

A Blind Man's Sight

Mark 10:46-52

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Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. Leaving Galilee to the north, He and His disciples and followers had made their way south along the eastern shore of the Jordan River. That was the usual route for Jewish people heading to Jerusalem for Passover. Seldom did they venture through Samaria, the region between Galilee and Judea. Jews and Samaritans did not like one another and there could be violence. It was better to choose another route, even though it was a bit longer. Crossing over the Jordan just before it entered the Dead Sea, brought a traveler to that ancient city of Jericho. The walls which had been knocked down in the days of their ancestor Joshua, had long since been rebuilt. Jericho was now a prosperous city located near a spring that produced an abundant supply of fresh water. It was also the kind of city that produced a multitude of beggars looking for a handout, even if it was only a penny or two for a bit of bread. One of those beggars was a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus.

He had been blind for a long time, perhaps from his childhood. Without sight there was no way to earn a living other than sitting beside the roadway leading into Jericho, begging those who passed by for a little help. Bartimaeus may have been blind, but his ears still worked quite well. He listened very carefully to what was going on around him. That's why he was so excited when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming to Jericho. The great teacher and healer from Galilee was going to be coming right down the road where he begged each day. Hearing the commotion of a crowd drawing near as well as the name of Jesus being mentioned, he knew it was now or never. In a loud voice, he began to cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David, have mercy on me." Those around him who had listened to his pleas for money day after day, were not pleased. They did not want this important guest to their city to be pestered by the local riff-raff. In a harsh retort, they told Bartimaeus, "Be quiet. Jesus does not have time for the likes of you."

Undeterred, Bartimaeus cried out even louder. In fact, he yelled so loudly that Jesus could not help but hear him. Hearing this man's voice above all of the clatter going on around Him, Jesus came to a complete stop. Turning to the crowd he said, "Bring that man whose been crying out so loudly right here to me." Surprised by Jesus's interest in the blind man but anxious to comply with His request, they turned to Bartimaeus and said "Take heart Bartimaeus. Get up, He is calling you." Bartimaeus jumped to his feet, threw off his dirty old robe and made his way through the crowd to Jesus. When he arrived, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Falling to

his knees, he said, "Teacher, I want to see again." "Go," Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well." Immediately, Bartimaeus could see again, his sight completely restored. It was the beginning of a new life for this blind beggar. As Jesus had commanded, he did go, but he didn't go far. He picked up his few belongings and followed after Jesus, telling everyone he met that Jesus had healed him. He too was now a follower of Jesus.

Bartimaeus may have been blind physically before he was healed, but even in his blindness he saw some things that we would do well to remember ourselves. If he could stand before us this morning, this is what he would say:

- "The One who healed me was the only One who could help me. There were not many treatment options for blindness in my day. There were a few ointments and salves but none of them helped. I was condemned to blindness until Jesus healed me. Today, of course, there are many kinds of wonderful treatment options, but blindness is still a problem and sometimes the kind of blindness that people face today has nothing to do with physical eyesight. It's a blindness of the mind and heart to the truth that without Jesus we're all blind, blind to the things that make life worth living and blind to any hope of life everlasting."
- "The One who healed me doesn't play favorites. I was a dusty and dirty old beggar sitting on the roadside begging for a few pennies each day. My family and friends had cast me aside. They didn't want to have anything to do with me, to say nothing of the crowds who either ignored me or cursed me when I begged for money. But Jesus heard my cries and called me unto Himself. He really cared about me, even though I was nobody. Jesus loves everybody. No matter who you are or what you have done, He cares about you and wants to help you."
- "The One who healed me required nothing more than my faith. I called Him the 'Son of David' because deep down in my soul I knew He was the redeemer. Just like our ancestor David, He was the One whom God had chosen to save us. I will never forget what He said to me when He touched my eyes, 'Go, your faith has made you well.' Faith is simply trusting in the One who can help you and not being afraid to tell the whole world that you believe in Him.
- "The One who healed me was the only One who deserves my allegiance. I could have gone on my way, a man now cured of his blindness. But that was the furthest thing from my mind. I wanted to follow Him. I wanted to become one of His disciples. I wanted to learn everything I could about Him and I wanted to tell others about what He did for me and what He could do for them. That has become the goal of my life and that is why I stand before you this morning. Jesus is the Messiah,

the promised Son of God. What He did for me He can do for you. He can make you whole again, both physically and spiritually. It's just a matter of being willing to stand up and follow after Him.

One of those who stood up and followed after Him was a man who had to climb out of the refuse pile of humanity. Born to a godly mother who died during his childhood, he went to sea with his sea captain father. He turned his back on what his mother had taught him and adopted the ways of the world, a hardheaded young man who was determined to live by the values of the world. Forced into the British Navy, he deserted and was court marshalled. He sank into the dregs of society, drunken and abusive. For a short period of time he was even enslaved by an African ruler. Discovering the lucrative business of human trafficking, he became the captain of a slave vessel carrying human cargo to the Americas. But somewhere deep down in the memories of his mother's faith, a realization of God's love began to rekindle in his mind and heart. Gradually turning away from his immoral and pagan way of life, he found his way back to God and became a Christian, professing faith in Christ and in Christ alone. Eventually he was ordained as a pastor in the Church of England, becoming a leading advocate for the end of the slave trade. Along with several friends in the parish church where he served, he began to write some hymns. Most of them have been forgotten, but one remains as an autobiographical testimony of his journey of faith. Like Bartimaeus he too was blind, but God restored his sight, so that he might see and believe in the One who had loved Him and who had saved him. His name was John Newton. The song he wrote is "Amazing Grace." Together, let us stand and sing it as a testimony to the One and the only One who can deliver us from our sins and help us both see and experience the Grace of God.