

Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶Then 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. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵²"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. - Mark 10:46-52

A blind beggar on a roadside or near a city gate was a common sight in ancient Palestine as blindness was pandemic. A. T. Robertson notes: "The dust, the glare of the sun, the unsanitary habits of the people spread contagious eye diseases." Bartimaeus was not born blind. The grammar of his request for sight in verse 51 indicates that it is a recovery of sight that he desires. The dark was an awful place to be, especially for someone who knew what sight was.

Only a relatively few priests served in Jerusalem at any given time. Just a few miles from Jerusalem, Jericho with its pleasant tropical climate was the home for many priests. No doubt, many priests were on hand when Bartimaeus began shouting. Still, this blind man could see Jesus in a way that no priest could. The mere fact that some men were born into a religious vocation was no guarantee that they could recognize God's Son. Bartimaeus saw through eyes of faith. Isaiah was speaking to those who were religious in their own eyes when he said: "Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes" (Isaiah 59:10). Bartimaeus wielded a spiritual advantage over most of those in that Jericho crowd, and especially over the priests. He knew that he was blind. They only thought they could see.

When in his excitement Bartimaeus began calling for Jesus, he addressed him as "Jesus, Son of David." To most of those in the crowd, "Jesus of Nazareth" was a reputable preacher, healer, exorcist, rabbi and prophet. "Son of David", however, was a reference for *messiah*. The Twelve Apostles believed that Jesus was the *messiah* and, at points throughout His ministry, there had been some chatter among the multitudes to that effect. But, Bartimaeus evidently was clinging to that hope. When some in the crowd tried to "shush" him, perhaps, in fear of the Romans, Bartimaeus just cried out all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Then, something strange happened. If Jesus had wanted to avoid being identified with *messiah*, He would either have silenced the man or just walked faster. But He stopped, saying, "Call him." Jesus did not reject the title. On the contrary, He responded to it. The tone of the crowd changed. Now, they encouraged the man to respond to Jesus. Perhaps, their own latent messianic hopes for Jesus has been rekindled, for the very next major event after Jesus healed the man was the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, when He was accompanied by a newly electrified company of disciples crying:

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"
"Hosanna in the highest!" - Matthew 11:9,10

Bartimaeus immediately came to Jesus, throwing aside his cloak. As a beggar, his take for the day was in the folds of that cloak, but he didn't care. He trusted that his life as a blind beggar was about to end. When Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" his response was trusting, simple and direct: Bartimaeus addressed Jesus not simply as "Rabbi" as the text renders it, but by the more tender "Rabboni," or "my Rabbi," "my Teacher," "my Master." It was the same precious word that Mary Magdalene would use to address Jesus when she would encounter Him in the garden after His resurrection.

Many acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, Who died for humanity's sins. But, many who acknowledge this truth intellectually never really seem to grasp their own desperate condition without Christ. They have never seen themselves as helpless sinners in profound need of God's grace. Jesus died for sins, and they are church members. It's a very tidy arrangement. Beyond that, they give little thought to these matters. That is what separates the intellectual Christian from an authentic believer like Bartimaeus. The latter knows what it means to be lost, to stumble in darkness and to cry out for mercy. And, when the light of Christ comes to such yearning eyes, all in the world that makes sense is to follow Him.

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