

Blind bartimaeus essay sample



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Blindness and sight—that's what our gospel story is about today. In this wonderful miracle story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus, we learn something of what it means to journey out of darkness and blindness into light and the gift of seeing. Have you ever wondered what it's like to live as a physically or spiritually blind person? Have you ever thought about what difference it could make if you were blind and then, suddenly Jesus came along to give you the gift of sight?

Mark begins this story by telling us that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, it is the season of Passover, and Jesus has just arrived at Jericho, about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. Travelling through town, crowds line the streets, most likely some to welcome Jesus, and others to criticize him and find some reason to do away with him. It was customary for rabbis at that time to have a following and teach as they travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover.

As they were just about to leave, lo and behold, there was at least one heckler in the crowd. This one was perhaps different than many though, since he was a blind beggar, Mark tells us, and his name was Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. Actually, there is a bit of a word play on his name, for in Aramaic, the prefix "bar" means "son of." His name actually tells us who his father was—Bartimaeus. Mark doesn't make it clear whether or not Bartimaeus was born blind—although he hints at him perhaps having sight earlier in his life, for in verse fifty-one, Bartimaeus makes the following request of Jesus: "let me see again." And in verse fifty-two, Mark says: "he regained his sight." These two words, "again," and "regained" may very well refer to an earlier time when Bartimaeus could see.

At any rate, to be a blind person at that time, in that society, was certainly no fun. As Mark tells us, Bartimaeus was a beggar. He was a desperate man. He had no secure means of making a living—condemned to life on the streets of Jericho begging. Along with that was likely lots of scorn and derision from the general public; lots of judgment, since many “religious” folk associated illness with either inheriting the sins of one’s parents or grandparents, or having committed some sin personally and not properly repenting of it, therefore one was ill because one sinned and now God was punishing the person for their sin. So, to be blind like Bartimaeus meant to live as an outcast; to live in poverty. In spite of the stigma attached to life as a blind beggar, Bartimaeus was a very tenacious, he was determined, he was desperate heckler that day Jesus walked by him. We can hear it both in the tone of his voice and the words he speaks—Mark says he shouted at first, and then later cried out even more loudly.

In that cry were all of Bartimaeus’ future hopes and dreams; his whole life and destiny depended upon gaining a hearing with Jesus. He had heard of Jesus’ character; he was ecstatic that finally he could, please God, meet the Messiah. So he shouted out at the top of his lungs: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! However, there were some in the crowd ready to shout out obnoxious words to Bartimaeus. Can’t you hear them saying: “How dare you, blind beggar heckle Jesus! Shut your mouth blind beggar, or we’ll throw you to the wild beasts! Get out of here, away with you, no good-for-nothing!” In spite of all the judgment and denunciation; in spite of all the loneliness and pain because of status, in spite of his own inner struggles with self-worth; Bartimaeus is determined not to be silenced this time, and cries out

with all of the energy he is able to muster: “ Son of David, have mercy on me!”

It is rather telling that Bartimaeus, even though he is blind and a beggar, addresses Jesus as “ Son of David.” This was actually the title of the Messiah. Bartimaeus, although blind and a beggar, may have been able to see more clear spiritually than those “ religious” folk who judged and condemned and ridiculed him. He may have remembered that wonderful passage from Isaiah describing the Messiah’s work: “ I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” (Isa 42: 6-7) Bartimaeus’ blindness felt like one dark prison, he was trapped, and could not, no matter how hard he tried, escape from this trap. He needed Jesus, the Messiah, and the Son of David, to do this. Only the Messiah could heal his blindness and release him from its dark prison, and he knew it, hence his loud plea.

What sort of blindness; what kind of dark prisons trap us? What blindness do we need Jesus to heal us of? Our plea, our prayer, our deepest desire, our words of request to Jesus may be the same as Bartimaeus’ “ Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Whatever blindness may be keeping us trapped in a dark prison, only Jesus can heal us. Bartimaeus trusted that this was true, do we?

As the story continues in verse forty-nine, everything changes. Jesus stops in his tracks and instructs someone to “ Call him here.” Those who, a moment ago turned away, walked by, ignored the blind beggar, now actually listen to

Jesus, obey him, and as they approach Bartimaeus offer words of acceptance, invitation and encouragement: “ Take heart, get up, he is calling you.” The one who spoke these words, perhaps a disciple, who had witnessed Jesus’ healing miracles before, now anticipates that Jesus is going to do something wonderful for this blind beggar. I wonder, too, if there is not a bit of play on words here? Perhaps the words “ he is calling you” refer to a double call—the immediate call into Jesus’ presence right now, as well as the call to a new life of discipleship, of following Jesus into a new future. At any rate, Bartimaeus responds by throwing off his cloak, so that he’d have nothing to trip on and prevent him from reaching Jesus. After he throws off his cloak, he jumps up enthusiastically and comes to Jesus. The thrown off cloak could also perhaps be a symbol of leaving behind his life as a blind beggar into a future of not only physical but also spiritual sight by following Jesus.

Then the wonderful encounter comes. Jesus asks Bartimaeus: “ What do you want me to do for you?” The question may function to highlight the message that Jesus never forces himself and his will on anyone—he gives everyone the opportunity to freely, without coercion, respond to him. At any rate, Bartimaeus says: “ My teacher let me see again.” The word “ my” indicates Bartimaeus’ willingness to follow Jesus as a disciple. Jesus responds by saying: “ Go, your faith has made you well.” Jesus however does not mean faith in faith, but faith in Jesus and his power to heal him. Faith is complete trust in Jesus, in spite of all the barriers the people put in place to prevent Bartimaeus from coming to Jesus. Mark concludes the story by telling us that his sight was regained and he followed Jesus as a disciple “ on the way.” On

the way to Jerusalem, where Jesus would suffer and die on a cross, and three days later be raised from death.

Today, as people of God, looking to please him in every way, Jesus asks us: “What do you want me to do for you?” It is an invitation to each of us to come and receive Christ’s healing in our lives—whether our healing is physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. And, like Bartimaeus, in response, we follow him on the way to his suffering, death and resurrection—his way of life, healing and salvation for all people.

WORKS CITED:

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