

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(March 29, 2020)

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Following Where Jesus Leads

(studies in apprenticeships to Jesus from the Gospel of Mark)

Jesus: Miracle-Worker...and LORD

(Mark 10:46-52)

Study #7

Introduction: Today's "in your face" news...

Turn on the TV or radio or go to any news source and you'll be exposed (if I can use that word...) to the latest information about Covid-19.

You'll see which parts of the world seem to be getting past the top of the bell curve; which areas are peaking; which countries or cities are seeing daily doubling of new cases.

It's a very dynamic situation and overwhelmingly "in your face". The coronavirus has impacted our work, play, school, family, and church life.

And there is so much we simply don't know.

We don't know how long the health crisis will last or how long the "stay at home" order will be in place in San Antonio.

We don't know how extensive the damage will be to American society or world-wide interactions? We don't know who among our friends and loved ones will become sick. Will I get infected? Will you?

It's a serious situation.

Jeff gave a great message last Sunday about how to respond to the disruption caused by Covid-19 *faithfully*.

He called us to *call to mind* Jesus' past work in saving; that we *enjoy* His present work of sustaining us with His presence; and that we *anticipate* His future work of taking us to be with Him forever.

No doubt about it, this is a challenging time. But we would do well to remember that challenging times have been the way it's been throughout time.

Mark Nash, who leads our men's ministries here at Northwest, sent around a great C.S. Lewis quote a week or so ago.

Lewis wrote what I'm about to read in 1948 in response to a question raised by a reader, "*How are we to live with the constant threat of nuclear warfare?*"

Lewis replied, "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, syphilis, paralysis, air raids, railway and car accidents"

"In other words, let us not exaggerate the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways.

"It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering...because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty."¹

To Lewis' words, we would add that recent decades have added many more ways that we might suffer and die. Now we can add Covid-19 to that very long list of threats to our health and to our lives.

¹ "*On Living in an Atomic Age*" (1948) in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*.

So, we're starting off today affirming that life on planet earth has always been filled with suffering, illness, pain, and death.

Yes, Jesus promised His disciples that He would give them peace and that He had overcome the world. But He also promised, **[John 16:33]... "In the world you will have tribulation."**

Today, we meet a man who was suffering tribulation.

Review...

This morning, I'm giving the 7th and final message in the series that Jeff and I have brought exploring the theme, "*Following Where Jesus Leads*".

All these messages are available on the church website where we've dug into the themes of prayer and dependence on God, Jesus' pursuit of relationships with all kinds of people, submission and authority, faith vs. fear, rejection, and servanthood.

Next Sunday, Palm Sunday, we'll watch Jesus march into Jerusalem to the cries of the crowds' "*Hosanna!*" - and a bit more.

Today, I'm highlighting Jesus' miracle-working power.

This is a provocative theme at any time, maybe especially when thousands of people have died from Covid-19 and many more are expected to die in the days ahead. (I speak as someone in the "vulnerable" category.)

Jesus and His disciples had been traveling south through the region of the Decapolis and then into the land of Perea, both of which were non-Jewish areas and were controlled by Herod.

When they came to the southern end of the Jordan, which empties into the northern end of the Dead Sea, they crossed the river.²

² They crossed at just about the same point that Joshua and the Jews of his day had crossed before, on a major ancient highway right across from the city of Jericho, some fourteen hundred years earlier.

Setting the Scene: Jericho (v. 46a)

[46] Then they came to Jericho.

Today, Jericho is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus lived, Jericho was already thousands of years old.³

From Jericho, which was located about five miles away from the Jordan River, but still in the Jordan River valley, Jesus will soon continue traveling another twenty miles to Jerusalem.

That journey will be a tough slog because the trip from Jericho to Jerusalem involved a very strenuous 3,500-foot elevation gain.⁴

Mark describes Jesus' departure from Jericho.

A Blind Beggar Cries Out (vv. 46b-48)

Bartimaeus, the Blind (v. 46b)

Jesus and company and more (v. 46b)

[46b]...And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd

In lots of other scenes in the Gospel of Mark, we understand that the crowds were there BECAUSE OF Jesus. That is probably not the case here.

³ By Jesus' day, Jericho had been destroyed and rebuilt several times. Recent archaeological discoveries reveal that there were two cities. The Old City was badly deteriorated. The New Jericho had been built by Herod as a magnificent winter palace and was famous for its beauty and extravagance.

⁴ Jericho was the last town a traveler would reach before hitting Jerusalem, and from there it was uphill all the way. From the Sea of Galilee southward, the Jordan River is all below sea level. By the time it hits the Dead Sea, the inland lake with the world's lowest elevation, the water level sits at 1388 feet below sea level. At the Jericho crossing, the Jordan is already 840 feet below sea level and Jerusalem is right about 2700 feet above sea level.

This is Passover season, and at Passover, there were always crowds on the Jericho Road heading toward Jerusalem.

Jews by the thousands were traveling from all over the place to make it to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

It's most likely that the "**large crowd**" Mark mentions was simply traveling in the same direction Jesus was going - to Jerusalem.

As they exited the city⁵, everyone could see "that guy." He was always there.

Sight for sore eyes (v. 46b)

[46b]...a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road.

The plight of the ancient poor

A blind man begging outside the gates of a city - would have been a common sight in Jesus' world. It's actually a common sight in many places today.

In Jesus' day, there wasn't much of a social safety net and there was nothing like the governmental aid that we have here in the US.

Back then, the disabled were cared for by family and friends and they would bring in what money they could by begging.

Naming...

This blind beggar's name is *Bartimaeus*. His name means, literally, "*the son of Timaeus*."⁶ The inclusion of his name is remarkable.

Many of Jesus' healings are recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He healed lots of people, but only Bartimaeus is named.⁷

The last person we see Jesus interact with in Mark's Gospel - except for the disciples - before dealing with Bartimaeus was a rich, young ruler. He was prestigious and influential. He's not named.

Bartimaeus wasn't rich or politically connected. Society would have probably called him a nobody. Mark ennobled him by naming him.

Still we don't know much about Bartimaeus. We don't know how old he was, his general health, his family situation, how long he had been blind - only that he is, Mark tells us, "**a blind beggar.**"

Physical location; cultural location

He "**was sitting by the road.**" That tells us his physical location and it might be that someone (family member? friend?) positioned Bartimaeus there every day so that he could beg.

But that phrase - "**by the road**" - speaks to his place in society. He's off to the side. Marginalized. He's as far removed on the scale of significance from the rich, young ruler as we can imagine.

On this day, as Bartimaeus was sitting there, hoping for charity, he heard the buzz of an approaching crowd. He picked up a few words here, a phrase or two there.

He heard people referring to "*Jesus*." But, back then, Jesus was a common Jewish name. There were lots of guys named Jesus.⁸

But Bartimaeus soon realized that the Jesus who's coming his way is the Jesus he's been hearing about for months. Jesus the healer.

⁵ Specifically, exiting the Old City *en route* to Herod's New Jericho.

⁶ The fact that Mark includes Bartimaeus' name and his father's name indicates that they both had become well-known in the early church. For the ultimate in redundancy, Mark includes phrase "the son of Timaeus" for his Gentile readers who would not have recognized that "bar" was the Hebrew word for "son."

⁷ Neither Matthew nor Luke (who both record the miracle) record the name.

⁸ Or, in the language of that day, "Joshua" or "Yeshua".

Bartimaeus, the Bold (vv. 47-48)

Calling out to THIS Jesus (v. 47)

[47] When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene⁹ he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

We know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that His home base for ministry was Capernaum. But He was raised in Nazareth, a small city out on the plains, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean.

So, Jesus was a Nazarene. **“Jesus the Nazarene”** singled THIS Jesus out from all of the other Jesus’ of His day.

But blind Bartimaeus didn’t call out to Jesus the Nazarene. He called out to **“Jesus, Son of David”** - which shows that while the blind man didn’t have eyesight, he had great insight.

He “saw” what others missed; that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

How he knew is anyone’s guess. But sitting by the road day after day, you hear things.

This Jesus is a leader and a healer and a teacher - and this Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus put two and two together.

When he called out, **“Son of David”** he meant *“Messiah.”*¹⁰ And you and I are cheering Bartimaeus the Bold for his spiritual insight.

But there were those in the crowd that day who were not pleased with his shouts. They shouted Bartimaeus down.

Silencing Bartimaeus (v. 48a)

[48a] Many were sternly telling him to be quiet...

Let me just point out that it’s dangerous to tell people to not call out to Jesus.

Mark has already told us (10:13-16) about the time when the disciples to keep some children away from Jesus. They thought Jesus was way too busy for children.

Jesus was incensed by the disciples’ attempt to shoo kids away from Him. Jesus was crazy about kids. He still is.

So, with that memory still fresh in their minds, I suspect that it wasn’t the disciples who were “shushing” Bartimaeus.

It was the other folks on the road, or those who were from Jericho and had known Bartimaeus for years. They thought of him as a nuisance, a nobody, a blight. One of the “least, last, and lost” that they didn’t have time for and assumed Rabbi Jesus wouldn’t, either.

So, **“many”** people in this crowd were telling blind Bartimaeus to pipe down.

“Jesus isn’t interested in you or in what you - and people like you! - have to say.” - which prompted Bartimaeus to get louder.

Bartimaeus: Hard to silence (v. 48b)

[48b]...but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Don’t you just love this guy? Nothing’s going to keep Bartimaeus from crying out for Jesus’ attention and help. Opposition just fans the flame of his persistence.

Somehow, he knew that Jesus was the only One who could meet his need, and he wouldn’t back down.

He was crying out to Jesus, hoping against hope that this **“Son of David”** would take notice.

⁹ At the first and the last healing miracles, Mark identified Jesus as a Nazarene.

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 7:11-14 - Messiah will come through David.

On the Way to Jesus (vv. 49-50)

The Call of Jesus (v. 49)

Jesus stops and speaks (v. 49a)

[49a] And Jesus stopped...

At the risk of melodrama, let's just pause for a minute at Jesus' "**stopped**" and consider the enormity of what's going on here.

Everything is on the line for Bartimaeus. He has pinned his hopes on this Jesus being ABLE *and* being WILLING to do something for him. All his apples are in the Jesus basket.

If Jesus ignores him, he's lost. If Jesus just walks on by and doesn't help, he's hopeless.

That's the situation from Bartimaeus' position. Now, consider the situation from Jesus' standpoint.

He is surrounded by His disciples and by a large crowd.

The large crowd may not all be following Jesus. But lots of them have heard about Jesus. They may have been caught up in the mystique of this increasingly famous Rabbi.

The crowd knows He's going to Jerusalem. There's an expectation that Jesus is moving up to bigger and better things. Power. Authority. Political success. Kingship.

People on the road to claim their crowns don't stop for the Bartimaeus' of the world. They hobnob with other kinds of people.

But Jesus - the Son of David - stopped dead in His tracks in the middle of the road when He heard Bartimaeus' cries over the sound of the crowd.

On those words, "**Jesus stopped...**" hang all of Bartimaeus' hopes and dreams. Stopping for a beggar? Really? Really.

Jesus said, "**Call him here**", and the crowd did a psychological about face.¹¹

Cheerleaders (?) (v. 49b)

[49b]...So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you."

All of a sudden, the hostile crowd turned friendly. They are now as warm Bartimaeus as they had been dismissive.¹²

The crowd may have thought that somebody would have to walk him over to where Jesus was.

Bartimaeus was on the side of the road and Jesus was *in* the road. Bartimaeus was blind, so he would need assistance, right? Wrong!

The Flight to Jesus (v. 50)

[50] Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

Bartimaeus didn't wait for help.

Mark tells the story with such an economy of words that we could miss the impact of this scene if we don't think about it. So, let's think about it.

He ignored the dangers inherent to walking blind. He put aside the normally tentative movement of someone who can't see.

¹¹ Thus far, Jesus has followed a policy of keeping His messiahship somewhat secret. He begins to relax that policy now, not bothering to rebuke or silence Bartimaeus for his "Son of David" address because, as He gets closer and closer to Jerusalem it must be understood that He is entering as the Messiah and will die as the Messiah.

¹² Crowds do that, as any candidate for public office will tell you. The same crowd that will sing "Hosanna" as Jesus marches into Jerusalem will yell "Crucify Him" a little later in the week.

This blind man couldn't have cared less about obstacles, potholes, rocks, stumps or people in the way. He got to Jesus as fast as he could.

Once Blind, Now Seeing (vv. 51-52)

Q & A, with Jesus (v. 51)

A routine question from Jesus (v. 51a)

[51a] And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"¹³

To which we say, *"What a question!"*

What does Jesus expect that a blind man would want? What would a hungry man want? What would a lame man want?

And of course, Jesus knew what this blind man wanted. But Bartimaeus was more than a problem to be dealt with. He was more than a project. He was a person to be pursued and engaged.

So, Jesus asked the question.

Bartimaeus' simple response (v. 51b)

[51b]...And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!"

Crystal clear communication. No hesitation at all. *"Exalted Teacher, I'm blind. I remember what the world looks like. I want to see it again."¹⁴*

¹³ We've heard that question before. It is exactly, word for word, the question Jesus asked James and John when they told Him that they wanted Him to do for them whatever they asked. (10:36) There, Jesus wanted to expose the selfish hearts of the two apostles. Here, Jesus wanted to expose the sincerity of Bartimaeus' faith.

¹⁴ The New American Standard Bible likely has the sense right in its translation, with *"...regain my sight!"* If Bartimaeus had not seen previously Mark likely would have told us, as John does in John 9 when Jesus healed a man who had been born blind.

Healed and Heeling (v. 52)

Faith is the victory (v. 52a)

[52] And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."

This is faith that cries out to Jesus for mercy; faith that rushes across an unseen road to get to an unseen Jesus.

What we're seeing here is the final miracle of healing recorded in Mark's Gospel. And it is sweet.

2. Faithfulness is the privilege (v. 52b)

[52b]...Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

Two things happen in the finale of this story, and they are both wonderful.

First, there is the miracle of the gift of sight. Blind Bartimaeus sees. With no medical treatment, ointment, incantations, or physical touch, he is healed - just like that - by Jesus.

You and I have gathered here today to worship a powerful, miracle-working Jesus.

He turned water into wine, walked on water, made the lame walk, multiplied fish and bread, and cleansed lepers. This is our Jesus.¹⁵

He is the One who has all power over the physical world as surely as He saves souls from eternal death.

In fact, He performed miracles like the one we've seen today to validate that He can perform the even more glorious miracle of redeeming people like us who need forgiveness of sin, who need grace.

¹⁵ See all the miracles performed by Jesus in the Appendix at the end.

Second, and equally remarkable, is the direction of Bartimaeus' life, post-miracle.

When Jesus healed him, He said, "**Go...**" But Bartimaeus didn't go. He came after Jesus. He followed. Now that he can see, he takes his first steps on the road as a disciple of Jesus.

He has no idea what he is getting himself into. He doesn't know that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to embrace a cross. He doesn't know that those who follow Jesus may find their own cross.

All he knows is that he has experienced the loving power of the Son of David. And wherever Jesus is going, he's going, too.

We serve this same miracle-working, powerful Jesus. May we each have the same Jesus-following spirit Bartimaeus had.

Now, an alert. Warning. Hard turn. Radical shift. What follows is the "Part 2" to this message that you didn't know was coming.

Part 2: A God Who Doesn't Always Heal...

I'm backing away from what we've seen today in Mark 10 and looking at Jesus from the vantage point of people like us who live in a broken world filled with suffering and pain and disease and death.¹⁶

I want to look at life with God, now, from a Covid-19 perspective.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus healed a blind Bartimaeus.

Jesus has not healed a lot of people who have already died from the coronavirus.

Over the next few weeks, if predictions are accurate, there will be a lot of people who will be innocently infected with the virus. Some will get very sick and some will die.

Some of them will cry out to God for healing. Some will be placed on prayer chains and prayed for by hundreds. And they will die.

This is unspeakably sad. Our hearts break for each person who suffers and loses their life to this virus. But this is the way it has always been. Suffering is an inescapable part of the human condition.

We regularly remind ourselves of God's glorious redemption of the nation of Israel from Egypt through the parted Red Sea. Great stuff.

We don't spend as much time thinking about the four hundred years-worth of disappointed Jews who were born, lived, and died in chains in Egypt, all the while crying out to God for a deliverance which He didn't give.

Think about that. And think about...
 ...Job on his heap of ashes, mourning his losses;
 ...Jeremiah in his muddy cistern for obeying God;
 ...Jerusalem surrounded by the armies of Babylon while the citizens suffered and prayed for deliverance;
 ...faithful John the Baptist as he was taken from his cell to be beheaded for speaking truth to power.

Think about all the times that the people of God have cried out to God for this or that deliverance - and were not delivered.

We expect that God will do certain things in certain ways under certain conditions.

But, while God is always faithful to His every promise, He almost never behaves as we expect Him to.

He *is* different than what we had been expecting Him to be like; to *does* differently than we thought He would do.

¹⁶ I have benefitted greatly from Gene Edwards' little book on the life of John the Baptist, [The Prisoner in the Third Cell](#), and am grateful to Edwards for being among those who have helped me come to grips with the pain and suffering that is in this world in light of God's power and goodness. I highly recommend the book.

We may walk through life angry and disappointed. And if we do, we think we are upset with an enemy or with a friend who has treated us badly.

Actually, we're upset with God because we know He could have kept our loved one safe from the oncoming car, could have kept the virus at bay, could have creatively allowed us to avoid pain - and He didn't.

Jesus healed Bartimaeus, which was wonderful. And the Gospels describe Jesus' miraculous healing of many others, too.

Think of all the people who lived in Palestine in the time of Jesus who were *not* healed. Think of the epileptics and lepers and blind and lame who lived unhealed.

Evidently, it wasn't Jesus' plan to heal everybody of everything. He performed enough miracles to validate His claim to do something greater than heal broken bodies. He would heal broken people.

His plan was to leave His Father and camp out with us for a few years, enduring all the hardship everyone else in His day did.

Around the age of thirty-three, He would allow Himself to be arrested by Romans and Jews who would see that He was crucified. His death would serve as a perfect sacrifice for your sin and mine. And He would rise from the dead, victorious.

We may think that the ultimate question in life is, "*WHY did God allow this terrible thing to come into the life of my husband, wife, friend, son, daughter?*" or "*WHY did God not rescue me?*" or "*WHY does God allow this or that injustice?*"

These are not the ultimate questions. These things are givens. Injustice and suffering are a part of the promise Jesus made, "***In the world you will have tribulation.***"

If any of us expect that following Jesus goes hand-in-hand with escaping the normal sufferings and problems and challenges and persecutions and disasters that this broken world regularly hands out, we will be greatly disappointed because we are greatly mistaken.

The question of all questions, the question before you and me today is this:

"Having seen the grace and love of this God poured out for you in Jesus, will you follow where He leads? Will you follow a God whose ways you don't fully understand?"

Yes, we will follow.

We will learn to trust Him, not His ways. We will not trust that He will do such-and-such if we do so-and-so. Having shown Himself good and loving and having received His amazing grace in Jesus, we will trust Him. Period.

14:17-21 - predicts accurately that one of the disciples will betray Him.

Appendix: The Miracles of Jesus, as recorded by Mark

1:21-28 - casting a demon out of a man in the Capernaum synagogue;
 1:29-31 - healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever;
 1:32-34 - healed many and cast demons out of many late into the night in Capernaum;
 1:40-45 - cleanses a leper (unknown location);
 2:1-12 - forgives sin and heals a paralytic inside a home in Capernaum;
 3:1-6 - healed a man with a withered hand in a synagogue on a Sabbath;
 3:7-12 - healed many people by the Sea of Galilee and cast out unclean spirits;
 4:35-41 - calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee with a word;
 5:1-120 - casts out demons from a man from Gersa (Gerasene demoniac);
 5:11-43 - heals a woman with a long-standing physical ailment and raises a little girl from the dead;
 6:1-6 - healed only a few sick people in Nazareth, due to their lack of faith;
 6:33-44 - feeds a crowd of 5,000 men (not counting women and children) with five small loaves of bread and two small fish;
 6:45-52 - walks on water; 6:53-56 - healed many sick people near Gennesaret;
 7:24-30 - cast a demon out of the daughter of a Syrophenician woman who had faith;
 7:31-37 - healed a man of deafness and inability to speak in the region of the Decapolis;
 8:1-10 - feeds 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish in the Decapolis;
 8:22-26 - healed a blind man in Bethsaida;
 9:1-8 - was transfigured on a mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John, and was joined by Moses and Elijah;
 9:14-29 - cast out a demon from a young boy whom the disciples could not;
 10:46-52 - heals blind Bartimaeus;
 11:1-6 - miraculously prepares for a donkey to ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday;
 11:12-14; 20ff - curses a fig tree;
 14:12-16 - miraculously prepares for a place for Him and the disciples to eat the Passover;