

Clear Outcomes!

Jeremiah 31⁷⁻⁹; Psalm 126; Hebrews 7^{23-end}; Mark 10^{46-end}

What do you want me to do for you?
[Mark 10⁵¹]

When I was a theological student, in my late teens, I would never have foreseen any time that I would need to become proficient in employment law. (If you want to make God laugh. Tell him your plans). Supporting our family business and becoming Chair of Governors in two schools soon changed that. One of the things I have learnt is that, if you present a formal grievance, you have to say what the outcome should be. So: if you have been sacked, you may want to be reinstated; if you have been offended, you may want an apology; if you have been treated unfairly, you may want compensation.

When Blind Bartimaeus was brought to Jesus (I love the fact that the text says that he **sprang up**), he was asked directly: **what do you want me to do for you?** He knew exactly what he wanted – **let me see again** – and so he got that. Why? Because Jesus recognised his integrity: **Go; your faith has made you well.**

Here we are all of us in the presence of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How do we answer that direct question? **What do you want me to do for you?**

I'll give you a minute to get beyond knowing the numbers for the next Lottery draw – what is your focused, concise and clear answer to that question?

- ✘ The Psalmist and the prophet Jeremiah are united in what they want. The Israelites had been in exile – God had acted against their unfaithfulness – and they wanted back to their physical and spiritual home in Jerusalem. Jeremiah envisages that God will **gather them from the furthest parts of the earth** and that it will be a **straight path in which they will not stumble**. The Psalmist (unsurprisingly) is more up-beat than Jeremiah: **we were those who dream; our mouth filled with laughter; our tongues with songs of joy**. It is the fulfilment of promise: **those who sow**

in tears shall reap with songs of joy.

The thing with a clear request is that you can tell when it happens. There was no doubt that, in Israel, it was the **remnant** that were those who were faithful to God – that sense of a small minority being faithful whilst the rest either ignore God or pay lip service.

- ✘ The author of Hebrews is clear about what God expects. The failed system based on human priests making repeated sacrifices for repeating sins is scrapped. I confess that the candid phrase, **the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office**, brought me up short. In Jesus we have a high priest – **holy, blameless, undefiled** – who offers a sacrifice **once for all when he offered himself**.

Clear objectives – forgiveness, hope new life. All achieved.

- ✘ So, to the Gospel. Imagine Jesus standing before you and me and the questions comes, **what do you want me to do for you?**

Into fear, peace; into darkness, light; into doubt, faith; into sickness, healing; into loneliness, companionship; into sin, repentance; into death, resurrection; into poverty, riches; into confusion, purpose; into selfishness, service; into hopelessness, hope; into anger, calm; into envy, contentment.

It takes **faith** to ask: and then faith to look for God's response.

Just one word of caution – be careful what you ask for: God may just take you at your word!