

[Mark 10:46-52](#)

When the children were small, we used to take them on holiday each year to the Isle of Wight – the perfect location if either you were a young child or you wanted to travel back in time to the 1950s. If you've been there, you'll understand that comment!

One year, we decided to visit Osborne House, Queen Victoria's holiday getaway on the island. When we walked down to the beach that is part of the grounds, we found a traditional Punch and Judy show.

Now since Punch and Judy is hardly the epitome of political correctness and is therefore seen far less in recent years, this was a novel experience for our children. And to our son, who has always enjoyed slapstick humour, the sight of Mister Punch dispensing with his enemies by whacking them and then squeaking, 'That's the way to do it!' was great entertainment.

'That's the way to do it' could, in a more positive sense, be a slogan for our reading today about blind Bartimaeus. And especially if we contrast Bartimaeus with our story last week about James and John, which immediately precedes this in Mark's Gospel. If James and John show us how not to bring a request to Jesus, Bartimaeus shows us a good way. 'That's the way to do it,' Mark seems to say to us.

In what ways does Bartimaeus show us the right way to approach Jesus?

Firstly, he has *humility*.

As a blind man who with no social security is reduced to begging on the fringes of society to make a living (verse 46) he is in more than a humble position in the first place: 'humiliating' rather than 'humble' might be the word.

But his true humility comes through in the way he calls out to Jesus:

⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

He knows something of who Jesus is – 'Son of David' is a messianic title – and he knows that the only right and proper appeal to him is therefore a humble one – 'Have mercy on me.'

This is so different from the proud and arrogant way in which James and John came to request the seats on Jesus' right and left when he comes into his kingdom. They expected power and recognition for themselves, or at the very

least to bask in Jesus' glory. Not Bartimaeus. 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Mercy is the right approach to Jesus. We cannot compare to him. Moreover, we are sinners. The appeal to mercy is the only route.

Pope Francis wrote a book a few years ago entitled 'The Name Of God Is Mercy', and I wonder whether Bartimaeus had heard that mercy characterised the way Jesus dealt with people in need. Whether he did or not, we know that he got on Jesus' wavelength.

Let's not come trumpeting our greatness and our achievements, which is more in spirit with James and John, and which got them nowhere. Let's remember instead that Jesus loves mercy, and that is the way to him. We are sinners in need of mercy, and he loves to hear us call out to him on that basis. The cry of mercy is a beautiful song in the ears of Jesus.

Secondly, Bartimaeus has *persistence*.

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

It's as if people in the crowd were saying to Bartimaeus, 'You're just a blind beggar. What would the Messiah want with you? You're no help to his cause! Oh, and by the way, your noise is ruining our special time with the great man. Shut up!'

Now it wouldn't be surprising if someone as lowly in the population as a blind beggar like Bartimaeus suffered from what we call low self-esteem. He might very well have thought of himself as a nobody and as worthless. I'm sure cruel people would have tried to reinforce such a message on him.

And if he felt so low and worthless, then when these people in the crowd rebuked him for calling out to Jesus, the low self-esteem could have taken over and he might have acceded to their demand that he keep quiet.

But no. Mark tells us his response was that 'he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'' He won't let anyone or anything stand in the way of his audience with the Messiah.

What stands in our way when we begin to approach Jesus? Is it a sense of worthlessness? Is it the voices of others, telling us we are no-one special and Jesus would never be interested in someone like us? Perhaps that inner voice

says, 'Don't bother, you're not very good at prayer anyway.' These voices do not come from heaven: if anywhere, they come from the other place.

So do not listen to the messages that discourage you from approaching Jesus, because our sins are too many, or because we don't amount to much in the world, or we're not a very good Christian. Do what Bartimaeus did: be persistent. Press on with calling out to Jesus for mercy.

Because at some point those voices will subside: they will have to, because Jesus is calling you, just as he did Bartimaeus (verse 49). Then it's time to throw aside our cloak, jump to our feet, and come to Jesus (verse 50).

Thirdly and finally, Bartimaeus has *good motives*.

Contrast the nature of Bartimaeus' request to that of James and John. They want the power and the glory, but when Bartimaeus hears the same question from Jesus as James and John did – 'What do you want me to do for you?' (verse 51) – he simply asks for his sight. He just wants to be fully human.

And even then, his request to be fully human, to have sight like the next person, is not a selfish request. For what does he do when he is healed?

⁵² 'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Go, says Jesus, but Bartimaeus doesn't go, he comes. He follows Jesus 'along the road' – more literally, 'along the way', and you'll remember that the first disciples were called 'followers of the way' before ever they were called Christians. Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way – and we know where Jesus is going. He is on his way to Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die.

Bartimaeus wants something that will benefit himself, but his first use of that gift is an act of discipleship. His request is not like a child asking for a toy at Christmas, he is asking for something good for himself that he then puts to use in the service of Jesus.

I have a friend who has asked God in prayer for more income. But he hasn't done so to enjoy a more extravagant lifestyle. He has asked for more money so that he can bless others more.

As many of you know, I have an expensive hobby – photography. Mostly I fund it by selling old possessions and part-exchanging old photographic equipment. I love to buy a new lens for my camera, but they don't come cheap! But while I

want to enjoy the hobby myself, I also want it to benefit others. Right now, I'd like to think it's benefitting you, because all these videos are shot on high quality equipment I have bought. I aspire to my purchases being pleasurable but not selfish, because I love to bring something good and beautiful to other people through my hobby. And so I pray about my purchases!

Conclusion

That's the way to do it, James and John. Learn from Bartimaeus. Show humility as you come to Jesus. Be persistent through the discouragements. And have good motives, not selfish ones as you make your requests.

Doing so brings joy to Jesus. He will delight to hear you.