

Call Him

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 22
Mark 10:49 (Mt. 20:32; Lk. 18:40) 7/12/2020

Do you need more motivation to share your faith beyond just feeling compassion for the lost? This brief message will help.

This passage shows Bartimaeus taking initiative in coming to Jesus. That is a valid way to look at salvation, teaching us that free grace doesn't come easy. How that fits with divine sovereignty is a mystery.

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Mark 10:46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Take courage! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Introduction

There aren't very many passages in the NT about personal evangelism. But I believe this is one.

Mark 10:46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

Why did Jesus do that? Why not just walk over to the guy himself? Is Jesus lazy? Of course not. I'm convinced this is a model for how God draws people. Jesus will be dead in a matter of days, and the work of reaching the world now falls on the shoulders of his followers. And so instead of calling this man himself, which he could have easily done since he was right there, he makes a point of telling his followers to call him. I can't see any reason for that other than Jesus intended this to serve as a model for evangelism. So let's see what we can learn from it.

Our Motivation: Christ's Call

First, take a look at the change in attitude of Jesus' followers.

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet

Then one verse later:

49 "Take courage! On your feet! He's calling you."

One second they're rebuking him, seconds later they're all excited—"Can you believe it? He's calling you!" I don't know if it's the same people both times—maybe not. But either way, the point is, once Jesus calls this man, at least some of his followers get really excited about letting the guy know. It's Jesus' call that gives people value in the eyes of those who honor Christ.¹ Imagine a guy at a football game with his son. And at halftime the star quarterback gets on the PA and calls that kid to come down on the field and meet him. But kid doesn't hear, so the dad is all excited—"Hey! He just called your name!!!" That's the mood here.

Usually when we look for a motive to help us get more serious about evangelism, we look at the plight of the sinner and try to motivate ourselves through compassion. And that's great, but it's not our only motive. Another powerful motivation is spending some time thinking about the fact that Jesus is calling that person.

How do you know for sure if Jesus is calling the person? Well, if he's weary and burdened, he's being called.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come

So if the person is spiritually bankrupt, or if they are spiritually dry—Jesus is calling them.

John 12:32 When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

All people are invited.

2 Peter 3:9 ... The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God's call is universal.

Revelation 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

The call is universal, and notice what it says. The Spirit and the bride are both involved in this call. And whoever hears the call is also involved in calling others. We might find ourselves sharing the gospel more if whenever we met someone we thought of them as a person on the roadside that Jesus stopped and told us, "Go tell him this is his lucky day."

What a privilege that is! And not just in speaking to the lost. We can encourage one another in the church this way. Someone gets discouraged, and you have the happy privilege of being the one to reassure that person, "Be encouraged. He's calling you! No, he's not sick of you, he hasn't turned his back on you, he's not ignoring you—he's calling you!"

And that affects the way we present the message, doesn't it? Instead of a mood that conveys, "I know it sounds like a drag, but you have to turn from your sin and give up everything and follow Christ. Sorry about that." It's more like, "Hey! The unthinkable has happened. *God* is calling you!"

Our Message

So that's our motive. How about our message? What is our message to the world? Three parts: **Take courage, on your feet, he's calling you.** We just covered "he's calling you." Let's look at the first one—**Take courage.**

¹ The verb "call" (*phoneo*) is repeated three times in verse 49: Jesus tells the crowd to "call him"; "they called to the blind man," saying, "Take courage! On your feet! He's calling you."

Take courage

I don't know why the NIV translates this "Cheer up." That's something you say to someone who is moping around and you're trying to get him to crack a smile. This is the same word Jesus used back in 6:50 when the disciples were panicked in the storm out on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus walked out on the water to them and said, "**Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.**" It's that phrase, "take courage." Every other place this word is used in the gospels, it's always Jesus who says it to someone before doing a miracle for them. Of all the tasks Jesus had in this world, that had to be one of his favorite—being able to come to someone in desperate straits and say, "Take courage."

And in this passage, for the first time ever, he delegates that glorious task to his followers. We get to say it. And again, it's not just to unbelievers. Jesus said it to his disciples. We get to say it to anyone who needs to hear it. Jesus is full of mercy when we are in misery. Sometimes it's hard to hear over the shouts of our own self-pity, and so we need a brother or sister to come alongside and remind us, "Hey, he's calling you. Jesus hasn't forsaken you—he's calling you." What a privilege to be able to be the ones Jesus sends with that message, and to be able to say it with absolute certainty. We don't have to say, "Maybe he's calling you." Or "I think he's probably calling you." We can guarantee it.

On Your Feet

So what's our message? 1) He's calling you, 2) so take courage, then one more: **On your feet.** You're sitting there by the side of the way—time to get up. This is the call to action. They didn't just say, "He's calling you, FYI." They said, "On your feet. Get up and go to him." Our job is not just to let people know the information of the gospel, but to call them—command them to take action and go to Christ. We tend to be so timid, but we have full authorization to command people—Get off your backside and go to him.

Our Privilege

So—our motivation? Christ's call. Our message? Take courage, he's calling you, so on your feet. One more point. And I really wish this one started with an M like motivation and message, but, alas, it starts with a P.

I'll tell you the word in just a second—first let me show you where I got it. This point isn't as obvious as the others because it's not in the passage. I'm getting it from something that's not in the passage. It's not there, but it's such a glaring omission, I'm confident the Holy Spirit wanted us to notice that it's not there. Right after Jesus heals this guy, do you notice something missing? Jesus usually says it to people after healing them in Mark, and he always says it whenever someone refers to him as the Messiah. What was the first thing Jesus said when Peter declared, "You are the Christ"? The first words out of Jesus' mouth: "Don't tell anyone." He's been saying that all through the book. When he heals people, or when they identify him as Messiah, we've seen it over and over all through the book: "Don't tell anyone."

Now this guy makes the most overt declaration of Jesus' Messiahship in the whole book. Son of David was a very militaristic title that could really get Jesus in trouble with Rome. But that's okay because the time has come for Jesus to get into trouble with the authorities. The other reason for people to keep quiet is the fact that they couldn't be trusted to get the message right. The disciples understood who Jesus was, but they didn't understand why he came. But Jesus is about to go into Jerusalem and make it crystal clear why he came. So for the first time, someone calls Jesus the Messiah, and Jesus doesn't command him to keep it quiet. And by the very next paragraph, the whole crowd is saying it. It's time. It's time to go straight into the heart of the opposition (Jerusalem), and force the issue.

So what's point #3 after our motivation and our message? Our privilege. From this point forward there is no more messianic secret. What Jesus whispered in the disciples' ears we are now free to shout

from the housetops. There are no more restrictions. So to conclude I'll just say this: my privilege now as a preacher, and as your brother is to say to each of you, "Take courage! On your feet! He's calling you."

Note on Human & Divine Initiative (Free Grace Doesn't Come Easy)

Now, before I sign off, I have something to say to those of you who have some theological training. If you're new to the faith, this probably isn't going to be an issue for you. Usually brand new believers understand this point just fine, but the more theological training someone has, the more confused they get. So if you're a new believer, you can turn off the recording now, guilt free. The rest of you, I'd like to make some quick observations about human initiative and divine initiative when someone comes to Christ.

For new believers, they usually think, "Yeah, people have the responsibility to come to Jesus." And "Yeah, Jesus draws people to himself." And if you ask how those two truths fit together, they'll just shrug and say, "I don't know. I believe both are true—I'm not worried about how they fit together."

Then you get a little theological training and everyone divides up into the Calvinist and Arminian camps. No one wants the messiness of saying, "Yeah, not really sure how it all works together exactly," so the Calvinists tie it up in a really neat, tidy, easy to understand bow that says, "It's very simple. Unbelievers are corpses, incapable of doing anything, then God gives them spiritual life completely apart from faith or their will or anything they do or believe. And he puts faith in their hearts and causes them to believe."

The Arminians hear that and say, "That doesn't square with all the passages that speak of human responsibility and even human initiative in salvation. And it doesn't square with passages that talk about God drawing someone and that person resisting and ending up lost." So the Arminians come up with a tidy, easy to understand package of their own where the whole thing is very simple: God gives everyone equal ability to believe, he invites everyone the same way, and it's totally up to us whether we come or not. Problem solved.

But it's not solved, because that view doesn't do any justice to all the passages that speak of God as the ultimate initiator, and the author of our faith, and the fact that in our fallenness we are totally disinclined to come to God and believe apart from a special work of God. And it totally ignores all the passages that speak of the day of our salvation as the day we were called (which implies a special kind of calling that's different from the general invitation to all humanity—a call that, when it happens, you always respond the same day).

So one side keeps shouting all the passages that support their side, and the other side shouts all their passages, and churches split and denominations form and friendships break up and hymnals get thrown and all the rest.

So who's right? What do we see in this passage? Who acts first? Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus starts shouting, then he persists through opposition, shouts some more, then Jesus finally stops and calls him.

There is a tendency for those of us with a Reformed understanding of God as sovereign over salvation to want to downplay the role of human seeking or human initiative in coming to Christ. But it seems to me the gospels make much of it. I'm not a Palagian—I don't believe anyone can come to Christ without the Father drawing him. But Scripture also very frequently places the responsibility on the human heart to seek God, and the Holy Spirit doesn't feel the same need certain theologians feel to have to throw in a footnote in a passage like this that says, "We know, of course, that God first acted on this man's heart before he started calling out in faith." The Holy Spirit is content to just show this man initiating the encounter, because from the human perspective, it's accurate to think of it that way because secondary causes are still real causes. Just like when the Bible says it was God the Father who punished his Son on the cross, but then turns right around and holds the humans who did it responsible. From a human perspective, it's accurate to say the Jewish leaders and the Romans did it, even though the ultimate cause was God the Father. There are times when God wants us to think about coming to Christ from the human point of view—like the way it's presented in this account, where Bartimaeus takes initiative.

It's not good to just sweep that part under the theological rug and always only focus on the divine initiative part. It's important because we need to understand that grace is free but it doesn't come easy. Free grace doesn't come easy. Before Jesus called to him, Bartimaeus had to shout and endure opposition and overcome it and shout some more.

When Jesus sees faith in someone's heart, he wants to expose it so others can see it. And not only that, he also wants to strengthen it and grow it. And so he places obstacles in the way, so when the person overcomes those obstacles, his or her faith is exposed, and it is strengthened. From the human point of view, receiving grace requires human initiative.

But on the other hand, don't go to the other extreme and think the ball completely in our court when it comes to salvation. And Bartimaeus could have screamed for mercy until he was hoarse, but until Jesus stops and calls for him, it doesn't do any good. No one can come unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).

So my point? I think our goal should be to get back to where we were before we had all our theological training and got it all figured out. We need to get back to just reading the verses about human responsibility and free will and admit, "Yep, those are talking about real human responsibility and free will." And read the verses that speak of divine sovereignty in salvation and say, "Yep, God's ultimately sovereign over it." And don't worry ourselves about how to harmonize the two into a simplistic theological package devoid of any tension.

The mystery of God calling us and us seeking him is just that—a mystery. Any simplistic way of harmonizing them is probably wrong.

But we don't need to sort out the details of how it all fits together; what we need to do is be like Bartimaeus and seek hard after him, and be ready when he stops and calls us.

Summary

The fact that Jesus delegated the task of calling Bartimaeus is designed as a model to teach us about evangelism. Our motivation is Christ's call. Our message is 1) Jesus is calling you so 2) take courage and 3) get up and go to him. Our privilege is we can speak freely—no more messianic secret.