

January 5, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY MERCY Luke 18:35-43

“Lord have mercy!” We have all heard the phrase more times than we would have liked. Sadly, maybe we have said it without thinking. Is it using God’s name to curse? Probably not. Is it a meaningless statement about one of God’s most wonderful actions? Yes. Does that qualify it as “taking the Lord’s name in vain,” which is prohibited by command number three (Exodus 23:7)? Probably.

Maybe a good response when you hear someone in your circle of conversation make that thoughtless, vain expression would be to ask the person, “Exactly how would you like God to demonstrate His mercy to you?” No doubt that would shock the person who would very likely respond that he or she didn’t mean anything by it. It was just an expression. It is not wise to make meaningless, trite requests to God who sees all, hears all, and rewards every person for their words and actions (Jeremiah 32:19).

In our text, we read Luke’s record of the fourth miracle Jesus performed while on His journey to Jerusalem to lay down His life. Up to the end, Jesus continued to prove that He was God the Son with power over sickness, nature, demons, and death. To the very end Jesus continued to fulfill the words of Isaiah, the promise He referred to at the very beginning of His public ministry: *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).*

In this, Jesus’ final miracle during the journey to Jerusalem, we meet a man whose eyes were completely blind, but whose heart perceived great truth. In his physical blindness, he perceived far more

truth than the seeing eyes of most of his peers ever saw. His eyes of faith led him to depend wholly on Jesus. His eyes of faith drove him to cry for mercy, which he fully expected Jesus could and would grant. When you ask Christ to show mercy to you, what exactly do you want?

A Plea for Mercy. (vv.35-39)

Luke’s story about the good news reminds us at this point that Jesus attracts the attention of the needy (vv.35-37). But that is a useful attraction only when the needy person admits the need. Such was the case for the fellow we meet in verse thirty-five. *As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging (v.35).* In this story, there were actually two blind men who begged for mercy. Matthew clarifies that thought by writing, . . . *two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” (Matthew 9:27).*

Here in Luke’s account he focused the story on one of the men. He is the same blind beggar Mark named as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46). That the man was named could indicate that by 10 years after the founding of the Church, Bartimaeus was known by the Christians who would read these Gospel accounts. The man did what he could. He was sitting where people would be found, begging for subsistence. He did not pretend that he was not blind. He knew that he was blind and positioned himself where he could receive help from the people who passed by. Surely the blind man did not know that Jesus would pass by that day. But he was where he needed to be at the right time.

It is a picture of the person who responds appropriately to God’s prompting. As sinners we are spiritually blind, incapable of seeing our spiritual need. But God showers common grace on all sinners. The sinner who responds to the little light of common grace receives more light. As we respond to the light God gives, God continues to draw us. The sad reality is that most people are spiritually blind but quite sure they are okay, and, therefore, they reject the convicting promptings of the Holy Spirit – thinking that it is not good to have bad feelings about themselves.

The needy person must inquire. *And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is*

passing by” (vv.36-37). The blind beggar heard something unusual – something more than the normal sound of citizens passing by. He did not hesitate to ask questions. He inquired of the people even though they would have certainly considered him to be an outcast, not part of the mainstream of society. Matthew told us there was a large crowd of people (Matthew 20:29).

The needy person needs to admit their need, and the truly needy person must beg for mercy (vv.38-39). The needy must cry to the only real source of help. So Bartimaeus *cried out*, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” (v.38). The man was convinced that Jesus was more than the man from Nazareth. His reference to Jesus reveals the belief that He was the promised Christ of God. “*Jesus, Son of David*” was a Messianic title. It recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was born in the lineage of David. But more than that, the title refers to Jesus as the promised Son born in David’s line who would fulfill God’s promise that David’s relative would reign over God’s people forever.

Somehow this man knew enough about Jesus to accept Him as God the Son, the promised one. He referred to Jesus with a title that fit with Gabriel’s promise to Mary regarding her son. “*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 1:32-33). Bartimaeus knew this and fully believed it.

His plea for mercy reveals that he truly expected the Christ to be able to change his life. Such cries for mercy are common in the Jesus stories. One time a woman outside the community of God’s people Israel expressed the same strong desire for mercy. *And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon”* (Matthew 15:22). There was a hopeless father who cried to Jesus, “*Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly*” (Matthew 17:15). So in many cases Jesus demonstrated mercy like He did for the demon-possessed man from Garesenes when He told him, “*Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you*” (Mark 5:19).

These cries for mercy flow from or are thematically connected with David’s cry for mercy in his repentance after he sinned with Bathsheba and against her husband. He cried out, “*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions*” (Psalm 51:1). People who believe Christ is able to change them desire His mercy. And if we really believe it, we ask for it. Here the beggar’s request (like our own when we were sinners) is for Jesus to forego justice and bestow favor that is not deserved.

Crying for mercy is not the same as reciting a mantra or a creed that means nothing to you. When you realize that you are helpless and hopelessly spiritually blind because of sin, you will cry for help. When you realize that Jesus, God the Son, is the only one who can help you, you will beg Him for mercy.

And when the needy person finally cries out for mercy, we need to be persistent. *And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (v.39). The people were no doubt embarrassed by this man’s outbursts. They told him to be quiet and not bother the famous Teacher who had recently raised Lazarus from the dead.

But all the resistance did not dissuade Bartimaeus one bit. He who knew he was blind and was convinced God the Son could change his life would not be silenced. He didn’t just call out to Jesus. The word (*boao*) used in verse thirty-eight means to roar, shout, scream. Moving on to verse thirty-nine, we find a different word (*krazo*) that describes how the man got even more persistent. This new word means to shriek, cry out, scream like disciples in a boat would do when they thought they saw a ghost (Mark 6:49).

We will not cry out to the Savior to heal our spiritual blindness, to take away the scales of sin from our spiritual eyes, until we admit our desperate condition. Once we become convinced of how blind we are and what are the hopeless consequences of that blindness, we will scream to Jesus for help. That is good initial evidence of our dependence on Him alone.

A Demonstration of God's Mercy. (vv.40-43)

Jesus did not ask the question, but it is implied in His response to the blind beggar who asked for mercy. "What do you mean by 'mercy'?" That question is implied and answered in verses forty and forty-one. Jesus' question did not overshadow the fact that our Creator already knows what is wrong and why we need mercy. *And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (vv.40-41).*

Before we go that far though, let's back up and see how the Savior commanded that the needy man be brought to Him. Why didn't Jesus simply walk over to where the man (or men) was? From a practical perspective, it could have been a bit difficult to move in the crowd. But more important is that Jesus might have desired to apply an important principle here. Sometimes in the Gospel stories we see Jesus going to the needy. For example, He went all the way across the Sea of Galilee to meet the needy demon- possessed man at the Gaderenes. When the ruler's daughter had died, Jesus followed the man to his daughter's bedside. When Lazarus died, Jesus went to him. Obviously, in none of those cases would the needy person be able to come to Jesus.

Sometimes Jesus meeting a needy person might look like coincidence. However, a closer inspection reveals that Jesus actually had an appointment with the person, as it was with the woman at the well in Samaria. Most of the time the needy person was brought to Jesus for healing, much like His command to allow the children to come to Him.

This is an important idea because it is the principle involved in the miracle of salvation. On one hand, the Savior condescended to us when He emptied Himself of majesty. That is the wonderful reality stated in Philippians two, that Jesus, *"Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).*

The Kenosis (God the Son emptying Himself to come to us) was an incomprehensible display of grace. We are the needy ones who are sunk in sin. But Christ came to us. And in the same way, it is impossible for us to move toward Christ in our sinful condition because we are dead (like the ruler's daughter and like Lazarus). Jesus must initiate the invitation. And He does.

God our Creator invites us to come to Himself through the Savior. Here is the wonderful invitation even in the Old Testament. *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).* It is much like working out the details for negotiations, like at whose office or on whose terms will the contract be discussed. The huge difference is that in salvation God offers a unilateral covenant. It is His covenant, made on His terms. We bring nothing to the table. We respond to His invitation, we do not initiate the invitation. God does not come to us on our terms. This is the fallacy of those who think that "accepting Jesus" is simply a matter of adding Jesus to their well-ordered lives.

Having invited the blind man to Himself, the Savior gave the needy man opportunity to "confess" need. Jesus was not looking for information when He asked the man what he wanted. Jesus knew better than this man the depth of his need. Rather, Jesus simply gave the man the opportunity to agree with Jesus' assessment. We call that confession, "saying the same thing God says about us."

This picture is such an accurate portrayal of our coming to Christ by faith so that He makes us whole. Like the blind man, we sinners must acknowledge our need to our Creator. When Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted, *he said, "Lord, let me recover my sight" (v.41b).* His response that "I might see again" is full of meaning. On one hand, the verb means to look up. In that sense, the blind man desired the ability to look up and see. But on the other hand, the word generally refers to restored sight, being able to see again. Which would imply that Bartimaeus had been able to see in the past.

The translation, *let me recover* might be better translated "that I might recover." Bartimaeus knew that there was nothing he could do to recover his sight. He was convinced that Jesus, Son of God, had the power to cause his sight to return.

Again, it is a beautiful picture of the sinner's restoration to fellowship with God. God created all things perfect. That means that God enjoyed perfect fellowship with our original parents Adam and Eve. That sinless, undeterred fellowship was to be the norm. Adam's and Eve's rebellion against God broke the fellowship and destroyed the norm. The sacrifice of God the Son, to pay the penalty for sin, restores that fellowship.

This is a sad reminder that we are each born in sin and, therefore, out of fellowship with our Creator. But through faith in Christ's work in our behalf, we can be restored to that divine norm that God intended. Only through faith in Jesus, Son of David, is that fellowship restored.

And fellowship is restored because God's mercy is boundless (vv.42-43). When we beg Him for mercy, He meets our need according to faith. *And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well" (v.42).*

Actually, Jesus did two great acts of mercy at the same time. First, He restored the man's sight. That was the blind man's most obvious need. That was his specific request. But at the same time, Jesus also restored the man to fellowship with His Creator because of His faith. *"Your faith has made you well"* is a very important statement because the single verb translated *"made you well"* is the very important Greek word *sozo*. We have pointed out in the past that this phrase built on the verb refers to eternal salvation. The word actually means to be delivered from. In this case, the verb is the perfect tense verb which means that faith is the source that brought deliverance which has continuing results. What a perfect description of salvation.

Where did the man get such great faith? How did he know that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of David? How did he know that the Son of David was the promised Christ? Why did he believe that the Christ could heal him, both physically and spiritually? Like all sinners who are brought to Christ by the Holy Spirit when we are invited, his faith was God's gift to Him. The gift of faith is the great demonstration of God's mercy.

God grants us needy sinners mercy for His own glory. *And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God" (v.43).*

Physical evidence of God's mercy was the restoration of physical sight. Spiritual evidence of God's mercy is found in the restored man's determination to follow Jesus. Having received Christ's mercy, the restored man quickly put into practice the same principle Jesus gave as the description for believers. We follow Him. Jesus taught, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).*

Another evidence of genuine restoration is that the restored man kept on giving all the glory to God for his condition. We call such praise testimony. You should have one if you are born again. Furthermore, we notice that the restored man was the channel for others to praise God. We ought to always praise God for the ways that He has showered His mercy on us and others. It ought to be infective.

We close with an interesting comparison. Bartimaeus, like all repentant sinners, was brought into the family of God when he cried out (*krazo*) "Son of David have mercy on me." And, like Bartimaeus, once we are brought into the family of God by His mercy, we have the privilege of crying out (*krazo*) "Oh Father!" That same word is found in the wonderful promise, *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).*

Have you come to the end of yourself, acknowledged your hopeless condition in your spiritual blindness, and screamed out to the Christ to show you mercy, take away your blinding sin, and change your life? Now that you are in the family of God, because of His mercy, how often do you cry out to Him still, "Oh Father, help me live in a way that will bring glory to You alone!"? Coming into the family of God requires His mercy. Living for God's glory in His family still requires His mercy.