

THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM: Where the Blind Can See

Mark 10:46-52

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Rev. Melissa Hatfield, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO

WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-upside-down-kingdom-where-the-blind-can-see/

I.

I don't often get to quote rapper and songwriter Eminem in a sermon, but today is one of those rare moments you've all waited for. I shared online my dilemma on whether to rap or read his lyrics. Nearly everyone told me to rap rather than read, which tells me one thing: most of you do not have my best interest at heart. Friends, you're supposed to walk me back from the line, not coax me over. Out of respect for Mr. Marshall Mathers and his musical genius, I will leave the rapping to him, but I will read a couple of lines from his 2007 release "Careful What You Wish For." The song reflects on the downside of fame. In it, he addresses the pressure, scrutiny, and challenges that come with success, particularly the mental toll it took on him. Eminem wished for fame and fortune, but once he got it, he realized the cost was far greater than he anticipated.

The song's chorus reads:

*"So be careful what you wish for, 'cause you just might get it,
And if you get it, then you just might not know what to do with it."*

Whether it's fame, success, wealth, or even healing, we often desire things without fully understanding the weight of what they bring into our lives. Maybe you can recall something you asked or wished for, got, and later realized it came with a great cost. Sometimes it is worth it, sometimes not. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar from Jericho, understood this. He, like Eminem, wished for something powerful: he wanted to see.

II.

We don't know when Bartimaeus lost his sight, but at one time, he could see, but something happened. We don't know when or how, but I imagine him sitting by the roadside, clinging to memories of what the world looked like before everything went dark. He wasn't just begging for coins; he was longing for restoration, aching to see again, to be seen again.

We don't know when Bartimaeus heard stories about Jesus of Nazareth, the healer, but he probably heard the whispers of a blind man recently healed up in Bethsaida, where the rabbi used a bit of spit and mud to restore the man's sight. If it could happen to that blind man, it could happen to Bartimaeus. He dreamed of the day when Jesus might come near, and he would get his chance to ask for the one thing he truly wanted: to see.

And then, one day, it happened. Jesus was passing through Jericho, surrounded by a crowd. Bartimaeus could hear the excitement in people's voices. This was his moment. Rarely has anyone listened to or seen him, but maybe today would be his day.

With all the courage he could muster, he shouted into the darkness, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd tried to silence him. Perhaps they thought Jesus wouldn't bother with a blind beggar, a nobody, or maybe they were afraid Bartimaeus's use of the royal title "Son of David" for this rabbi would provoke unwanted attention from the authorities. Either way, they tried to hush him.

But Bartimaeus, unwilling to give up, shouts even louder: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Bartimaeus's prayer reaches Jesus's ears and heart. Jesus stops and sees Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, and calls for him.

Before Jesus does what Bartimaeus is sure he will do, the blind beggar springs up and tosses aside his cloak—possibly his only possession, the thing that kept him warm at night, the thing that collected whatever coins and food were thrown his way. He is confident he'll have no need of it now.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. (v.51)

Surely, what Bartimaeus wanted Jesus to do was obvious. But Jesus never asked questions for his own sake. He wanted Bartimaeus to voice his desire, name it, and participate in what he hoped for.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks.

"My teacher, let me see again. Take me to the river. Spit in my eyes. Cover me in mud. Do whatever you need to do to give me back my sight." (v.51)

But there was no spit, mud, or hands touching his eyes. Instead, Jesus simply said, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately, Bartimaeus could see again, and instead of going, he chose to follow Jesus on the road.

III.

Bartimaeus got what he wished for, but I wonder—was he prepared for everything that would come with it?

If Bartimaeus followed Jesus into the next week, as the synoptic gospels infer, he most likely witnessed things he and the other followers never dreamed they would see. As he followed Jesus from Jericho to Jerusalem, he saw the city in all its vibrant, colorful chaos as thousands converged there for Passover. He witnessed the adoring crowds waving palm branches as Jesus entered like a king. He saw flying tables, coins, and doves as Jesus flipped some tables in the temple, disrupting the inequality and injustice of the temple practices.

But he also saw Jesus betrayed, arrested, and beaten. He watched as the same crowds that had welcomed Jesus with joy now turned against him, calling for his crucifixion. And Bartimaeus was there to see Jesus, bloodied and broken, crucified.

This is the part of the story we don't always think about. Bartimaeus wished to see, and he did - but with that new sight came the reality of Jesus's path—one filled with both glory and suffering.

*"So be careful what you wish for, 'cause you just might get it,
And if you get it, then you just might not know what to do with it."*

IV.

It makes me wonder: **Do we really want to see?**

When Jesus asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" It might seem easy to answer, but are we ready for what's next?

We want healing in a relationship, but we may have to walk through confession, forgiveness, and therapy to get there. We want truth, but it may be on the other side of humility, correction, and changing our minds. We want freedom, but it may require letting go of control. We want peace, but it may come only when we speak up or lean in.

Seeing isn't just about physical sight. It's about gaining insight into things that challenge us, make us uncomfortable, and lead us to be transformed. It means acknowledging failings and self-centeredness. It forces us to confront painful truths about ourselves, our relationships, and our world. It requires us to let go of some things and admit we've been wrong. Just like Bartimaeus, when Jesus gives us sight, and we follow Him, we will see beauty, but we will also see brokenness around us and within us. Seeing will bring joy, but it will also bring pain.

The disciples struggled with this, often failing to understand Jesus's mission. They were blinded by their expectations of what the Messiah should be—someone who would bring political power and glory and raise them to seats of privilege in a kingdom of this world. They were unaware that sacrifice, suffering, and service would be the ways of the new kingdom.

I think of Bartimaeus after he was healed, walking down the streets of Jerusalem, his eyes wide open. He might have seen the vibrant colors of the marketplace, the beauty of the temple, and the faces of joyful children playing. But he also saw the corruption, the injustice, and eventually, the suffering of the one who healed him and threats against those who followed him. Considering all he'd seen in just one week's time, it would be tempting to go back to the old, familiar life, taking whatever scraps it gave you. It would seem easier to pull that tattered cloak over his eyes and pretend he never saw anything. I know I've been tempted by far less.

The truth is, once you've seen something, you can't unsee it. You can't return to being blind. You can only pretend you didn't see. And that brings its own misery.

IV.

When Jesus asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" It might seem easy to answer, but are we ready for what's next?

Imagine you ask God for healing in a broken relationship. It's easy to ask for healing, but often, healing is on the other side of forgiveness and vulnerability. What if what comes next is the need to let go of long-held resentment, admit your faults, and open your heart again? What if seeing means you refuse to dismiss and demonize those you disagree with? Healing broken relationships takes courage because it strips away the comfort of staying guarded, but if you want to heal, discomfort may come next before you can get to healing.

Or think about those who long for truth in their lives. Perhaps you ask Jesus to help you discern what is right and true. But seeing truth often demands humility and the willingness to admit when we've been wrong or worse, when we've been complicit in harm. Are we ready for the responsibility that comes with this new seeing?

Perhaps you ache to be set free, exhausted by the things that hold our lives captive. But what if freedom can only come when you choose to let go of harmful addictions or attitudes or the need to please others, be in control, or prove your worth? Are you ready to see how certain ways we live and believe are life-taking rather than life-giving? Are we willing to toss those old, familiar cloaks aside to follow Jesus?

We pray for peace in our lives and the world. But real peace, the peace Jesus gives, often comes with a cost. It might mean stepping out of silence and comfort to confront injustice. It might mean being a peacemaker in conflict situations, speaking truth to power, or risking the loss of status or security. Peace isn't the absence of conflict; it's the presence of justice, which isn't easy to seek. Are you willing for Jesus to open your eyes to this?

V.

We don't know the rest of Bartimaeus's story, but because he is named, distinct from the other healings in the gospels, it is likely he was a leader in the early Jerusalem church, witnessing the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. If we listen closely, we can hear him testifying loudly to anyone who will listen, "I once was blind, but now I see." And it was all worth it.

Bartimaeus tossed aside his old life and stepped boldly into the unknown with a faith that trusts not in outcomes but in the One who draws near, hears our cries, and opens our eyes to new possibilities and new ways of living.

Whether today finds you in the dust or the darkness, among the discouraged or the deconstructed, may we toss everything aside and run to the One who hears our cries and asks, **"What do you want me to do for you?"** I wonder what our answer would be. And I wonder if we're ready for what comes next ... for the glory of God and the good of the world.

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All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.