

## What the Blind Man Saw

Mark 10:46-52

Klaus Schmidt, 64, suffered serious heart problems. He experienced difficulty breathing while on a Lufthansa flight from Dublin to Frankfurt. The chief flight attendant asked if there was a doctor on board. In fact, there were 40 - the entire German delegation to an international medical seminar in Ireland. After quick treatment and recovery, Schmidt admitted to an attendant that it was all just dumb luck. "I'd been thinking of flying back the next day, but changed my mind."

As believers, we're not big advocates of the "dumb luck" of being in "the right place at the right time." When those dynamics appear to be in play, we look to the hand of One Who guides and guards the lives of His people. Whenever anyone comes to the end of his own strength in the struggle to find spiritual direction, Jesus' presence is always the right place and the right time.

The restoration of sight to Bartimaeus is the last healing Jesus performed before facing His crucifixion in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, who just happened to be begging on the roadside when Jesus passed by, lived in Jericho of Judea, the southern Jewish territory. In the last text we studied from *Mark*, Jesus healed a different blind man in Galilee to the north. Since then, Jesus has continued moving about, teaching His disciples the demands and values of His kingdom.

The healing of that previous blind man was the only healing Jesus ever worked in stages. He spat on the man's eyes, touched him and asked him what he saw. He saw people, but that they looked like walking trees. When Jesus touched him again, his sight was restored. Jesus could drive out demons or calm a tempest with one word, so I believe that this act of mercy also served to encourage Jesus' disciples that they would eventually see more clearly the truths of the kingdom of God.

Bartimaeus' healing drove home a different lesson, one on the power of wholly responding to Jesus. Who knows if Bartimaeus would ever teach or lead others? Still, he is a model for all would-be disciples. Bartimaeus could not see Jesus with his physical eyes, but he was not as blind as many in the crowd that day. He knew Jesus held the answers to this life's futility.

It took a long time for the Twelve to conclude that Jesus was *Messiah*. They had entertained that notion from the moment they met Him, but He never behaved like a *Messiah* should. His power to heal was obvious. His authority over nature's elements and Hell's demons was undeniable. But, He never seemed angry enough at Gentiles. He never seemed interested in the trappings of royalty. The fact that Jesus called them was flattering, and it puffed them up on occasion. But, at times, it must have confused even them. "Why would any King call us?" Eventually, after all they had seen, Jesus took the Apostles to Caesarea Philippi. There, Peter confessed, presumably for the group, his belief that indeed Jesus was *Messiah*, saying, "You are the Christ of God."

This great confession was immediately confirmed to Peter, James and John when Jesus took them to a mountain where His outward appearance changed, and they saw Him standing alongside Moses the Lawgiver and Elijah the greatest of Israel's prophets. A voice identified Jesus as "my Son." They knew He was the next major player in God's redemption of Israel. When they looked up again, Jesus was alone, indicating that He was also the greatest. This inner circle clearly knew that Jesus was *Messiah*, but they still had little idea as to what that meant.

Lori Anderson shared this anecdote with *Reader's Digest*:

“As a professional animal trainer, I was disturbed when my own dog developed a bad habit. Every time I hung my wash out on the clothesline, she would yank it down. Drastic action was called for. I put a white kitchen towel on the line and waited. Each time she pulled it off, I scolded her. After two weeks the towel was untouched. Then I hung out a large wash and left to do some errands. When I came home, my clean clothes were scattered all over the yard. On the line was the white kitchen towel.”

In a similar way, Jesus saw many blank looks from trainees who just didn't get it. Chapters 8-10 are filled with teachings on discipleship. When Jesus and His inner three returned from the mountain of Transfiguration, they came upon the other disciples failing in an attempt to drive a demon from a boy. Jesus bailed them out and told them to be more dependent on prayer. As the disciples competed over the greatest positions in Jesus' future kingdom, He emphasized servant hearts and childlike spirits. Through His interaction with a rich, young ruler, Jesus taught them that a disciple couldn't be divided in his loyalties between God and the material world.

Now, the long training process was winding down. The Twelve had been with Jesus for three years. Sometimes, their mental thickness frustrated Him. It would soon be the role Holy Spirit to empower them beyond their natural capacities. Jesus and His troupe made their way to Jericho, only fifteen miles from Jerusalem and only days from the cross. This was the homestretch.

Ultimately, it is a man's sense of need for *a* savior that causes him to recognize *the* Savior. Bartimaeus had little occasion to ponder the theological ramifications of *Messiah* coming from Nazareth. He was not preoccupied with his preconceived ideas about the coming King. He didn't know much about *Messiah versus* the Romans. He was needy. He was blind. He had heard about the things Jesus had done. All Bartimaeus knew was that Jesus was the Savior He needed.

## **I. Bartimaeus Saw His Extreme Poverty (46)**

<sup>46</sup>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.

### **A. Physical Blindness Is a Unique Malady**

Other conditions lend themselves to denial. You can be too old to do certain things and hurt yourself trying. You can be too fat or too thin and not face it in the mirror. You can be losing your hearing and not admit it. We'd tease my Mom about going deaf and she'd say, "Have you considered that maybe I'm just not listening to you?" Of course, we could hear her TV from the driveway. We can deny we have quirky habits. I got me a Bluetooth. Now, whenever I notice people in the next car have caught me talking to myself, I just turn my head and tap the earpiece.

Vision is different. It's hard to bluff that you're okay. I am past the point of reading much of anything without my glasses, so when I misplaced them this week, Barb needed my notes for the bulletin whether I could find them or not. I had Caleb watch over my shoulder to insure I was sending what I meant to send where I meant to send it. "Does the address say 'WORSHIP GUYS'? ... Does that attachment say 'WEEKLY WORSHIP NOTES'?" I didn't want to send a blonde joke to some missionary. Denial certainly doesn't work with total blindness. Darkness is dark.

The darkness can lead to regrettable consequences. In the days before electricity, a tightfisted old farmer teased his hired man for wasting fuel by carrying a lighted lantern when he went to call on his best girl. "Why," he exclaimed, "when I went a-courtin' I never carried one of them things. I always went in the dark." "Yes," the hired man said wryly, "and look what you got!"

A blind beggar on the roadside near a city gate was a common sight as blindness was a pandemic in the ancient world. Bartimaeus was not blind from birth. The grammar of his request for sight in verse 51 indicates a recovery of sight. He knew what it meant to see. Unlike the Twelve, he had no delusions about his potential for kingdom greatness. The dark was an awful place to be, especially for someone who knew what sight was, and Bartimaeus just wanted to see again.

## **B. Spiritual Blindness Is Not So Easily Acknowledged**

This crowd was not necessarily convened in Jesus' honor, but it was clearly electrified by His presence. It was a time for Jews around the world to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Entire communities traveled together as a safeguard against bandits. Those who could not make the trip gathered to see off those who could. When pilgrims from other villages passed through town, the locals came out to greet them. Many people were on hand for this healing.

So near to Jerusalem, Jericho was the home of many priests. Relatively few served in Jerusalem at one time, so many priests would be on hand when Bartimaeus began shouting. Still, this blind man could see Jesus in a way no priest could. The mere fact that some men were born into a religious vocation was no guarantee that they would recognize God's Son. Bartimaeus saw through eyes of faith. Spiritual blindness is not a theme reserved in the scriptures only for the most backward pagans. Isaiah was speaking of Israel and of the elite within Israel when he said:

"Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes" - Isaiah 59:10

Paul had in mind Jew and Greek alike when he wrote of those outside of Christ:

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." - II Corinthians 4:4

Jesus even indicted one church of blindness to His supremacy among them:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired great wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." - Revelation 3:17

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 thought they could see.

## **II. Bartimaeus Saw His Excellent Remedy (47-51)**

...<sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

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

<sup>49</sup>Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

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

<sup>51</sup>"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

## **A. This Man Who Could Not See Could See *Messiah***

Bartimaeus learned that the cause of the ruckus was "Jesus of Nazareth." That was a rather vanilla designation for Jesus. He was a rabbi, and while Nazareth did not produce many rabbis, that was His hometown. To those in the crowd, "Jesus of Nazareth" was an identifiable rabbi, Who had also established Himself as a healer, exorcist and sociologist. Many believed Him to be a prophet. But, when Bartimaeus in his excitement began calling, "Jesus, Son of David," the blind man was breaking new ground. "Son of David" was a clear reference to the *Messiah*.

Peter and presumably the rest of the Twelve had reached the same conclusion. Peter had confessed to Jesus, "You are the Christ" (the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*). But, to this point, Jesus had discouraged any such public proclamations. At times, other crowds had entertained the possibility that Jesus was *Messiah*. The 5000 that He fed wanted to forcefully enthrone Him in Jerusalem, but He would have none of it. The hope that Jesus might be the Promised One was out there. But, this close to Jerusalem and the Passover, when the Romans would be on high alert for insurrectionists, and in the presence of all these priests, some in the crowd began to "shush" Bartimaeus. But the more they shushed him, the more he cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Then, something strange happened. If Jesus had chosen to avoid being identified with *Messiah*, He would either have "shushed" the man Himself or just walked faster. But He stopped and said, "Call him." Jesus did not reject the title. On the contrary, He responded to it. The tone of the crowd changed. Now, instead of "Shh ...", it was "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you!" Were the latent hopes of that crowd that Jesus might be *Messiah* being reignited?

When Jesus healed this man, not as "Jesus of Nazareth", but in response to the acclamation, "Jesus, Son of David", their hopes were confirmed. The very next event after this healing will be Jesus' celebrated entry into Jerusalem. Did this healing transform a crowd of pilgrims in route to Passover, entertaining possibilities about Jesus, into the throng of worshippers that spread cloaks and branches before Jesus as He entered Jerusalem as King? And, of course, they would cry:

"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!" - Mark 11:9, 10

## **B. Salvation Requires a Personal Plea for God's Help**

The man threw his cloak aside as He came to Jesus. As a beggar, His take for the day was in the folds of that cloak. He didn't care. He trusted that His life as a beggar was about to change. Jesus asked Bartimaeus what seemed an obvious question: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus' lone desire reflected a singular sense of need. "My teacher, let me see again."

He says, not merely, "Rabbi", but "rabboni", which is a tender and respectful term for one's own rabbi. A teacher is not necessarily "My Teacher." Someone's master is not necessarily "My Master." A rabbi is not necessarily "rabboni." This was the word Mary Magdalene would utter to the resurrected Jesus when she encountered Him in the garden where He had been buried.

Many know that Jesus is the Christ. They have a matter-of-fact handle on the gospel. They grasp the redemption formula. But many, who understand these truths intellectually, never really grasp their own personal, hopeless condition. They have never really seen their desperate need for God's forgiveness. Jesus died for sins. They are church members. Beyond that, they give it little thought. That is what separates an intellectual Christian from a passionate disciple. The latter knows what it means to be lost, to stumble in darkness and to cry out for mercy. And, he is inclined not simply to believe the facts of the Christ of the Gospels, but to follow Him to life.

### **III. Bartimaeus Saw His Extraordinary Destiny (52)**

<sup>52</sup>"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

#### **A. This Man's Healing Was by Faith**

Again, unlike the healing of the blind man in Galilee, Jesus simply speaks the word that heals: no spitting, no eye-rubbing, no walking trees. Bartimaeus' faith is all Jesus needed to see. But what faith was this? It was not simply a desire for healing. It was the recognition of the true identity of a Person. To declare Jesus "Son of David" was to declare his belief that King *Messiah* had come. Faith in the Person of Jesus as the remedy sent from God is the faith that empowered Bartimaeus to raise his voice above that din of the crowd, and to eagerly receive the mercy of Jesus.

Bartimaeus had been longing to see, but in the most important sense, He saw before he ever saw. In this story of sight-restoration, the ability to see physically parallels the ability to see with spiritual eyes. Jesus told the man that he was free to go, but he wasn't free. The bonds of love and gratitude compelled him to follow. Having regained his sight, Bartimaeus' natural impulse was not to go his own merry way. His response to his newfound vision was unhesitating - he applied his previous faith to his new life and eagerly followed Jesus in faithfulness.

#### **B. This Man's Response to Healing Teaches Us about Discipleship**

"Go? How can I go?" Bartimaeus is Mark's "poster boy" for authentic discipleship. Anyone who is truly touched by Christ feels overwhelmingly called to follow Him. There is no reasonable argument to the contrary. They become imitators of Jesus as they seek to become perfected disciples.

Bartimaeus' followed Jesus just as things appeared to be degenerating. Jesus would soon enter Jerusalem in His final role as the crucified Lamb. There would be little time for Bartimaeus to enjoy Bible School or other training opportunities. Jesus' followers would soon be thrust into a crucible of testing. Assuming Bartimaeus did reach Jerusalem, there he would see the One Sacrifice for sin that would secure for him more than sight, but a place in God's kingdom.

Are you following Jesus, and I mean truly following Him? He was a rabbi, but is He your Rabbi? Is He your Teacher? Is He your Master? Is He the wisdom by which you lead your life? Is His the strength by which you battle your temptations and serve God? Does His authority over your life give credence to your declarations that He is Lord? If not, get up off the side of the road, call out to Christ and follow His way of the cross. His cross secured your salvation. His way of the cross will lead you down paths of service and surrender as your Father shapes you for eternity.