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November 17, 2019

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“What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:40).

All four Gospels record stories about Jesus healing blind people. If we accept the common theory that Mark wrote first, his story about Bartimaeus is the probable basis for similar accounts in Matthew and Luke, and even the healing John includes as one of his seven signs that revealed Jesus as “I AM,” the divine name of God. This order of composition is important for identifying a key theme in the New Testament by the early church, namely, that faith is a way of seeing and believing in Jesus as the messiah.

Luke does not identify the blind man by name, but he preserves the rich details of the story that describe, in effect, how disciples come to faith. The blind man is on the sidelines when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing that way. He cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” In his first step toward faith, he appeals not to just a hill country preacher and miracle worker but to the messiah.

His use of a messianic title disturbs the crowd, which tries to shut the blind man up. They are blocking him, perhaps from embarrassment that this beggar is ruining their reception of the famous Jesus, or because the claim he is shouting is controversial and discouraged by the local religious leaders. Either way, as soon as Jesus stops and calls for the man to be brought forward, the crowd opens the way. Jesus then asks him, and all of us engaging this story, a remarkable question: “What do you want me to do for you?”

If you can imagine meeting Jesus in your own prayers for help, often so vague and general, and suddenly being confronted by this direct question, what would you respond? Here is your chance. Jesus is about to give you whatever you want. If you say I want to do God’s will, or I want more faith, or to be a better person, or any of the other requests you have prayed in the past, it will be granted. But isn’t there some other more specific wish, your heart’s desire, your dream prayer?

The chance for ultimate fulfillment confronts us, carrying us into the realm of folk tales about being granted three wishes. Why not riches, love, and long life? Will we ask for too little, or the wrong things, or will we stumble and waste this magic moment? Only we can decide, but the blind man knows what he wants. He asks to see. He is granted both physical sight and spiritual vision, enabling him to begin a whole new life with Jesus, the first face he has ever beheld, looking back at him with love.

Like every disciple, the man comes forward from the sidelines of life, ignoring the objections of others and the risks of offending the critics and skeptics. He leaves behind his role as beggar and steps onto the road that will take him to Jericho and beyond to Jerusalem. More than anything, this is what he wants, to be with Jesus, the Son of David. His faith has saved him, and his real life has just begun.

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