

# What Do You Want Me to Do For You?

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Preacher: David Court

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's read together from God's word. Mark chapter 10, verses 32 to 52. This is the word of the Lord. And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them.

And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priest and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days, he will rise. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory. Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? And they said to him, We are able. And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized.

[ 1 : 14 ] But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And they came to Jericho, and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples, and a great crowd, pardon me, let me back up. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

[ 2 : 19 ] And Jesus stopped and said, call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart, get up. He is calling you.

And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight.

And Jesus said to him, Go your way. Your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. This is God's holy word.

Well, we begin this evening, a new series over these summer months, looking at some of the questions that Jesus asked.

And perhaps we're more likely to think of Jesus as the man with all the answers. And while I don't think we're wrong to do that, it is striking to note that more than any other person in the Bible, Jesus asks questions.

[ 3 : 22 ] There are, I think, more than 300 questions asked by Jesus in the four Gospels. So this could be quite a long series. Jesus asks questions of his disciples, religious leaders, critics, rich and poor, men and women, powerful as well as the powerless.

Why so many questions? Well, frequently Jesus asks questions as a teaching tool, to help people discover the truth about themselves, the truth about God, the truth about God's kingdom.

Sometimes he asks questions to enable others to see things from a very different perspective. And the questions Jesus asks are often the first step in drawing people into a relationship with himself. His questions are an invitation to us to come to him and to get to know him. And in this new series, we'll be taking one of Jesus' questions each week.

And we'll try and understand the story, the context in which those questions occur. We'll look at what that question tells us about Jesus and what it means for us to be in a relationship with him.

[ 4 : 52 ] And tonight we begin with the question, what do you want me to do for you? And you'll notice in our reading that that question is asked not once, but twice in this short section of Mark's gospel, both in verse 36 and 51.

It's asked of two of Jesus' very closest followers. And then the very same question is asked of a blind beggar at the roadside.

What do you want me to do for you? And that's the question before us this evening. Because the same Jesus who asked it then asks us tonight.

He stands before us in the preaching of the word. He says, what do you want me to do for you? It's a soul-searching question that challenges us to stop and think about the desires that are driving and shaping our lives.

Some of those may indeed be honoring to God, but others, of course, may not be. And sometimes the desires of our hearts are tainted by depravity and pride.

[ 6 : 16 ] And so they need to be challenged and indeed changed. And you'll notice here that the backdrop against which we must understand this particular question is the backdrop of the cross.

The context here is Jesus making his way towards Jerusalem. At this point in the gospel, the dark shadow of the cross looms ever larger.

And Jesus is marching, as it were, into the very jaws of death. They were on the road going up to Jerusalem. Jesus walking ahead of them.

They were amazed. Those who followed were afraid. Taking the twelve, he began to tell them what was to happen to him. See, we are going up to Jerusalem.

The Son of Man will be delivered over to chief priests, scribes, and they will condemn him to death, deliver him over to the Gentiles, mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him.

[ 7 : 20 ] And after three days, he will rise. Here in Mark's gospel, this is the Jesus' third prediction of his death in just these three chapters.

It's the most graphic of the three, the most violent. He's going to be delivered up and condemned to death. He's going to be mocked. He'll be spat on. He'll be flogged and killed before rising on the third day.

Jesus is not a comfortable teacher offering us up self-help advice. He is the suffering servant, pouring out his very soul to death for the sins of many.

And here in this gospel, on the two previous occasions that Jesus has spoken about his death, his words are met with disbelief and misunderstanding.

After the first, Peter sought to take Jesus aside and to rebuke him. And after the second, we discovered the disciples squabbling over which of them was to be the greatest.

[ 8 : 28 ] And now here, once again, we discover the way of the cross reveals the all too shallow and selfish attitudes of his followers. So what I want to do tonight, just from this passage, is kind of look at it by way of contrast.

These two questions, the same question asked twice of two very different people. And in the first section, we have James and John.

And we discover that they are looking for glory, for glory. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you, verse 35.

These two disciples, they had been witnesses of the transfiguration of Jesus earlier in the gospel. They'd already been privileged to see something of Jesus' glory.

And they no doubt saw themselves as amongst Jesus' closest, most favored disciples. And they come to Jesus with this quite astonishing request.

[ 9 : 35 ] Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. It's an amazing prayer. Jesus, we want you to give us what we want.

They don't even reveal their demands up front. It's almost as if they want to manipulate Jesus into serving and obeying them.

They're desperate to feed their own egos. Jesus has been speaking about his suffering and death, and yet they're more interested in what they can get for themselves.

Oh, yes, Jesus, we hear what you're saying about what is going to happen to you, and suffering, and death, and flogging, and all of that. But actually, what's in it for us?

What's in it for me? Unfortunately, there is much that passes for Christianity today that exudes a kind of similar attitude.

[10:33] It's not about Jesus. It's about me, my wealth, my health, my success. And yet, perhaps even more remarkable than the question of these disciples is Jesus' response.

He said to them, verse 36, What do you want me to do for you? It's fascinating. Jesus doesn't rebuke them. He doesn't put them in their place.

He doesn't get on his high horse. He simply asks them what it is they want. He draws out their request. He gets them to say it out aloud.

He gets them to reveal what is really going on in their hearts and minds. And they said to him, verse 37, Grant us to sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left, in your glory.

They're looking for glory. If I can paraphrase that well-known pop group, the Spice Girls.

[11:41] This is what they want, what they really, really want. And when Jesus comes into the fullness of his kingdom, when he comes to be glorified, they want the places of power and honor at his side.

When Jesus takes the throne, they want to be one on his left, one on his right. They're unashamedly, brazenly asking Jesus for positions of power and status and glory.

To be right and left of the king was to be in the place of his most honored advisors or counselors. And they were anticipating that possibility of sitting on thrones.

They rather fancied having a throne each, one either side of Jesus. And perhaps from those seats of authority, they were intending to exercise power and authority.

And although Jesus has been telling them that God's kingdom will come about by him going to die in Jerusalem, these disciples, it seems, have only their own agenda in mind.

[12:53] And the irony here is, of course, as Mark will later reveal to us, that the one place where Jesus will come into his glory is the cross.

At the moment of Jesus' greatest glory, there will be somebody on his right and left, but they will be crucified criminals. And so Jesus tells the brothers that they have no idea what he is talking about, what they're talking about.

Jesus says to them, you don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink, be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? Verse 38. The Old Testament, that cup, common metaphor for God's judgment or wrath.

The baptism language, I think, has a similar meaning, conveying the idea of being overwhelmed by water, like Noah's Ark and the flood, or the Egyptian army being drowned in the Red Sea.

In each of those cases, the water represented the overwhelming power of God's judgment, from which only a few were saved. This is what Jesus was going to the cross to achieve.

[14:02] He was going to take upon himself the judgment and wrath of a holy God, that we might be saved from sin. And yet James and John, they just don't get it.

We are able, they say. And Jesus said to them, the cup I drink, you will drink, with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized. But to sit at my right or my left is not mine to grant.

It's for those for whom it has been prepared. When the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. James and John, their hearts are desperate for prestige and glory.

They think nothing of exploiting their relationship with Jesus for their own ends. And Jesus tells them that they will indeed come to know something of his cup and his baptism.

James, we know, would be martyred, John exiled. But those places of honor that they've set their hearts upon have already been allocated.

[15:08] And unsurprisingly, the other disciples are left angry and indignant by the brother's request. The world loves power and glory.

And if we have an eye for what's going on around us, I think we can see this lust for power and status and glory almost everywhere. In some circles, everything appears to be reduced to a power play of one kind or another.

We certainly see it in politics and in public life. But we also see it in big business and industry, science and the media. All too often, people are not there to serve others with their skill, but are

there for power and status.

It's interesting, this whole idea of public service is fast disappearing in our post-Christian society. Because more often than not, people seem to be out for themselves to pursue their own agenda. And sadly, sometimes we see it in the church. We can see it in the pulpit. The pulpit can be a dangerous place to occupy. And at times, it can be easy to turn it into a throne of authority and power where you lay down the law, dominate, exercise control over others.

[16:34] Yes, it may be done with good intentions, but it's a dangerous road for any minister to travel. And one where many become intoxicated with their power and influence.

And you'll notice here how Jesus uses this exchange with James and John as a kind of teaching opportunity. He calls the disciples around him, starts to instruct them. He desperately wants them to understand what it means to belong in his kingdom.

It's not about power and glory. It's about being a servant, he says. He called them to him. He said, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

Verse 42. The disciples of Jesus are not to be characterized by selfish pride, but by selfish, selfless humility.

They're not to be rulers, but servants. And he draws a kind of contrast. The Gentile world of his day in the Roman Empire, power and influence were everything in that society to be a great person was to be someone with authority and power and control, and that is the way of the world still.

[17:49] And yes, of course, authority in and of itself is not wrong. Jesus himself was a man of authority. Matthew 28, even tells us that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

You see, the issue is rather how that authority is exercised. And the great danger is that it's used selflessly, selfishly rather than selflessly.

That's why often people covet power and authority means they get their own way. And to do that, they have to climb to the top of the ladder to be number one.

Money, connections, influence, position become the sought-after idols of their lives. Rapacious egos must be constantly fed and fueled.

Delighting to lord it over others. And as I say, you only need to look at politics, business, any large institution to see this kind of pattern at work in the lives of many people.

[18:56] Some people spend their whole lives seeking after these things, believing it will give their lives meaning and purpose and direction. salvation. But Jesus says in verse 43, but it shall not be so among you.

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. Not so with you.

Because in Christ's kingdom, to be great is to be a servant and to be number one, you must be the slave of all. They're quite astonishing words.

The very antithesis, the very opposite of what our world believes. Intensely counter-cultural. They were then, they are now.

Jesus is not looking for rulers and lords. He's looking for servants and slaves. because for disciples of Jesus, the way of influence in this world is not by taking power and control.

[20:10] He calls us in a different direction. He calls us to serve others, not to use them. He calls us to love others, not abuse them.

Our influence in the world is to come from the winsomeness and beauty of our service. Not from attempts to coerce, manipulate, or control.

This is the way of the kingdom, friends, because this is the way of the king. Jesus is our model and pattern.

He's the one who took the very nature of a servant, the Lord of glory, who stooped down into the squalor and filth of a Bethlehem cattle shed, the great I am who took the servant's apron and a basin of water and knelt down on the ground and washed his disciples' feet.

The king of love, who in Calvary's cross gave his life blood for sinners like you and me. From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world your glory veiled, not to be served, but to serve and give your life that we might live.

[21:25] For even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. What do you want me to do for you, says Jesus?

What does your heart say tonight? Do you want him to make you a ruler or a servant? What do you really want from Jesus?

Comfort without cost, honor without humility, blessing without brokenness? Are you willing to drink his cup and share his baptism?

Here's the question. Do you want to be like him? Do you want to be like Jesus? So here are James and John and they're looking for glory.

And then we have this other encounter in which we discover Jesus asking the self same question. And here's blind Bartimaeus in verses 46 to 52.

[ 22 : 36 ] And he's looking for what? He's looking for mercy. This healing of blind Bartimaeus closes, I think, a section of the gospel.

It runs way back from chapter eight. And one of the key themes that runs through this section is the blindness really of the disciples. Chapter eight, the disciples have had their eyes opened to Jesus' identity, and yet no matter how clearly Jesus speaks about the cross, they are blind really to the purpose of his mission.

And this incident provides a very clear contrast to what has gone on beforehand. James and John bring the requests for the best places in the kingdom.

But here is another person bringing his request to Jesus. Bartimaeus is the only person healed in the synoptic gospels who is named.

And this is the last healing miracle of Mark's gospel. Here is a man who, for all his lack of eyesight, proves to have great insight. Here is a man who sees with the eye of faith.

[ 23 : 49 ] Here is a man who is beside the way, and yet through the gracious ministry of Jesus, soon finds himself following Jesus on the way. Here is a poor man in great need looking for not glory, he's looking for mercy.

They came to Jericho, and as he was leaving with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind becker, son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. Here is a man who lived his life in darkness.

His condition meant he was utterly dependent on other people. He was not an independent, self-sufficient man. He was on the margins of society, he was reduced to begging by the roadside, he was someone that other people looked down on with pity.

In the eyes of many, he was a nobody. And yet, though he could not see with his eyes, his hearing was excellent. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, verse 47, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. As the crowd of pilgrims made its way from Jericho, it passed Bartimaeus and his begging bowl.

[ 25 : 19 ] And here he hears of Jesus. And perhaps he'd heard about Jesus before, his teaching, his miraculous works, and so on, and yet, almost in a kind of act of desperation, he decides to shout out and call upon Jesus and seek his help.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy upon me. And it's interesting, that title he gives to Jesus, son of David. There were lots of different ideas about the Messiah in first century Israel, but one that was common to all of them was the understanding that the Messiah would come from the house of David.

The promise of Samuel 7 was that God would raise up the offspring of David, establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And so, this title that Bartimaeus ascribes to Jesus was an explicitly messianic one.

Bartimaeus is here calling upon Jesus as the promised Messiah, as God's true king, great David's greater son. He sees Jesus for who he really is, and he calls out to him in faith, Jesus, son of David, have mercy.

It must have been an embarrassing sight for many. Poor blind beggar shouting, crying out, calling on Jesus. And such is the commotion that the folks around, you know, they tell him to zip it, keep quiet, stop, shouting out, shut up.

[ 26 : 51 ] But Bartimaeus, rather like James and John, is utterly shameless. He is not the least bit embarrassed. He's not bothered about what others think or say.

Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, verse 48, but he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. And that little phrase, have mercy on me, one that we find repeatedly in the

book of Psalms, Psalm 4, Psalm 6, 41, 51, 109, 123.

Every instance, the one addressed is Yahweh himself. And Bartimaeus takes that cry of a sinner for mercy, and he directs it directly to Jesus Christ.

Lord, have mercy on me. This is what he was looking for. He was looking for the mercy of God in his life.

James and John looking for glory. Bartimaeus, mercy. In some way, it seems Bartimaeus understood himself to be a guilty man. His self-pity, his pride, his lust, his greed, his short temper, his contempt, his jealousy, all the sins that he had that as a blind man he was guilty of.

[ 28 : 05 ] And yet, here was the one who could show him mercy. Mercy he looked for. Mercy he sought. Mercy he cried for.

Have you ever asked the Lord Jesus for mercy? Because mercy is the only basis in which we can enjoy a relationship with God.

Not the basis of our good works, our good name, our good standing, our religious pedigree. Only by the mercy of God can we come to know him.

We are not morally superior to others. When all is said and done, we're all blind and bankrupt sinners. I don't think I've told this story here.

I may have done. I tell so many stories I begin to lose track of when I've told them and where I've told them. But many years ago there was a minister in Tarbert on the Isle of Harris.

[ 29 : 11 ] He was in the Church of Scotland. He was a man with Reverend Donald Angus McRae. He was an interesting character. When he died there was an obituary written I think by John MacLeod in the Herald newspaper.

In that obituary it tells the story of how just a few days before he died a friend from Stornoway called in to see Mr. McRae. And though he was very weak Donald Angus was awake and alert and he eyed his visitor whimsically and seized his hand.

And what will you have to say to the Lord he whispered on the day of judgment. Well the elder who'd visiting him was quite disconcerted by this.

Well he said you know you you're the minister and on the good way many years what will you say yourself? Oh said Mr. McRae mercy mercy mercy friends we must never forget that the basis of our relationship with God the basis of our belonging in the family of God God is nothing more nothing less than the mercy of God.

Paul writes he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy. Titus 3 5.

[ 30 : 42 ] I love the words of John Stocker's hymn The door of thy mercy stands open all day to the needy and poor who knock by the way no sinner shall ever be empty sent back who comes seeking mercy for Jesus dear sake.

Jesus stopped and said call him. They called the blind man take heart get up he's calling you throwing off his cloak he sprang up and came to Jesus. I love that little detail that Mark records throwing off his cloak he sprang up and came to Jesus probably an outer garment maybe even his bedroll.

It's suggestive of this man's eagerness to desire to come to Jesus. I wonder if there's an eagerness and a desire that we share. When Jesus calls us what is our response I wonder if there's a spring in our step.

Perhaps we've become more like James and John looking to see what's in it for us rather than like Bartimaeus eager to run to and run after Jesus.

And Jesus said to him what do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said Rabbi let me recover my sight. You see the difference to James and John yes they wanted glory and thrones and cabinet seats in God's kingdom.

[ 32 : 17 ] This blind man asks simply to see. And that's the great irony because it's the disciples really who are the blind ones. Bartimaeus' cry is not for power and status it's for mercy.

And even when the people tell him to be quiet he keeps on asking for mercy. He's seen who Jesus really is. He's not for giving up. It's the disciples who are in the dark.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 52 to him go your way your faith has made you well. Immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. Word there healed made you well.

Same word in the New Testament for salvation. Literally your faith has saved you. Praise the Lord his mercy is more stronger than darkness new every morn.

Our sins they are many his mercy is more. What are you looking for this evening? What are you living for?

[ 33 : 24 ] What do you want Jesus to do for you? Some of us are like James and John. We come to Jesus with ambitious hearts. We want success in our church recognition amongst others.

We want the crown without the cross. Jesus says you do not know what you ask. The way to glory is the way of the servant. The path to honor is the path of the cross.

The crown is always preceded by the cup. And the throne is only reached by way of Calvary. Or are you more like Bartimaeus? You know your blindness.

You know your need. You know that you need the mercy of God. You want Christ himself to see him more clearly, to follow him more nearly, to love him more dearly.

Your cry is not for position but for pardon. Not for prestige but for purity. Not for power but for the presence of the Savior. What are you looking for this evening?

[ 34 : 28 ] What are you asking for? What do you want Jesus to do for you? Looking for yourself? Looking for number one? Looking for glory? Or are you looking for mercy from Jesus the son of David, the servant king?

Which path will you tread? Will you tread the way of the cross? Will you tread the way of the king? Will you tread the way of the great servant? What do you want Jesus to do for you? What do you want to be like?

Do you want to be like this world? Or do you want to be like Jesus? Let's pray. Lord, grant us the help of your Holy Spirit.

Work in our hearts what is pleasing in your sight. Give us desire and motivation not to prioritize ourselves, but to put you first, to love you, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

[ 35 : 45 ] Lord, make us a people always thankful for your mercies that are new every morning. Make us a grateful people. Make us thankful as blind Bartimaeus was, and help us to live our lives out of the soil of your grace, and so to live always for your glory.

In Jesus' name, Amen.