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May the God of peace fill you with all joy in believing!

Mark 10:46-52

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Lord Jesus, as you graciously healed Bartimaeus of his blindness, so help us with our earthly afflictions. But most of all, open our eyes to see that you have healed us from our greatest affliction, that of our sin. Cause us to see your power and goodness, so that we run to you for help in every need, especially our need for forgiveness and salvation.

Dear fellow Redeemed,

It was the chance of a lifetime! Or so we thought at the time. Our college art class took its trip to the art museum in Chicago. You probably didn't know that pastors had to take art class in college. Yes they do, and that is why they have such a profound appreciation of art. Anyway, we looked forward to this trip because it was a day off from school. While at the museum one of my classmates overheard from someone that there was a filming crew outside shooting footage for a new movie. And guess who one of the main actors was. John Belushi! Well, the whole class was out there in a flash. It was the chance of a lifetime to get to see John Belushi in person. In case you don't know who John Belushi was, he was in movies such as Animal House and the Blues Brothers, and on Saturday Night Live. Remember we were in college. He tragically died a year later of an overdose.

In a far greater way, the chance of a lifetime came to a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus, as he sat near the gate of the city of Jericho. One far greater than John Belushi was passing by, and the Lord's presence presented this man with a chance to be

cured of his blindness. What no doctor could do for this poor man, the Son of God could perform with a word.

The chance of a lifetime comes also to you and me today as Jesus passes by us in his word. When a congregation assembles together at church to hear Jesus' word, when the family assembles together for home devotions, when we read and study God's word privately, then the Lord is passing by, and this is a real opportunity for us, a real "chance of a lifetime."

Let us consider the theme: Jesus' Passing--The Chance Of A Lifetime. When our opportunity arrives, let us: Recognize our need and ask for his mercy; Overcome every obstacle and persist in our plea; and Rejoice in his help and follow him.

Being blind is a tremendous hardship in our day, but it was even more so in Jesus' day. Poor Bartimaeus had to resort to begging in order to obtain the necessities of life. He usually sat at the city gate where many people went in and out. As they noted his plight and heard his plea, at least some of them would be moved to help. One day, as he waited for some charitable soul to come along and give him a coin, he heard the shuffle of many feet and the murmur of many voices. When he inquired about the commotion, he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Why, Bartimaeus had heard of him before. This was the Prophet who was supposed to come into the world--the long-promised Messiah. Of him it had been foretold by God's prophets that he would open the eyes of the blind. Perhaps those who shared their coins with Bartimaeus had also told him about Jesus, how he went about doing good, healing the sick, casting out devils, opening the ears of the deaf, raising the dead and performing all sorts of miracles of love. Immediately Bartimaeus recognized his "chance of a lifetime." He began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Bartimaeus had faith in Jesus as the Savior. He was not ashamed to recognize his need and ask for the Lord's mercy. He was not too proud to turn to Jesus for help.

Now, if we have only felt sorry for this poor blind man in his need, then we've missed the point of this account entirely. Physical blindness is but a picture of the spiritual blindness that has afflicted all people. The Bible frequently uses the picture of blindness to describe the lost and groping condition we were all in when we were born into this sinful world. Ask the person who has never been enlightened by the word of God where he comes from, what his purpose is here on earth, and where he is going in the future, and observing the blank look on his or her face you'll understand why God says that the minds of unbelievers are blinded, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. They are walking about in darkness. The Bible says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Even after we've become the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, the devil never stops trying to cause the scales of indifference and lukewarmness to form a cataract over our spiritual eyes so that we can no longer see clearly. Then God must say to us, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

When Jesus passes by, therefore, let us recognize our need of him and his cleansing from the stain of sin. Don't let selfish pride and self-righteousness come between you and your chance of a lifetime. That proud, sinful part of us does not want us

to admit that we need help. But to let self-righteous pride rule in our lives would be an eternally dreadful mistake. No, rather, confessing our sins and our unworthiness, let us plead for help from our Savior. Recognizing our desperate need, let us cry out for his mercy, saying with the Psalmist, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

Coming to Jesus isn't always easy. Bartimaeus found that out. When he raised his voice and cried to the Lord, the crowd told him to be still. "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet." They didn't want to be bothered by what this rather ragged-looking beggar had to say. "Don't bother us. Leave us alone." That was their admonition to him. But did this stop Bartimaeus? We read: "But he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.'" He refused to be hindered by the discouragement of the crowd. He would not take the chance that Jesus might pass by again another time. Jesus was there now, and no obstacles were going to stand in his way. This was an opportunity which he couldn't neglect.

We, too, do well to take advantage of Jesus' passing--a chance of a lifetime. We must overcome every obstacle and persist in our plea for help from him. This world in which we live is filled with such obstacles. There are those who tell us in regard to religion, "I wouldn't get too excited about it. A person can become too religious, you know. They call them fanatics." Then there's the cunning temptation that hooks so many, "What's the rush? There'll be plenty of time to get religious later, after you have everything else you want." Let's recognize all such obstacles for what they really are--Satan's stumbling blocks purposefully put in our way to trip us up.

This is the way in which we must deal with those who would prohibit us from reaching Jesus. We must break off all ungodly associations. We must push away the cup of worldliness. We must stop loving ourselves so much and start loving our Savior more. We must cast from us every hindrance and accept with joy Jesus' mercy. And don't neglect your present opportunity to come to Jesus for help, taking the chance that he will pass by again later. Hell is filled with people who believed that they'd get another chance. The Bible isn't kidding when it states so plainly and emphatically, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation." "Seek the Lord while he may be found." Open your heart now, and overcoming every obstacle, persist in your plea for mercy.

When Bartimaeus wouldn't allow his chance to go unused, Jesus listened. "Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'" It wasn't that Jesus didn't know what was going on, or that he couldn't cure Bartimaeus from a distance, but for the sake of the crowd, Jesus wanted a face-to-face confrontation with this man of faith. And in answer to the man's plea, "Rabbi, I want to see," Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has healed you." Then Mark reports, "Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

What a day for Bartimaeus! All of a sudden he could see with his own eyes Jericho, the city of palms. But he saw so much more than houses and faces and people and flowers and trees. His spiritual eyes, which had been opened long before this day, were now joined by his physical eyes in beholding Jesus, his Lord and Savior. And such a love filled his heart now that he followed Jesus down the road and praised God. And let's remember that this was Jesus' last journey toward Jerusalem. He was going to keep an appointment with a cross on a hill called Calvary. So it's very possible that the healed eyes of Bartimaeus witnessed the offering of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world

on Golgotha, as well as the glorious victory of that first Easter Sunday morning.

Many and exceedingly precious are the promises of God to those who rejoice in his help and follow him in faith. Here's one of them: "Before they call, I will answer, and while they still speak, I will hear." This is what the Lord will do for you if you will follow him.

Yes, following the Lord Jesus is to be the pursuit of all who have received the gracious healing from the leprosy of sin at the hand of the loving Christ. And as we follow, we, like Bartimaeus, shall see greater things. We shall become more intimately acquainted with the Lord and his ways. We shall be given the joy of serving him in ever more and better ways. We shall grow in knowledge and in the understanding of spiritual truths. And greatest of all, when we finally see him face to face, those things we know now only by faith-- everlasting life--the glories of heaven--the blessed reunion with our departed loved ones--those things will then be all our own. There will be perfect joy there, where "there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain," and we will see all things with vision unclouded. Then we'll know fully what it means when Jesus says to one of his own, "Your faith has made you whole."

May we never push aside the grace of God, but rather recognize Jesus' passing as the chance of a lifetime. Let us recognize our need and ask for his mercy; overcome every obstacle and persist in our plea; rejoice in his help and follow him. Then one day we'll rejoice with Bartimaeus in heaven.

Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word! Amen.