



Whose problem is it? Well, maybe that depends on what kind of problem we are talking about. Normally, if we have a problem, we try to fix it ourselves. But, what about the problems of others? How do you react when you see someone in need? How close are you willing to get to someone who needs help? They say you find out who your real friends are when you have to move! What about the problems of our world? Things like hunger, poverty, education, clean water, and injustice? Whose problem is it? For those of us who follow Jesus Christ, what, if anything, does he expect of us? What is the Christian faith all about anyway? Is it merely going to church 1.8 times a month, saying grace before meals, and avoiding big sins, or does God expect more?

Jesus had a lot to say about being a disciple, a follower of his. He not only taught about that but he showed it in his actions constantly. Whenever you read about his life in the Gospels, it's clear, God asks us for **everything**. More than church attendance, more than prayer, and much more than belief, Jesus requires a total life commitment from those of us who want to be his followers. And here is the incredible thing—Jesus wants to work with us to change the world. Did you wake up today believing Jesus wants to use **you** to change our broken world? He does. Kids, I'm talking to you too. What would happen if each one of us and the 2 billion people who claim to be Christians in the world today said to God, "Use me, I want to change the world. I want to make these problems my problems." What if just the 3000 people who call CPC their home church said that? What might God do? Over 2000 years ago the world was forever changed by just 12 very ordinary guys who said, This is my problem. I believe, working with Jesus, we can do it again.

Today, as we consider the compassion and mercy of God, I want us to look at a scene in the Bible where Jesus made someone else's problem his problem. After that, we'll look at what biblical compassion is all about. Here's my goal: I want you to leave today believing something and then doing something about it. That's why we are highlighting three very practical ways to make the world's problem your problem. We are not a church that simply wants to fill your head with a bunch of knowledge. By the Spirit of God, we want that knowledge to flow into your heart and out of your hands and feet in service of others. Jesus made his mission very clear, "Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." With that in mind, open your Bibles to Mark 10.

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "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 (verses 46–52).

A Man with a Problem

Jesus and his followers are leaving Jericho and heading for Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jericho is only about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jesus passed through Jericho on numerous occasions. It was in Jericho that Zacchaeus was converted. And just outside Jericho Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. But, this would be the last time Jesus would minister there. Actually, this would be Jesus' last miracle before the cross. Now, imagine a mob of people, following Jesus, scattered all over the road, all heading toward Jerusalem. Those who had been around Jesus for some time are all on edge; there is tension in this group. Jesus has predicted his death several times and the disciples are fearful of what might happen in Jerusalem. Jesus, on the other hand, was focused on one single goal: get to Jerusalem, suffer, and die for the sins of the world.

For the blind man, the day had begun like any other. He woke up, shook off the dirt and straw away from his worn out clothes, stretched, and began slowly feeling his way along the familiar path to the main gate of the city. Maybe he was able to get a little bite of bread along the way and a small cup of tea. Once at the gate, he took his usual spot among the other beggars and began to cry out for money and food. As the city became alive with life, Bartimaeus hears something unusual. There's a large

crowd of people approaching but this feels different. Maybe he heard someone mention the name Jesus of Nazareth. Maybe deep within him he knew there was something special about this rabbi. Maybe he grabbed someone and asked, "Hey, what's going on? What's all the fuss?" And they told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is walking by." Either way, Blind Bart knows this is not just Jesus of Nazareth; he knew more. He must have heard about his teaching and miracles because he cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Bartimaeus was blind, but he saw what many others didn't. The title "Son of David" was synonymous to "Messiah." Ever since the great King David, the Jewish people heard time and again God's promises to send a deliverer, Messiah, to rescue them from oppression. Blind Bart connected those dots and takes a big risk. He cries out, "Have mercy on me;" other translations say, "take pity on me." He's so excited. He can't believe that this Jesus, Messiah, is walking right past him. He must have been creating a major scene because we're told that the people rebuke him and tell him to be quiet.

How would that make you feel? Tense? Anxious? Awkward? Scared? I bet you wanted to say, "Be quiet! You're interrupting the pastor, how rude! Now's not the time!" That's exactly how the crowd felt about Blind Bart yelling out to Jesus. In their minds, he is not their problem and certainly not Jesus' problem either. Just like today, it was a common thing to see poor beggars in the streets. They told Blind Bart something like this, "This is the famous Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. Don't yell out to him! Have some dignity. Have some respect. He doesn't have time for you!" The mob of people were busy, in a hurry, and they needed to get to Jerusalem. This was not a time for interruptions. I bet some were worried that Blind Bart would get them into trouble with the religious leaders. Yelling out "Son of David" to someone might have gotten them arrested. Given the popularity of Jesus and the huge crowd following him, a socially insignificant blind man was a nuisance. The disciples often tried to protect Jesus from problem people like him. So, the crowd shushes Bartimaeus, "Hey buddy, Jesus is really busy and has more important things to do. You're an insignificant, needy, blind beggar, just like your friends. Now is not the time, ok?"

Jesus Makes it His Problem

It's right here, at this moment, we get an incredible glimpse into the heart of God. Jesus stops. Even though Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he'll be arrested, put on trial, beaten and then murdered on a cross, he hasn't lost sympathy with the needs of one single person. Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." The disciples were surprised but they ran over to Blind Bart and said, "Hey man, cheer up, take courage, get on your feet, Jesus is calling you to his side!" Can I just say, no matter what you are going through today, Jesus is stopping and calling you by his side.

He's telling you, just like Bartimaeus, "Take courage and come to me." Sometimes we think Jesus is too busy for our problems so we don't call out to him in prayer. That's a mistake. Jesus calls us to his side in order to comfort, cheer, and in this case to heal and restore. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumps to his feet and came to Jesus. Remember, this is a blind, poor beggar. The cloak is probably his only possession, but he tosses it to the side just to be near to Jesus.

With great tenderness and compassion Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Up until that point, Bart had only asked for mercy. Now, Jesus wants him to be more specific. Can you imagine, the master of the universe, the creator of all things, the Son of God asking you, What do you want me to do for you? Actually, Jesus does ask you that question every single day. We have the privilege to go to God in prayer. What do you need God to do for you? Be specific. Ask him.

Jesus knew what this man truly needed, he didn't need to ask, but Jesus wanted him to consider that question for himself. What is his greatest need? Does he want some money? Does he want some food? What Jesus wants for this man is not only healing but a personal relationship with him. Jesus wants Bartimaeus to not only see, but to have the eyes of faith, to see both physically and spiritually. Bartimaeus says, "Rabbi/Lord, I want to see." Jesus responds, "Go, your faith has healed you." Literally this means, "Your faith has saved you." Faith is itself a gift from God. Jesus blessed him not only physically, but spiritually as well. Even before he had physical sight, Bartimaeus had spiritual sight. He was once blind but now sees.

This story is not about getting healed and going home happy. It's about discipleship, what it means to be a follower of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, the recovery of sight isn't just a physical miracle, it's symbolic of discipleship. It means "I want to see and follow you, Lord." And that is exactly what happens next. Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the road. He would follow Jesus into Jerusalem and to the cross. True faith will always result in a life that follows Jesus to the cross. Jesus told his followers earlier, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me*" (Luke 9:23).

Real faith will also contagiously infect others with the good news of the gospel. I think that is why Mark tells us the man's name, while Matthew and Luke do not. The early church would read this and say, "Oh wow, no wonder why good ole Bart is crazy in love with Jesus and sharing his faith all over the place!"

There was also a lesson Jesus wanted to teach the disciples as well. The disciples were blind to the true mission of Jesus. They wanted a conquering king who would overthrow Roman rule and give them a seat at the table of power. Jesus's focus was on another kingdom, a different kingdom, one in which Satan, sin, and death would be destroyed through his own death

and resurrection. Jesus not only heals the blind man, but he is healing the spiritual blindness of his disciples, and maybe yours as well. He wants you to know today that he is much more than a prophet, teacher, and healer. He wants you to see that he is the Son of David, Messiah, God's one and only Son, and God in the flesh.

It is Your Problem

Let's get back to that skit we saw earlier and ask, Whose problem is it? In this story, we have one specific example of a common interaction Jesus had with a person in need. All throughout his ministry and travels he allowed for these "interruptions." Jesus did for Bartimaeus what was in his power to do for him. He gave him sight in response to his faith. He made a problem his problem. What about you? Is there a need in your immediate network of relationships that you have the power to do something about? What is keeping you from addressing that need? In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (which also mentions Jericho) Jesus told us to love God and love our neighbor. But who is our neighbor? Dr. Haddon Robinson said, "My neighbor is anyone whose need I see, whose need God puts me in a position to meet." Do you see people and their needs the way Jesus does?

Just the other day I was driving to our office and I saw a man from our church waiting at the bus stop. Immediately I sensed the Holy Spirit say, "Pick him up and take him wherever he needs to go." Honestly, my first thought was, "I really need to get to work and get started on my day!" But, thankfully, I obeyed, picked him up and drove him to the library. I share that not to pat myself on the back; trust me, there are plenty of days where I would have ignored that nudge from the Lord! But we all need to start somewhere. I saw someone in need and God put me in a place to meet that need. Sure, it was a small thing. But it's a start.

Matthew also writes about this story in his Gospel. And in his account he remembers there being two blind men, not one. I don't think that is a contradiction at all. Mark simply wants to highlight Blind Bart. What I love about Matthew's account is what he says about Jesus. He writes, "*Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him*" (Matthew 20:34). What does it mean that Jesus had compassion? In Jewish thinking compassion is associated with our guts and innards. It's something we feel deep within us. In the Greek language the word compassion deals with an intense feeling in your gut. It's a mix of both sympathy and outrage. Sympathy is to feel or to suffer with someone. We see this in the life of Jesus, "*When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (Matt. 9:36). Jesus wept over the sight of Jerusalem. After hearing about the death of his good friend, Lazarus, Jesus wept. Jesus felt deeply for people and that motivated him to act.

Compassion is much more than sympathy. It also has a component of righteous anger directed toward circumstances that are unjust, unfair, and disheartening. Do you ever read the newspaper or watch the news and hear about something and say, "It shouldn't be like that!" Do you ever get mad about an injustice or a helpless situation and think, "Why is our world that way?" Jesus healed people as a reminder of what life is like in his kingdom. He touched a leper and said "Be clean" because disease is not the way it's supposed to be. He raised Lazarus from the dead because death was not his original plan. As we look around our world and see pain, suffering, injustice, poverty, hunger, brokenness and evil, something should well up inside of us that wants to scream, "This is not the way it's supposed to be!" That's why, as followers of Jesus we pray, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." The book of Revelation looks forward to a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more pain, sorrow, death or tears. That's our hope.

The real power for us becomes when the compassion of Christ in us intersects the brokenness of people's lives. Maybe God isn't calling you to the mission field in Africa, but he is calling **all** of us to do something about our broken world. For some of us, the pain we've experienced in our own life can become our invitation to serve others. Our pain can become an incredible place of ministry. Maybe having survived the fear of cancer, you might come alongside someone who has just received the diagnosis. Maybe having gone through the pain of divorce, you can be there for someone who is experiencing the same thing. Think about your own life. Where do you find sympathy for others? Where are you disturbed by the forces that destroy people's lives? Like Popeye the sailor man, where do you find yourself saying, "That's all I can stand, I can't stand no more!" Whatever that is, it might be the place of ministry for you.

What about the big, huge, problems of our world? Is that our problem? Rich Stearns, the president of World Vision, in his challenging book *The Hole in Our Gospel* points out that the American church is the wealthiest community of Christians in the history of the world. The total income of American churchgoers, in a 2003 study, was about \$5.2 trillion. That's five thousand billion dollars. Sadly, the average Christian gives only 2.58 percent of their income to the church and to Christian organizations. And only 2 percent of that amount ever leaves the country to assist in what God is doing around the world. Stearns calls this the "2 percent of the 2 percent." He argues that if Christians would be more generous and give 10% of their income, there would be an extra \$168 billion to spend on funding the work of Christ worldwide. With that money, we could eliminate the most extreme poverty on the planet for more than a billion people. In addition, with \$6 billion we could educate all the children of the world. With \$9 billion we could bring clean water to most of the world's poor. And with \$13 billion we could offer basic health

and nutrition to every single person in the world. When I read that this week, I almost jumped out of my office chair!

Just imagine Christians giving so generously that we put an end to world hunger, solved the clean water crisis, eliminated 26,000 deaths of children daily, guaranteed education for the world's poor children, provided access to drugs and medical care for millions suffering from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and provided a safety net for the world's tens of millions of orphans. Don't you want to be part of that effort? Of course there are major obstacles to this list, like corrupt governments and closed countries just to name a few. But, is that really an excuse for the Christian community to say, "It's not my problem?" I don't think so. And we are only talking about money in this example. What about prayer? What about sending people to serve in these places?

I've never met anyone who wants to come to the end of their lives and say, "I never made an impact on anything or anyone but I'm okay with that." God made you and wants your life to

have an impact on others. Jesus wouldn't have made the world's problems our problems if it were not possible for us to do something about them. Kids, this includes you. If you are a follower of Jesus, he didn't give you a junior-sized Holy Spirit. Through his power and his grace we can show the compassion and love of Jesus by coming alongside human brokenness in all its forms. Are you in? If so, don't merely be hearers of the Word, as James says; be doers. What is one action step you will take on Monday? You can sign up for a LoveWorks 365 project, you can serve with Bags of Love, you can sponsor a Compassion child, or you can do whatever it is God is nudging you to do.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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