

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Jesus' Hard Path That Leads to Gospel For Us**

#### **Desperate for What Only Jesus Can Provide** Study #1 (Luke 18:35-42; 19:28-40)

##### **Introduction: Desperation...**

Maximo Napa Castro was sixty-one years when he set out from his home in Marcona, Peru on December 6, 2024, for a fishing trip to collect fish eggs (roe) from the Pacific Ocean.

After two weeks at sea, his boat's engine broke down and a storm pushed him off course. Maximo was lost at sea.

He had shipped out with enough food to last about 28 days. He was rescued on March 12, Day 95. For well over two months, Maximo was, in a classic understatement, in a desperate situation.

He desperately wanted to live. There were people he loved back home in Peru he desperately wanted to see again. He wanted to see his elderly mother and his 2-month old granddaughter.

Desperate people are willing to do desperate things.

Maximo quickly went through his water and food supplies of rice and crackers. He drank rainwater. And he ate anything he could get his hands on, including (brace yourself), cockroaches from the boat, birds that landed on his boat, and even a turtle that swam by his boat.

This morning's theme is desperation. Not desperation to stay alive when lost on the high seas, but desperation for what only Jesus can provide.

As of today, we are four weeks away from Easter Sunday. This morning and on the next few Sundays, we'll be thinking together about the last days of Jesus.

Most years, we'll pay special attention to the words and works of Jesus as Easter gets close. Then, we'll focus on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, which this year will be on April 13.

But this year, we're changing things up a bit, and are looking at that Palm Sunday entrance today. We'll spend the other weeks leading up to Easter walking through some of the events of Jesus' final week before the cross and His resurrection.

We'll see the beauty of extravagant generosity and the power of a life of service. We'll watch Jesus go endure betrayal and denial, along with His trials and condemnation by both Jews and Romans.

Over these weeks, we can all expect to learn more about Jesus, understand more about His heart and His mission, and be inspired to trust and obey Him.

But, again, today the theme is desperation. We'll see that desperation played out in two scenes. First, we meet a desperate man who once could see and now was blind.

##### **The Desperation of a Blind Man (Luke 18:35-43)**

##### **Setting the Scene: On the way to Jericho on the way to Jerusalem**

As we trace the movement of Jesus and His disciples through the last days of His life, we catch up to them on the outskirts of Jericho.

They had started their trek to Jerusalem up north in Galilee. They then crossed the Jordan River to enter the Decapolis on the eastern side of the River.

They crossed again to re-enter Palestine just north of where the Jordan empties into the Dead Sea.<sup>1</sup>

It was there, at Jericho's city limits, that Jesus had a fascinating encounter with a man. This man was stationed on the side of the road. He was always there. You couldn't miss him.

### **We Meet the Blind Man (vv. 35-38)**

*A victim of blindness (v. 35)*

***[35] Now as Jesus was approaching Jericho, a man who was blind was sitting by the road, begging.<sup>2</sup>***

Just as we see men and women "flying a sign" at intersections in most major cities in America - including San Antonio - it was common to see people begging at the gates of a major city in the ancient world.

There wasn't as much of a public safety net in that world as there is in ours. So, those who were physically disabled were taken care of by family and friends. In Israel, they were also care for by the benevolence that was a part of the Jewish culture.

This man wasn't rich, politically connected, or influential. We don't know his age, his general health, his family, how long he had been blind or why. We only know that he was a blind beggar.

That isn't to say that he was unimportant. We don't look at him as "just another beggar." He was very important, as is every person we'll ever meet, as Jesus is about to demonstrate.

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<sup>1</sup> They crossed the Jordan at about the same point that Joshua and the Jews had crossed before them, on a major ancient highway right across from the city of Jericho, fourteen hundred years earlier. Theologian S. Lewis Johnson, wrote, "*Here is the second Joshua performing miracles in Jericho, again.*"

<sup>2</sup> We know from the other Gospels that the name of the blind beggar is Bartimaeus. Mark includes "*the son of Timaeus*" for his Gentile readers who would not have recognized that "*bar*" was the Hebrew word for "son." Significantly, nowhere else in the Gospels do we get the name of someone Jesus heals. Neither Matthew nor Luke (both record the miracle) records the name. Matthew tells us that there were two blind men, which Mark and Luke don't contradict; they only list Bartimaeus.

As we'll see, this man has something to say to us.

On this day, he was sitting there by the side of the road, just like he always did, hoping for charity.

*An agent marked by boldness (vv. 36-38)*

***[36] But when he heard a crowd going by, he began inquiring what this was.***

When he asked, people who were a part of that crowd told him, ***[37]...Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.***

Of course, "Jesus" was a common name in first century Israel. But this man had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus was a rabbi, a healer. The man was a beggar, so he was always desperate.

But being a man who used to be able to see but who was now blind, and learning that a Healer was passing by, he became desperate for something else.

***[38] And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"***

By calling Him "*Son of David*," the blind man is telling us that he knew that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus was Lord, the descendant of David.

He didn't have eyesight, but he did have great insight. He knew better than those who had 20/20 eyesight exactly who Jesus was.

This desperate blind man begged Jesus - not for money or food - but for "*mercy*." He begged Jesus to do for him what only Jesus could do.

We're cheering him, applauding Him for reaching out to Jesus. The people on the road with Jesus didn't have the same enthusiasm.

These were probably decent folks on their way to worship in Jerusalem for Passover. But they didn't appreciate this beggar making such a racket. He was disturbing Jesus. So, they "shushed" him, **[39] sternly telling him to be quiet.**

They were all about decorum. Decorum doesn't much matter if you're desperate.

In fact, the crowd's attempts to shush him created the opposite effect. It's like when you tell a crying baby to be quiet, you're going to get more of the same.

And this blind man ***"kept crying out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"***

### **Blind Man, Meet Jesus (v. 40a)**

Now, just consider what is on the line here for the blind man.

He has put himself out there, hoping against hope that this Jesus both CAN do something for him and that He WILL do something for him. He's put all of his apples in the Jesus basket.

If Jesus ignores him, he'll never see again. If Jesus just walks on by and doesn't help, he's hopeless, forever blind. This is his last, best hope. He's hanging all of his hopes on Jesus' power and goodness.

We know that the blind man's ***"crying out"*** was loud, because Jesus heard his cries over the crowd's "shushing."

***[40a] And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him...***

Jesus didn't ignore him. He has stopped and has ***"commanded"*** that people bring him near.

At the beginning of this scene, the blind man had been sitting and begging, pathetic and hopeless on the curb. Now he is standing with Jesus. Jesus asked this blind beggar a question.

### **Once Blind, He Now Sees (vv. 40-43a)**

*Jesus' simple question (v. 40b-41a)*

***[41a] "What do you want Me to do for you?"***

If you think that's a silly question, I get it. I mean, 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 exactly what this blind man wanted. But notice how his question humanizes the man.

To Jesus, this man was more than a problem to be dealt with. He was more than a project. He was a person to be pursued and engaged. That's why He asked the question. Jesus wanted the man to express his desperate longing out loud.

*The blind man's simple response (v. 41b)*

***[41b]...And he said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!"<sup>3</sup>***

He remembered what it was like to see the world. Now he can't. His cry for mercy was a cry to see again. And with no hesitation Jesus spoke the healing word.

*A healing leads to heeling (v. 42-43)*

***[42]... "Regain your sight; your faith has made you well."<sup>4</sup>***

And just like that, ***[43a] And immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.***

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<sup>3</sup> The New American Standard Bible likely has the sense right in its translation, with ***"...regain my sight!"*** At some time in the past, this man was able to see, unlike the man Jesus healed in John chapter 9 who was born blind.

<sup>4</sup> Literally, ***"your faith has 'saved' (Greek sozo / σωζω) you."*** This is the most common way that the word we usually translate "saved" is used in the New Testament. It is a general word for deliverance of any kind, not necessarily - or even usually - used to refer to eternal salvation from sin.

Desperation won the day.

A recurring theme in the Bible is that if we would come to God the way God wants us to come to Him, we'll come desperate.

It's the people who are desperate who keep knocking until their knuckles are raw, keep seeking when they've already looked all over, and keep asking because they know God is still listening.

Luke records parables in which Jesus made heroes out of:

1 - a desperate friend who wouldn't let his neighbor get sleep until he gave him three loaves of bread.

2 - a desperate widow who wouldn't give up seeking justice from an uncaring judge. (Luke 11 and 18)

God doesn't want us to come to Him in prayer because, well, we know we really ought to pray. He wants us to come to Him hungry and expectant.

At its core, prayer is "*crying out*" to God. Pray is what we do when we are desperate for what only God can provide.

The blind man was desperate. So was the main character in the next story Luke tells, which is the story of Zaccheus.<sup>5</sup>

We're not going to look deeply at Zaccheus' story today, but it is a beautiful story. We notice that there are stark contrasts between Zaccheus and the blind beggar.

The blind man was not named, but we learn the name of the tax-collector; the blind man was in deep poverty, the tax-collector was wealthy; the blind man cried out for help, while Zaccheus climbed a tree; the blind man spoke first, while Jesus spoke before Zaccheus did.

But there is a striking similarity in that in both cases, people who watched Jesus' interaction with these desperate men objected.

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<sup>5</sup> Zacchaeus stands as a stark contrast to the wealthy "*ruler*" of Luke 18:18-30.

They objected because they either thought it was a waste of time for Jesus to spend time with someone (like the blind beggar) or because they thought it was not fitting for Him, a religious leader, to spend time with someone (like Zaccheus, the tax collector).

We're seeing desperation all over the place this morning. The blind man and Zaccheus were desperate for what only Jesus could provide for them.

And Jesus was desperate to meet these two guys at their point of need. One of the reasons we love the Gospel of Luke so much is that Luke shows Jesus' great heart for the least and the last and the lost.

Last Sunday, Todd made note of the same thing when he highlighted Jesus' pursuit of the highly esteemed Jewish rabbi, Nicodemus, AND the outcast Samaritan woman.

Jesus is an equal opportunity Messiah. He is a Savior for all. He shows no partiality. Rich or poor, female or male, young or old, Jesus welcomes all who come to Him. The stories of the blind beggar and Zaccheus remind us of Jesus' desperate love for us - and for everyone we know.

We move on from these two personal stories, past a parable Jesus told (The Parable of the Ten Minas),<sup>6</sup> to a final scene of intense desperation.

### **The Desperation of an Eager Crowd (Luke 19:28-40)**

#### **Arranging Transport for King Jesus (vv. 28-34)**

***[28] After Jesus said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.***

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<sup>6</sup> Note the following from this parable (Luke 19:11-17). (1). Jesus gave this parable only a week or so before His crucifixion. (2). The message of the parable is that His followers will have work to do in His absence. (3). The punchlines are that (a). the servants of the king who are diligent in His absence will be richly rewarded; (b). the servants of the king who are not will suffer loss; (c). those who reject the king will be destroyed.

All that we are about to see now took place on the first day of the Jewish week (Sunday) before the Friday of Jesus' death. Here, Jesus was five days away from the cross.

From the other Gospel records, we understand that Jesus had been staying with Mary and Martha and the recently-raised-from-the-dead Lazarus in Bethany, a small town just outside Jerusalem.

Luke takes us from Bethany to Bethphage, another Jerusalem suburb. It was probably a brisk thirty minute walk from the one town to the other. Jesus set His plan in motion at Bethphage.

***[29] When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mountain that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, [30] saying, "Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here."***

The directions gave to two of His disciples here were unlike anything we find Him doing anywhere else. He was orchestrating His Jerusalem entrance. He wanted it to be "just so." It had to be "just so."

Jesus had in mind a certain kind of entrance, the kind that was described when the prophet Zechariah predicted how the Jewish Messiah would make His entrance into the city of Jerusalem.

The Messiah was the long-awaited king. (remember the blind beggar's reference to Jesus being "***Son of David***")

The Messiah was the King who would re-establish a Jewish kingdom and who would bring about a reign of peace.

Here is what Zechariah said about that king's royal entrance into Jerusalem:

***[Zechariah 9:9] Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is righteous and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

To fit with Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus gave explicit instructions to His disciples to get a donkey's colt. Not a war horse.

If a crowd saw Jesus ride into town on a battle-tested steed, they would have had every reason to fear. "*Uh oh, trouble's here!*"

But by riding a young donkey - a mount that would be useless in battle - Jesus was identifying Himself as the Messiah AND putting an end to any hope that anyone might have had of Him leading a military *coup* against Rome. (At least, people there that day should have gotten those messages...)

The two disciples had their assignment: Bring a donkey's colt to Jesus. But Jesus' followers were not wealthy men. Exactly how were they going to secure this colt? They were to TAKE IT!

Jesus even told them what to do if the owner of the colt refused to let them take it: ***[31] "And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'***

Sure enough, that is exactly what happened. And the disciples said exactly what King Jesus told them to say, and the colt's owners let them take the colt, no more questions asked.<sup>7</sup>

And thus begins the short two mile journey into Jerusalem, a trip that couldn't have taken much more than an hour, but a trip that marked the high point of Jesus' earthly popularity.

### **A Triumphal Entry for King Jesus! (vv. 35-40)**

***[35] And they brought it to Jesus, and they threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.***

Surrounded by His disciples, He began riding down the slopes of the Mount of Olives, toward Jerusalem.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 19:32-34.

We can't miss this. Jesus was riding into town as the KING He truly was.

At Passover, all the roads leading to Jerusalem were crowded with Jewish pilgrims on their way to celebrate and to worship.<sup>8</sup>

The Jews coming from Galilee in the north would have refused to pass through Samaria.<sup>9</sup> So, they would have taken the same route Jesus had taken on this trip.

Leaving Galilee, they would have crossed the Jordan River just south of the Sea of Galilee and then traveled south through the region of Decapolis.

They would have then crossed the Jordan River again at Jericho and traveled on the main highway from Jericho to Jerusalem.

This route took them directly through Bethany and Bethphage and exactly on the road Jesus was taking on Palm Sunday on the back of a colt.

As King Jesus descended into the Kidron Valley and then rode up toward the wall that surrounded Jerusalem, the city was all stirred up.

It was Passover season. The crowds swelled into the hundreds of thousands.

And if you've always thought that these crowds had all come out to see Jesus, well - sorry. The crowds were on the road anyway.

But word has now gotten out about Jesus.

- People who had heard Him teach told about what they had heard.
- Those who had seen His miracles reported what they had seen.
- People who had watched Him best the Pharisees in some great "one-on-ones" told how He had done that.

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<sup>8</sup> Conservative estimates put the population in Jerusalem and vicinity at upwards of one million people during the days of the Passover.

<sup>9</sup> On one occasion, Jesus didn't hesitate to go through Samaria. In fact, John said that He "*had to*" pass through Samaria. (John 4, the story of the Samaritan woman)

Everyone had heard that Jesus was a Savior (after all, His name, Jesus - "Yeshua" - means "savior" in Hebrew) and were desperately hoping that He would "save" them. That is, that He would deliver them from Roman oppression and reinstitute a Davidic dynasty.

The ripples of news about Jesus filtered through the crowds.

This multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey toward Jerusalem, put two and two together, and figured, "*This is it! The Messiah, King Jesus is coming to overthrow Rome!*" - exactly the message that riding a donkey's colt was to have stifled.

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their king. They made a big fuss over Him. Watch.

***[36] Now as He was going, they were spreading their cloaks on the road. [37] And as soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen...***

They gave up their garments and threw them in the dirt to keep the dust off of Him. You don't want the king to get dirty. You don't even want the king's colt to get dirty.<sup>10</sup>

They treated Him like royalty. They honored Him.

And they spoke to Him as they would speak to a King. We listen as they shout:

***[38] "Blessed is the King, the One who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"<sup>11</sup>***

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew, Mark, and John all tell us that branches from trees (John says that they were palm trees) that lined the roads helped make a carpet for King Jesus, so the crowds cut off those branches and piled them in the road, along with their outer garments. Only Luke excludes the detail of the branch-waving.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew and Mark record the crowds shouting, "*Hosanna!*" during Jesus' triumphal entry. Hosanna is a Hebrew word meaning, "*Save us now!*" They weren't asking for eternal life, but for "salvation" from Roman domination.

Those words are quotes from Psalm 118, a psalm that Jews today read at Passover AND a psalm that was read in ancient times as the Jewish king led the people in procession to worship in the temple.

King Jesus would have entered the city of Jerusalem through the city's easternmost gate, the Golden Gate. This was the gate through which the ancient kings of Israel always entered the city.

On that day, the crowds saw in Jesus the fulfillment of their desperate hopes for relief from Roman oppression, deliverance from tyrannical rulers, and salvation from the burden of heavy taxes.

This was not the kingship Jesus was offering. But it was what the crowds wanted. They were desperate for it.

Their desperation drove them to wave their branches and lay their outer garments on the dirt for His donkey to walk on and shout at the top of their lungs for Jesus to be the king they wanted Him to be.

What they wanted wasn't Who or What He came for. His mission was a cross, not a crown. But on that day, He accepted the crowd's misguided recognition of His kingship.<sup>12</sup>

The Pharisees who were listening to these crowds desperately cry out to Jesus told Him to make them stop. **[39] “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!”**

To which Jesus replied, **[40]...“I tell you, if these stop speaking, the stones will cry out!”**  
**Conclusion:**

Today, our time in the Bible has been something of a seminar on the theme of desperation.

We started with Maximo Castro of Peru, who was desperate for rescue on the Pacific and then met a blind man who was desperate for sight and a crowd that was desperate for political and social relief.

In all cases, desperation led to action.

The Bible gives us glimpses of many people who were desperate for God to provide for them what only He could provide.

Abraham - for a son.

Hannah, - for a child.

David - for deliverance from enemies.

Solomon - for wisdom.

Friends - for a paralyzed friend's healing.

An unnamed woman - to anoint Jesus.

And the list could go on. It's like God is very pointedly drawing attention to the spirit in which He wants us to come to Him.

Hungry. Needy. He wants us to own that we are least in control of what concerns us the most so that we come to Him desperate.

It is in THIS that I have a long way to go.

God invites us to come to Him and ask for the things that are on our hearts. He doesn't promise that He'll keep our lives pain-free or suffering-free or even persecution-free. Quite the opposite, actually.

But we are free to ask for healings and about societal issues. And He does often answer our desperate cries for all kinds of help.

But the desperate cries He loves to respond to are our cries for the things He explicitly says are His will. For instance...

- Do you need wisdom to navigate a challenging trial or a pressing temptation with God-honoring grace? Ask God for that wisdom. He promises to give it. (James 1:5)
- Do you need help in remaining faithful to God while facing serious hardship? It could be an illness, a relationship fracture, or financial stress. Pray for help in exactly that. He will give it. (Hebrews 4:16)

<sup>12</sup> On another day, after the feeding of the five thousand, John tells us that people were clamoring for Jesus to be crowned king. They were going to force Him to be king. At that time, He would have none of it and instead preached a message that effectively culled His followers from thousands to roughly twelve. (See John 6)

- Do you need boldness to speak for Jesus when that will be difficult? Pray for that boldness. He promises to give it. (Acts 4:29-31)
- Do you need guidance for how to interact with others so that they are spurred on to walk with Jesus? Pray for God to provide opportunities to interact with others at deeper than surface levels. He wants that to happen. Watch how He provides. (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Do you need inner transformation? Growth in character? Maybe you need to grow in one of the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5) Since you know that it is God's will that you to grow in love and kindness and patience and self-control, pray that He will grow you.

May we each learn to live and to pray in desperation for what only Jesus can provide.