

# What Do You Want Me to Do?

Isaiah 50:4-9, Luke 18:31-43 (ESV)

October 16, 2005

“What do you want me to do for you?” That is the question in today’s reading. That is our clue as to what is important. That points us to good news for our lives. “What do you want me to do for you?” It was Jesus, of course, who asked this question. It was not one of his disciples trying to be helpful. It was not a bystander looking for a job. It was the Lord of the Universe, going up to Jerusalem, who stopped at the outskirts of Jericho to help a blind beggar. “What do you want me to do for you?” The question is as fresh today as it was nearly two-thousand years ago. For just as Jesus of Nazareth asked this to the blind beggar, so does the risen Lord Jesus Christ continue to ask it to us: “What do you want me to do for you?” “What do you want me to do?” “What do you want?”

The blind man said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” No sooner had he requested it than the Lord did it. We do not know how the Lord did it, other than the sheer power of his will and word. There is no description of any surgery. There is no mention of any salve or medicine. We simply know that he did it. Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight,” and immediately he did. For with his very next breath, Jesus continued, “Your faith has made you well,” referring to the healing as already done, accomplished, and finished. In the twinkling of an eye, the blind man saw. Immediately he recovered his sight and followed Jesus, glorifying God. And yet as wonderful as that is, we may be left wondering what it has to do with us.

“What do you want me to do for you?” That is the question in today’s reading. That is our clue as to what is important. That points us to good news for our lives. A number of affirmations are made here. One is that Jesus Christ wants to help. That may seem a small thing, but it is really quite remarkable. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He had important business there. As long ago as Luke chapter nine, Jesus had “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” He had walked from Galilee, through Samaria, and into Judea. And now in Luke chapter eighteen, Jesus was at Jericho, the last city before Jerusalem, so he was almost at his destination. And he was surrounded by a crowd, pressing into the city, and the crowd was determined to silence any distractions. But Jesus stopped because he wanted to help.

“What do you want me to do for you?” A second affirmation made here is that Jesus can help. It is not only the case that he wants to help. It is also the case that he can help. There is a tremendous difference. The basis for this may be found in the shift of titles used here for Jesus. When the blind man heard the commotion

and asked what it all meant, the crowd told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Humanly speaking, that was a perfectly good way to refer to him. Jesus was his name, Nazareth was his home town, so “Jesus of Nazareth” said who he was and where he was from. But the blind man knew better. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And the more they tried to silence him, he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

“Son of David” is not a place name. “Son of David” has to do with royalty. In fact, “Son of David” has to do with eternity. And so, “Son of David” has to do with divinity. A thousand years earlier, the prophet Nathan had spoken the word of the Lord to King David, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12, 13, 16 ESV).

And the angel Gabriel had built upon this word to tell the virgin Mary, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33 ESV). So while the seeing crowd thought Jesus was from Nazareth, the blind beggar knew that he was from God and that he was God. How he knew this we do not know, other than to say that he saw this by the eyes of faith. It is not only the case that Jesus wants to help. It is also the case that, as the Son of God, he can help. There is a tremendous difference.

“What do you want me to do for you?” A third affirmation being made here is that Jesus Christ does help. It is not only the case that Jesus wants to help and that he can help. It is also the case that he does help. In this case, he gives sight. The man whom he helped was blind, unemployed, impoverished, reduced to begging, apparently pushed outside the city, publicly rebuked, and, most likely, spurned and despised. For Jesus to give him sight was for Jesus to give him life itself. He would have an opportunity to work, to contribute, to mean something, and to be somebody. And even more important that all that put together, the man whom Jesus healed followed Jesus and glorified God. He followed Jesus and glorified God. That is what we were made for. That is what we are saved for. That is the purpose of our lives and the meaning of our existence.

You remember the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” We might say today that the ultimate purpose of human existence is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. The authors of the catechism probably learned that from today’s reading, among others. So it was that

the formerly blind man followed Jesus and glorified God. It does not get any better than that. The man's life was complete. And somehow, with the one blind man's healing, even the rebuking crowd and all the people saw what was going on and gave praise to God. There was a multiplying effect. They were healed, too.

"What do you want me to do for you?" The already tremendous significance of this healing is only heightened when it is set in the larger context of the rest of the reading and of the situation of the disciples. "And taking the twelve, he [Jesus] said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.' But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said." They were in worse shape than the blind man! Jesus told them explicitly about his betrayal, condemnation, suffering, death, and resurrection. "But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said." The seeing disciples did not understand who Jesus was. But the blind beggar knew who Jesus was. The contrast is startling. And the good news is that Jesus wants to, can, and does heal the sick, even including giving sight to the blind. There is hope yet for the disciples.

"What do you want me to do for you?" The gospel point of these juxtaposed stories is for the disciples to take up the blind man's answer, "Lord, let me recover my sight." Indeed, the gospel point of these juxtaposed stories is for all of us who are and who would be disciples to take up the blind man's answer, "Lord, let me recover my sight." This is an invitation to us, yet today. The good news is that the Lord Jesus wants to, can, and does give sight. Do you want to see? Do you want to know? Do you want to understand? Do you want what is hidden to be revealed? Do you want to grasp the sayings of Jesus? Do you want to follow Jesus? Do you want to glorify God? "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, let me recover my sight." Jesus wants to do that. He can do that. And he does do that even for you and me. Thanks be to God!

Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well." This does not mean that faith is magic. It does not mean that faith can somehow work apart from the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. What it does mean is that faith is precisely a knowing confidence in the goodness, power, and willingness of God to help us in and through Jesus Christ. The blind man had faith that Jesus could and would help him. As John Calvin wrote centuries later, "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed

upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> So faith is not believing something you do not know. Faith is knowing, in Jesus Christ, that God is good. And today’s reading is an invitation to us all to have that faith. Today’s reading is an invitation to us all to be confident that God in Jesus Christ can and will help us. And today’s reading is an invitation to us all to use our faith, to exercise our faith, and to act upon the basis of our faith to ask Jesus to give us sight and understanding. There are many other things we could ask for. But they might not be the right things to ask for. This is what we are being urged to ask for. This is what is important.

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” As the Apostles’ Creed summarizes this, he “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead.” The saving work of Jesus Christ for us was concentrated into his death and resurrection. We delight in his parables. We exult in his healings. But the important part is this hard part, this horrible part, this part we do not want to see or contemplate: he suffered for us, he bled for us, he died for us, on our account and for our sake. This is what we need to see, as hard as it may be to look at. This is what we need to understand and to grasp. And while such knowledge may not be simply humanly possible, we have good confidence that our Lord can give us that sight and grant us that understanding. He paid the price to win the privilege to be able to heal us.

Even the poor disciples eventually received this healing. Do you remember what it says in Luke chapter twenty-four? After the crucifixion and after the resurrection, two of the disciples were going to Emmaus, and Jesus himself drew near and went with them. “But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” They were still blind. But he talked to them along the way, and they invited him to stay with them. And then, “when he was at table with them, he took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” Finally! Their eyes were opened, and they knew who he was. Their blindness was healed, and they understood that the crucified one had been resurrected. Finally it all made sense. Thanks be to God! And since their eyes were opened, there is hope even for us.

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), cited by book, chapter, section, and, in parentheses, volume and page, 3.2.7 (1:551).

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“What do you want me to do for you?” “What do you want me to do?”  
“What do you want?” Do you want Jesus to restore your sight? Do you want Jesus to give you understanding? Do you want Jesus to call you his very own? Then tell him so! Ask him to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Ask him to do for you what you want him to do for you. Ask him to do for you what he came and died and now lives again to do for you. “Lord, let me recover my sight.” Take away my blindness. Let me see that in your crucifixion you willingly poured out your life for me so that my sin might be forgiven. Let me see that in your resurrection God vindicated your sacrifice so that I might have eternal life. Grant me grace that I may both follow you and glorify God. And may all the people, when they see it, give praise to God!

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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