

“Spiritual Sight”

Job 42:5-6, Psalm 34:1-8, 22, & 126, Mark 1:15, 10:26-27 & 46-52,
& Hebrews 7:23-25

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Are you able to ask for help? When you receive help are you able to rejoice in that help, not feeling obligated to help in return or repay your helper? Are you smart enough to know when you need help and brave enough to ask for it?

Mark 10:46b-47 NRSV “As Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus was physically blind however he had exceptional spiritual sight. The gospel of Mark begins with **Mark 1:15b “Jesus announced. The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe the Good News.”** Throughout the gospel of Mark, almost everyone is spiritually blind, the disciples and the religious leaders are blind. Before Mark tells of Jesus, passion, Jesus’ last week in human flesh on earth, Mark reveals the great spiritual sight of Bartimaeus. He knew he needed help and was brave enough to ask for help. The Good News is we are saved by grace. Two weeks ago, we explored the life of a rich person who thought he could save himself through wealth and keeping the commandments. Exasperated by attempts to earn salvation the disciples ask Jesus, **Mark 10:26b-27 “Then who in the world can be saved? Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”** God’s grace is great enough to save everyone. Believe the Good News! Bartimaeus believes the good news. He is seeing God’s grace. He knows he is a sinner in need of help. He knows he needs God’s mercy to save him.

The disciples spent three years with Jesus yet were still spiritually blind. How did Bartimaeus get his spiritual sight? Not by following Jesus. Not by worshipping in the temple, he was considered unclean and prohibited from enter the temple grounds. Not by giving or serving, he was a blind beggar. His spiritual sight was a gift from God, grace, mercy.

Bartimaeus acknowledges his need for help and Jesus as his savior. He called out. **Mark 10:47c “Jesus, Son of David”** a messianic reference, meaning savior. Those there that day would have heard Bartimaeus’ words as “Jesus our savior”.

Being able to ask for help begins when one acknowledges they have a problem. The more we try to hide our sin. The more sinful we become. The more we try to compensate for our sin with good works the more frustrated we become. When we admit we are sinful, when we embrace Jesus as a savior, we are saved by grace, then we are set free to love extravagantly. This is the spiritual sight behind Bartimaeus words. **Mark 10:47b-48 “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

Many ask for help as a last resort. Culture encourages us to be fiercely individualistic, to pull ourselves up by our boot straps and to be self-sufficient. There are few stories and role models illustrating how to ask for help. Our, “I can do it myself” attitude makes us unaware that we truly do need help. Many are afraid to ask for help. Afraid that asking for help will make us indebted to our helper. Afraid to ask for help, because it reveals weaknesses, our struggles, our problems. How many blessings have you missed, because you did not ask for help?

Bartimaeus was not afraid to ask for help. He is our role model in the gospel of Mark. A person who admits they cannot save themselves, so they ask God to save them.

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by without hesitation and without any sense of embarrassment, the blind man began to shout, **Mark 10:46 "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** The crowd around him thought this was scandalous and sternly ordered him to be quiet, much like we might be mortified to let the public know our problems. But Bartimaeus continued to not only ask for help but to cry out for it. Bartimaeus had great spiritual sight. Bartimaeus had faith in God's saving grace. He believed he qualified for God's help, that he was worthy of God's help; not because he was a great person, rather because he is a child of God. You, me, all of us are children of God.

Bartimaeus does not cry out, "Have mercy on me a blind man." More than physical sight he desires to savor God's grace that saves the goodness, love, and beauty of his true self, that washes away all of his imperfections and mistakes.

Mark 10:49-50 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus." Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, his only possession, his only shelter from the cold, the rain, bullying, his only way to survive spreading the cloak on the ground to catch coins. By throwing off his cloak, he becomes vulnerable, putting all his faith in Jesus, his savior. This is in stark contrast to the wealthy person earlier in this chapter who refused to give up his possessions. Soon we will learn that Bartimaeus is about to embark on a new way of life. Throwing off his cloak is symbol of his willingness to leave his old life behind.

Mark 10:51 "Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" How would you answer? Jesus just asked James and John the same question. Their answer was to sit in places of honor next to Jesus. Jesus replied that honor comes by being a servant. Twice Bartimaeus has asked for God's mercy to save him. Since all is well with his soul, he now asks for help physically. **Mark 10:51-52 "The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way."**

"Go your faith has made you well" is also what Jesus said when he healed the woman with a hemorrhage. Like Bartimaeus, she was an outcast, had little education, no money, and was excluded from religion. Both of them knew they needed help and were bold in asking Jesus for help. Both of them give us a glimpse of the future revealing that God will save all of us. God will heal all of us. Jesus will wipe away every tear.

The psalmist sang about salvation in the past tense even though it has not yet happened. **Psalm 126 NRSV "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." Psalm 34:1-8, 22 NRSV "I will bless the LORD at all times; God's praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt God's name together. I sought the LORD, and God answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to God, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear God, and delivers them. O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in God. The LORD redeems the life of God's servants; none of those who take refuge in God will be condemned."**

Hebrews proclaims that Jesus is our savior. **Hebrews 7:23-25 NRSV "Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but Jesus holds his priesthood permanently, because Jesus continues forever. Consequently Jesus is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."**

Spiritual sight sees our need for help. Sees Jesus is our savior. Sees ways to ask for help. Sees that God's grace will help us. Sees that God's grace will save us.

Job experienced tremendous suffering and loss. Job endured the misguided counsel of his friends and spiritual experts. Job endured his own quest for answers. N. T. Wright wrote, "Jesus doesn't explain why there is suffering, illness, and death in the world. Jesus brings healing and hope. Jesus doesn't allow the problem of evil to be the subject of a seminar. Jesus allows evil to do its worst to him. Jesus exhausts evil, drains evil's power, and emerges with new life." Job eventually, by God's grace, is given a new way of seeing. Job said, **Job 42:5-6 "I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees God; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."** Job finally sees that he cannot save himself. His friends cannot save him. Spiritual wisdom cannot save him. Only God can and will save him, so he despises himself, his attempts to earn salvation, to explain suffering. He admits he needs help. Apart from God, we are mere dust and ash. Job receives few answers except the greatest answer of all. God's grace will save us.

A theme throughout Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *Life Together* is our need for asking for help from God, while stressing the need to help one another in community. God will help us, until we are made whole by God's gracious help, we are to help one another.

The 92-year-old, petite, well-poised and proud lady, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock, with her hair brushed and makeup applied (even though she is legally blind), asked for help after her husband of 70 years passed away by moving to assisted living. After waiting patiently in the lobby, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, the director provided a visual description of her tiny room. "I love it," she said, smiling with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy. Surprised, the director said, "You haven't gotten to the room yet." She replied, "That doesn't have anything to do with it, happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged... it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it ... It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or I can ask for help, get out of bed, and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift. I ask God to help me make the best of every moment. I celebrate loving memories. I dream of resurrection. God is saving me!"

Mark 10:46-52 NRSV 10:46 "As Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way." Amen