

# “Jesus, Bartimaeus and Jerusalem”

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by Rev. Steve Hammond for FBC of Newport, NH

*//46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” 50 Throwing 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 (NIV)

Here is one little story about Jesus picking up a blind hitchhiker, as he and his nervous disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. One little story. And yet from this story we are able to learn so much about this blind man. And hopefully about ourselves as well. Here’s what we can know just from the details of this story.

His name is Bartimaeus. This means he could well be the son (“bar”) of Timaeus, as explained in the text. He is blind, of course, and consequently he was a beggar. That’s how he made his living. And so he was begging on the outskirts of Jericho toward Jerusalem. For people traveling to Jerusalem, Jericho was the last major stop along the uphill way to the city of Jerusalem, the temple of God and the summit of Mt. Zion.

We can also know that Bartimaeus has heard of Jesus before. He knows his reputation as a healer and he even knows people are starting to see him as the Messiah, the Son of David. Bartimaeus readily calls Jesus “Son of David” when he cries out to get his attention. Which brings up another thing about this blind hitchhiker. He’s not easily dissuaded. When he has a mind to do something, he is determined to do it and no one is going to talk him out of it. At least that was the case here. For when he started calling out to Jesus the people around him tried to make him be quiet. They were probably thinking Jesus was too important and this blind man was too unimportant for him to be bothering Jesus, let alone expecting him to stop what he’s doing and visit the guy alongside the road. But the man yelled all the louder! And Jesus did indeed stop.

From here we get help from Jesus in learning something that we take for granted and maybe learning not to take such a thing for granted. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?”

What’s the man going to say? “I’d like a ham sandwich...” No wait, “Make that chicken salad....” It’s an obvious question with an obvious answer. The

blind man wants Jesus to heal him of his blindness. "Teacher, I want to see," the man answers.

Jesus does this sort of thing. Remember how he healed the lame man by the pool of Bethesda in John 5? The man was staying by that pool precisely because it had the reputation of healing the first person to enter the water whenever it was supposedly stirred by an angel. He also asked that man an obvious question, "Do you want to be made well?"

I think what this is showing is that though the need here may seem obvious, the meeting of that need must still hinge on the willingness of the recipient. There is no real point in healing a blind man, nor a lame man, or anyone for that matter, if they themselves don't want it or don't value it. He doesn't ask this of every person he deals with in healing, curing, exorcising and obviously in raising the dead. But I think the implication is still there in all those cases. Even in raising the dead. Though they can't speak for themselves, they either have a previous relationship with Jesus, or they have a loving representative appealing to Jesus on their behalf.

So, we can say of Bartimaeus, he was of a mind to be made to see; he valued this very much. In addition to this, his shouting out to Jesus was an expression that he believed, or faithfully hoped, that Jesus could heal his blindness. Then, as Jesus said, according to his faith he was healed. He was no longer a blind man. He would no longer make his living by begging alongside the road. In fact, Bartimaeus incorporated this change immediately into his life. He joined Jesus' followers and took up walking with him on that road to Jerusalem.

What an odd picture that makes. This road to Jerusalem has been the source of confusion and fear for Jesus' disciples and apostles. The closer they get to Jerusalem the more dangerous it is for Jesus and all who follow him. They know the authorities hate him. The Jewish authorities have been plotting against his life since chapter three in Mark's Gospel here. Yet can't you see these two figures, Jesus and Bartimaeus, walking side by side? While the others tremble, they are both rejoicing in what has just happened. Bartimaeus is surely pointing out all the amazing and beautiful things he can now see: the color of the dirt (to *him* it's amazing), the leaves on the trees, the people's faces, the heights of Zion. And I'll bet Jesus is delighting in this man's delight.

All the while, though, Jesus sees more clearly than anyone. He has predicted three times what will happen in Jerusalem. This Son of David, who has just healed this former blind man, will be arrested for being a fraud. He will be put on trial, found innocent, yet still condemned and executed.

How could Jesus be rejoicing with anyone along such a road as that?

The answer is in the joy of Bartimaeus and the joy mentioned in the later words of scripture in Hebrews 12.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. --Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)*

Jesus did not take delight in the cross. But he did have delight within him as he endured it. He overcame sin and death itself and made the cross his complete victory for the saving of sinners—and even for the healing of this blind man walking now alongside him.

This brings up two more things we know about Bartimaeus. He was a sinner. And he was saved. We know he was a sinner because, well, everyone in the human race except Jesus is a sinner. But in the days of Bartimaeus that sin would be all the more obvious because he was a blind man. It's not a biblical way to look at things, but people then tended to associate general misfortune in life with specific punishment for sin. The whole book of Job is written to combat that idea, but that won't stop some people from believing it and perpetuating it.

We humans have it built into us that justice must be served, which is true. The guilty must be punished and the innocent ought not to be punished. So if we see people going through terrible problems in life we are faced with a dilemma: either these people deserve what's happened to them, or else God is asleep at the switch when it comes to justice. And so, the ones who believe in God tend to opt for blaming the people in trouble, while the ones who hate God opt for blaming God.

But there is a third option! The grace and love of God for sinners has come. And that is what we see in Jesus as he walks along the Jerusalem road with Bartimaeus. I saw this option highlighted, in a bad light and then in the right light, in a Q&A exchange between William Lane Craig and a questioner from the audience. It went like this, as I transcribed it from a documentary.

*QUESTIONER: You talk about moral accountability in Christianity and that God would somehow punish wrongdoers and reward those who do the right thing. ... In Christianity it's only about accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. You could go off, rape, murder, kill and on your 90th birthday or the day before you die, say that "I accept Jesus" (and be completely truthful in that) and you'd go to heaven, whereas the victim you sliced apart, raped, murdered. If they found that they couldn't believe in Jesus, they would go and burn in hell forever. Am I misrepresenting you there?*

*WILLIAM CRAIG: No. That's right. So, as I said, it is more subtle than the way you have expressed it. If a person acknowledges his moral sin or failure and sincerely turns to God in deep contrition and repentance, then God, as a loving God, will forgive him. God is not some sort of hard-hearted, indifferent Being who says, "No, you're gonna get yours." The Christian view of God is that he is a gracious, loving heavenly Father who is anxious to forgive the sinner who is truly contrite. And so that person will be forgiven, if on his 90th birthday he turns to God in genuine contrition [remorsefulness, repentance, sorrowfulness].*

*Now that doesn't mean, however, that his sins go unpunished. Because you see, on the Christian view, Christ bears the penalty for those sins. On the cross, Jesus suffers the penalty for the sins of the whole world. So, the demands of God's justice are met. It's not as though God just blinks at sin. His wrath and justice is poured out, but Christ bears it as our substitute so that one need not bear it one's self.*

*So, yes, I willingly accept that and think it one of the wonderful things about Christian faith. That God forgives sinners no matter how miserable they are, as long as they repent and turn to him.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQT2ghiMlv0&feature=youtu.be>

God's grace can come across as baffling, or even as immoral, to those who do not sense the need of it, which is to be like a blind man, who when offered healing, turns down the invitation. It happens. Maybe not as much with physical blindness, deafness and the like. (Though I've myself actually seen a documentary where a deaf parent did not want his child to hear, as it would make the child less pure in the deaf community, or so he thought.) But with spiritual blindness it happens all the time.

But that is not the case with Bartimaeus. He did not hesitate at the opportunity for Jesus to heal him. And we can also have some confidence that he did not turn down the forgiveness Jesus offered him and the whole world at the cross. I say this because there's one more thing we know about Bartimaeus. His name is carefully recorded in the Gospel, even though the account could have been told without it. That means it was of interest to the first readers. They would have known him. And that would be because he and those readers would have been members of the early Church reading the Gospel of Mark. Bartimaeus not only followed Jesus into Jerusalem, he followed him for the rest of his life.

Isn't it amazing how much we can learn about Bartimaeus from this one little section of scripture? Isn't it amazing how much we can learn about ourselves, as well?

Consider this picture for yourself. When Christ asks you, "What can I do for you?" how do you answer him? Do you know the great need in your heart? Do you want it healed? And do you trust this Jesus to be able to bring healing to you?

And when you experience this amazing grace and love of God through this Son of David, Son of God, do you express a joy "unspeakable and full of glory"? Can you see yourself walking along a road that you know leads to death, and yet be full of joy? Because you know the One walking with you is the One who defies and defeats death—for you! You know that, right? Can you see yourself walking that road with Jesus?

And can you see the joy on Jesus' face as you rejoice in what he has done for you on that Jerusalem way?

Obvious questions. May we give obvious answers. And join with Jesus in making even the blind to see the way to go.