

The Final Miracle of Mercy

Scripture: Mark 10:46–52

Code: 41-55

In order to keep moving through the gospel of Mark, we are going to look at that tonight. We haven't done this before but we will probably do this in the next six months as we go through 2011 because I have as a goal to finish the gospel of Mark in the summer, early summer, I hope, and that will be to finish the entire New Testament that we've been working on for over 40 years. So that will be...that will be a monumental day.

And by the way, it might be of interest to you that our friend Ian Murray, the...really the premier biographer has written so many wonderful biographies, has chosen to write a little bit more about the history of Grace Church and that should be released in the summer about the time we finish. So it might be a fitting exclamation point, or question mark at the end. We'll see how that works out. So we'll move in that direction.

Mark chapter 10 and the last section in that chapter, the final paragraph, verses 46 through 52. "Then they came to Jericho and as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples in a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on Me." Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more. Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man saying to him, 'Take courage, stand up, He is calling for you.' Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' And the blind man said to him, 'Rabboni, I want to regain my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go, your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road."

If you were with us this morning, you will remember verse 36 where Jesus says to James and John, and their mother, "What do you want Me to do for you?" So these two are the "what do you want Me to do for you" passages. This man wants nothing so exalted and elevated as to sit on the right hand, or the left hand of Jesus in glory. He just wants to see.

Jesus did not meet the request of James and John. He said that was in the determination of the Father and those whom the Father has prepared that glory for. But Jesus did respond positively to the desire of this blind man. This is the final healing...the final healing, the final miracle really in Jesus' ministry. Oh there is the cursing of the fig tree, recorded in Matthew 21, but we could hardly count that as a positive miracle. This is the final miracle, final healing. Jesus' miracles began way in the north in the town of Nazareth, or the little village next to Nazareth called Cana where He turned water into wine...first recorded in John chapter 2. It ends here a few years later with giving sight to the blind. It all began in the north in Galilee in a really insignificant little village in the foothills atop the sea of Galilee and it ended in the south in Judea in a very historically significant town in the lowlands atop the dead sea. From the north to the south, from the high country to the low country, and all in between, Jesus did miracles. It is fitting that the first and the last miracles bracket the land of Israel which He filled with miracles in virtually every town and village. He did signs and wonders and mighty

deeds displaying His deity, His compassion, and His power, and all the while preaching salvation and entrance into His glorious Kingdom.

This miracle puts the final period on this marvelous, unparalleled display. Through the years since His baptism at the Jordan River, He has filled the land of Israel with supernatural power displays. He has demonstrated power over disease, over demons, over death, over nature. He has shown that He has absolute authority over everything, including that which was most sacred to, the Jews, Sabbath and even the Law. To an open mind, He must be designated as He claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah.

There is, however, one more miracle to come, a separate one from all these that He did on behalf of others, and that is His own resurrection from the dead. But for now, it is time for the servant of Jehovah to become the suffering servant, it is time for the anointed one to become the rejected one, it is time for the sovereign Lord to become the sacrificial Lamb. It is time to go to Jerusalem for the last time, as He said back in verses 32 to 34, it is time to face the hatred and animosity of the leaders of Israel, the rejection by the nation, and be crucified by the Godless Romans at the will of the Jewish religious leaders. Rejection is set, death is inescapable, the shallow crowd that hails Him when He comes into the city is so fickle that a few days later they're screaming for His execution. Israel is now entered into the greatest period of its apostasy in history. It is so apostate, so ungodly as to be pleased to execute its own Lord and Messiah. This, however, is according to God's pre-determined plan, but doesn't lessen the guilt of anyone involved in rejecting Christ.

From here on, from Jericho on in the final week, there are no stories of conversion. There are no stories of salvation in Jerusalem in these last days. There are, however, at the very end, two unique conversions that occur right when Christ is crucified. The thief and the Centurion. But in the last week before His death, no conversions are recorded. This is a tragic, sad drama of suffering all the way to the cross. His days before the cross are filled with sorrow and there is never really a joyful note. Once His entry is finished, it is all sadness and grief. Only a few days left, really, and He will be executed.

We'll begin that journey with Him. When I come back in a couple of weeks, I'll be gone for one Sunday, and we'll start with chapter 11, the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. And then we'll live again the Passion week with Him. He is now on the way to Jerusalem, the last stop is Jericho and in Jericho, two wonderful salvation stories take place. Two stories that stand in stark contrast to national rejection in bleak contrast to the unbelief and hatred of the believers and the people, two...two prodigals, you might say, come home, two lost souls are found, two darkened minds are enlightened, two sinners are saved, two outcasts are reconciled.

One is the story of the blind. The other is the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector, for he too encountered Jesus in Jericho and that is recorded for us in Luke 19 verses 1 to 10. Mark doesn't tell us that story, but it is Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus who are the last two trophies of sovereign saving grace until the cross and then there is a thief and a Centurion. It's an illustration, isn't it, and a reminder of what our Lord said about the narrow gate and few there be that find it. And it is also remarkably an indication of the fact that there aren't many noble, not many mighty, but it's the poor and the outcasts and the nobodies and the nothings, all four of them fit into that category, a blind beggar, a tax collector, a thief and a despised Roman. These are the only shining moments. It's as if they make an exclamation point on the divine rejection of the Jews. The hypocritical hoopla that will occur when He comes into the city is just that, superficial and hypocritical.

We really need to cherish these stories of conversion before the cross, and even the two at the cross. And we are given the opportunity to cherish this story in a special way because it is repeated in the gospel record both by Matthew and Luke as well as Mark.

There's only one way to look at the story and that's to break it into the two parts and that goes along the line of the two main characters. First we meet the blind man, and then we meet the Savior. Let's look at verse 46.

"Then they came to Jericho," that's all that needs to be said. Jesus had been ministering in Perea, which is a region east of the Jordan and down in the south. And he would keep moving down in Perea, eventually would cross the Jordan, just north of the Dead Sea. And the first town He would come to of any note would be Jericho. And from Jericho it is a direct ascent right up the hill to Jerusalem, they came to Jericho.

A great crowd is with Him, that is indicated to us here in the text. They are following along a large crowd, Matthew tells us the same thing, a large crowd, a great multitude. And it's a combination of people who are following Jesus because they know about Him, and just the mass of humanity flowing down to the south to ascend to Jerusalem because they want to be there for the Passover. Many of them would cross the Jordan to go to the east, and cross the Jordan back again to avoid Samaria. Our Lord has concluded a brief preaching/teaching/healing mission in Perea and now crosses over the Jordan, probably by some kind of a ferry or a raft. The river would have been swollen at this time of the year. Passover is springtime. And the snow would have melted high in the mountains of Lebanon and filled up that lake of Galilee and it would have overflowed down the Jordan River and they would have crossed. They came to the city of Jericho known as the city of Palms...city of Palms, about a six-hour walk straight up to Jerusalem.

Well known in New Testament times, well known, formidable place, a city fed by springs, had a lot of water even though it's desert. Plenty of water piped in if there wasn't enough there in the springs. They piped enough in to irrigate that place and to turn that place into a garden. It had a large population because of the availability of water. It was filled, they tell us the story it was filled with Palm trees, it was filled with fruit trees of every kind. It was home to a bush known as the Balsam Bush that supplied juice that was used as a medicine and found only there. The climate was warm, obviously. Josephus says, "Linen clothes were worn even when there was snow in Jerusalem." Mark tells us that it was not yet the season for figs in the eleventh chapter of verse 13 in Jerusalem, but it would have been the season for figs ripening already in Jericho. Almonds flourished there, we are told. And rose plants. It was really a garden. The city given by Marc Antony to Cleopatra, according to Josephus, in the place where Herod built a fort and a palace in which he finally died. So it was a magnificent place.

But it's not just the Jericho of the New Testament that we know about, the Jericho of the Old Testament is pretty famous, isn't it? We all know the story recorded for us in Joshua chapter 6 about the destruction of Jericho when the walls came falling down, when the Israelites marched around it for seven days. It had a well-known history to the Jews. It had recovered from those darker days and was a flourishing, flourishing place.

So in verse 46 they came to Jericho. Now Mark says He was leaving Jericho. Luke says He was

approaching Jericho. That's quite interesting. Matthew says He was going out of Jericho. What's going on here?

Well the best way to understand that is that those references can be taken to mean He was in the general vicinity of Jericho. He was going in and out of Jericho because He was not intending to stay very long, although He did stay long enough to spend an evening and a night in the house of Zacchaeus, the tax collector to whom He brought salvation. Whether He was at this point coming in before the incident with Zacchaeus, or going out after the incident with Zacchaeus, one can't be dogmatic about but safe to say in any case it is in the vicinity of Jericho where this happens. And that place would have been a buzz, filled with all kinds of sites and sounds and smells, even memories for Jesus because very near Jericho was an area called The Devastation...The Devastation, the very place where our Lord had been taken by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil.

With Jesus coming into town and all the pilgrims pouring through Jericho on their way to Jerusalem, it would have been the parade that never ended and the towns people must have lined the streets the way Zacchaeus did who climbed up in a tree to see that Jesus was coming. If he knew He was coming, surely everybody else knew He was coming. And so the crowd swells with curiosity seekers and the streets are lined with people. It is Passover excitement elevated and intensified because the one who could be the Messiah has come to our town. At the very top, by the way, of the hill from Jericho straight up, just before you go into Jerusalem is a little village called Bethany and not long before this, Jesus had gone to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead.

Do you think the word got down to Jericho? It surely did. Everybody who went from Jerusalem through Bethany must have been told about the resurrection of Lazarus and carried the message to the next town going down, which would be Jericho. It was because He raised Lazarus from the dead that the Jewish leaders decided they had to kill Him. So He is the focus of immense attention, to put it mildly. The whole city must be lined, the dirt road that goes through there just amassed with humanity wanting to see Him. And there is that short, stubby, little, despised tax collector among the crowd and Jesus brings him by grace into the Kingdom.

But here, the story focuses on a blind beggar, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, a blind beggar sitting by the road. That would be a good spot for a beggar, don't you think? By the road because so many people are coming by. If you want to be a successful beggar, go where the people are, go where the crowds are. There were many, many beggars in Israel, many of them, according to Matthew 9, Jesus healed many of them, this is one among many and blindness was his problem. That's what made him a beggar. He is blind, we don't know how, we don't know when. We don't know whether he was born blind like the man in John 9, or whether blindness came upon him from some kind of unsanitary conditions, some kind of accident, some kind of fight, some kind of infectious organism, we don't know what made him blind. But we do know this, that blind people were pretty much reduced to begging because if you were blind, in their theology, you were under divine judgment. You were blind because God was punishing you. Remember John 9, the man who was born blind, who sinned, this man or his parents? So here is this man who would be alienated, ostracized, a man under a divine curse by their assessment, begging.

By the way, just as a footnote. When Jesus called the Pharisees blind leaders of the blind, that was a severe slur on them cause the blind were deemed to be cursed. Matthew, by the way, tells us that there was another blind man there, a second blind man. Not surprising, since they would have found each other and tried to help each other. Mark only focuses in on one of them, Bartimaeus which

means son of Timaeus. And Luke only mentions one, the one who had a name. Why? Why does it give us his name? I think maybe a good answer to that is the fact that it is very possible that this man, Bartimaeus, became a well-known believer, a well-known person in the early church, by the time Mark wrote his gospel and this was a way for Mark to tell the conversion story of a familiar believer...Bartimaeus.

He's at the bottom, by the way, socially, obviously below the peasants, below the unclean and degraded sinners are the cursed. He's just a hair above a tax collector. And again this is such a rebuke, such a rebuke to religion, elite religiosity that the Lord saves the scum.

Luke tells us in Luke 18:6 that Bartimaeus hears the crowd going by and he says, "What's happening?" And somebody responds and says, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." They refer to a man from Nazareth, that's who they saw, a man from Nazareth. Nothing abnormal about that. There must have been many men from Nazareth pilgrimaging to Jerusalem. However, this man has a far different perception of who this is. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, which is what they said, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David." He began to scream. Mark uses the verb *keradzo* to shout, it's a very strong word. It is used in Mark 5 to speak of insane epileptics, demon-possessed people. It's used also in the Scripture to speak of Revelation 12, birth pain and the screaming of a woman....strong. He begins to scream in anguish and desperation and he doesn't say, "Jesus of Nazareth," he says, "Jesus, Son of David."

He tries to be heard over the noise of the crowd, din of the mob with all its myriad conversations, all the talk of the people, all the disturbances of motion and commotion. He shouts, "Jesus," that's the name that everybody knew, that was the name He was given at birth because He would save His people from their sins, and it meant Jehovah saves...Son of David. That is a messianic title and he knew exactly what it was. The Messiah was to be the heir of David's throne, according to 2 Samuel chapter 7. The Messiah would receive the Kingdom that had been promised to a Son of David. David's greater son would be the King who would bring the fulfillment of all the promises both to David and to Abraham. This was the most common Jewish title for the Messiah, Son of David...Son of David...Son of David. That is why you have the genealogy in Matthew 1 of Joseph, it shows He comes from the family of David. That is why you have the genealogy of Mary in Luke, to show that she comes from the line of David. Both His earthly father and His true mother were in the line of David. He is truly a Son of David. More than that, He is THE Son of David. That is messianic title at its purest. The angel says to Mary, "He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His Kingdom will have no end," Luke 1.

So what is this man saying? He is acknowledging Jesus as Messiah. Son of David is synonymous with Messiah. Check Matthew 21 verses 9, 15 and 16 and you will see the synonymous character of the term Christ and Son of David. And what does he want? Look at his request. "Have mercy on me, pity me."

So here is a man who recognizes Jesus as the true Messiah. And here is a man who knows what he needs and it is mercy...it is mercy. And while this is a typical cry of afflicted people, certainly it's a true and pure cry of this man from the heart, "Pity me." He's not deserving of anything and he knows it. He would have understood the theology of his people as well and thought himself cursed by God because he was blind. He knows he needs mercy. He knows he is a sinner. His blindness aids him in

facing that.

And by the way, to show you how he would be treated in that society, his cry elicits no sympathy from the crowd, none...none at all. Verse 48, "Many were sternly telling him to be quiet." That was the attitude of the people. Be quiet. Quiet that man down. Sternly telling him, forcefully telling him. Why? He was a nuisance. They had disdain for beggars because of what I said. He was an outcast. But it had no effect on him. He was persistent. I really believe the Spirit of God is drawing him. He kept crying, verse 48, all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

There's only one way to really understand this man. He believes everything he's heard about Jesus and he's heard a lot, enough to believe He is the Messiah. He understands his own condition and the wretchedness of that condition. He is an outcast. He is a sinner. It is hammered home to him day after day after day as he feels the disdain and the despising of the people who pass by. He couldn't see Jesus. He couldn't see the dusty stranger who was not clothed in royal robes, who did not carry a scepter, who was not ascending a throne, but he knew who He was. And he refuses to be beaten back in silence. He needs mercy and he will fight for that mercy and he knows that Jesus is a merciful Messiah. I think his faith had risen to the highest possible level, the highest possible level opened to him. His heart had seen the light before his eyes ever saw the light. His heart had seen Jesus before his eyes ever saw Jesus. He is a picture much like Luke 8, a man pounding his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That's how he saw himself. And he knew the mercy of God was to come to him through the Messiah who was Jesus.

We don't know how he got all that information. But we see a believing heart. So we meet Bartimaeus. The story turns in verse 49 and the focus is on Jesus. From the blind beggar to the supernatural healer.

Verse 49, "And Jesus stopped." And I just need to say, if you see anything through all the years of studying the gospels, you see the compassion of God toward people, demonstrated in Jesus Christ. Compassionate at every turn. He stopped and He said, "Call him here...Call him here. Don't silence him, call him here bring him to me."

In fact, Luke 18:40 puts it this way, "He commanded that he be brought to Him." He commanded it. "And so, they called the blind man," in verse 49, and they said to him, 'Take courage stand up, He's calling for you.'"

Now all of a sudden they change their tune. Jesus' response to the man changes their attitude for the moment. Their curiosity drives them to let this thing happen and see what could be made of it. Maybe they'll see another miracle.

How does he respond? Verse 50, "Throws aside his cloak and jumps up and came to Jesus." Somebody had to bring him, obviously. And when he comes to Jesus, verse 51 says, "And answering him, Jesus said, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'" You know, that is so connected to what we heard this morning, isn't it? What do you want Me to do for you? Oh, I want you to elevate me, James and John, we want to be on the right and the left hand of the glory. We want to...we want You to put us in a position where everybody serves us, where everybody honors us, where everybody elevates us, everybody lifts us up.

Here is a completely different attitude. What do you want me to do for you? The high King of heaven, the God of very God incarnate becomes the true servant and the true slave of a sinner, of a debased, lowly outcast. This is the kind of thing Jesus taught the disciples, as we saw this morning, isn't it? You want to be great in the Kingdom? Then be the servant. Do you want to be first in the Kingdom? Then be the slave of all. Here is Jesus taking that position. This man only wants mercy. Unlike James and John who thought they needed elevation, this man knows he deserves nothing. He's not laying claim on anything. Mercy means to give what people don't deserve. And he said, the blind man did, "Rabboni, which means Master...Master." And according to Luke 18 he also said, "Lord, Master...Lord," wow, now this theology is starting to fill out here. Lord and Master, and he uses a form of the word *kurios*, he recognizes him as his Master and his Lord. And yet Jesus is taking the role of a servant and a slave. What can I do for you? I mean, compassion and sympathy and lowliness and tenderness and kindness and affection and grace and mercy, the King does what the beggar asks him to do.

What do you want? "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight. I want to regain my sight." According to Matthew's account, Jesus then reached over and touched his eyes. And according to Luke 18:42 He said, "Receive your sight." He so often healed with a touch, didn't He? He touched him and said, "Receive your sight."

What happened? Verse 52, "Go, your faith has made you well. Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road." This really is a model of a conversion pre-cross, a model of a conversion pre-cross. Do you think there was any doubt in his mind that this was his Lord? No. His Master? No. His Messiah? No. That he was a sinner? No. That he needed mercy? No. There was no doubt in his mind that here was the dispenser of mercy needed by this desperate man. This then is more than a healing, my friend, more than a healing. When Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well," He uses a verb *sozo*, from which we get saved. It means to save. Your faith has saved you.

There is a word strictly referring to healing, *iaomai*, that's not the word here. It's the word *sozo*, your faith has saved you. And we know that that encompasses the healing but also the salvation. The healing is indicated and he regained his sight and the salvation is indicated in he began following Him on the road. The evidence of the healing was obvious, he saw, 20-20 instantaneously. The evidence of salvation was following him. He had received mercy and he gives the sign of a true conversion, he followed.

By the way, Matthew focuses on the two of them and it says, "They followed." And so his friend followed also.

So he was there when he got to the top of the hill. You know, there must have been a...there must have been a literally stunning experience going on in his mind as he comes out of his blindness into sight and out of his sin into salvation and walks with Jesus to the triumphal entry. And he's there through the week and he's there after the resurrection. And very likely he's there in the church and that's why he's named, and that's why his story is told.

Who knows? My guess is he was one of the 120 in the Upper Room at Pentecost, a lifetime of being an outcast and now he's on the inside. By the way, I have to add this. Luke 18:43 says, "He was following Him on the road glorifying God." So he has become a worshiper, not just a submissive obedience but worship. Can you grasp the picture here? A man who can't go anywhere, who is stuck

as a beggar because he can't see, who is hopeless unless Christ comes to him. Is this not the picture of every sinner...hopeless, sitting by the road, if per chance the healer, Savior might come by? Jesus went to the bottom of Israel, to the lowlands of Jericho to claim a tax collector and a beggar and his friend for the Kingdom. Really stunning event.

And the people saw it all. And according to Luke 18:43 it says, "When all the people saw it, they gave praise to God." What else could you do? How else could you explain it? I think this is part of what escalated the event when He finally arrived at Jerusalem. It was so public, it was so open, it was so undeniable...surely contributed to the praise that occurred immediately after.

So many lessons here. You see the Lord's profound compassion. You see that He never ignores the cry of a true heart of repentance and desperate sinners who know they're worthy of nothing will always gain a hearing with Him. You learn again what we've seen all through His ministry that He has the power to heal disease, but far more importantly, He has the power to save sinners, turn them in to obedient followers who live lives of true worship.

That's why we're here tonight because we have been approached by Jesus somewhere along the road in our lives, in our blindness, in our desperation He passed by and our hearts were awakened and we cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me." And He heard our cry, didn't He? And all of this is possible because He went all the way to Jerusalem, all the way to the cross and out the other side of the opened tomb.

Father, we thank You for the record again of this wonderful occasion. We are so blessed to have Your Word and all the rich, wonderful, detail that it provides for us, so cohesive, so clear, so true, so consistent. We've seen again a picture here of what salvation is. We're all like this man, hopelessly blind, unable to seek You, You have to seek us and find us along the dusty road of life and hear our cry and awaken our heart and awaken our faith. But You have the power to do that and the compassion to do that. We bless You and we know that all of this is possible, even as it was for this man and his friend because of the cross and the sacrifice that You made there. You had blind Bartimaeus' sins imputed to You when You suffered under the wrath of God at Calvary, and all of ours, and all of those of all who have ever believed. You bore them all and You did it for the joy that was set before You and the joy was to please the Father and to have the worship of saved sinners forever. We thank You, Lord, that You number us with those beggars who needed mercy and found it through Your compassion and through Your cross.

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