

All the Lonely People

by Alistair Begg

The sermon explores the theme of loneliness and highlights Jesus' compassion for those who feel isolated and in need of help.

Duration: 36:42

Scripture: Hosea 6:6, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:13, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 10:17-22, Mark 10:49, John 15:4-5, Romans 13:1

Topics: "Loneliness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing our own sinfulness and the greatness of Christ as our Savior. He uses the story of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, to illustrate this point. The preacher highlights that there are people in the audience who may be blind to their own need for Christ and too proud to ask for help. He urges them to humble themselves and respond to Jesus' call. Additionally, the preacher challenges Christians to not become so caught up in their own lives that they ignore the cries of those who are spiritually blind and in need of salvation.

Transcript

Mark chapter 10, and we'll read from verse 46. 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. And 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.

Amen. Father, I pray in these final moments of our day together in worship that the Spirit of God will be our teacher, that you will grant to us listening ears, that you will save us from distraction, that we might know ourselves to be in the presence of the risen Christ and that the Spirit of God may be our teacher, so that, like the disciples of old, we may be able to remark to one another as the evening ends, didn't our hearts

burn within us as Christ spoke to us and explained from the to hear a man talk. But we desperately want to hear you, the living God, reach into our lives tonight.

Indeed, we need it, and we come to you in Jesus' name. Amen. Some time ago, in a newspaper here in the United States, someone placed an advertisement which read as follows, I will listen to you talk for thirty minutes without a comment for fifteen dollars.

They ran it in the newspaper, and it may sound like a joke, but it wasn't a joke, and within a very short period of time, the person was receiving between twenty and thirty telephone calls a day. Who were the people who called? Well, people in whose hearts the hang of loneliness was so deep and who had such a lack of companionship that the prospect even of an unfaced person at the other end of the phone was to them a great opportunity to relieve their empty hearts. And tonight, loneliness is not contained by geographical boundaries.

Loneliness is capable of hurdling the heaviest weights onto our lives. It can rise like a tide, like a flood in a river in the night when we go off to sleep, and we wake up in the morning and we find ourselves engulfed by it, overflows its banks, seeps into our homes, and would drown us before we were even able to get up to a new day. Tonight, in the towns and cities of America, they are full of lonely people.

In the churches of America, there are many who are lonely who worship with us. What is the anguish of loneliness like? We've never been lonely, we won't know. Perhaps we could ask the prison inmate who faces no prospect of release.

We could ask the sailor who's just spent six months at sea in isolation from his family and his friends. We could ask the divorcee as he ekes out his little stouffer's frozen food meal in the silence of his flat. Ask the individual whose arms ache for the loss of a loved one now gone.

Ask the single person who prepares a meal for one and goes to bed early. Ha! Look at all the lonely people! Where do they all come from? Look at all the lonely people! Where do they all belong? I'm glad we sang that song about Jesus and his love, because that is exactly what I want to address with you in these final moments of our day together. For when we take our Bibles and we read the gospel records, we discover that Jesus was concerned for lonely people.

And it's a very worthwhile exercise to take your Bible and to go through the gospel records and to look for the times when Jesus encountered people as individuals, and often some of the most likely individuals--one of whom we're going to consider now. For example, the lady at the well who drew water from the well in the hottest part of the day, presumably to avoid the crowd, because the crowd didn't like her, because she'd already had five relationships in marriage, and the person she was now living with was not her husband. And Jesus said, How about a glass of water? And as a result of that conversation, her life was changed.

What about the wee man in Luke chapter 19 who decided that although he was not a friend either of the Roman authorities nor even of the Jewish people from whom he collected the Roman taxes, nevertheless he'd heard enough about Jesus of Nazareth, and he would climb a tree and see if he couldn't see this individual who was making such a stir. And climbing up above the crowd, because he was small of stature, Jesus looked up in the tree and called his name. It was a divine appointment.

He neither had the prestige nor the money nor the influence to have invited Jesus to his home, but Jesus had the concern and the compassion to invite himself to Zacchaeus' home. Who better qualified to deal with people who experience loneliness than the one who cried out from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And there may be some who are here tonight, and we say, Nobody fully understands just how lonely I am, even in the vastness of a crowd like this, even surrounded by people. I sense in my spirit a deep alienation, a deep lostness, a deep loneliness, and I cannot settle the matter.

Well, maybe this record here will go to some length in addressing the issue. The story of this man called Bartimaeus. If you've been in Sunday school all through your days, you've known it for a long time.

If you've come newly to faith, or perhaps you're agnostic here tonight, you frankly may be read it for the first time, and I'm delighted I hope you're here. I hope there are at least a number of questioners here. I hope there are at least some seekers here.

For this is a great story for the seeking heart. What I'd like to do is to set it up as if we were shooting a film--that is, to not shoot it just with a wide-angled lens and take everything in, but rather to set up the camera angles as we would choose, setting them on the particular scene in a particular moment. And first of all, focusing primarily on the crowd.

Mark tells us in verse 46 that there was a large crowd. Now, that's not an unusual phenomenon in the Gospels. There were crowds of people increasingly following in the wake of Jesus, none more so than after the feeding of the five thousand, when in John chapter 6, Jesus has to explain to them what the nature of following him is really all about.

And they had been intrigued by these miracles, and they were interested in what was going on. And so there were crowds and crowds and crowds and crowds. Of course, draw a crowd.

And in any crowd, there are some who are there because they know what's going on. There are some who are there because they just like big events like this. If you interview them, they say, Oh, I don't know what's going on.

I don't even know who's leading this parade, but I love parades. I love crowds. I mean, if they're on Fifth Avenue, I'm on Fifth Avenue.

I love it. I'm just here for the company. I'm here for the cheer.

The traders are here to sell stuff. I'd like to buy a watch. Can I sell you one of these? Those salesmen will always be there in a crowd.

The intrigued will be there. What's going on? Who's at the front of this thing? The searchers. They'll be there.

And so it is in a group like this tonight. I'm not going to assume for one moment that every boy and girl, every young person, every mom and dad, every single seated in these seats knows for a surety why you're here. That would be a bad assumption on my part.

For if the crowds who followed and listened to Christ himself didn't know why they were there, why would everyone in Camp of the Woods know why they're here? And out of a group like this, there is the exact variety of background and experience as is found in the crowds that followed in the wake of Jesus before.

Now, they knew enough. They knew enough to answer the question that was posed by the blind man.

It's recorded for us in Luke's Gospel, not in Mark's Gospel. In Luke chapter 18, in the parallel account, the man asks a question. It's an important question, and I'm just going to read it.

When he heard the crowd going by--see, he's a blind man, so he heard the crowd going by, that's why he doesn't say he saw the crowd going by--he asked what was happening. Hey, what's happening? Blind people are very sensitive to the other senses. And so it is that he would be aware of smells, and he would be aware of the movement of the people, and he would know that this was an unusual experience in Jericho, and see, he cries out, unable to see.

Put your hands over your eyes for a minute. Close your eyes completely, just for a moment. Close them completely.

Shut them. Now, don't open them. And imagine that a great hullabaloo goes on down below us here.

Now, don't open your eyes. What are you gonna do? You're gonna have to shout out, What's going on? You can open them now. And they said, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

Well, at least they got that right. Well, after all, there's no big surprise. They were in the crowd, and now he finds out.

But with the angle on the crowd, notice this. First of all, notice the rebuke that they gave. He says, What's happening? They say, Jesus is here.

Soon as he hears Jesus is here, he begins to shout. Now, the interesting thing is, in Mark's gospel, it would seem that Mark is showing us that both the disciples and the crowd were not doing really good when people expressed an interest in what was going on. For example, just a few verses earlier, you find that the disciples blow it badly.

Because here are the people bringing children to Jesus, and the disciples are saying, Get these kids out of here! We don't want them! You say, Well, wasn't that what you were doing just a moment ago? No, not at all. I'm not Jesus, you know. Get them out of here! And Jesus says, Hey, wait a minute! The little children, the kingdom begot begins with little children belongs to, such as these bring them here.

So now it moves on a little bit more. Jesus explains where he's going and what his death will mean, and the crowd begins to follow in his wake. And here's a man by the side of the road, and he says, Hey, Jesus, could you help me, Jesus? It's not, Help, help me, Rhonda.

It's, Help, help me, Jesus. Okay? That's what he's singing. That's his song.

Help, help me, Jesus. Help, help--and the crowd is going, Hey, shut up, man. Chill out.

We got a parade going here. We got a Jesus thing going. Don't you understand? We don't have time for this.

An amazing rebuke. Why? Presumably, they were so taken up with themselves. They were so taken up with their little business.

They were so taken up with what it meant to them to be in the group that they had no place for anyone else in their group. Stop there for just a moment, would you? You ever been anywhere like that? Have you ever worshipped in a church like that? So consumed with what we're doing in our group, and how we're enjoying our group, and all the plans for our group, that we don't have time for any blind men on the fringe shouting out for the help of Jesus. This is not the message this evening.

This is a passing note in comment. We may face the charge, loved ones, tonight, in Western Christianity, of almost total preoccupation with who and what we are and what we want, and the church, by and large, is missing the cries of the blind men and women who are shouting out, Help me, Jesus! Oh, not me. Okay, maybe not you.

What did Jesus tell us to do? He said we should go and make disciples of people. He didn't tell us to have Bible studies. Oh, he said if we abide in him and his words abide in us, we'll bring much fruit.

So, we should have Bible studies. But he didn't send us out to have Bible studies. He didn't send us out to elect people to Congress.

The Scriptures make it clear that we should give authority to those who are in authority, that we should pray for kings and our rulers, that we should make sure that we do what is right in our society. But that's not our mandate. The crowd here had messed it up.

One man, encountering a similar reaction in a church, wrote these words down. I wanted to say, Please help me. I wanted to say, I need you.

I wanted to say, I'm sorry. I wanted to say, Forgive me. But you were suffering from never-open ears.

And here was a group of people, tight with Jesus, and their ears were closed to the cries of those whose needs were greatest. I want to tell you tonight that here in America, we are a subculture. We are a sideline.

We are an irrelevancy to the largest part of the quarter of a billion people that inherit these fair shores. Some of you have lived long enough to recognize this. In our town in Ohio, you cannot find but one evening service.

All the doors are closed, and all the lights are off. People say, Who cares? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter? Is this the Lord's day? Is this an opportunity for evangelism and for worship? Goodness gracious, I went to play golf the other day.

We played eighteen holes. We looked at our watch. We said, Do you think we can do another nine? We did another nine.

We looked at our watch again. We said, Do you think we can go the whole way? We'll go for thirty-six. We did another nine.

We had now finished thirty-six. We looked at our watch. We thought about our wives, and we didn't do it anymore.

But nobody had to convince me about the second nine or the third nine or the fourth nine. I don't understand what it is when we've got this apparent great army in American Christianity, we've got to supposedly cajole them into getting to grips and getting serious about the opportunities of evangelism on

the Lord's day with the Lord's people. We're kidding ourselves.

If it took a quarter of a century to get to this point, just project it without a revival of the Spirit of God another ten or fifteen years. When some of you older folks who know the Bible and who know the convictions are taken home to glory, and a generation that never finished its vegetables, never finished its homework, never finished squat, is left to carry on the church of Jesus Christ, it's not a pretty prospect. The crowd was masterful at rebuke.

And the crowd was masterful at missing the point. Listen. Be quiet, they said.

Be quiet! They made the mistake that the Pharisees made when Jesus had dinner at the house of Matthew. Let me quote to you what happened there. While Jesus--this is Matthew 9--while Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

Hey, guys, we're going over to Matthew's house. There's a big deal going. The Jesus man, he's there.

Get your friends, let's go. This was the Harley crowd. These were the bums.

These were the bad guys. We're going over to Matthew's house, okay? Right? These are all the kids you don't want in your youth group, because they may marry your daughter. We're not having these long-haired freaks in here.

After all, this is our church, for goodness' sake! We got Jesus, and we got our thing going, we got a band, orchestra, we got the whole thing. Go! That's what happened to Gandhi in the church, and that's how he became Gandhi. What I mean by that is he was influenced by conservative evangelicalism in his early teenage years, and the church stifled him, and he turned in a totally different direction.

And there are many, many young people out there who are crying out, Jesus, have mercy on me! They couldn't get within a hundred miles of Jesus Christ, because the crowd has become masterful at rebuke and makes the same classic mistake in every generation. The spirit of the Pharisee is so rampant in many of our hearts that those who need him most can never meet him. And we need loved ones at a camp like this to come away and take stock of what is happening in our world.

For we retreat with every passing day into our schools, into our homes, into our huddles, into our fellowships, into our citadels, and somehow or another, there's been a missing link. Jesus said, Be salt and be light. But if the salt loses its savor, you might as well chuck it out and trample it under your feet.

And the Pharisees said to the disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? On hearing this, Jesus said, It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.

And this was a lesson that the crowd was about to learn. The interesting thing here is, if you look in Mark chapter 10, you will see that there is a story which precedes this of a young man that you would think was absolutely definite for inclusion in the army of Christ. He was a rich young man, he was concerned to know how he would inherit eternal life, and he was a well-put-together fellow.

And he ran up to Jesus, which is a good start, and he fell on his knees, and he addressed him in a respectful way, and he said, Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? The kind of young man

that you would like to have come home for dinner. The kind of guy that could become a deacon in the average church, you know, with only two or three weeks. And Jesus says, Buzz off! Well, he didn't say, Buzz off, but I mean, he said essentially that.

He says, You got a problem, buddy, and that is, you're gonna have to go sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Then you come follow me. And at that, the man's face fell, and he went away sorrowful.

So we've got one very likely candidate who gets the boot, and now we've got another most unlikely person who's about to get the welcome. I love this, don't you? I love it! I am tired of the world trying to tell me about my Jesus. And don't tell me that Jesus is bourgeois.

Don't tell me that Jesus is an upper-middle-class mentality. We may have made him that, but he ain't that. The crowd were ready to do that.

They would exalt him as a king. They didn't want a dying Savior, no more than we want one today. Are you with me? Let's turn the angle fast.

That's the crowd--masterful at rebuke, masterful at misunderstanding. What about the man? Well, look at this man. His name is Bartimaeus.

That's like having a name McDonald, because Mac means son of Donald, Bar means son of Timaeus. Bartimaeus, McDonald, same kind of thing. That was his clan.

He was the Timaeus clan. Bartimaeus. If you're interested, fine.

If you're not, doesn't really matter. And I want you to notice just three things. I'll say them quickly.

First of all, this man was in no doubt about his need. He was in no doubt about his need. He was a blind man, and he was a beggar man.

For his sustenance, he had to depend upon the generosity of others. Perhaps his family had left him, in which case he would be put in this position by his friends. Perhaps his family was using him, in which case they put him in that position.

It wasn't unusual if you had someone in your family who was impoverished in some mental or physical way, you would take them there and use them as a source of income. And so the man was in this position in Jericho every day. He was well known.

And he was in no doubt about his need. Secondly, he wasn't too proud to cry out. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Never saw Jesus.

And the rebuke of the people in verse 48 only intensifies his cry. Hey, quiet, please! We've got the thing going here, you know. We've got the crowd, and we're moving on.

But he shouted all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me! His cry, Son of David, was an acknowledgment of the fact of the messiahship of Jesus. So this man must have had a background somewhere. He knew more than some who were in the crowd.

Isn't that interesting? The people who need to be in the crowd sometimes know more than those of us who are in the crowd. I didn't think a Christian was supposed to do that. I didn't think a Christian spoke like that.

I thought the Bible said--and the man shouts, Son of David, Messiah! Messiah, Jesus! Yeshua, Yeshua, have mercy on me! He was in no doubt about his need, and he wasn't too proud to cry. Let me tell you something. That is the only ultimate way a man or a woman ever comes to trust in Christ.

First, we are in no doubt about our need. And secondly, we are not too proud to cry. Some of us have never faced our need, and some of us have never cried for mercy.

Therefore, although we attend church, may be members, may be singing choirs, and walk with our Christian family, we are no closer to heaven than the man who was stuck up the trees, Achaeus himself. Have you ever faced your need? Have you ever come to an end of yourself? I'm not asking you, have you ever decided that it would be a nice idea to, quote, have Jesus in your life? After all, you know, if that's all that it means, that I continue in the way I'm going and I have Jesus in my life, yeah, I'll have that. I'd like that.

That's fine. I believe my parents have it, so I think I should have it. And then these young people have no victory over sin.

They've no interest in the Word of God. They've no desire for worship. They have to be cajoled into church.

They never evangelize. They never tell their friends about Christ. And their parents say, Oh, we're going to have to get them to a conference or something to try and get them warmed up.

The fact is, they're unregenerate. They don't know Christ. They never faced their need.

They never realized that they were dead men and dead women and couldn't do a thing to make themselves alive. Bartimaeus is a classic picture to us of what it means to be without Christ. We are blind, and we are beggars.

We ain't got no hope. And so he shouted. When the word came back from Jesus, you will notice too that while he was not unaware of his need and he wasn't too proud to cry, he was immediate in his response.

And the action that is compressed into one little sentence is quite remarkable. In verse 50, throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. It just goes like that.

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. So let's just turn the camera angle on to Jesus and finish at the high point, as it were. Now the lens moves on to Jesus.

Look at the question he asks in verse 51, What do you want me to do for you? It's almost an unbelievable question, isn't it? I mean, here's a blind man. He's sitting by the side of the road. He begs every day.

He starts to shout out for Jesus. Jesus says, What do you want me to do for you? He knew what he wanted him to do for him, but he wanted to hear him ask. Jesus knows our needs.

Jesus knows who we are, but he wants to hear us acknowledge our need, and his ear is ever open to our cry. He doesn't barnstorm into our lives. The wooing of his Spirit works within our hearts, but eventually there comes a point where we hear his welcome voice, as the hymn writer says, I hear thy welcome voice that calls me, Lord, to thee, for cleansing in the precious blood that flowed on Calvary.

What do you want me to do for you? But Jesus comes along the road tonight and asks you the same question. What do you want me to do for you? The response, as I say, was immediate. One minute the man was blind, totally blind.

The next minute he had unimpaired vision. That's the kind of change that Jesus brings about. We hear a lot today about healings and miracles and signs and wonders and everything else.

There is nothing that happens today that comes close to the instantaneous, radical transformation that was brought about by the work of Jesus in his person and the work of the apostles that followed him. Does God heal? Yes. Is much that is proclaimed to be healing truly healing? Probably not.

I'm not impressed with the stories of the man who has cancer being prayed for and then people getting up and walking him round his bed, as they did in one of my neighborhoods in Scotland, so that they could go back to the prayer meeting and say, Mr. So-and-so who has terminal cancer, we prayed for him today, and he was up and walked around his bed. What they failed to say was that the walk around his bed virtually finished him, and he would be dead within the next forty-eight hours. But when you have a triumphalist approach to things, you've got to always have good stories.

This is a miraculous transformation. A blind man can see in a moment. That's Jesus.

What is one of the clearest pictures in the Bible that is given to us of what it means to be outside of Christ? It means to be in the dark. The god of this age, says Paul, has blinded the eyes of men and women so that they cannot see. It's interesting, in closing, the part that Jesus gave to the people, isn't it? The man cries out, they rebuke him, the man cries all the more, and Jesus says to them, Call him.

Interesting. Relevant? I think so. How is the call going to go out to men and women? Through you? You a Christian tonight? Who you calling? Shared your faith lately? Heard a cry lately? Stumbled over a blind beggar lately? Or are you and I just so stuck with the marching band and the crowd that we can't even hear these cries? And when we do, they annoy us.

And we've hung around with this group for so long that we've decided that you have to be like this to be in this group. And we've forgotten what we were like before ever we got invited in the group. Heaven's gonna be full of people who discover two things--one, that they were great sinners and that Christ was a great Savior.

Let me say again, in closing, that the word that they then gave-- Cheer up, on your feet, he's calling you!--is a great word to proclaim, is it not? We've a story to tell to the nations that will turn their hearts to the right. Cheer up, on your feet, Jesus is calling! I want to say that to you tonight. And as a result of that, the man followed Jesus along the road, we're told.

He praised God, and on account of his transformed life, others did the same. So, reducing it to two points of application, here it is. Point number one, in this auditorium this evening there are blind people who have never faced the depth of their need and who have been too proud to cry for help.

If that is you, Dad, if that is you, Son, if that is you, Gramps, if that is you, Mom, then I say to you tonight, Christ is calling you. Point one of application. Point two of application.

Mr. and Mrs. Christian, as we make our way down this thoroughfare here this evening and look out over this lake, I urge you to take time to examine your heart, to find if to any degree we might have been caught

up in the action so deeply that our ears are no longer open to the cries of the blind beggars, Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me. Who will be the missionaries of the next generation? Who will give their lives for the cause of Christ? Missionary organizations cannot get people to serve the rest of their lives. They'll go for six months or for two years.

It's the generation that never finished anything. There's got to be some young men and some young women this evening who can say, I want to have my ears open to hear those cries, and I want to do what Jesus said. I want to call them.

Cheer up on your feet. He's calling you. Let's pray together.

At the end of what has been a wonderful day and what is a warm evening, let's just commit ourselves afresh to God. The great concern is not that we react to the voice of a man but to the voice of the Spirit of God who takes the truth of his Word and brings it to our lives. And some may be here this evening, come as an invitation, as a result of an invitation of a family member or a friend, and you know that you're like Bartimaeus.

Your condition is hopeless. You're blind. You're a beggar, spiritually.

You have no sustenance. You can do no better than just say, just as I am, poor, wretched, blind, sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea, all I need in thee I find. Lord Jesus Christ, I come to you.

And just where you are, call out to him for mercy, as did Bartimaeus. And for those of us who have grown cold, as a result of spending too long in the march and too little time with the blind and the hungry, fill our hearts afresh with a zeal for the lost. Save us from the lie of the devil that the future of our world lies in the future of our political machinations.

Remind us that the kingdom is the issue, and that unless a man is born again, he'll never see nor enter the kingdom of God. Hear our prayer, O God, and let our cry come unto you. For Jesus' sake we ask it.

Amen. That concludes this message. Thanks for listening to Truth For Life.

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