

## **“Silence Is Not Always Golden”**

**Mark 10:46-52**

Preached by

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This morning our attention is drawn to one of the most startling miracles Jesus performed. I say this because the last person anyone thought Jesus would respond to that day leaving Jericho was a blind beggar others tried to silence as he called out for Jesus’ attention. Quite frankly, I believe this is why Mark included it in his account of Jesus’ public ministry. Listen as I set the scene for you.

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem to observe Passover. It was customary for crowds to gather around pilgrims as they made their journey, especially if someone in the group was teaching. Caravans became mobile classrooms, and even those unable to go to Jerusalem would walk a short distance with those who would complete the journey. Since Jesus had a reputation as a good teacher who courageously challenged the religious authorities, many walked with him and listened carefully to what he said.

Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside where Jesus’ caravan passed. When he heard that Jesus was near, he began to shout, “Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:48b) He repeated the cry for help, even though many around him tried to silence him.

Upon hearing Bartimaeus, Jesus came to a complete stop. “Call him,” he said. (Mark 10:49) The beggar wasted no time throwing off his cloak so he could run.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. “Rabbi, I want to see,” the beggar said. Jesus replied, “Go! Your faith has healed you.” Immediately, he was healed and followed Jesus with everyone else. (Mark 10:51-52)

This is one of my favorite stories in this gospel. I am not sure there is another one in Mark that better describes the differences between the way Jesus and the religious leaders of

his time shaped their public ministries. The contrasts are clearly seen here, and to see them I believe we must ask several questions.

**Why do you think Bartimaeus made a scene the day Jesus passed by and cried out so loudly?** I believe this was an indication of how desperate he was and how much confidence he had in Jesus.

Have you ever been shunned, ignored, overlooked and given the impression you were worthless? Has anything ever happened to you that helps you to identify with Bartimaeus?

In that culture, as well as ours, beggars were nobodies. The only time someone spoke to them was to remind them of their insignificance.

Do you know what rejection does to a person, and how devastating it is to their self-esteem? Do you know how it makes a person feel to realize that no one hears their cry for help? Have you ever felt that lonely and that level of despair? If you have, surely you are committed to preventing it from happening to anyone around you.

Despair, however, was not the only reason Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus. He truly believed Jesus could make a difference in his situation.

How do I know this? Look at the way he addressed Jesus that day.

“Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47)

In Mark’s gospel, Bartimaeus was the first to connect Jesus to King David, the most prominent, powerful and revered king of Israel. How interesting it is that a blind beggar could see what others could not and probably had more faith and confidence in Jesus than others did.

**Why do you think the people around Bartimaeus rebuked him and tried to silence him?** He was a nuisance. They could not hear Jesus talking for all the commotion Bartimaeus was making. Besides, they were convinced Jesus was too important or busy for Bartimaeus.

**Why do you think Jesus stopped and called for Bartimaeus?** How could the man that told the parable of the Good Samaritan do differently? In many ways, this was his moment of truth. Did he really practice what he preached? Yes he did.

Do you recall the words Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth as he began his public ministry? “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and **recovery of sight for the**

**blind**, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened upon him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Luke 4:18-21)

How could the person that spoke those words not stop to help Bartimaeus? Hearing pleas for help that others ignored was the essence of his faith.

**Why do you think Jesus healed Bartimaeus?** After all, he refused to grant James and John's request in the previous passage when he asked them the same question he asked Bartimaeus. "What do you want me to do for you?"

It appears to me Jesus was not interested in granting requests for positions of honor and privilege. He was, however, more than eager to help people see those things that would make life better for them and all those around them.

The placement of this story in Mark's gospel is noteworthy and strategic. It comes at the end of a block of material in Mark that begins and ends with Jesus healing two blind men (Mark 8:22-10:52).

Surely, this was not coincidental, but symbolic of the disciples' inability to discern Jesus' mission and purpose. Doesn't the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples while on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem support Mark's intention?

Three times on this journey, Jesus told the disciples he would be rejected by the religious authorities, suffer and die. It appears this warning went over their heads. When he told the disciples he came to serve others, not to be served, they responded by asking for positions of honor and prestige. When he reminded them in God's kingdom the first would be last and the last first, they asked to be placed at the front of the line.

Is there any doubt the disciples were spiritually blind? I don't think so.

Perhaps Mark's readers were spiritually blind, too. In all likelihood they were focusing on the wrong things and failing to do what Jesus did during his time on earth.

**What do you think they were overlooking?** What did Mark want them to understand about ministry?

In God's kingdom, no one is to be left behind. Community embraces everyone.  
Everyone!

Repeatedly, Mark told his readers about Jesus reaching out to those others ignored, the Gerasene demoniac, the Syrophenician woman, the blind man at Bethsaida and even little children. Bartimaeus was another example of Jesus' inclusiveness and should serve as a reminder to us to leave no person behind.

This story clearly instructs us to respond to those in need, not hide them. If you can get people's attention when you need help without shouting, you are fortunate. Not everyone in our culture has a loving family or circle of friends who responds to their needs, which is all the more reason we should.

Hearing pleas for help that others try to silence should be the essence of our faith, as it was for Jesus. Rather than being annoyed by those that cry out for help, we should be upset by the actions of those who silence them. It is the responsibility of the church to be the voice for the voiceless and an advocate for the powerless.

Look carefully at 10:49. The word "call" is used three times. "Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they **called** to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's **calling** you.' "

I am confident you see the significance of Mark using this word three times. It is the duty of the church to call outsiders to the forefront and make their needs known. If we don't do it, who will? I fear no one will.

This is why we must heed the advice of Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., the former pastor of Riverside Church in New York City "We must get out of our cul-de-sacs of religiosity and join others on the road of life. We must listen for the cries of those who are hurting and go help them."

There is something else I believe Mark wanted his readers to understand. **Building caring communities would be accomplished one person at a time.**

Notice how specific Jesus was after he heard this man cry out for help. "Jesus stopped and said, 'Call **him.**' " When the man arrived, Jesus asked, "What do you want **me** to do for **you?**"

I am convinced the way we are going to make the world better is one person at a time. Don't ever think what you do to help just one person is insignificant or unimportant. It is God's design for changing the world.

Transferring what I have said today from the head to the heart is the hard part. Hearing and responding to the cries of those others try to silence require a strong level of commitment to be the presence of Christ in a blind and deaf world. Bringing their plight to the world's attention will take precious time and resources. We cannot do this without God's help; we are far too distracted and self-centered.

I believe Jesus knows this, and for this reason I hear him asking each of us, "What do you want me to do for you?" Perhaps the most appropriate response is clear vision, a warm heart and a generous spirit.

Think about it.