

• *Moving steadily towards Jerusalem*

Three truths about greatness

1. *Greatness will always involve suffering*

2. *Greatness comes when God's will is followed.*

3. *Greatness comes through self-sacrifice*

Lessons from the story of Bartimaeus

1. *He grasps his opportunity*

2. *He had a conviction that Jesus was the Messiah*

3. *He refuses to be ashamed or intimidated*

4. *He knows what he wants*

Jesus is steadily moving towards Jerusalem. Mark mentions that Jesus was going ahead of them^{☞1}. He was moving forward with determination. The disciples were coming behind with less enthusiasm. Jesus predicts His sufferings and death^{☞2}.

As well as predicting His death Jesus continues to teach His disciples things that they need to know about His kingdom.

One of them concerns **ambition and greatness in the kingdom**. James and John approach Jesus asking for positions of honour in His kingdom^{☞1}. Jesus does not rebuke their desire to achieve greatness but He warns them of what will be involved.

1. **Greatness will always involve suffering.** Jesus is about to drink a cup of suffering. He is about to be immersed into agonies^{☞1}. Are they ready for that? Clearly James and John have got the wrong idea about what the 'kingdom' is. They are thinking of military and political greatness.

2. **Greatness comes when God's will is followed.** Position in the kingdom, says Jesus, is not His to give^{☞1}. God has a plan for His kingdom. He is the one who sovereignly plans where people will be and what they will do. We shall find greatness if we accept the position that He has planned for us. There will be some people who are like 'prime ministers' and 'presidents' in God's kingdom. But only God gives positions of eminence and leadership in His church. Even Jesus could not choose anyone He wanted. Even Jesus could only appoint according to the Father's will. God's plan for our lives is the vital thing. Greatness comes by finding it and following it.

3. **Greatness comes through self-sacrifice.** The disciples hear about the request of James and John and are indignant^{☞1}. Jesus uses the occasion to teach a lesson. Greatness in the kingdom is very different from what people normally think of as greatness. Normally people think that greatness is being able to boss people around^{☞2}. But in the kingdom of God greatness is service to others, helping them to true salvation and true fulfilment in God. Jesus is the greatest example. He is about to lay His life down as a 'ransom' for the world. A 'ransom' is a payment of a price that releases slaves. He is about to 'ransom' the world from bondage to guilt and sin. He does it for everyone. 'Many' is a Hebrew way of saying 'everyone'. Jesus is about to offer Himself as a ransoming sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Jesus continues on His way and reaches Jericho.

The key fact in **the story of Bartimaeus** is his recognizing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David. He is also an example of a different kind of ambition, not an ambition to have worldly position, but a determination to have a need in his life removed by Jesus.

1. **He grasps his opportunity.** As Jesus is leaving the city Bartimaeus is determined to make use of the occasion to receive the answer to the greatest problem of his life^{☞1}.

2. **He had a conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.** Not many others were calling Jesus 'Son of David' but Bartimaeus was. He knew that Jesus was no ordinary person; He was the Son of David of Old Testament prophecy, the one who would come to save Israel and the world.

3. **He refuses to be ashamed or intimidated.** Others discourage him but he refuses to be discouraged^{☞1}.

4. **He knows what he wants.** It is his great desire to have this particular answer to his need. Suddenly Jesus stops and calls for Bartimaeus^{☞1}. He has been ready and waiting for a long time. He jumps to his feet^{☞2}. He knows exactly what he wants.^{☞3} His prayer is answered and he joins the disciples of Jesus. He must have travelled to Jerusalem with Jesus because Mark (whose mother lived in Jerusalem) knew him by name.

To seek greatness within the will of God, to know who Jesus is, to know what we want Him to do for us and what we want to do for Him – these are the secrets of

☞1 10:32
☞2 10:33–34

☞1 10:35–37

☞1 10:38–39

☞1 10:40

☞1 10:41

☞2 10:42

☞1 10:46–47

☞1 10:48

☞1 10:49
☞2 10:50
☞3 10:51

The Bartimaeus story in the other gospels

• Extra Note

• Reconciling apparent differences and reconstructing the complete picture

• Totally unimportant but useful for answering critics

greatness in the kingdom of God.

There are some differences among the gospels in this story. Matthew 20:29–34 refers to **two** blind men who are healed at a time when Jesus is **leaving** Jericho. Mark refers to **one** blind man called Bartimaeus^{☒1} who is healed as Jesus **leaves** Jericho. Luke 18:35–43 talks about Jesus' **entering** Jericho and then refers to **one** blind man being healed.

☒1 10:46–52

The difference in number is not a problem. There were two men (as Matthew, who was there at the time, says) but one of them was better known in the later days of the church. He was known by name to Mark who likes to include small details.

There are several possible explanations of the entering / leaving puzzle. Some think that Matthew and Mark are referring to **old** Jericho but Luke means **Herodian** Jericho, and that the healing took place between the two.

My view is that Luke is following the same material that we find in Mark, but that he edited it in his own way, in order to include extra material that relates to Jericho.

Mark 10:46 says '*And they came to Jericho*' and then immediately says '*and as he was leaving...*'. He has only one story about Jericho.

Luke 18:35 is following the same material but inserting more. Luke says '*And as they drew near to Jericho...*' (which is almost identical to Mark) but he goes on '*...a blind man was sitting by the roadside...*'

The wording is closely parallel. Mark says Jesus came to Jericho but tells something that happened as Jesus went out of the city.

Luke follows Mark quite closely, and also says that Jesus came to Jericho, and goes on to tell the story of what happened. But he is compressing the story so much (as Luke tends to do with Mark's material) that he has left out the phrase '*as he was leaving*'. This means that Luke's version simply means '*And as they drew near to the Jericho area...*' and he goes on to tell a story without bothering to mention that it happened as Jesus was on the way out. His story compresses Mark's version and tells us of something that happened early on in His entering the Jericho area.

There is a reason for his doing this. Luke has an extra story about Zacchaeus in which Jesus says '*I must stay at your house...*'^{☒1}. Jesus was **intending** to pass through Jericho, but Zacchaeus the tax-collector surely had a house in town. This means Jesus went **back** to Jericho. Luke 19:11–27 is a parable told at the same point, in Jericho, '*while they were listening*'^{☒2}. Unlike Mark, Luke is telling of a number of incidents that happened in the Jericho area. He does not want^{☒3} to **precisely** say Jesus was leaving Jericho. Jesus was indeed on the way out but Luke is about to tell a story not in Mark's Gospel in which Jesus goes back again! So he leaves out Mark's phrase '*as he was leaving*' and tells the story as something that happened early on in Jesus' coming to the Jericho area.

☒1 Luke 19:1–10

☒2 19:11
☒3 in 19:1

None of this is worth bothering about; it is all totally unimportant. Yet some people like to find contradictions in Scripture so it is worth reconstructing what happened.



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