

Series: Mark — Summer 2020 Series

Title: “The Most Important Type of Freedom”

Text: Mark 10:46-52

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Verse 46

Mark 10:46-52 contains the last miracle involving healing in Mark’s Gospel account.¹

Verse 46 finds Jesus traveling to Jericho. Our text says, “They came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting by the road” (Mark 10:46). It was the time of the Passover, and worshipers were making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Such was a special occasion in the life of a faithful Jew.

Psalms 120-134 contain what are known as “the Songs of Ascent.” They were often sung as God’s people climbed to the Holy City to keep sacred observances. In them, we see details about the music and customs that usually accompanied the journey. In Psalm 123:1-2, the psalmist declared, “I lift my eyes to you, the one enthroned in heaven. Like a servant’s eyes on his master’s hand, like a servant girl’s eyes on her mistress’s hand, so our eyes are on the Lord our God until he shows us favor.”

Quite possibly, Mark’s Gospel contains an allusion to the lyrics of the psalmist’s song.² As Jesus made the trek to Jerusalem, His eyes were fixed upon His heavenly purpose (Isaiah 50:7). In addition, Jesus gave a living object lesson concerning His purpose through the narrative in our text. He did so by healing the sight of one who couldn’t see. Once healed, the man would join Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem, using his newly healed eyes to set his sight on “the one enthroned in heaven” (Psalm 123:1).

The act of healing the blind may seem like just another notch on Jesus’ resume of mighty deeds. It is worth noting that the act was full of all types of messianic innuendo. Years before Jesus’ appearance on Earth, it was believed that the Messiah would heal eyesight (Isaiah 29:18; 32:3; and 35:5).³ In His preaching, our Lord applied such promises to Himself, proclaiming He had come to provide “recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). His act of healing blind Bartimaeus, along with His healing of the man in Mark 8:22-26, was intended to prove His messiahship.

One issue must be addressed before studying our story in more detail. Matthew’s account of this same incident speaks of two men being healed on this occasion (Matthew 20:29-34). Luke speaks of only one (Luke 18:35-43). It is unmistakable that the three gospel writers intended to speak of the same event. Why is there a discrepancy concerning the number of men healed. Did one or two of the evangelists make a mistake? Is there an error in our Bible?

¹ Brooks, 172.

² Ferguson, 175.

³ Brooks, 174.

To solve this dilemma, one must first look at another apparent contradiction in our text. Matthew's account says Jesus performed His miracle as He and His disciples "were leaving Jericho" (Matthew 20:29). Both Mark and Luke say the healing took place as the group entered the city. What do we make of this? Are there two different errors in our Bible?

It seems that one explanation can solve both supposed difficulties. In Jesus' day there were two different parts of Jericho — the old part and the new part.⁴ The former was the one Joshua defeated in Joshua 6:1-27. The latter was built by the Hasmonean rulers. It rested about 5.5 miles north of the Dead Sea. King Herod had led a renovation project in the newer part of Jericho to repair it from an earthquake that left the city ravaged in 31 BC.⁵ The two locales were separated by enough distance to be regarded as separate cities. The events in our text take place in the newer part of Jericho.

It seems that Jesus healed two different blind men on His trek between the two locations. One was healed as He left the first part of the city, and Bartimaeus was healed as he approached the second part. Matthew grouped the two healings together. Mark and Luke kept them separate.

"Bartimaeus" was the name of the second of the blind men to be healed. Mark tells us his name meant "the son of Timaeus." In Aramaic, the prefix "bar" meant "son of."⁶ See Matthew 16:17 in the King James Version for another example of this naming device. It is interesting that Mark shares the man's name with us. In his gospel, he hasn't shared the names of any other people who Jesus healed. Quite possibly, Mark knew that his readers would have known Bartimaeus. Maybe the man was a member of the early Church. As Mark's Gospel circulated, perhaps many were familiar with the man of whom Mark spoke.⁷

The man in our text suffered from a disease that was all too common in the ancient world. History attests that eye problems were rampant. One ancient writer documented his trip into a city. He spoke of how many people suffered from ocular diseases, saying that it seemed nearly half the population had eye problems. The dust of the ancient Near East, unsanitary conditions, and a lack of medical care made defective eyesight a common problem.⁸

Mark tells us that Bartimaeus was a "beggar." In the first century, such a fate was the sure outcome for one who lost their sight. Unlike nowadays, a person who couldn't see couldn't offer any practical benefit to society. Begging was their only means of eking

⁴ Robertson, 355.

⁵ Schnabel, 216.

⁶ Robertson, 355.

⁷ Schnabel, 216.

⁸ Robertson, 356.

out a living. On a visit to any city, one would likely see a slew of beggars like blind Bartimaeus. As A.T. Robertson has noted, “it was a common sight.”⁹

Mark highlights Bartimaeus’ posture of begging by saying the man “was sitting by the road.” In the original language of the text, we find an imperfect verb that is used to portray an iterative or customary action. One could translate it “he used to sit” or “it was his custom to sit.”¹⁰ Our passage highlights the desperate condition of the man. Day in and day out, he hunched on the side of the road, pleading with people for help. His existence was nearly sub-human. Barely getting by in life, his future was bleak. Only God could help him.

Verse 47

Verse 47 describes the way in which the Bartimaeus sought help from Jesus: “When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47). Notice that the man “heard” of Jesus’ arrival. Since he couldn’t see, he relied on his ears. Most likely, the crowd of pilgrims and onlookers became excited as Jesus and His disciples approached. They had heard of His miracles and His ministry. Jesus had become quite a celebrity; as a result, the people began to chatter excitedly as He approached. Bartimaeus heard the clamor, and He ascertained what was happening. Knowing the rumors and reports related to the potential Messiah figure, he saw an opportunity to get the help he needed.

Mark says the blind man “began to cry out.” The language does not suggest a mere mild request for help. Mark uses a word that means “to scream.”¹¹ The man was intense and vocal in his plea. Can you imagine the blood-curdling scream from the side of the road? The man wanted help, and he was desperate to get it. He stands as a memorial for us. To experience the transforming power of Jesus, we must be steadfast in our pursuit of Him. Persistent and unflinching faith brings the power of God into our lives.

As Bartimaeus hollered out to Jesus, he cried, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The man knew what he was doing. He used a messianic moniker in addressing our Lord. The title “Son of David” was “a functional equivalent among Jews for ‘Messiah.’”¹² Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was more than a teacher, leader, or miracle worker. He regarded Jesus as the fulfillment of ancient promises (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

In his eyes, our Lord was the much-anticipated deliverer of God’s people. Bartimaeus’ implementation of this title is significant when one considers what follows in Mark’s Gospel. As Jesus continues His travels and approaches Jerusalem, crowds swamp Him while proclaiming, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Mark 11:10). Our gospel writer is careful to present Jesus as the

⁹ Robertson, 355.

¹⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

¹¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

¹² Schnabel, 256.

Anointed One. Christ was the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. He alone can give the deliverance and rescue we need!

Verse 48

As blind Bartimaeus hollered for Jesus, the crowd tried to shut him up. Mark records, “Many warned him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, ‘Have mercy on me, Son of David!’” (Mark 10:48). In the original language of the text, Mark uses an imperfect verb to describe the people’s attempts to silence the man. It conveys a continual action in the past.¹³ It seems the people tried to shut the man up on numerous occasions, but he wouldn’t relent.

Why did the people try to silence the beggar? Perhaps some thought Jesus was too important to hassle with dirty and dingy folks like Bartimaeus. Maybe they were caught up in messianic fervor, believing Jesus was en route to Jerusalem for a coup d’état. It is likely the disciples were finally getting acclimated to Jesus’ warnings concerning silence.

Throughout Mark’s Gospel, Jesus warned people to keep silent about His identity (Mark 1:25; 5:43; and 7:36). He knew that both the religious and political leaders were plotting His death (Mark 3:6), and He wanted to keep things on the Lord’s sovereign schedule. As a result, He often commanded people to stay quiet about He who He was. Maybe the disciples in our text sought to silence the man for this reason. They were finally grasping some of Jesus’ teaching. They knew that the title “Son of David” was loaded. Jesus could get in big trouble for staking claim on such a lofty position. Because of this, they tried to get the man to quiet down. However, they should have known that the Lord would have been willing to help such an individual, as He had shown much compassion toward the sick (1:29-34; 2:1-12; 3:10; 5:21-43; and 6:53-56) and blind (Mark 8:22-26) throughout His ministry.

Verse 49

Verse 49 describes Jesus’ response to Bartimaeus’ cries: “Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called the blind man and said to him, ‘Have courage! Get up; he’s calling for you’” (Mark 10:49). Notice the way “Jesus stopped.” The language underlying English translates means “to stand” or “to remain.” Emphasis is placed on the fact that Jesus stopped, waited, and allowed the man to come to Him.¹⁴ Though such actions may seem insignificant at first glance, they were a big deal. Despite the busyness of the Passover season, and regardless of the monumental task that awaited Him, Jesus was not too hurried to stop and care for a sincere seeker. Take heart from our Lord’s the lovingkindness to Bartimaeus. Does not it stand as a reminder of Jesus’ love? Know this — Jesus is never too busy for you! He hears you when you cry and He will respond to your prayers!

¹³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

¹⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

As Jesus waited on the man, the change in the people's demeanor is almost comedic. They went from rebuking the man to encouraging him. They said "Have courage! Get up; he's calling for you." The word translated "have courage" means "to be cheerful."¹⁵ It carries ideas of one being filled with boldness, courage, cheer, and comfort.¹⁶ In modern vernacular, we could regard it as meaning "it's going to be alright!"¹⁷ The word (tharréō) is used only five other times in the New Testament. Interestingly, in each of those instances, Jesus is the one who uses the word (Matthew 9:2 and 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; and John 16:33). Perhaps the disciples were familiar with Jesus' use of the consolation and they mimicked Him in our text.

Whatever, the appearance of the word in the New Testament is a reminder that Jesus wants His disciples to be of good cheer. His When sinners are overwhelmed with their sin, they can be of good cheer. Jesus stands ready to help. Hope and healing are available in Him. Our greatest worries can be wiped away, our strongest anxieties can be assuaged, and our biggest fears can fall in the presence of the Son of God!

Verse 50

At Jesus' summon, the man responded in haste. Mark recounts, "He threw off his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus." The "coat" in view was the man's outer garment or robe.¹⁸ Beggars would typically use the article of clothing as a pillow or mat.¹⁹ In disregarding the item, the man demonstrated his faith. He would no longer need his mat, because he would no longer be a beggar! The man's prompt and pronounced response highlights the importance of fervent faith. Freedom, forgiveness, and fullness from God come our way when we fling ourselves on Him without reservation.

Verse 51

As Bartimaeus approaches Jesus, our Lord asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). In His omniscience (Mark 2:8), the Lord surely knew the answer to his question. In fact, He had most likely heard Bartimaeus' cries (Mark 10:47). Why did He inquire about the man's need? Most likely, our Lord's question was designed to give the man an opportunity to express the desire of his heart. Jesus used a similar tactic in Mark 10:36. He knew well that one cannot experience the healing power of Jesus, whether in a physical or spiritual sense, without first requesting help from a posture of need (Romans 10:13). Restoration comes when one is honest about what one's brokenness and need for Jesus (Psalm 51:4). Knowing this reality, our Lord gave Bartimaeus an opportunity to demonstrate His faith.

¹⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 91.

¹⁶ Zodhiates, 718.

¹⁷ Schnabel, 258.

¹⁸ Robertson, 356.

¹⁹ Robertson, 356.

The man responded to Jesus' inquiry, saying, "Rabboni...I want to see." The term of address "Rabboni" is one that literally meant "Great One." It was often used in regard to those who were scholars and teachers of God's Law.²⁰ By using the term, Bartimaeus showed great respect toward our Lord. However, one should not think the man saw Jesus as being a mere rabbi.

Behind Bartimaeus' request exhibited a belief that Jesus was God's Son. His supplication was based on an ardent knowledge and trust in the Scriptures. In the Septuagint, Isaiah 61:1 announced that the Messiah would provide "recovery of sight to the blind."²¹ Pardon the pun, but Bartimaeus shows us that saving faith isn't a blind shot in the dark. It involves a firm confidence in God's truth. One doesn't experience the transforming power of Jesus by mere wishful thinking, by belief in "fate," or through self-driven perseverance. Restoration and renewal come to those who stake their confidence in the realities of Christ!

Verse 52

In verse 52, we read about what happened after Bartimaeus was healed. Mark says, "Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has saved you." Immediately he could see and began to follow Jesus on the road" (Mark 10:52). The word translated "saved" is one that was used of physical healing, but it could also refer to spiritual salvation.²² Bartimaeus experienced deliverance in both his body and soul. In the original language, Mark uses the verb in the perfect tense. He intends to emphasize a complete and permanent state of healing. The man was radically changed forever. When a person encounters the saving power of Jesus, he or she is never the same. The grace of God transforms perfectly and completely.

What was the basis of Bartimaeus' healing? It was faith. His belief, trust, confidence, and reliance on Jesus is what saved him. In Mark's Gospel, we have previously seen that faith is the conduit of Christ's blessings (Mark 2:5; 5:34; and 9:23).

The man's experience is a model for us. "This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith" (1 John 5:4). Faith is the act of trusting in, relying on, or placing one's confidence upon Christ. It is the virtue that brings salvation to our souls (Ephesians 2:8 and Acts 16:31). It is also the means of living the daily Christian life (Romans 1:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus preached a message of faith. We saw such to be earlier in Mark's gospel. When He initiated His ministry, He regularly declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). In a world overrun with self-help techniques, seven-step programs, and pop psychology, believers must remember that faith is the means and method of

²⁰ Schnabel, 258.

²¹ Brannan, Rick, Ken M. Penner, Israel Loken, Michael Aubrey, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds. *The Lexham English Septuagint*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), [CD-Rom].

²² Robertson, 52.

experiencing God's grace. May empty ourselves of self-striving and learn to trust Christ for the provision, peace, and power we need.

The words translated "on the road" is a recurring one in Mark's Gospel (Mark 6:8; 8:27; and 10:32). It is a sort of catchphrase that alludes to discipleship, depicting the way in which disciples are called to habitually follow after Jesus.²³ In our current text, it portrays Bartimaeus as joining Jesus on the road to Jerusalem (Mark 11:1 and 15), but it also depicts him as committing to a life-long walk with the Lord.

When Jesus called His first disciples unto Himself, He said, "Follow me...and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:17). The Christian experience involves a long, ongoing pursuit of the Word, will, and ways of God (Mark 2:15; 3:7; 5:24; 6:1; and 10:21 and 28). One cannot be a true Christian without such follower-ship. Are you daily seeking after Jesus?

²³ Brooks, 174.