obvious actually. But he chooses to show him dignity by asking him, what do you want me to do?

[13:55] The king of heaven, who will very soon save anyone that wants to follow him, gives a choice to this blind guy. And it screams against the culture of the time.

The heart of God is to see those people other people don't see. Now, as I said, we do live in a culture where that's become normal now.

If you want a book on that, there's a fantastic book called *The Air We Breathe* by Glenn Shruvener that looks at the fact that all of the things that now are seen as super moral and are good things in terms of how we treat one another and we give dignity to the elderly or we give value to the young or we include the excluded and the overlooked, those are rooted in our very culture because of moments like this where Jesus shows what it looks like to care for people that everyone else walks past.

Jesus could have easily carried on going or done the sort of more spiritual equivalent of the pat, but instead he gets right in with Bartimaeus because he's retraining us in what a life of following Jesus looks like, which looks like caring for those who are overlooked and looks like slowing down and giving our time and attention to people who don't deserve it in the world's eyes or maybe in ours sometimes.

One of the things I love about the fact that we're, I'm going to keep saying this for about six months, I'm sorry, but that we're moving in here as our permanent home, all that stuff.

[15:24] What I love is I was looking at the stats this morning before I came out and there's about 700 people come, a space of about 700 people in various groups to help them in this centre every week of the, of pretty much every week other than about six in the summer, all the other weeks of the year.

There's space for people to come and connect with other people, come and connect with us, come and be served, come and be part of something bigger than themselves. I love that we're a church that loves to serve people, both by helping this place stay open and thrive, by things like the feast that we do, by being supporters, as Mike said, giving every month to the busy project.

Like, we do that not just because we're nice, because I don't know about you, sometimes I look in the mirror, I'm not that nice. We do that because we see Jesus caring for people and Jesus lifting up people who've been left behind and Jesus seeing the person who's on the ground begging. When Jesus turns up, the overlooked get dignity. I wonder, I wonder what the Holy Spirit might say to you on that. Might he want you to slow down the next time you see someone you'd rather avoid? Might he want you to include someone as an act of the grace of God? It doesn't mean we have to get involved in every detail of people's lives, but I do believe there's something there for us of what we see in Jesus, of stopping, of lifting up or getting down.

[16:50] As he says, you who wants to be the greatest must be the least and the servant of all, the servant of many. The final thing we see is this, is we see when Jesus gets involved, people move from being on the roadside to being on the way, and beside the road, sorry, or on the way.

And what I mean by this, if you notice right at the, quite early on, you'll see in verse 46, what we see is this. It says, He's physically not on this busy road.

He has no purpose like the other people of coming and going from the town. He has no ability really to walk down this busy road, given he can't see. He's there on the side, and there's real symbolism there of hopelessness, of kind of being a bit pointless, not having a direction he needs to go in or could go in if he wanted to.

And then what you see, the very last verse of this chunk here is verse 52. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

It's hodos is the word for road there. It's way. It's the way. He received his sight and he followed Jesus along the way. Interestingly, the way was the first name for the Christians, right?

[18:03] They called themselves the way because they'd gone from being off the way, not knowing where they were going, to knowing where they were going, following the way, the truth, and the life. The way has massive meaning.

There's a great Bible project video you can watch on it. But if you were to summarize it, it means to be out of slavery, to be through the wilderness, to be into the promises of God.

How amazing is that? To go from being enslaved, to being lost in wilderness, to not knowing God, to being on the way, to being out of slavery, through the wilderness, into the promises of God.

And if you follow Jesus, you remember that feeling, and that feeling today as we worship of, I'm not a slave. I don't have to serve other things anymore. I don't have to be lost.

He's found me, and I can know just how good he is. Jesus takes him from being peripheral, on the side, not knowing where he's going, and he moves him forward with him.

[19:15] Actually, he gives him the choice. He could have done what the rich young ruler did. He could have just wandered his own way, even after receiving his sight. But he can't resist. He's compelled to follow Jesus, to be on the way with him.

I do want you to spot what he did, though, as part of that. I said earlier about the rich young ruler won't let go of his stuff. The disciples, they're clinging to glory, hoping it looks like greatness, and lording it over other people.

Have a look for me at verse 50. So Jesus stops and says, call him. And so they call the blind man up and say, cheer up on your feet, he's calling you. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumps to his feet, and he comes to Jesus.

I'm almost certain this was about 100% of what this guy owned. And before Jesus has healed him, he chucks it away.

He clearly has seen who Jesus is. He clearly knows Jesus is really worth following, and nothing else matters in comparison to him. He throws that cloak away. His probably security, warmth, probably the one comfy thing he's got to sit on.

[20:24] And instead of that, he just gets on with it. He doesn't allow himself to be, to kind of just meander.

He gets rid of his security because he's found it in Jesus. I imagine him kind of almost saying, I have him now. Come on, where are we going? As I said, following the way has those hints that I mentioned of being out of slavery.

He's no longer slave to being blind, can't move for fear of what he might bump into. He's through the wilderness. People don't care for him. No one wants to really be near him. Into the promises of God.

And in Jesus, we find the promise of purpose. We find the promise of eternity. We find the promise of his love and guidance and security in him, not in any belongings.

Let's get rid of the cloak. I wonder, what's your cloak? It's a tricky question. What's that thing that you might think, oh no, I need this to be okay.

[21:32] What's that thing that you maybe think, my security is here. It might be a duty. It might be who you belong to. It might be all kinds of different things get in the way of being on the way sometimes.

I think we can learn a lot from Bartimaeus in realising actually nothing compares. Like, just chuck it over your shoulder. We want to be on the way and following him.

We don't have to be stuck. We don't have to sit and watch the world go by. We can find and re-find our voice, our dignity and our purpose in him. Because that's what he does when he turns up.

He brings it all. For the first time, if you don't know him, or again and again, as we realign ourselves daily, weekly with him. He takes us from being spectators who watch what he's doing into being people who join him in what he's doing.

And I guess that's my big prayer for us, right? Not, you know, I love all that we do and I think we do it because we believe that God's called us to all the things in the notices or the weekly email or stuff around the community centre, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

[22 : 41] But the one thing, the one thing we really want is that we don't just watch what he does, but we join him on all that he's doing. And that's why we do that stuff, because we believe it's what the Lord's doing.

But I just encourage you, how do you not become a spectator in what the Lord's doing, but join him, join him in giving dignity, join him in lifting up the oppressed, join him in hearing the people around you who need to know him.

Jesus isn't physically passing by right now in the same way he was with blind Bartimaeus, but we know his spirit is at work. We know he hears us. We know his spirit is leading us into all truth.

I just want to encourage you that there's never a wrong time this side of the spirit being sent for us to say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. I need you.

Would you keep me going on your way? Would you lead me into all the purposes you've got for me? Jesus takes people who might feel they've been left behind or might even just be a bit distracted and he brings them in on his purposes.

[23 : 48] not because we are good, but because he is. Not because of what we're able to do or what we contribute, but because the gospel is that Jesus is really, really good and he lived and died and rose again for us that we might join him in the mission of God.

I think we see that in blind Bartimaeus. I hope you enjoy seeing that in his story too. Let me pray for us and then we'll wrap up. Let's pray. Let's pray. Jesus, I thank you that when you turn up and when you turned up in our lives, things changed.

I thank you for the moment we realise or even now we can realise that we have your ear, that you hear us, that you're moved by us shouting out to you and crying out for you and that people notice when we depend on you and I thank you for that.

I thank you that you bring us dignity and worth and value. In fact, you founded those good bits of our culture around us on those things, but we sensed that when we first began to follow you and that is amazing.

You took our gaze, put it on you and we sensed freedom and the promises of God. And I thank you for the way and I thank you for the way and you call us to follow you every day living on your way and I do ask where there are parts of our lives or things we need to let go of to make that happen, that we'd be quick to let go of distraction or to let go of other things that hold our gaze.

[25 : 41] We love you. We love that you lead us. We ask would you lead us afresh this week into your purposes for us. In Jesus' mighty name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.