

Healing Two Blind Men

Introduction

Today's story comes to us primarily from Mark's account (10.46-52), but we'll also be consulting parallel accounts given in Matthew 20.29-30 and Luke 18.35-43. In Mark we learn that Jesus is on the road making his way to Jerusalem when he comes upon a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Matthew adds that there were two blind men present. We do not know the name of the second blind man. Some have surmised that Bartimaeus' name was preserved because he may have become a leading person in the early church.⁴¹ In Mark, this is the last of the healings recorded. There are more miracles to come certainly, the resurrection being the greatest, but this healing, like the others, clearly demonstrates Jesus' ultimate power.

Before getting into the actual account of Bartimaeus' healing, Mark sets the scene. Jesus has come to Jericho and was on his way to leave. Luke says he was approaching Jericho, (18.35). Why the discrepancy? At this time there were two Jericho's, one being the ancient city, and the other a new one built by Herod the Great.⁴² He is headed for the last stop of His ministry: the cross in Jerusalem. There is a large crowd. The Passover is coming. Barclay tells us that it was common for distinguished teachers who were on a journey to be surrounded by a large gathering of people, disciples, and learners who would listen to him as he walked.⁴³ Jewish law required every person who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem to attend the Passover. With the law being impossible to fulfill, it was very common to have people line the streets in the towns on the road leading to Jerusalem and wish the Passover participants well. Add the presence of Jesus to all of this and the crowds had to be huge.

On Bartimaeus

Blindness was common in Jesus' day, usually caused by an injury, birth defect, or disease. One of the most common causes was due to a highly contagious infection that could affect people of all ages, but especially children. It was carried about by large flies that would settle upon a person's eyes, especially sleeping infants. Sometimes blindness was caused by high fevers. Other factors included blowing dust and sand, along with the intense glare of the sun. Along with everyone else who had a disability, blind people were social outcasts and often reduced to begging. Many believed their malady came as the judgment of God, John 9.1-2.

Blindness caused a man to be prohibited in serving in the priesthood, and blind animals were prevented from being used as a sacrifice. Blindness and poverty often went together. There were provisions in the

⁴¹ MacArthur, John. *Mark 9–16*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015, p. 115.

⁴² Cooper, Rodney L. *Mark*. Vol. 2. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000, p. 172.

⁴³ Barclay, p. 302.

law, Leviticus 19.14, for people to care for them. Mistreatment of the blind would cause a person to be accursed, Deuteronomy 27.18.⁴⁴

Despite the directives in the law, Bartimaeus would have very much been a marginalized person of his day. It would have been a very natural thing for a blind beggar to be sitting along the side of the road at a time when so many individuals were on their way to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus hears that it was Jesus who was passing by. Edwards observes that on the occasion of Jesus' first recorded miracle in Mark, 1.24, and last, 10.47, Jesus is designated as "the Nazarene." Both most likely refer to his place of birth, but it is noted that a similar expression is used of Samson in Judges 16.17 where he is called a "Nazarite to God," which describes *God's powerfully anointed one*. It is suggested that Mark's usage of the term might also carry the idea of Jesus' own powerful anointing by God.⁴⁵

When Bartimaeus hears it is Jesus he *began to cry out*, 10.47. This is not a casual *hey Jesus, . . .* it's a "cry out, scream, or shriek." BDAG describes it as a "vehement outcry, . . . like that of mentally disturbed persons, epileptics, or the cry of a woman in childbirth."⁴⁶ The wording here also continues that he continued to do so, repeating himself over and over again. Bartimaeus describes him as Jesus *the Son of David*, and repeatedly begs for mercy. This is a cry from the deepest part of his heart. He knew Jesus was the only one who could bring sight to his blind eyes.

His pitiful condition and repeated cry brings him no mercy from the crowd who *warned him to be quiet*, 10.48. To them he is just a nuisance who needed to be quiet. He doesn't care. He was undeterred and with unrestrained voice he *was crying out all the more, "Have mercy on me, Son of David!"* The sheer desperation of his situation is propelling him.

Jesus' Response

Jesus stopped. These are the opening words of Mark 10.49. *Call him*, Jesus commands. Someone in the crowd goes over to Bartimaeus and tells him *Have courage! Get up; he's calling for you.* There is no hesitation. No indecision. Bartimaeus immediately throws off his coat (probably part of which had been being used to collect coins people would throw down next to him), jumps up, and comes to Jesus, 10.50. Someone must have led him to Jesus, who when he gets there in the middle of the road, in 10.51a Jesus asks, *what do you want me to do for you?* This is a powerful moment. Imagine the scene. Here is the Son of God, delaying his journey, ceasing his work of teaching, and asking how He can serve a lowly beggar.

Bartimaeus replies, *Rabboni, . . . I want to see*, 10.51b. "Rabboni" means "my master," and is a term of obvious respect. In Jewish literature, the term was almost never used to reference another human. It was usually used to refer to God in prayer. He knows who Jesus is and he knows who he is. He doesn't

⁴⁴ Harrison, R. K. with Macalister A. "Blindness." Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988, Vol. 1, p. 525.

⁴⁵ Edwards, p. 329-30.

⁴⁶ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 563.

deserve anything. He simply asks for mercy, asking for his sight to be restored. There's no request for wealth or power, he simply asks for *normalcy*.⁴⁷ Here we observe his great humility.

Jesus touched his eyes (Matthew 20.34) and said *Receive your sight*, Luke 18.42. He then tells Bartimaeus to go, *your faith has saved you*, 10.52. "Saved you," as worded in the CSB, means to "save or deliver." It carries the connotation of being rescued or delivered from imprisonment or severe affliction. It is often used in the New Testament to describe being saved from sin.⁴⁸

For the 21st Century

We have to admire Bartimaeus' persistence. No one or no thing was going to stop him from reaching Jesus. What the crowd thought of him didn't matter. He knew Jesus was the only one who could heal him of his most desperate need. *It was a desperate desire, and it is that desperate desire that gets things done.*⁴⁹

When Jesus called for him, there was no hesitation. We know many who continually put off Jesus' invitation. *At a more convenient time*, they say. Not Bartimaeus. He gets right off, removes every hindrance, and goes straight to Jesus. He seized the moment. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock*, says Jesus.⁵⁰ Will you come without delay?

Bartimaeus knew exactly what he wanted. *I want to see*, 10.51b. This was his problem. He needed it fixed. As we make the spiritual application, sin is our problem. We go to Jesus with the desperate cry for mercy, *please remove my sin*. First and foremost, salvation revolves around this.

After his request was granted, Bartimaeus moved with gratitude. This is seen in how he followed Jesus. He didn't just go on with his life. Barclay adds that he began with need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty ... *and that is a perfect summary of the stages of discipleship.*⁵¹

For Thought and Reflection

1. How can we explain any alleged discrepancy between Matthew/Mark's account of Jesus leaving Jericho with Luke's description of him coming into Jericho?

⁴⁷ Edwards, p. 331.

⁴⁸ Matthew 1.21; 19.25; Luke 8.12; 9.24; 13.23; 19.10; John 10.9; Acts 2.21; 4.12; 16.30-31; Romans 5.9-10; 10.9, 13; Ephesians 2.8; 1 Timothy 1.15; 2 Timothy 1.9; Titus 3.5.

⁴⁹ Barclay, p. 303.

⁵⁰ Revelation 3.20.

⁵¹ Barclay, p. 305.

2. Why is Jesus headed to Jerusalem? What is the upcoming religious holiday and why is that important to know?

3. What was the plight of the blind during Jesus' day?

4. Where is Bartimaeus when Jesus comes down the road?

5. How does Bartimaeus react when he is told it is Jesus?

6. How does Jesus respond?

7. What does Bartimaeus request? Do you think this is a description of his humility? Explain.

8. After he is healed, what does Jesus tell Bartimaeus to do? Instead, what does Bartimaeus do?

9. What can we learn about persistence from Bartimaeus?

10. What do we learn about gratitude and loyalty from Bartimaeus?