

Jesus Heals!

Mark 10-46-52

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Here in Egypt we are used to seeing blind beggars. It is not uncommon to see them sitting alongside the roads. Often a small boy or girl is close to them to take care of them. Family members make sure the beggar has a good spot to earn some good money for the family. What a horrible misery.

Jesus came across such a heap of misery when he passed by Jericho. We will look at that beggar and at his prayers, and at his healing, and see what is in it for us.

The Beggar

We read that as Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, on the way to Jerusalem, a blind beggar called out to Jesus.

Before we look at this event, something about the context first. Jericho is about 20 kilometers northeast Jerusalem, and as the group with Jesus at the center had left Jericho, it would be clear that it was a matter of hours before they would be in Jerusalem.

It was the season of Passover, and the Jewish laws prescribed that anyone living in a circle of about 20 kilometers around Jerusalem, was obliged to come and celebrate in the Temple. That was of course impossible for many, and a habit had developed for people, who could not go, to stand by the wayside and cheer for those who did go up to Jerusalem.

So the streets of Jericho had been packed with people, and outside the city, many were lining the road.

Our beggar had been sitting along the road with his cloak in the dust, for catching some small currency from those passing by. Of course the masses of people passing by in the Passover season, and many people in a religious mood, guaranteed some extra money.

Maybe word had been spread that Jesus was passing by, and this blind beggar realized: here is my chance!

Now, of most people who were healed by Jesus we do not know the name; of this one, we find out that he is called Bartimaeus.

The Anglican theologian David Bauckham has written a very interesting book in which he argues that most of the times when names are used in the gospels, this is because those people were actually sources for the writing of these stories. Did Bartimaeus relate what hap-

pened at the time of his healing to Mark and others?

Mark explains that Bartimaeus means: 'son of Timaeus.' Maybe he wanted to underline that this beggar was none other than the son of Timaeus, maybe a well-known person in society in Jericho and Jerusalem?

In any case, the names of father and son suggest that the story could be verified. Just go to Jericho, ask for Bartimaeus, and you will get all the juicy details...

In the Gospel of Mark we do not read some mythology, but something that really happened in a certain place, outside Jericho, at a certain date – a few days before Passover in the year 30AD or so.

What also becomes clear: the blind beggar has no name. He is just the 'son of...' He himself, he is a nobody. What is he, after all. A blind beggar.

But a blind beggar with guts. Jesus' group took many 30 seconds to pass by the blind man... He knew, this is my chance and he took it.

He does not care about the people around, who try to shut him up. He just shouts louder. He knows Jesus can draw him out of his misery, and how many chances do we get in life. Jesus is here! He can do it! He can solve my needs.

He can solve our needs. Bartimaeus can testify to this! Waste no chances and pray to God; mention your needs to him.

The people around Bartimaeus tried to keep him quiet. 'Do not shout at Jesus. That is not polite. Do not show your trust in him!'

Have you had circumstances in life telling you, do not throw your life on Jesus? Do you have friends or family members that have held you back?

His Prayer

Jesus had just told his followers that he was on the way to Jerusalem for suffering and dying. Maybe that is why many rebuked Bartimaeus when he shouted: 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!' That was a dangerous prayer! It could upset the rulers in Jerusalem.

Take care, Bartimaeus, do not make the religious leaders and the majority upset. Keep your head low! It may work against us...

But Bartimaeus only shouted louder for help. 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me...'

Jesus means: 'God saves.' That was a normal name in those days, but meaningful. Son of David is the title for the expected Jewish Messiah.

I assume Bartimaeus knew the promises of Isaiah concerning the coming Messiah. I read from Isaiah 42:6-7, where God speaks to the Messiah:

I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind.

No wonder Bartimaeus was excited and persistent. He cried loud for mercy. 'Have mercy on me.' He knew Jesus could do it, as he believed in him as the redeemer of Israel and of himself personally.

But to cry for mercy to Jesus... I thought that only God is Merciful? Is Jesus also Merciful? Do God the Creator and Jesus have the same address?

That is something the leaders of Israel rejected. But Bartimaeus knew: My salvation depends on Him. Jesus must be merciful to me. He even has the divine power of healing.

So while people tried to stop him, Bartimaeus just shouted a bit louder.

Whatever religious leaders tell me... whatever people say... whatever the cost – I will confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of God whose mercy I need.

And Jesus stopped and asked for Bartimaeus. Church Father John Chrysostom says:

Jesus allowed Bartimaeus to shout a few times before Jesus responded. He knows what we need but he wants us to pray! [...] Let us imitate [Bartimaeus]. Even if God does not immediately give us what we ask for, even if many people try to put us off our prayers, let us still go on praying.' [Homily on St Mathew, 66]

When Bartimaeus knew Jesus was going to pay attention to him, he threw away his cloak. This was the cloak he needed for begging, not as a coat. It is warm in Jericho around Passover time.

Even before he had exchanged one word with Jesus, Bartimaeus knew that his old lifestyle of begging was over. What a magnificent example of faith in Jesus.

Jesus asks a strange question: 'What do you want me to do for you?' And was it not clear what Bartimaeus needed and wanted?

God knows what we need and what we want. But he wants us to ask for it.

And maybe it was actually not so predictable what Bartimaeus wanted. We know how lucrative begging can be. To have a handicap can be a great asset!

If Bartimaeus would be able to see again, his life would chance dramatically. For starters, he would have to work for his money. Maybe even his family would be upset, losing this important nobody who was a good source of income.

'Bartimaeus, do you really want to work for a living?'

Do we actually want our problems to be changed? There are many people who are scared of change. Their misery is so much part of their image, yes even of their identity. They complain and complain and they get attention and help...

But Bartimaeus was a decent man, and he knew what he wanted. Actually, the man expressed it in three words only. They came out his mouth like gunfire. 'Rabbuni, that I see!' No doubts. This is what I want!

'Rabbuni....' The word used is not just rabbi, but a term used mostly for God himself. 'That I see.' He knows Jesus, the divine healer, and he knows what he wants.

His Healing

And Jesus took care, because he is almighty and merciful. He can do it, and he wants to do it.

He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. When he was on earth he saved people from awful diseases, and after he went to heaven, his disciples continued praying for people in name of Jesus, and many were healed.

'Your faith has made you well', Jesus said, and Bartimaeus was healed.

Ah, and now you wonder, what next... Is Bartimaeus an example for us and should we claim healing for all the sick, because Jesus is unchanged? Can we expect similar miracles today?

Bartimaeus is certainly a model for us. He had a grave need, and he knew that Jesus could help him. He showed faith, and persistence. With our needs, let us go to God by all means. With our physical needs, our financial needs, with all of our needs. Make them known to Him who is able to help.

But take care. Bartimaeus knew that the job of the Messiah was to open the eyes of the

blind, but he did not take his Bible to tell God or Jesus: you must do it, you promised...

Bartimaeus did not ask for his rights. He asked for mercy.

And in the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus granted the mercy of healing. 'Your faith has saved you', Jesus says to him. The Greek does not speak of healing, but of salvation.

And that is, more than anything, what we should focus on. On complete salvation of our mind and our heart and our body. And this complete salvation will not be our part in this life, ever. Only when we meet with our Lord in eternity our salvation is complete.

Yes, we desire to see salvation now. But the full salvation of eternity will never be ours in this life. Paul says this in Romans 8:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves [...] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for [...] the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:22-25)

Paul underlines that in this life our salvation is incomplete. There is so much to desire for... We need patience. And he speaks specifically about the redemption of our bodies.

But we do ask God, we plead with him... that he shows us signs of his coming kingdom even now. But without demanding, without assuming it is our right... just trusting that he who will make all things well one day, may also bless us today with a foretaste.

And that is why every now and then we do see miraculous healings and Gods amazing help in unexpected areas. But that is not normal.

Our goal should not be a perfect body; our goal should be perfect obedience. Then let God do to his servants as he pleases. Yes, we pray for our needs, yes we pray for healing when ill. But we leave that to him and to his wisdom. And we follow him.

That is what Bartimaeus did. Jesus healed him and told him: 'Go your way'. What did Bartimaeus do? He immediately followed Jesus on his way.

That is what counts. Whether we follow him blind and poor and lame, that is secondary. Our life's goal is to follow him, in spite of our brokenness. If we do so, he will give us maybe not what we want, but what he thinks we need.

Bartimaeus immediately followed Jesus on the way. The way to suffering and problems and uncertainty and stress and problems and headaches and pain. But is the way with Jesus and that is best.

Conclusion

Our life is about praising God and following Jesus. That is what we must do. We hope and pray that God blesses us and that gives us health and strength and all we need. But even if he does not... we continue to love him and to worship God – Father Son and Holy Spirit – on the road of life.