



The other day I headed out for work. After saying goodbye to my family, I went out the front door and headed down the driveway to my car. But on that morning, there was something a little different. For each step out the door I had been followed by tiny little feet. One of my sons had snuck out the door with me and was right behind me. He was hoping, against all odds, that maybe this time I would take him with me. I thought he was just acting goofy, so I told him to go back in the house. But it turns out he was serious. It took a lot more effort to get him to stop trying to follow me. All of us gathered here follow Jesus. How determined should we be in following him? This morning we'll answer that question as we look once more at Mark 10. We'll finish off our sermon series on "Family Values" as we see two very different ways people follow Jesus.

Jesus' following was increasing as he neared Jerusalem. On his way he was passing through the city of Jericho. His death wasn't too far away now. The next thing recorded in Mark's gospel account is the large crowd with Jesus as he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. When he came to Jericho a considerably large was following him.

Somewhere between the old city of Jericho and the new city of Jericho was a man who wanted to join the crowds. But he had a problem. He couldn't even see the road. He was blind. Matthew's account notes that he sat along the side of the road next to another blind beggar. But there was something extraordinary about this particular blind beggar. His name was Bartimaeus. And there was much more to him than what met the eye. Bartimaeus believed in Jesus.

It became quite clear that he has faith in Jesus as Savior. When he learned that Jesus of Nazareth was near he began to call out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This was a cry of faith. Very few actually called out to Jesus with this Messianic title. Before Palm Sunday this title is only spoken to Jesus by two other blind men and a woman from Canaan. The title "Son of David" meant Bartimaeus believed Jesus is the Messiah. Holy Scripture prophesied that the son of David would take the throne over Israel and would rule forever in peace over all the world. Bartimaeus believed Jesus, the man from Nazareth was that promised king. All his hopes and all the world's hopes were on Jesus, Son of David. All of the Scriptures centered on David's son and what he would do for all the world. Bartimaeus' lack of sight didn't keep him from seeing with the eyes of faith that Jesus was his Savior. Though he begged for food, he had tasted the goodness of the Bread of Life.

The crowd at this time, however, wasn't so convinced of Bartimaeus' cry. They dismissed it. There were likely many in the crowd who did believe that Jesus was the world's Savior. But as they followed Jesus on the road they were bothered by Bartimaeus. They were telling him to stop. We don't know why. But it doesn't reflect well on their faith. So, we see two very different types of followers of Jesus. The crowd followed him with their eyes. Bartimaeus followed him with his heart.

Yet Bartimaeus encountered some obstacles. Can imagine how disheartened he felt when the crowd tried to overpower his cry and make him be quiet? How would you feel if you were blind and crying out for someone but the whole crowd of people around you turned on you and told you to shut up? Following Jesus on the road seemed impossible; confessing him difficult.

You and I may not face the same challenges Bartimaeus faced, but we do know what it is like to have many obstacles in the way of following and confessing Jesus. Aren't there many things which could become a discouragement today for those who seek to follow Jesus? A young man off to college might have easy enough access to follow Jesus by attending a faithful local church home. Will he succumb to all the obstacles in his way? Too far to drive. Too busy to take the time. His friends will say "Don't bother with that Sunday church stuff, just sleep in." His schedule will be full so he reasons, "I must drop something, it might as well be the campus ministry Bible study group." If his family doesn't encourage him to keep following Jesus, will he? Will his new girlfriend want him to follow Jesus or will she have other plans? Will the new husband lead his family to follow Jesus when it is easy, or will he lead his family to call out his name like Bartimaeus even when it is difficult? The father of a young child will have a new work-life balance to maintain. Will he take the time to follow and call out to Jesus? Or will he give up on that effort? Will the father who has his son visiting from out-of-town join his son hunting, or will he say, "Son, I've got to follow Jesus first." This last week I overheard someone at the airport, "God ruined your Sunday morning. Why don't you just come over to my place instead next Sunday." Another obstacle from the crowd.

And what about you? Does it take considerably large crowds telling you to stop calling on Jesus' name or does it sometimes take less to make you stop? How many obstacles need to be thrown into your path before you conclude it's easier to give up? I have to admit that my personal and family devotion has often fallen silent over much smaller obstacles. A crowd of seven little ones momentarily not interested in Bible reading or prayer has caused me to fall silent and not call on Jesus' name. A family prayer gets dropped. A family Bible reading gets set aside. Am I following Jesus even when excuses and obstacles come to deter me? How big was the last obstacle that hindered you from your discipleship and calling on Jesus?

What if Bartimaeus had just given up? Wouldn't he have lived out the rest of his days in blindness and possibly had his spirit grow dim and his faith grow weaker because he despaired or gave up on his opportunity to call on Jesus? It's not always easy. There is sometimes opposition. We do sometimes cease to call out his name. What happens when you and I give up our discipleship and calling on Jesus because we face a few obstacles? Doesn't the misery of sin take hold and drag us down far worse than any blindness ever could? We need to call on Jesus. We need to confess his name. We need to follow him. Jesus

from Nazareth, the Son of David, is the only one we can call out to in all troubles, the only one we can follow out of this world cursed by sin with pain and death.

Bartimaeus stood up to the crowd. When they began to silence him, he began to call out all the louder, "Son of David!" Following Jesus means calling out and confessing his name, looking to him, despite the obstacles and opposition. When Jesus heard him, he called for him. The crowd told him, "he's calling you!" Jesus then asked him "What do you want me to do for you?" "I want to see," he said. "Your faith has healed you." Jesus responded. Then at once Bartimaeus could see and immediately he followed Jesus on the road. He had followed Jesus in faith with his heart, now his eyes and feet could too!

No doubt Bartimaeus was in the crowd that Mark records next. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday a chorus started to erupt. "Hosanna to the Son of David." I like to picture Bartimaeus as one of the first to give out this cry. Soon the whole crowd joins in the chorus and praises Jesus as the promised king. He and all the rest would see Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, take his place of glory. It wasn't on a throne, but it would be on the cross. The king came to give his life and die for his people. In the face of all opposition and despite every obstacle, Jesus was resolute. Never once did he let anything deter him from following the plan of rescue. He died for Bartimaeus, for you, and for me. By his taking up our sin we are saved from sin's curse. By his suffering we are saved from the pain we deserve. By his death we have been saved from death.

And all who call on him and trust in him will be saved. Through faith in him we already have been saved. For every believer there is much more than meets the eye. We follow Jesus not just with our feet, but with our hearts. Jesus will one day forever remove all blindness, all opposition, everything that separates us from him. He will make our bodies new and say to you and to me "you have been saved, through faith." So now, today, we follow him. We lead our families to follow with us.

Bartimaeus is somewhat unique in Scripture. Jesus healed many blind and many others. But none of them, apart from three others (Malchus, Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend Lazarus, and Simon the Leper) are directly named in the gospels. Why is he recorded by name when so many others are not? We can't say for certain, but I believe it is a good indicator that he was well known in the early church by the believers. Bartimaeus clearly wasn't a fly by night follower, but someone who stuck with Jesus and followed him all his life. We get to see how it all began. It appears he continued to follow Jesus.

Just this past week it was impressed on me how important it is to keep that as a priority. I guess I might have been getting careless in my driving. I could blame the political signs blocking my view. Or I could say the other driver must have been speeding. But I have to admit: I wasn't being as careful as I should have been. I looked left, looked right, and then let my gaze hang to the right a little too long. Before I could accelerate far across the road I heard a loud screeching to my left. The other driver stopped within a few feet of a collision which would have directly hit my driver's side. Had only a split second or few feet changed, I don't think I'd be here right now.

Reflecting on that morning I had been failing in more than attentive driving. I was reminded at a pastor's conference just a couple days earlier of the importance of taking time with Jesus: to make time to follow him throughout your day despite the obstacles. I had the habit of regular prayer and Bible reading but had decided earlier that very same morning I would increase it. And I wanted to increase it for my family by interacting more with prayer and Bible reading with my family. We had an evening routine, but why not in the mornings? One of the things I started doing that morning for the first time was saying a prayer openly together with my family before I leave the house. So, for the first time I could ever recall I said a morning prayer and blessing before we parted ways. "Distractions, noise, obstacles, I don't care. I'm going to lead my family this morning in calling out to Jesus and following him."

It was a bit against the normal flow. That's because I had a whole host of other things distracting me as I headed out the door. "Time for a prayer and blessing?" I had always thought before, "You need to iron those pants and brew that coffee. The kids are too busy to pay attention anyways. Your wife is probably too busy getting the kids and class ready for school." There were a lot of obstacles that might led us to conclude, "Don't bother with that Jesus stuff right now." But despite the distractions and obstacles and the innocent noise of our seven little children I said the prayer and blessing with my wife.

Open your hymnals to page 152 and you'll see what I used that morning for prayer. I'm not claiming to be better than any of you in my personal devotional life. Rather I admit I had not used these words before when they were always there and available to me. And I didn't use the whole devotion page either. I just took a little moment of time for the closing prayer and blessing. To myself I prayed, "Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me..." Followed by what I spoke out loud with my wife and the children who listened, "May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself. May the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do his will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives. Amen." Our family followed Jesus for that moment to start our day.

God answered that prayer the very first morning I started using it! Reflecting back on my morning had I died I would be glad my family heard me calling to Jesus with that prayer. Since I lived I could thank God for answering it!

Don't let the obstacles, the crowds, the business of things in your life crowd out your life of following Jesus. Join Bartimaeus and all God's family as they say, "Distractions, noise, obstacles, I don't care. I'm going to lead my family this morning in calling out to Jesus and following him." Call on his name. Call out his name despite the crowds that might seek to silence your cry. Lead your family in confessing and calling on the name of Jesus. Follow him from cross to glory. Amen.