

Series: "Lesser Known People in the New Testament"
"Bartimaeus"

Jesus is making the final journey of His life to the holy city Jerusalem, where He will face the religious leaders who want Him out of the way. He and His disciples are joining thousands of others who are converging on the city for Passover. They're about 15 miles outside of Jerusalem, making their way through the town of Jericho. I can still remember Jericho from our Holy Land trip many years ago – Jericho is a beautiful town situated on an oasis. It boasts of lush palm trees and open air markets with delightful varieties of fruit.

Already excitement is building for the Passover festival. Even those who can't attend line the streets of the town and wish the religious pilgrims god-speed. We get the impression from Mark's gospel that Jesus' arrival was adding to the festive mood and creating quite a stir. Word was spreading that this charismatic Galilean teacher/preacher was passing through town! "It's Jesus of Nazareth! C'mon, hurry up or we'll miss Him!"

As He's leaving town a blind beggar named Bartimaeus is sitting by the road. "What's going on?" he pesters someone nearby. "What's all the commotion about?" "It's Jesus of Nazareth," someone replies, caring enough to answer the beggar's question. Apparently Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus. Maybe he had heard stories of Jesus' miracles and His healings, because immediately he starts to shout at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

People are irritated at Bartimaeus and his loud outbursts: "'Be quiet', many of the people yelled at him" (Mark 10:48). "Shut up, will ya!" "Keep your voice down, beggar!" People weren't very nice to Bartimaeus.

We should keep in mind that the common view at that time was that if you were blind or disabled in some way it was because you had sinned. and were being punished for your sins, or maybe for your parents' sins. So there was a certain stigma attached to Bartimaeus' blindness.

Also, a lot of people don't especially like beggars! We don't see too many beggars today – maybe in Lancaster city, or even more if you go to a large city like Philadelphia or New York. Chances are, *we* don't especially care for beggars, do we? Ever drive up to an intersection and see someone there with a sign, "Homeless". Or, "Veteran – Out of Work." What's your reaction? Do you give them anything?

Some beggars can be inventive. In Olympia, Washington, a beggar held up this placard: "Why lie? I need a beer." In New York, another tapped into the feelings of many when he held a sign that said, "Tell me off. One dollar." A saw a news program where a reporter investigated a lady who occupied a spot by the road begging, and found out she left there and a few blocks later got into a very expensive car. She wasn't poor at all.

"Shut up, Bartimaeus!" How did Bartimaeus respond? Verse 48 says, "But he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" We don't know for sure what Bartimaeus believed about Jesus, but we get clues. He calls Jesus "Son of David." That is a title given to the

Messiah, Israel's deliverer who would come from the line of King David. Bartimaeus must have believed Jesus was more than just your average person, and that Jesus could help him.

Here is a man who was determined to get Jesus' attention. He wouldn't let an unsympathetic crowd deter him! This might be the only time in his life when Jesus would pass by (in fact, that was the case). If he doesn't get Jesus' help today, he'd be a blind beggar the rest of his life.

I love the next few words found in the story. Mark writes: "Jesus stood still" (Mark 10:49). *The Message* has it, "Jesus stopped in his tracks." Jesus had so much on His mind – He knew the horrible things that would happen to Him in Jerusalem within a few days. He knew He would be executed on a cross. Yet He stopped to help someone who wasn't worth much in the eyes of the crowd

Mark continues the story, "Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' So they call the blind man, and say to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you'" (Mark 10:49). "Cheer up, fella! It's your lucky day! Jesus is calling you."

Bartimaeus is so ecstatic he doesn't wait for anyone to lead him to Jesus. He throws off his cloak, springs to his feet, and somehow gets to Jesus. Most beggars back then wore a tunic of camel's hair. It would help keep him cool in the sun and protect him from the rain. It was like he was throwing off this symbol of his life of darkness and dependence on others.

Jesus then says to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Really? What a dumb question! Jesus, what do you think he wants you to do for him? He's *blind!* *He wants to see!* But it isn't such a dumb question! Think about some advantages he had: he didn't have to work, he had no responsibilities. Just sit there and beg. Let others do the worrying and working.

Some beggars don't want to stop begging. I was in for a shock the first few years I was a pastor. People would come to the parsonage or the church and ask for money. There was always a hard luck story. I would give them money. I was a Christian – and a pastor – you know, be caring, be compassionate. Then I found out often they would hit every church in town. Most of the hard luck stories were lies - made up stories. I actually learned that there was a phone booth somewhere in the Lehigh Valley where someone had marked off the churches and the pastors who were "softies" and gave out money. I'm not so generous anymore unless I know the person and the situation. (It's sad, and I'm not very comfortable having this attitude, but that's where I am on this matter). *Many people don't want to take responsibility for their own lives.*

But Bartimaeus was tired of begging, sick of being blind, and he wanted to change. Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus replies, "Rabbi (teacher), let me see again" (verse 51). Mark writes, "Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way" (Mark 10:52). Jesus healed him! It doesn't give any details how. He just healed him at that moment. And notice, right after his gained his sight *he followed Jesus on the way.* Apparently this was a life-changing event for Bartimaeus, not just physically, but spiritually too. He started to follow Jesus!

You know what? ***Everyone of us is Bartimaeus.*** No, we may not be physically blind, but in some way ***everyone of us is a disabled, dysfunctional person in need of the mercy and healing of Jesus.***

Some of us could use His healing touch for a physical illness or problem, just like Bartimaeus. Some physical ailment, some dis-ease within our body, that is hindering our being physically well and whole.

Some of us, like Bartimaeus, are blind – not physically, but spiritually. Jesus called some of the religious leaders of His day blind men, blind guides, because they missed seeing Him as the Messiah, sent from God. We can be spiritually blind – we're far from God, our sins have not been confessed and forgiven. Maybe we've drifted away from the faith we once had.

Some of us need the healing touch of Jesus because we've been broken in some way by people and by life. Some kind of recent hurt, or one that goes way back, into our childhood, and yet that wound is still unhealed. Some of us need healing for our grief, that we may be able to move on and live with joy again. Over the years as a pastor and therapist I've listened to so many people's stories as they've poured out their hearts and wept because of being overwhelmed by life's burdens and wounds. And yes, there have been those times when *I have been the one* broken and wounded and in need of comfort and healing.

Everyone one of us at some level, in some way, is in need of the healing power of Jesus, and the strength and hope that only He can give!

And this blind beggar, this "nobody" named Bartimaeus, is our role model of how to access the healing and help Jesus offers!

First of all, he was persistent. People in the crowd tried to shut him up!" But he wasn't going to let anyone else keep him from the one chance he had to be liberated from a life of blindness. Don't let anyone keep you from the healing and hope and new life Jesus' can give! Don't let any unbelieving family member or ungodly co-worker keep you from seeking the Lord with all your heart! Don't ever feel you're too unworthy or too insignificant for Jesus to care. Like with Bartimaeus, Jesus will "stand still" long enough to see you out of the crowd and minister to your need.

Secondly, Bartimaeus was willing to admit that he had a need and was willing to change. "I'm blind, Teacher. Let me see again." No evading the obvious; no shifting the blame.

Sometimes the hardest thing is to admit that we have a problem, or that we *are* the problem. Often our family can see it. Our friends can see it. Our husband or wife can see our shortcomings. But we're blind to our own needs and our own faults.

Jesus says, "What do you want me to do for you?" For things to get better, our answer to that must be like Bartimaeus' response: "Lord, let me see!" "Lord, I'm chained to this addiction - my

life is out of control." "God, it's my own bad attitude that spoils so many of my relationships."
"Jesus, I've got no one to blame but myself and my own poor choices that my life has turned out
this way. I need help."

*Thirdly, Bartimaeus found a healing even more important than regaining his physical sight:
he began to follow Jesus.* But Mark is careful to mention that Bartimaeus began to follow Jesus.
He didn't say "thanks" and go home. Hopefully, this marked the beginning of Jesus becoming a
disciple of the Lord!

The greatest healing of all is healing in our relationship with God. Sin has distanced us from our
Creator. Jesus Christ died to forgive our sins and bring us back together again with God in a new
relationship with God. Salvation and new life in Christ are the most profound type of healing we
can experience.

This is so important! There are a lot of sick people who would love to get better, but have no
interest in becoming a follower of Jesus. There are tons of people who want their problems
solved and their pain taken away, but have no interest in God or being a spiritually healthy
individual.

God is not just interested in mending our physical ailments or solving our problems. God wants
us to be a *whole person* – in our relationship with Him, in our relationships with other people, in
our attitudes and outlook on life, in our moral behaviors. And Jesus makes this possible!

So there's good news for us Bartimaeuses! The Bible says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,
today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The same Jesus who healed Bartimaeus can bring healing
and wholeness to you and me!

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