

## Believing without Seeing

Mark 10:46-52

Have you ever considered what it would be like to live with blindness? Anyone have a relative or friend who lives with blindness?

Close your eyes. Imagine you live in a small village in Israel east of Jerusalem. It's not too different from here...except never as cold. You are an 11 years old boy. Your home has 2 rooms, a dirt floor and a flat roof. Basically, that's just where you sleep. You have 2 sisters and 4 brothers. Your oldest brother is married and his wife lives there too.

The males are all laborers at the local Date Palm orchard close to the Jordan river (watering, hand pollinating, harvesting fruit and using old trees for needles rope and lumber).

When everyone is healthy and working, your family has just enough for food, simple clothing, taxes, offerings, house repairs and a couple of goats for milk.

Your doorway opens into a courtyard shared by 8 other homes. That's where all the action is: cooking, laundry, sewing, handiwork...and sometimes children getting in trouble. Most meals are made in the big pot over the fire - stew surprise. There's are no personal utensils. Everyone cleans their hands and prays like a good Jew before dinner. Food is scooped out with your fingers. On a

good day, you might get to dip in with flatbread. You learned to do the chores...like get water from the town well and filling the cistern in the courtyard.

Your father, Timaeus, whose name means 'highly prized' makes sure you understand and memorize the books of Moses. The writings of prophets like Isaiah interest you, too. Especially the ones about the promised Messiah. You know very well that things aren't right. The way your people are treated. How hard it is for your family to live. It's a hard life but you have a good family and friends.

Then one day, everything changes. The day your eyes are damaged in an accident by the cooking fire. At first the darkness is suffocating, terrifying. Eventually, the pain goes away and you began to use your other senses to find your way around using a stick. But you seem to be in the way. So you try to be useful in the house. But you will never be able to work again like the rest of the boys and men. What hurts the most is how you're treated differently. Your friends avoid you. Your closest friend lets you know that his parents say God has cursed you for some sin.

Another terrible day comes when the family had to make a hard decision.

Food is becoming scarce. Your brother's wife is pregnant with her third child. It's time to leave the family and do the only thing that might earn a living...beg. You remember following your father on the journey to Jericho. You remember hearing him fight back the sobs when he says goodbye. The family promised to visit but they rarely come. You now live a life dependant on the goodwill of pilgrims and the fringe people of Jericho. The only thing you own is a cloak to lay on at night and to lay out for people to cast their hard-earned coins. You learn much about human nature...cruelty and mercy. You learn the routine of a blind beggar. You keep praying...believing that God has not abandoned you. You recall the stories of how God used men whose sight was failing like Isaac and Jacob to change the course of history. Maybe God will yet use you for something good.

One day you begin hearing stories from Galilean travelers on their way to Jerusalem. Stories about a teacher with authority. One powerful like John the Baptist. One who casts out demons, forgives sins, feeds thousands...and heals anyone from anything. Even lepers. Deep down, you believe this is the Messiah. The prophecies are lining up. Not the military leader people were hoping

for. But someone even more amazing...for a person living the life of an outcast. For a while new news stops. Jesus is out of the country. You wonder...when they will return. And then the sweetest news reaches your ears. A blind man had been restored in Bethsaida. Jesus and His disciples are heading South to Jerusalem for Passover. They will be coming right through Jericho!

### **Pray**

#### **V46a Jericho**

**Map** of Journey to Jerusalem.

Scene shifts from Perea – westward back across the Jordan river, 5 miles into Judea (detour around Samaria complete). Herod the Great (father of Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby) rebuilt Jericho and made it his winter palace. It's 2 miles south of the famous OT site (6 miles north of the Dead Sea). This is the main route for people from Galilee making the annual pilgrimage for the Passover. And many have joined Jesus and the disciples at Jericho. They have 18 miles to go.

#### **V46b-47 Bartimaeus, not so Blind**

I was curious that this one time, Mark includes the name of the person who needs healing. Bar means 'son of' and Timaeus can mean 'highly prized'. He calls out with one of the oldest prayers of the faith: "Jesus have mercy on me."

'Son of David' should ring a bell for us because we just celebrated the birth of Christ and the prophecies fulfilled about his royal lineage through Mary biologically and through Joseph legally. Interesting that we never hear this Messianic title from the disciples. Sitting at a prime spot to hear all the news, Bartimaeus comes to believe Jesus fulfills the prophecies about the Messiah. Imagine his hopes rise from hearing Jesus give sight to the blind man at Bethsaida – just like the prophet, Isaiah (35:5) said he would. Blind? Bartimaeus sees more clearly than the crowds and disciples. A blind Jew with true spiritual sight. He makes up for his lack of sight and calls out with a voice that has been well exercised over the years....appealing directly to Jesus, the merciful.

#### **V48a Nature of the Crowd**

Be quiet! Sadly, this may remind us of how the disciples treated those bringing infants to Jesus. The people see Bartimaeus as a nuisance...a beggar making noise. Perhaps some in the crowd are annoyed because they're trying to hear some of Jesus' teaching. Maybe they're just tired of beggars. Absorbed by their own interests, it has not dawned on them that this is the beggars' only shot for an audience with Jesus. Nor has it occurred to them that Jesus would be interested.

We don't know when it may be our last chance to get right with God through Jesus, either.

It seems the disciples are blind and deaf to Jesus' example and teaching about serving others...the least.

In Luke 10, Jesus answers a question from an expert in law, "Who is my neighbor?" (the one I am supposed to love as much as myself). He answers it with the story of the good Samaritan. In this story, it's the priest and the Levite who pass by quietly on the other side of the street...making excuses to themselves. The crowd here walks by and shouts back to silence the needy. They would rather he be blind deaf and mute, so not to spoil their day.

How do we treat beggars?

We have a different name for those who wait by the roadside, looking for mercy. Some are legitimately in a jam. Some just waste chance after chance. How do you tell? If we're serious about making an impact, they are people to know. Listen and learn. The worst is to pretend they aren't there. The second worse is to toss some money to quench our guilt in 30 seconds or less. People are people. No one likes to be categorized or patronized. Pray. Most of all, people need the Lord...and His presence is felt through us. It begins by asking a question and listening.

As believers, we should be most familiar with undeserved favor...like Jesus' story of the king who forgave his servant's huge debt (Matt 18). Yet how many times have we grimaced on the inside when we see our taxes used to help some 'undeserving'. Just like that ungrateful servant.

### **V48b Faith Persists**

People don't call out to the Savior until they understand their need. Bartimaeus understands what's at stake. This is his chance to declare his faith in Jesus the Christ. And that He has the means to transform his life from blind beggar. There comes a point in one's conviction where a person will not be denied...no matter what the cost. Bartimaeus called out all the louder...until the commotion could reach the ears of His Savior. And that's the difference between the rich man who came running up to Jesus...and Bartimaeus the beggar. The rich man was looking to receive eternal life, not a Savior. Jesus is the way the truth and the life. Bartimaeus overcomes the social stigma of being cursed, the physical challenge of blindness, and the potential assault of an annoyed crowd...what's our excuse?

Finally, Jesus hears him.

### **V49-51a Nature of Jesus**

Last time we were in Mark, Jesus instructed His 12 to become servants...the greatest being the slave to all. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus is the interruptible Servant. It seems people who recognize their need catch God's attention. They are noticed and loved by Jesus. Even with the cross looming before him, Jesus hears the cries of others in distress.

The Great Physician of body and soul – calls for the needy to approach. No one is insignificant to Jesus. A leper, an unclean woman, little children, a blind beggar.

Notice Jesus allows the man to call out his messianic title. For this is His final journey. Soon, He will make His messianic identity even more obvious, arriving on a colt.

Jesus tells the crowd to call for the man in need.

Imagine being one of the shouters in the crowd who thought the blind beggar was disturbing their progress, "We're on important business with Jesus!" No saying, Ah, cheer up. Turns out you are part of His important business." Don't discourage people from God's plan unless humble pie is one of your favorites.

Let us be attentive to the call of Jesus. Responsive like Bartimaeus. He cast aside all and moves toward the voice. The tool of a beggar is no longer needed.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb. 12:1-3*

### **What do you want me to do for you?**

Jesus forces Bartimaeus to reflect on what he truly wants from Jesus. And Jesus listens for faith.

### **V51b Rabboni**

At Jesus' side, Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as his Lord/Master/Teacher. The only other person to speak of Jesus this way is Mary after His resurrection in Jn 20:16. He may not be able to see with his eyes, but his heart sees with full belief. Bartimaeus' request is much purer than James and John...asking for the highest seats of power in God's kingdom. They would

benefit greatly from the spiritual sight of Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus wants to cast off the role of a beggar and be fully able to choose his path in life.

What will he choose?

### **V52 Faith that Follows**

What an honor to be complimented by Jesus on one's faith. The ancients were credited as righteous because of their faith (Abraham: Gen 15:6, Rom 4:1-22, Gal 3:6-9, Heb 11:13-16)

The word translated "healed" (sōzō) can also mean *saved*, and Mark probably intended both meanings. Bartimaeus was healed physically and saved spiritually.

How do we know this?

What is the appropriate response to Jesus' mercy? What path does Bartimaeus choose?

A life of thankfulness as a disciple of Jesus. The emphasis is not on the miracle but on how Bartimaeus responds. Jesus told others to 'go' after healing them but Bartimaeus chooses to leave everything and follow Jesus as a disciple. We are reminded that the calling of a disciple is to be with Jesus (3:14).

Last Sunday, in our time of sharing, the importance of prayer emerged as a theme. Prayer is the practise of God's presence...with Jesus. Our faith is not a stagnant pond that only has a flow in...and then just sits. God began

a two-way relationship. And through prayer we embark on that faith relationship: to know God; to depend on God; and to share His love. God's grace is released and received by faith. The result? A person sitting beside the road...that everyone writes off as a charity case, is given the chance to start a new life. He chooses to make it count forever...following the road of Jesus.

Bartimaeus has truly found the one who is highly prized. And has become a son of the Most High by adoption. He is a faith example for us: Faith through the Darkness. Faith through Discouragement. And Faith to Follow – putting the old way behind.

How do we fan the flames of our faith? Resolute in the face of discouragement, public shame and antagonism...like Bartimaeus, the bleeding woman, the Phoenician woman and Jairus. Sometimes we just need to cry out like that desperate father with a demon possessed son...Lord help my unbelief! Jesus said deny yourself. We need to deny those things that breed friendship with the world and quench the Spirit's work. To guard our heart. Make healthy choices for our mind body, soul and spirit. God's Word, Pray, Serve. Get around people who do the same.

[Do you think Bartimaeus continued to follow steadfastly?

Perhaps in heaven we will hear the rest of the story from those Jesus reached out to in Mark's Gospel: The man with an Unclean Spirit (1:23-26), Simon's Mother-in-law (1:30-31), Man with Leprosy (1:40-45), Paralyzed Man (2:1-12), Man with Withered Hand (3:1-6), Gadarene Demoniac (5:1-20), Daughter of Jairus (5:21-43), Bleeding Woman (5:25-34), Syrophoenician Woman's Daughter (7:24-30), Deaf and Mute Man (7:31-37), Blind Man Near Bethsaida (8:22-26), Demoniac Boy (9:14-29), and Bartimaeus (10:46-52).]