

# *This Week at the Creek*

is an e-mail ministry of

## the Church at Dyers Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

### Opportunity

Mark 10:46-52

November 5, 2006

A young man who had worked for years on the railroad wanted a job as a signalman. For his interview, he was told to meet the inspector at the signal box. The inspector asked him, "What would you do if you realized that two trains were heading toward each other on the same track?" The young man said, "That's easy. I would switch the points for one of the trains." The inspector then asked, "What if the lever broke?" The young man said, "Then I'd jump down out of the signal box and use the manual lever over there." Next, the inspector said, "What if the lever had been struck by lightning?" The young man said, "Then, I would run to the signal box and phone the next signal box to let them know what was happening."

The inspector continued on, "What if the phone was busy?" The young man said, "Well, in that case, I would rush down out of the signal box and use the public emergency phone at the crossing up there." Then, the inspector said, "What would you do if the public emergency phone had been vandalized?" The young man said, "Well, then I would run into town and get my uncle." That answer puzzled the inspector, so he asked, "Why would you go get your uncle?" The young man answered, "Because he's never seen a train wreck before."

Too many of us feel our lives are headed toward a crash – like two trains headed directly toward each other and there's really nothing we can do to stop it from happening. Maybe you feel as if you've gotten off track. Maybe you feel something is **missing** in your life and you just don't **know** what it is. Is there a way out? Is there any hope? Is there any way to stop the crash before it happens? In this passage we're given an example of a man who must have felt the same way.

Helen Keller, so brave and inspiring to us in her deafness and blindness, once wrote a magazine article entitled, "Three Days to See." In that article she outlined what things she would like to see if she were granted just three days of sight. On the first day she said she wanted to see friends. Day two she would spend seeing nature. The third day she would spend in her home city of New

York watching the bustling city on a workday. She concluded with these words: "I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you were stricken blind."

As bad as blindness is in our own age, it was so much worse in Jesus' day. Today a blind person at least has the hope of living a useful life with proper training; indeed, some of the most skilled and creative people in our society are blind. But in first-century Palestine blindness meant that you would be subjected to abject poverty. You would be reduced to begging for a living. You lived at the mercy and the generosity of others. And unless your particular kind of blindness was self-correcting, there was no hope whatsoever for a cure. The skills that were necessary were still centuries beyond the medical knowledge of the day. Little wonder then that one of the signs of the coming of the Messiah was that the blind should receive their sight.

Bartimaeus really had very little going for him. Stranded on the outskirts of Jericho, he most likely lived on the streets. There didn't seem to be any changes on the way in his life. There didn't seem to be any way for him to break the cycle. He seemed destined to remain on life's disabled list for all of his life. Bartimaeus was blind, he was poor, his future looked gloomy, his life seemed hopeless. That is until the day Jesus came along. And what Jesus did for Bartimaeus, He can also do for you. In fact, what can we learn from Bartimaeus that will help us get plugged into the plan that God has for our life? I'd like to share with you four ways.

First, realize your problems. Thousands of years ago a young Chinese emperor called upon his family's most trusted advisor. "Oh, learned counselor," said the emperor, "you have advised my father and grandfather. What is the single most important advice you can give me to rule my country?" And Confucius replied, "The first thing you must do is to define the problem." So many unhappy people cannot put their finger on what is really causing their distress. So many unfulfilled people can't even tell you what it would take to satisfy them. And many of us have no clear idea or conception what our real needs, our real desires, our real priorities are. When we've never defined the problem or clarified our goals, we're apt to spend a lifetime anxiously wandering with little to show for the pilgrimage.

It's like the beggar in the movie "Monty Python's Life of Brian." Brian and his mother are walking through town and get hit up by a beggar. "Alms for an ex-leper. Alms for an ex-leper, please." And Brian says, "What do you mean an ex-leper?" And the leper says, "Well, I was cured." "Who cured you?" Brian asks. The leper says, "That Jesus fellow, and now I have a hard time making a living; all I've ever known how to do is beg." So Brian says, "Well, why don't you go back and ask him to make you a leper again?" But the leper says, "Well, I might not like that. Maybe he could just make me a leper during working hours or something." So Brian just sighs, drops a coin in his cup, and walks away. Peering into his cup, the ex-leper cries, "Half a denarius? Look at this! He only gives me a half a denarius!" And Brian says, "Some people are never satisfied." To which the leper replies, "That's just what Jesus said!"

Maybe Monty Python is on to something. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What can I do for you?" – a question Jesus asked many times over. He wanted those He healed to identify their problem – because only when they could pinpoint what

in their lives needed fixing could their problems be addressed and converted into a solution.

Second, capitalize on the opportunities God provides for you. This story takes place when Galilean Jews were making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Avoiding Samaritan territory, they would cross over the Jordan at Jericho and then take their journey's final leg up the steep road. Reduced to begging and at the same time anticipating the generosity of the pilgrims, Bartimaeus sits by the roadside. But once he discovered that Jesus was close by, he went berserk, shouting, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus didn't know what lay ahead for Jesus in Jerusalem. He couldn't know that the Master would be crucified there and that this opportunity would never come again. He did know, however, that the opportunity was here now, and he wasn't going to allow it to pass him by.

Opportunities only become opportunities when we embrace them as such. God may offer something to us time and again; however, if we refuse to accept it, the opportunity will be missed. An opportunity must be seized! Before every one of us is a door of opportunity. God could be calling you to accept Him as your Savior and Lord. He could be calling you to recommit yourself to a walk with Him. He could be calling you to a place of service in the church or to get involved in a ministry in our community. If God is placing an opportunity before you, you have two choices. You can seize the moment and grab the opportunity, or you can allow other things to hinder the opportunity. May we make the right choice.

Third, minimize the negative voices that clatter around you. Notice the crowd's reaction when Bartimaeus cried out for help: Many tried to hush him up. The crowd stereotyped Bartimaeus. To them, he'd never be anything other than a poor, blind beggar – and a waste of Jesus' time. But Bartimaeus persisted; he wouldn't give up; he yelled all the louder. Bartimaeus wasn't going to let a bunch of negative, critical, heckling bystanders rob him of his dream of sight – and neither should you. Never try to please those who constantly criticize you! Why? Because you'll never be able to do so! When you're criticized – when you face the negative crowd – follow the example of Bartimaeus. Use it and grow from it, but move forward in spite of it. Don't let it hold you back; don't be limited by it. Just continue to seize the opportunities that you're sure God is placing before you.

Fourth, exercise all the faith you can muster up. Bartimaeus's boldness grabbed Jesus' attention, but it didn't get him healed. Jesus healed him because of his faith. Knowing exactly what he needed most, Bartimaeus didn't hesitate to speak to Jesus about it. And through prayer, we have this same privilege. It is as the Lord promised in Jeremiah: "Call to me and I will answer you. I'll tell you marvelous and wondrous things that you could never figure out on your own." It is as Paul told the Philippians: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns." But please don't be shallow. Just requesting something of the Lord or speaking to Him is never enough. Complete faith is obedient faith! Don't miss that when all was said and done, Bartimaeus had thrown off his coat and followed Jesus down the road. Don't miss your opportunity to throw off whatever is hindering you! Don't miss your opportunity to be faithful! Don't miss your opportunity to follow Jesus!

A missionary in a very isolated area of Africa performed surgery on a poor blind man. The surgery was successful and his sight was restored. Several days after the operation, the man disappeared from the hospital. Everyone was concerned for his well-being. But then a few days later, the missionary opened his door and there stood the man who had been operated on. The man was holding a rope, and on the other end of the rope were ten more blind people.

Genuine faith is contagious faith! Genuine faith can't wait to tell others, to point others to God, to follow Jesus. So stop settling for less! Stop muddling through life partly on track, partly off track. Look and see the opportunities Jesus has for you.

Let us pray: Lord, help us keep our eyes open for every opportunity You put before us. And when those opportunities do come, may we prove to be people of complete and obedient faith – of genuine and contagious faith. In Jesus' name.

### **Sources**

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