

How to Deepen Your Insight

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 21

Mark 10:47-52 (Mt. 20:29-34; Lk. 18:35-43) 7/12/2020

How do you increase your spiritual insight and find blind spots? Jesus answers that question in the account of blind Bartimaeus.

Summary: The heart of this passage emphasizes the desperate, persistent, energetic, undaunted zeal with which Bartimaeus sought favor from Jesus. We should understand we are in as desperate straits as he was in, making our cries just as urgent. But we must keep the right-side up perspective, so that the lowlier we feel, the more boldly we ask.

Seek Urgently/Humbly	1
Understand the Desperation of Your Need	2
Ask boldly	3
Jesus Gives Sight to the Lowly	3
Contrast with James and John	4
The Logic of Grace	4

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.

Seek Urgently/Humbly

Last time we learned how absolutely essential and urgent it is that we gain more and more spiritual insight. And I mentioned three principles from the passage on how to do that (Seek it from Scripture, believe what you know, and use the insight you receive to enable you to follow Christ on the road of suffering). Those were minor points, but there's a fourth principle that stands out in the passage far more than any of those. More than half of the words of this whole story occur between when Bartimaeus asks for mercy and Jesus says, "**Your faith has healed you.**" And it's all about Bartimaeus' persistence and enthusiastic, excited, urgent, undaunted faith even in the face of resistance. That's the central emphasis of the passage. We see it in his shouting, we see it in his bold request, we see it in his ignoring the rebukes and shouting even louder, and we see it in his response when he throws his cloak aside and jumps to his feet. The Son of Honor will not be denied, and we've seen in this gospel that Jesus loves that kind of gutsy faith—people tearing holes in his roof, a woman getting into a battle of the parables to get him to heal her daughter—Jesus responded to people who threw pride and caution to the wind, acted decisively, and seized the one chance they get when Jesus passes by. Jesus doesn't want a mealy-mouthed, tepid, desireless approach to prayer that says, "Just do whatever your will is God." He wants someone who will wrestle with God all night in prayer because it shows passion and strong desire. So the principle is simple: if you want insight, seek it desperately.

Proverbs 2:1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, 3 and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Understand the Desperation of Your Need

Why are we so easily discouraged in our prayer life? The reason we don't pray more than we do is very simple: lack of urgency. If you get desperate enough, you'll pray hard. We don't beseech God for insight because we don't feel a strong need for it. I think most people think of insight as icing on the cake. It would be great to have some more, but it doesn't feel like you're going to be in desperate trouble if you don't get it. So when we take prayer requests, rarely if ever does anyone say, "You've got to pray for me. I need insight! I need deeper understanding into who Christ is!" We don't feel a desperate need, but what does God's Word tell us about how important it is?

Philippians 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

Do you want to glorify God? Do you want to be filled with the fruit of righteousness? Do you want to be pure and blameless? That will all happen when your love abounds in knowledge and depth of insight. In Ephesians 3 Paul begged God to give the readers insight into God's love so they could be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.¹ And that happens only when you have enough insight to grasp and appreciate high and long and wide and deep God's love is. And it takes tremendous spiritual power to have enough insight to grasp those dimensions of his love, and so Paul prays for that. He prays that because he knows—if you had more insight into the dimensions of God's love, it would change your life in amazing ways.

The whole key to the Christian life is faith, right? And what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 Faith is being ... certain of what we do not see.

We live in a world where only a fraction of what is real can be seen. Only a fraction of reality is reflected in the physical realm, and all the most important realities that affect our lives are invisible. And so we live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7) But what if you try to live by faith in what is unseen, but you lack insight so you don't have a clear concept of what's unseen? When you lack spiritual insight, that's like flying an airplane in thick fog, relying on the instruments, but you forgot your glasses so you're not quite sure if your altitude is 10,000 feet or 10 feet.

You try to live by faith, but you're angry about something and you don't have insights from Scripture about how to overcome that anger. You know you're supposed to cast your cares on God, but you try that and it doesn't work and you don't have enough insight in the moment to grasp how to solve that problem. You have a besetting sin, but you don't have the insight to know how to break free. Your goal in life is to love God with all your being, but if you lack insight into what's so wonderful about his attributes, it doesn't happen. Some days you read the Bible and it's dry as dust; other days it brings you all kinds of joy and strength, and the difference is one word: insight.

What could be worse than lacking insight?

¹ Ephesians 3:17-19.

Ephesians 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them ... 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

That's where lack of insight will take you. That's how desperate our situation is.

But we don't feel that desperation, and so Jesus gives us Bartimaeus as a living parable of what we're like spiritually when we lack insight. He's a physical picture of what we look like spiritually when we lack insight. Put yourself in Bartimaeus' shoes for a second. In a culture like that, with no braille, no audiobooks—none of the things we have today to assist blind people—could you imagine what it would be like to be blind? All you could do is beg all day and hope enough people have mercy on you to help you stay alive from day to day. It's no mystery why Bartimaeus was shouting. And Jesus wants us to know—that's us when we lack insight and so we should be every bit as desperate. Alister Begg: "Christ will never be a reality in a person's life until he is a necessity in that person's heart."

This question Jesus asked—What do you want me to do for you?—How you would answer that question says a lot about your heart. What's the best answer? There was a guy in the Bible who answered that question in a way that pleased God so much that God rewarded him. God said, "Since you asked for that instead of asking for money or a long life or the death of your enemies, I'm going to give you what you asked for *and* give you all that other stuff." That's how pleased God was with his request. And what was the request? A wise and discerning heart—literally a hearing heart. In other words, insight.

Ask boldly

And when you realize you desperately need more insight than you have, the great news is that you're exactly the kind of person Jesus love to give insight to. He favors those who are in desperate straits, like Bartimaeus.

Jesus Gives Sight to the Lowly

Did you notice how little attention the city of Jericho gets in this account? Jericho was a glorious city—very wealthy, famous, important. Herod had re-built the city placed his extravagant winter palace there. It was renowned for its fertility and beauty. Such an important place, but look at how much attention it gets in this passage. Watch how fast it comes and goes. Mark 10:46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a large crowd That was quick. The second he gets there, he's already leaving. What happened in Jericho? Doesn't matter. Not worth mentioning. Jesus blows right by the king and the palace and all the upper class rich folks, their city barely gets mentioned as a landmark to let you know we're getting close to Jerusalem, but then this poor, blind beggar comes along and Jesus says, "Stop the presses!" He brings the whole procession to a halt. Nothing can stop Jesus on his trek to Jerusalem—he's determined, he's resolute, nothing can slow him down. But then a blind beggar cries out and it literally stops Jesus in his tracks, and this entire periscope is devoted to this guy.

That's shocking in the upside-down world, but in the kingdom of God it makes perfect sense. Jesus is doing the very thing he's been telling the disciples to do—babies, children, outcasts, outsiders—welcome them because the kingdom of God belongs to people like that.

I think there are a lot of people in a lot of churches who would be shocked if they found out which voices in their church were the most precious to God. How often do the powerful, beautiful, articulate words of the great go unheard by God, and the annoying cries of those dirty, unattractive, nobodies are music to God's ears? The people who have been soiled by some scandalous sin and are relegated to second-class status in the church ringing louder in heaven than the shallow hallelujah's of the self-righteous. If you are in church, and everyone around you is happy, and you're heartbroken, never think the cry of your desperation gets lost in the clamor of all the joyful praises of the people around you.

Contrast with James and John

I mentioned last time that Jesus puts the exact same question to Bartimaeus that he gave James and John: What do you want me to do for you? James and John: We want to be on stage with you. Bartimaeus said, “I want to see.”

Preachers expect a little starker contrast than that. I know that because a lot of the sermons I listened to, they went ahead and preached what they expected it to say rather than what’s actually there. They say, “James and John had a request that was totally self-serving. But Bartimaeus was different ...” but then they kind of fade out because what’s in the passage doesn’t really support what they’re saying. Bartimaeus asked for something for himself. Asking for eyesight— isn’t that just as self-serving as James and John’s request?

And if you compare it to the rich young ruler, the ruler’s request seems like a better request. He asked for eternal life, while Bartimaeus just asked for physical sight.

So what are we to make of this? There’s no question in my mind that we’re supposed to compare the two incidents—when you have Jesus asked the exact same question, word-for-word in two consecutive paragraphs, that’s no accident. Mark wants us to notice this and compare the two. And Jesus responds negatively to one and positively to the other.

So we compare them, but we don’t get as much of a contrast as we want. This passage would have preached a lot better if Bartimaeus would have answered by saying something like, “Lord, all I want is to have an opportunity to serve people.” But that’s not really what happened.

The reason we have trouble seeing the contrast is because we’re looking at the wrong part. The real contrast isn’t so much between what they asked for; it’s in how Jesus responded. He’s showing us the stark contrast between how Jesus responds to self-exaltation and how he responds to desperate lowliness. Jesus favors the lowly and desperate and needy—that’s the point.

And that’s great news for the lowly, right? My point in going through all that is just to say this: when you realize how desperately you need more insight, ask boldly, because Jesus responds to the lowly.

The Logic of Grace

You see, this only works if you have enough insight to see the world right-side up. If you look through the world’s lens, you won’t see it that way. If you see yourself as being self-sufficient and not all that needy, then you won’t cry out to Jesus for insight. And if you do see yourself as being really, really needy, you still won’t cry out to Jesus for mercy because you’ll think you don’t deserve it. That’s how the upside-down world thinks. “Who am I to bug Jesus. I’m a lowly blind beggar on the side of the road—who am I to expect him to pay any attention to me?” That’s how the upside-down world thinks. But Binocular Bart saw things right-side up, so he thought, *It makes perfect sense that Jesus would stop and help me. The greatest in the kingdom of God is the servant of all, Jesus is the greatest by far, so it makes perfect sense that he would serve my needs.*

Don’t ever let your neediness and lowliness and unworthiness hinder you from coming boldly to the throne of grace. The needier you are, the bolder you can be.

Psalm 41:4 O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.

Do you hear the logic of grace? You should have mercy on me God. Why? Because I have sinned against you. I see things right-side up, and so I understand that the needier I am, the more standing I have to seek grace from you.

So how do you gain greater insight? Realize the desperation of your need, and do that with the right-side up perspective so that the resulting feeling of lowliness doesn’t hinder your prayers, but makes you come boldly to the throne of grace and cry out all the more: “Son of David, have mercy on me!”