

What do you want me to do?

Read Luke 18:35-43

Focus: Luke 18:41, "what do you want me to do for you?"

When I was in Brazil in an earlier life, I went with my wife to a market - it was a small town racked with poverty. The market was alive with people vying for fruit, vegetable, meat - but because it was on the coast, it was right alongside a beautiful beach. So right beside the slum shanties were 3 star hotels.. Consequently, the market also sold souvenirs, clothing and trinkets. As I walked along a passage from one section of the market to another, something locked onto my wrist like a handcuff. It was the skinny, dirty, long fingers of a beggar, "Uma Cruzeiro?" he asked. I looked down and there was a man, broken, ruined. He was filthy. Dressed in rags. One eye was missing and it was a running sore with flies landing on the rim of where the eye used to be.

He was bold. He had to be in order to survive. I gave him all that was in my pocket and moved away. He was not afraid to demand money from any who passed.

That is what this man in our story was like. He was a survivor. He knew his need and wasn't afraid to announce it.

Luke begins this story by saying that Jesus was approaching Jericho. This is a symbolic for Jericho is the historic gateway into the promised land. Perhaps you remember the dramatic events that took place long before when Joshua send spies to the city to discover its weaknesses and after crossing the Jordan River, the armies of Israel took this city first. That gave Israel entry to the promised land to liberate it from the demons which had made this land their own. So now, as Joshua once had led Israel's host into the promised land, so Jesus, having crossed the Jordan, now comes to Jericho, leading a large crowd for he too must conquer the land. In fact, he came to set free not just this land but the whole world! And just as great battles awaited Joshua, so now great battles awaited Jesus - and the key one would take place in Jerusalem, the city of God.

This clearly was on Jesus' mind for in vs 31 - 33, he had spoken of it again. People heard him and they were excited. They believed that soon Jesus would take up the royal mantle and establish the great messianic kingdom. The next chapter describes Jesus entry into Jerusalem riding a donkey and the people cried, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (19:38)

But first he comes to Jericho. As he approached the city, a blind man was there by the side of the road. Where bad men rule, the people suffer. When Satan rules, men become beggars. If it is so at the entry point to the promised land, what will it be like at the centre? This is an ominous indication of what awaited Jesus. Satan's power is great for the people suffer much. A terrible battle awaited him.

The blind beggar hears that there is a crowd coming down the road so he was asking people what was happening. Finally someone gave him an answer - perhaps he had to snap at someone's ankle to get their attention and to force the information from them: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by", he was told.

Not many people knew Jesus of Nazareth, that is, not many knew what kind of king he'd be. But this beggar, blind though he was, knew. Jesus was the kind of king who would care for all his people, from the greatest to the least. None would be too poor or too ugly to get his attention. In fact, the more fallen, the more loved. That's the sort of God we've got. God delights especially to lift the fallen, to encourage those without hope, and to raise the dead. Think of how God famously speaks in the prophecy of Isaiah, "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite" (57:15) The king was coming for such as this man - broken, ruin, but one who cries out to him.

"Jesus son of David", he cried, "Have mercy!". The crowd called him Jesus of Nazareth, but this blind beggar sees more in Jesus and calls him by his royal title "Son of David". The more desperate are more bold. Now the lowest in the land appeals to the highest.

"Have mercy", he cries. *O my king, see my suffering. See what the enemy has done. See how the people suffer under his rule. But now, as you had compassion on the leper, on the grieving widow, on the woman with a blood disease, on the man whose son was demon possessed . . . so now have mercy on me. Even on me.*

People did not know Jesus - that he is helper of the helpless, eyes to the blind. They think that a king belongs with the great, leaders belong with the strong, the wise belong with the intelligent, and Jesus belongs with us. So they rebuked the blind beggar: *Shut up! Silence. Your pain is of no concern to him. He is the King! He is important. You are nothing. Be silent!*

So you remember someone else doing the very same thing, just earlier in the story or Luke? The disciples were shooing away the parents who brought their infants to Jesus to have him touch them. Clearly, this is important to Luke because it is a problem for God's people - they want to walk past the poor; they would ignore those who suffer; they had more important things to do.

Do not think more of yourselves than you ought, or less of others either. With God, none are too insignificant for his care and attention. When you cry out to him as the Great Lord and the only saviour, he will hear you. He will seek you out and he will take care of you. For his pledge to you is this: He loves you. He cares about you. He is so in love with you that he will not just cross the ocean to come near to you, or take down a star as gift to you - he'll cross the distance from heaven to earth, and he'll bring heaven down as a gift for you. He delights in you because he is not afraid to associate with those of low position.

The man called louder, "Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy." So Jesus stopped. He summoned the man. He was brought to Jesus - perhaps he's lame too. When he was near, Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Does Jesus really need to ask? Can't he see? Isn't it obvious?

But you see, it isn't enough to be bold. You need to boldly believe in Jesus, but you need more. You need to be honest about yourself. You need to tell him what you need and humbly ask the king for his mercy to give it.

If Jesus asked you, "What do you want me to do for you?" what would you answer? Few would come as this beggar, totally dependant on the King's mercy. But that is what you must do. Come like a beggar. You've got nothing to offer. You're in no position to bargain.

And really, you need everything. You don't need just a little. You need everything. So go to him and say, "Lord, I want to live." The beggar says, "Lord I want to see". Just hearing that is beautiful. *Receive your sight*, Jesus says. And the King gave the gift of sight to the blind.

Yes Lord. O my king, I want to live. Tell him. It's your only hope.