

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,
by Dr. David Fischler, on Sunday, September 13, 2015**

SIGHT FOR THE BLIND

Mark 10:46-52

On July 28, at about 4:30 in the afternoon, I embarked on a journey of trust. It was right about then that I fell down eight stairs in my house and at the bottom had a broken tibia and fibula and a dislocated ankle and the greatest pain I have ever felt. Why do I say it was a journey of trust? Well, shortly thereafter, following Maryanne's call to 911, an ambulance arrived with several paramedics. I give God thanks for them and their work that day. When they came in the door, I thought, oh, no, they're going to ask me to move and the pain's going to be even worse. But they assured me, "We know what we're doing. Just follow our directions and we'll be very gentle with you and there won't be any problems." And they were true to their word. They got me up, they got me in the ambulance, and they got me to the hospital. That's where the next part of the journey of trust began.

I was surrounded by people I had never met and they wanted to do things to me. They wanted to do some things that weren't a big deal. They took my blood pressure, they took my pulse, made sure I was still alive, that sort of thing. Then they wanted to start sticking needles in me. I wasn't so sure about that, but I thought there's really not an alternative, so I let them. Then one of them came with a particularly big needle and said, "This one's morphine." And something inside me just recoiled from that, because when I was growing up, when I took health classes in middle school and in high school they warned us about various kinds of drugs and they included morphine among the drugs that people abuse and that you should avoid with a purple passion. And I always had. I may have done some stupid things in my time but I've never taken any kind of illegal substance, certainly, and even morphine. I'd never had it before. But they said, "Don't worry. It'll be okay." So I let them stick me and I got as nauseous and I've ever been. But they said, "Don't worry. It'll pass." They put a cold cloth on my head and sure enough, in a couple of minutes it passed. And everything felt fine! And I wasn't worried about what was going on anymore. They took me down and they did x-rays and that was good. I wanted to look at the machine and I thought, "Gee, I wonder what the inside of my tongue looks like?" Then they took me back after taking the x-rays and they said, "Now we have to relocate your ankle." And I said, "Morphine's not going to help this, is it?" They said, "Well, it's going to hurt, but it will only be for a minute. Trust us. It'll be okay." And sure enough, it was not as bad as I thought it would be. And someone took a look at my x-rays and told me the full extent of my injury. They bound up my foot and sent me on my way and said, "In about a week you really should consult, again, with the doctor who saw your x-rays. He's a surgeon and an orthopedist and he'll be able to complete the treatment that needs to be done. We are letting you go."

So the journey of trust continued. Two days later I met someone I'd never seen before. I didn't see him at the hospital that I remember. I met him and saw him for about ten minutes. (I went to see him the following week and he did the surgery.) So two days

later he told me what needed to be done and he said, “I’m going to repair your leg and it’ll be as good as new in a few weeks. All you have to do is trust me.” So I went in the next week and he did the surgery and I went home that afternoon. A week later I took this thing off for the first time, took the bandages off. Actually I didn’t do it. They did it when I went back to get the staples out from my surgery. That was another instance of trust.

“I’m going to take the staples out now.”

“Oh, are you going to give me morphine?”

“No, we’re not going to give you anything.”

So they did it and I got through that. And then I saw what he had done to my foot and my ankle and I realized that I trusted him a lot more than I thought I did.

All of this makes me think of Bartimaeus. He didn’t have to undergo surgery. As a matter of fact what happened to him was both miraculous and painless. But nevertheless, what we see in the story of Bartimaeus (if you’ve heard it pronounced Bar-ti-MA-eus that’s incorrect. Just telling you it’s Bar-TIM-a-eus. The BAR means “son of.” We don’t know this man’s first name but the name we do have is “son of Timaeus.”) is that Bartimaeus embarked on a journey of trust that day in Jericho. Jericho, as you know, is on what we call the West Bank in what’s now Palestinian territories. In those days it was simply another city in Israel and Jesus visited there several times. On this occasion we’re told that after He had been to Jericho – we don’t know what He did there – if you look at verse 46 it says, “Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city.” We don’t know what He did there. He may have preached. He may have exorcised demons. He may have not done either of those things. But for whatever reason He gathered a large crowd around Him in addition to His disciples, which meant this was a perfect time for Him to demonstrate the power of God, and He took that opportunity.

Bartimaeus, we’re told in verse 46, was blind. We don’t know whether he was blind from birth or he had become blind from an accident or a disease. All we know is he couldn’t see. But what we do know about him is that he had heard of Jesus. He had been sitting by the side of the road just begging as Jesus was on His way out of the city. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, then he began to shout. When he knew who it was that was walking by him he raised a commotion. He said, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” This is the only place in the Gospel of Mark where anyone, other than Jesus Himself, calls Him *Son of David*. But that’s an indisputably messianic title. Jesus Himself uses it in Mark 12 while He’s talking in the Temple to the teachers of the law. He refers to the *Son of David* and He refers to what He is supposed to do when He comes into His kingdom. No question, when this man referred to Him as the *Son of David* he was speaking of Him not just as some itinerant teacher, not just as even some miraculous healer. He was using the term that is associated with Messiah. So in a way, this wasn’t just his way of saying, “Hey, you,” and trying to get His attention. This was a confession

of faith. We don't know where Bartimaeus got the idea that Jesus was the Messiah, but it was in the air. It's used by a crowd of people in the town of Galilee, in the context of an exorcism in Matthew 12. It was used by a Canaanite, someone who wasn't even Jewish of Jesus when she asks for help for her demon-possessed daughter in Matthew 15. And, interestingly enough, it was shouted by the Jerusalem crowd on Palm Sunday. Now in Mark's Gospel that hasn't happened yet, of course. That doesn't happen until the next chapter. Nevertheless, the idea that Jesus was the One whom Israel had been waiting for for all these centuries was out there and people were talking about it and wondering, "Could He be the One?" There were even those who gave their lives over in the belief that He was indeed the One. They were not all faithful in every moment, necessarily. We know for instance that Peter confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Anointed One in Matthew 16 and yet he didn't stick with it. He was unfaithful. So we're not suggesting that these are people who are yet ready to die for that belief but again, everything leads up to a culmination that takes place in the week of the passion and the resurrection.

So Bartimaeus calls Him *Son of David* and he says, "Have mercy on me." Kind of an all-purpose, "Yo, Bro, do your thing, whatever it is." The man may not have even known what it was that he was asking Him at that point. He may have just simply thought, "This is the One who may be the Messiah. Perhaps He can do something for me. Who knows?" His crying out, interestingly enough, was not picked up by the rest of the crowd. Instead, verse 48 tells us, "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet." How dare you, you bum, sitting here begging, you pathetic example of humanity. You're obviously cursed of God because you're disabled and blind. How dare you try to interrupt the events of the day? It's almost as though Bruce Alexander in the wheelchair over here were to have the gall to interrupt my sermon, which as we all know is the best thing since Charles Spurgeon. It's as though he were to interrupt my sermon and say, "David, I need you to pray for me. I'm in a great deal of pain at the moment. Could you stop and pray for me?" Hey, he's on wheels. Get him out of here. That's what some people were saying about Bartimaeus. Jesus, however, didn't have that reaction. But upon being told to be quiet, Bartimaeus shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Verse 49, "Jesus stopped." He stopped the train and He said, "Call him. Have him come to Me." So they called to the blind man. Imagine this perhaps sarcastically from some of those who had been telling him to shut up. "Hey, cheer up! Get on your feet. He wants to talk to you. I don't know why He wants to talk to *you*. He ought to be talking to *me*. I'm an important person around here. Or at the very least I'm not the kind of human garbage that you are." Pardon me for using this kind of terminology, but the truth is in the first century people who were not whole, people who were blind, people who were deaf, people who were lame and unable to walk, people who had leprosy or any of a number of other terrible diseases, were considered, if not less than human, then cursed by God and that's why they had that disability. So they were looked upon as outcasts. They were no better than Gentiles even if they were Jews. They were people with whom *whole* people, *normal* people would not want to associate. If nothing else, if you associated with them you might catch whatever they've got. Don't ask me how you're supposed to catch deafness, but they had no idea how physical impairment was transferred from one person to another or even if it could be. They just weren't going to

take any chances, because in those days being physically impaired might not be a death sentence but in some ways it might just as well have been. As an outcast what's this man doing? He's by the roadside begging. That's what he'd been reduced to simply because he was blind.

They told him, "Cheer up. On your feet. I have news that's going to make your day. He wants to talk to you." In verse 50, "Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus." Then Jesus asked him what he wanted him (Jesus) to do for him. Before, all he'd said was, "Have mercy on me," which could mean anything from "confess my sin" to "heal my disease" to "make me a millionaire." It could mean anything. So Jesus in verse 51 asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man gave Him the answer we would really expect him to give. I mean he could have shied away and said, "Oh, well, could you pray for me?" Or "I've been here begging. How about it you make a really big contribution?" He could have said stuff like that, but he says what we really would expect him to say, what we hope he'd say. "The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.'" What a surprise! The blind man said he wanted to see. This time, it's interesting, he calls him *Rabbi*. He doesn't call him *Son of David* again. It may be he was cowed by the hostility of the crowd. It may be that there were some people in the crowd who heard him call Jesus *Son of David* and told him, "Stop with that. We don't know anything here. You're making assumptions." So he calls him simply *Rabbi*, which means *Teacher*. "Teacher, I want to see." And Jesus gives him the address of the best ophthalmologist in Jericho and tells him, "Go see him and I'm sure he can do laser surgery on you and you'll be fixed up good as new." Isn't that what we would do? These days if someone comes to us and says, "I need healing of some kind or another. I have a broken ankle. I can't see. I can't hear. I have pneumonia." We would give them the name of a good doctor. That's what we would do. We would tell them, I hope, given the nature of this congregation, that we would pray for them. But probably we would give them the name of a good doctor. Jesus doesn't do that. And Jesus also doesn't do anything that looks like healing. Instead, in verse 52, He simply says, "Go. Your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

It's an interesting way to put it. The English Standard Version may capture a nuance here when it renders this, "Followed Him on the way." You may know *the way* was the earliest name for Christianity and it may indicate that Bartimaeus was not only healed of his blindness but became a devoted disciple of Jesus. Could be. We don't know that for a fact, but it could be. And that's that.

So Jesus healed the man. That's cool. Jesus heals lots of people in the gospels. What's so significant about this particular healing? What I'd like for us to notice in here are three things in particular with regard to this healing.

First is that Bartimaeus at least has a good idea of who it is that he's talking to. When he refers to Him as *Son of David* he no doubt does not understand all of the nuances of that. If he thinks that He's the Messiah he almost certainly doesn't know everything that that implies. If we were to sit Bartimaeus down after he's regained his sight and can read and

write so we give him the Presbytery of the East ordination exam and see if he can tell us what *Son of David* means and what its historic origins are and how it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity, I suspect he would have said that all things considered this sightedness thing is overrated. No, he no doubt does not understand fully what is going on. But he does recognize that the Man whom he's calling to is not simply a teacher who's going to show him a better way to live with his blindness. He's not just an example to emulate. Both of those ideas are very fashionable these days. You'll get lots of people in the world, many of whom will tell you they are Christians, who when you ask them, "Who is Jesus?" will answer, "He was a great teacher who has shown us how to live well in this world." Well He did do that, that's true. But there's not much there. You could just as well say the same thing about Norman Vincent Peale.

Just saying Jesus was a great teacher doesn't even begin to capture it. Jesus was the Messiah, one anointed by God, one who embodied God in this world, one who was the Lord of heaven and earth, one who was the Lord over all creation, one who is Lord of all of our physical and emotional and relational and spiritual disabilities. He is the ultimate Healer. And Bartimaeus may not have known much about Him, but I suspect that he had an idea that there's more here than just somebody who's going to tell us how to manage our symptoms a bit better. Here is one who is going to change everything and in his case changing everything meant giving him his sight. So he knew who he was dealing with. And we are called upon to know who it is that we are dealing with when we speak to Him.

You all have seen, I'm sure, the obnoxious, heretical bumper sticker that says, "God is my co-pilot." You've all seen that. I'd ask everybody to shut their eyes and everybody who's ever had that bumper sticker, anybody who's ever made that mistake, to raise their hands, but I'm not going to because I don't want to embarrass anyone. If you've ever done it, you're forgiven. God is not your co-pilot. You're not flying the plane with Him occasionally helping you to make minor course corrections. It is not even that you are His co-pilot. Do not fool yourself. You're not only not His co-pilot, you are not part of the flight crew. As a matter of fact, for many of us, we are not even sitting back in coach. We're in the luggage compartment! God's not our co-pilot. There are a lot of people who think that they're in charge of their lives when they're really not. There are a lot of people who think that if they will simply put enough effort into life, if they will show enough will, if they want something badly enough, then they can accomplish whatever they set their mind to. I'm sorry, but life is not a Disney movie. We cannot do everything that we set our minds to. I've tried to learn at least three different musical instruments. The only one I can play is one that my wife graciously refers to as an "idiot's guitar." There's a reason for that. Anyone could learn how to play this thing, truth be told. If you have any sense of rhythm at all you can learn how to play it. I failed with the guitar, the real one. I failed with the clarinet. I failed when I was a teenager with the organ. Just because I wanted to didn't mean that I could. I'm different from God in that regard. Can God do what He chooses? Yes, He can. Can He instantly heal this (my foot)? So why doesn't He? I want that pretty badly, I don't mind telling you. I wanted it even before that surgeon cut into my ankle. Ask Bruce Alexander who's had nine surgeries on his ankle whether God can heal his ankle instantly. Can He? Of

course He can. Why hasn't He? We don't know. We do? To glorify Him. That's a good answer, Fara. Because what's happened, for Bruce, for me, for George Rouse who says he's only here by the grace of God (Amen! It's the grace of God that's gotten him through these last three months.) and every person here who's ever had an injury or a significant illness, even an insignificant illness is that you've embarked on that same journey of faith that I did on July 28th in that if you didn't receive the instantaneous healing that you undoubtedly prayed for at some point, because we all do, you've had to lean upon Him to get you through the next several days, weeks, months, even years.

My Aunt Rose, my father's sister, and the favorite of all of my relatives when I was growing up, is in her late 70s, could pass for 50. She's amazing. And she has stage 4 cancer. And I'm amazed, continually amazed by the things that I hear from her. She's the other Christian in our family. Became one in 1998. And she is so completely dependent on God to get her through every day. And she knows that the chances are really pretty good that at the end of her journey of trust is going to be death. The worst thing that can happen, or one of the worst things that can happen to you, according to our society. And she has no fear of it, any more than she has any fear of cancer. Now that's not to say that those who have dealt with cancer and had a hard time with it lacked faith. We're given it in the measure that we need it. But for all of us, even those of you who are completely physically fit, you, too, are walking that same journey. And the question is, do you know who it is that you're walking with? Because if you're just walking with someone who's going to teach you how to avoid the obstacles in your way as you walk, you're not only going to stumble, but you're going to have no idea what to do about it when it happens. Instead of leaning on the One who's going to get you through it.

That's the first thing. The second thing is that we need to be persistent in our requests. Bartimaeus didn't let the disapproval of the crowd or his own feeble condition stop him from getting the attention that he needed and wanted from Jesus. When Jesus asked him what he wanted, he didn't hem and haw, he didn't do the false humility thing and say, "Oh, Lord, I only want you to place Your hand on my head and give me a blessing." That's nice, but he knew what he needed and he did not hesitate to ask for it. And if Jesus had said, "I'm not going to heal you, but I am going to make it possible to live with your blindness in such a way that you can rejoice every single day, even in the midst of that disability," He would have still answered Bartimaeus' request. Even as we submit our will to His, Bartimaeus demonstrates to us, we need to be clear and we need to be persistent in our prayer. There are some of you who have children for whom you have been praying for years and years who have wandered away from the faith. They were dedicated to Him when they were infants and now you desperately want them to come to Christ. Well, that may happen today. It may happen tomorrow. It may happen next year. It may happen after you're dead and gone. We don't know whether it will or not. And yet we continue to do so and always conclude that prayer with, "Lord, let Your will be done."

One final thing and that is that our relationship with Christ is at the heart of everything. This in some ways is the most important part of this, so listen carefully. When Bartimaeus asks for his sight, Jesus says, "Your faith has healed you." That is an

expression that has been, unfortunately, grossly misunderstood. Most especially by people in the prosperity gospel, health and wealth, name it and claim it movement. But others have as well. When He says, "Your faith has healed you," He doesn't mean that he healed himself. He doesn't mean, "Well, you had enough faith so you get what you wanted." What He means is that he was healed because he placed his trust in the Healer. "Your faith in Me means that you are healed, because I'm the One who heals. Not you, not your belief, not positive thinking, not any of the spiritual techniques that are so popular in 21st century America. You haven't done this yourself. It is only inasmuch as you have acknowledged (and that's essentially what Bartimaeus does) you can't heal yourself. You can't make it okay. You can't see just because you want to."

Bartimaeus comes to Jesus and he opens his arms and he says, "Lord, I can't do it. I give it to You." It is Bartimaeus' trust in the Healer that brings about his healing. The relationship that even at that moment begins and, we pray, continued throughout his life, that's where the healing came from. And in everything that is not right in our lives, for that matter, everything that is right in our lives, - our relationship with our children or with our spouse or with our employer, our physical health, our financial circumstances, our jobs, our relationship with our mother-in-law - everything can and must be seen in the light of that relationship with the One who oversees it all. Every bit of it.

Bartimaeus called that One *Son of David*. We call Him the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.