

What Do You Want Me To Do for You?

I hadn't always been blind. I wasn't born that way. I knew what it was like to be able to see. To see the sun rise. The cotton clouds in the sky. The tiny, pin-prick stars at night. To not just hear people's voices, but to see their faces. You can learn so much by looking at people's faces. Their eyes, especially. Tiny, pin prick windows into their souls.

It happened when I was a child. I had had some prolonged illness. And one day I began noticing my vision becoming narrow, like looking through a tunnel, or a small hole between two rocks, and within a couple of days, it was gone. It was that fast.

I had to learn to live life without eyesight. How to find my way; how to avoid being trampled in the streets; how to get myself dressed. My mother helped me with that; for years she helped. But sooner or later I had to learn to do it on my own. I had to learn to do everything on my own.

My Father, Timaeus was . . . is . . . a carpenter. He had been looking forward to me learning the trade, working alongside him, and one day taking it over completely. After I lost my eyesight, he had no one to take it over. And so, he just kept going. He grew old, and tired; his body has slowly given out, but still, he keeps going. I guess he has no choice.

I didn't either, of course. Since I could no longer help him in his shop, I had to . . . well, start begging. I had to become a beggar. A blind beggar. That's who I became.

There's not much to it. You just sit. On the side of the road. With your cloak spread out, to catch the coins. All day. Every day. "You make a fine beggar, Bartimaeus," my father would sometimes say to me. I supposed he meant it to be encouraging. But it couldn't help but hear the deep disappointment in his voice.

I supposed if you're going to be a blind beggar, Jericho isn't a bad place to be. It's busy with commerce, sun-up to sun-down. Situated smack dab on a major travel route, from Galilee in the north, to Jerusalem, in the south. So I guess you could say I was doing just fine, at my little spot on the roadside. People were usually generous. I could have stayed there the rest of my life, and I would have been okay, in a sense.

But what do you do all day long when you're a blind beggar? What is the purpose of your life? What meaning does it have?

I did the only thing I could do. I listened. People talk while they walk. Of course, they were always walking by, so I never heard entire conversations, only snippets, ever changing, sun-up to sun-down. I had to fill in the blanks, to make things up, to imagine what people's lives are like. Some voices sounded happy; others sad, or angry. Or, scared. You pretty much hear every emotion and feeling there is.

Something else you hear, of course, is news. And so I had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. For two years at least, I had been hearing about him. That he was a miracle worker. A healer. A teacher. A rabble rouser. He definitely made some people angry—you could hear that in their voices. But to others, he gave hope—you could hear that too.

I had heard, already the day before, that he and his disciples were walking on the road, from up north to down south, probably going to Jerusalem. Bit by bit, the buzz grew, like a wildfire grows when a wind is blowing. The next day, I figured that it would be the day when he would pass by. And I couldn't help but think, maybe he could help me. Maybe he could heal me. Heal my eyes. Give me my sight back. Rumor was he had healed at least one other blind person,

so why not me? [Laughs derisively] Yeah right, Bartimaeus! Along with all the other desperate needs and wants in the world. As if mine was any more important than any others.

The news of his approach kept building and building—there's nothing wrong with my ears, by the way. "He's coming! He's just around the bend in the road! I can see him!" Yeah, well, I can't. (I hate it when people talk so flippantly about sight. Assuming that we all have it. When clearly, we don't.)

Then I started to hear people calling out to him. "Jesus! Jesus!" And all of a sudden, I found myself doing it too. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Son of David? Why did I call him that? Did I realize at the time what those words mean? That they are a title? That they basically mean "king?" Not just king, but the king. The long-awaited king. The Messiah. The one foretold in Scripture. I mean, yes, this Jesus of Nazareth was clearly something special—a teacher and healer, yes. But the Messiah?

And why did I call out, "Have mercy on me"? I mean, that's what you say to God. That's the kind of thing I say only at night, in my prayers. What was I expecting from Jesus of Nazareth? What was I wanting?

A bunch of the people around me—my friends, mostly—tried to shush me. "Bartimaeus, be quiet! You're embarrassing yourself!" But for some reason that just made me want to call out to him even louder; in fact, it made me mad. I mean, why shouldn't I? I'm no less a person than anyone else. Am I? "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

A few moments passed—they seemed to last forever—and then I heard one of my friends shouting to me again, but this time saying something completely different, and unexpected, and I would even say shocking. "Bartimaeus, he is calling you. Get up. Take heart." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I mean, dare I believe what I was hearing? But once again, I couldn't stop myself. I jumped up. I cast aside my cloak. I ran—well, kinda stumbled, actually—in the direction I thought he might be. I crashed into some of people. "Hey, watch out!" some said. Watch out; right! I can't see! Can't you see that?!

But someone grabbed me by the arm, and brought me to a standstill, just held me there. And then I heard his voice.

Now, I have heard a lot of voices, since I became blind. But I've never heard a voice like this. "What do you want me to do for you?" What do I . . . what do I want him to do for me? It's obvious, of course. I mean, I'm a blind beggar! But it was as if he was telling me that I could have anything I wanted. A one shot deal, sure . . . but I could ask for anything I want. "My teacher," I said (more properly, this time). "Let me see again." I wanted my sight back, of course. But you know, I felt like I was asking Jesus for something more. Something bigger. Way bigger.

"Go," he said. "Your faith has made you well." And then it was as if someone had lit a lamp amidst my darkness. A whole bunch of lamps. I could see! No, not just see. I could see!

"Go," he said. But I didn't. I stayed. I stayed with him. I followed him.

And I'm still following him. Where? I don't know. Jerusalem, I suppose. But I don't care. I'll follow him anywhere. Because he is the merciful Son of David. He is the Messiah. He is God, in human form. And what I want now, more than anything, is simply to be with him.

What will you say, when he asks you? "What do you want me to do for you"? Maybe you should think about it. I don't know that you'll get exactly what you ask for. But I promise you this: you'll get so much more. And anyway, he's asking.