



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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SERMON – 22<sup>ND</sup> PENTECOST

MARK 10:46-52

OCTOBER 24, 2021

## “WHAT WOULD YOU ASK FOR?”

Of the cities named in the Bible, Jericho is likely, after Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the most famous. Its fame comes from its demise, sad to say. When its walls came a tumbling down at the command of Joshua and the blare of the priest's horns it was destined for bible immortality. That's the way it goes with history – the spectacular gets the notoriety. But how many of you, in a show of hands, can tell me what city little Zacchaeus that cheatin tax collector hailed from? On the road to what city did a “good Samaritan” do his good deed, and likely house his wounded, destitute roadside “neighbor”?

And blind Bartimaeus who muscled his way to the front of the crowd, determined to be seen by Jesus even if he couldn't see Jesus, continuously blaring “*Son of David have mercy on me*” even as he was continuously told to keep quiet – giving, I'll bet, those ancient priest's ram's horns a run for their money on the decibel scale. Three stories of faith beside those famous “*walls of Jericho.*”

In Joshua 6:26, the culmination of the story of Jericho's destruction, it says “*cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city.*” Yet rebuild it many men did – it stands to this day. In Jesus' time it was a commuter suburb of sorts – housing thousands of priests who worked a month at a time at the temple in Jerusalem a few miles away. It was a summer residence of King Herod who made it into a resort city for the fine folks of Jerusalem – complete with swimming pools. It's no wonder the likes of Zacchaeus hung out there – it's hard to say you haven't got the funds to pay your taxes when you're vacationing with a king!

In our story, Jericho is the setting of our Lord's final days - from there he traveled to Jerusalem, the Good Shepherd re-tracing the steps of the Good Samaritan perhaps, escorted by shouts of “*Hosanna to the Son of David*” – possibly with a fellow named Bartimaeus in the lead! And why not – of all the folks in the gospel of Mark who meet Jesus, Bartimaeus alone seems to have understood who he was –Israel's Messiah. Such for the symbolism of this story – it's rich to be sure, but what does it have to do with us?

The story of Bartimaeus makes one wonder – what do we want Jesus for? If I were your Southern Baptist neighbor, I might shout a greeting your way and ask you what the good Lord is up to in your life. Lutherans would if we had one handy, or even better had it memorized, might respond with what Luther teaches in the Catechisms – we'd say God has given me my life and provides daily bread in countless ways, we'd say Jesus has redeemed me a lost and condemned sinner, and that the Holy Spirit has gifted me with my faith. Correct answers by the way, and they highlight the beauty of our confessional tradition and that precious catechism.

But the story of Bartimaeus, if you pardon the phrase, begs the question – what sort of things do you ask God for – what should the church ask God for – what sort of prayer, if Bartimaeus cry be considered a prayer, and why wouldn't it, does God answer? The will of God, as asked for in the Lord's Prayer is that God gives us his Holy Spirit, so we believe his word. The kingdom of God, as asked for in the same prayer, is for the strengthening of that same faith that it be lived as a godly life. If today, Jesus were in your very presence what would you ask of him? There might be a hundred good responses to that. We think Bartimaeus request a no-brainer, of course a blind man would want to see.

But what of the others in the crowd that day – folks with 20-20 vision, ears that could pick up the sound of a gentle breeze, limbs that could carry them through a long work day, speech as clear as a whistle – whose kids were all fairly healthy, spouse loyal and in good shape, parents comfortable in their old age, at least one change of clothes in the closet, a decent store of grain back at home and the funds to buy whatever they didn't themselves grow or raise. What would those others have asked for? Given that the foregoing describes most of us in this room, it does beg the question, what do you ask for when you in a sense, you don't really need anything?

Well, you could pray for others who don't have everything – there are lots of them in this world, the poor, the abused, the bullied, the persecuted, the grieving, the dying. You could pray as we often do for good, or at least better government, though for all our complaining in our country – it could be a lot worse. You could pray for those who don't see Jesus, or see him clearly, or don't like what they see in him. I doubt there's a person in this room who doesn't have such person they know, and in a lot of cases know really well, who would fit that description.

What would you ask, what should you ask? In Mark 10:35-36, Jesus' disciples James and John come to him with demand – call it a prayer if you want, it wasn't a very good one, but regardless, they say "*Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.*" I'll say this for the brothers – they were bold. Jesus says, "*what do you want me to do for you?*" Where have we heard that phrase? James and John wanted to sit at Jesus right and left hand in his glory – they wanted to see themselves in places of honor.

To the same question Bartimaeus said "*I want to see.*" He wanted his sight – we have to grant that. But this story escorts us immediately to the telling of the passion of Jesus, Palm Sunday is right around the corner, and it leaves us with a beautiful example of what every Christian ought to pray for – Bartimaeus words are the ageless prayer of the church – one that will only be answered fully at the end of the age – '*Lord Jesus have mercy on us...Lord Jesus, we want to see you.*'

Consider this...the very first thing Bartimaeus ever saw in his life was the face of his healer and forgiver – the very first thing you will see when you close your eyes in death. "*Jesus, have mercy on me... Jesus I want to see you.*" There are lots of absolutely wonderful things to pray for in this life – and I hope you do pray for them, but perhaps our confessor Bartimaeus has given us the very words with which always to start. In Jesus name...AMEN