

Saturday March 27th: Bartimaeus: [Mark 10:46-52](#):

‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.’

I wonder what goes through your mind when you encounter the homeless on the streets of our cities. They are there in increasing numbers and even though for many, I suspect, they are invisible they are all people with a story to tell. I often wonder when seeing someone sleeping rough what series of events led to the present reality of life on the streets.

It was Bartimaeus’s blindness that meant that he sat there day after day by the roadside with his cloak spread out for donations. Unable to support himself and with nobody in the world to look after him begging was his only option. Day after day of humiliation and mockery, of hearing everybody else going about their business and chatting with family and friends while being locked in a sightless world from which there was no escape. This was all that life was ever going to be – blindness in those days was a one-way ticket to isolation. To most people in Jericho on that particular day Bartimaeus might as well have been invisible. Save one.

Jesus was passing through on his way to Jerusalem. He is on the final journey of his earthly life and is about to set off uphill all the way to Jerusalem where he knows that he will suffer and die. He is in a large group of people all on their way to celebrate the Passover festival commemorating the liberation of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Yet in their excitement they walk straight past the man by the roadside enslaved by blindness.

Bartimaeus had got wind of the fact that Jesus was somebody very special, perhaps even that he was able to cure blindness. So when he hears that Jesus is coming past he knows that he has just one shot; it’s now or never, slavery or freedom. He screams, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me’ (v 47). He screams and screams and screams even as he is told to shut up and get lost (in all sorts of cruel ways). Jesus stops and in just two words changes the whole of the atmosphere around him. He could have that effect, a bit like when a stone is dropped into a pond and the ripples circle out. In asking those nearby to ‘call him’ (v 49) he has communicated to everyone that this beggar is a person and suddenly the abuse is replaced by encouraging words (v 49b).

Importantly Jesus does not just go ahead and decide what was best for Bartimaeus; he first asks him what he wants him to do for him (v 51). In doing this Jesus treats him with humanity and respect. He wants to see (v 51b); obvious enough, but when we read the Gospels it is clear that there is more than one way of seeing. There are a number of healings from blindness recorded in the Gospels and these were remembered and thought significant because of the obvious spiritual symbolism embodied in them. This is made most clear in John’s Gospel where the healing of a man blind from birth leads to a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees about spiritual blindness (John 9 v 35-41). When Jesus heals Bartimaeus, we read that he ‘followed Jesus along the road’ (v 52). On several occasions in the book of Acts Christianity is described as ‘the Way’ (Acts 9 v2) and the word for ‘way’ is the same used here for ‘road’. We’re meant to know that not only was Bartimaeus’s physical blindness cured but the eyes of his soul were also opened as he followed Jesus down the road as a new disciple.



If we imagine Jesus coming to us and asking us 'What do you want me to do for you?' what would it be that we want to see? Perhaps we would like to see more clearly the guidance of God, to see and address a habit or attitude that is harming our faith or our relationships with others, to see the truth that is in the Bible in a deeper way or to see more of the love of Jesus. Perhaps there is something else that you would like Jesus to do for you or for someone you love. I can't promise the instant sight giving healing that launched Bartimaeus on his life of discipleship but I do know that your prayer will be heard by one who loves you and respects you very much – our Lord Jesus Christ. We can sometimes feel that, rather like Bartimaeus, we don't matter very much either to God or to other people. We think that God has much more important things to worry about than what is on our hearts as we pray. He doesn't. When Jesus died on the cross it was for every single human being who has ever lived or will ever live in the future; and that includes us. We are all loved and cared for a very great deal more than we too often think.

In considering how desperate Bartimaeus was for Jesus to stop and hear his request I often lament the times when prayer has been put to one side because of something that seemed more urgent or important at the time. That sense that prayer has to be fitted around everything else that makes up day to day life is itself a form of spiritual blindness. I'm aware of how busy people's schedules are and I vividly remember how difficult it was to find quiet moments when there were small children in the house. But if we are to stay close to Jesus we will need to match the urgency that Bartimaeus amply demonstrated in his encounter with him.

Everything in his life changed from that moment. From being totally helpless all kinds of possibilities opened up literally before his eyes. Jesus had recognised his faith and given him the gift of sight in more ways than one. I wish we knew more about what happened in Bartimaeus's life after he followed Jesus down the road. How many others came to believe in Jesus through his testimony? How many people were blessed because they knew him? These are important questions (if unanswerable!) because at the end of the day it wasn't just about him; he didn't receive faith and healing to keep it to himself. Those who follow Jesus on the Way are not members of a private club but a source of blessing for those around them. Those who follow Jesus Christ have something precious to share; the life of God's kingdom. They don't do this by bashing people over the head with a Bible or telling them off when they get it wrong; they do it instead by being the kind of people God wants them to be. I suspect that most Christians have no idea of the way in which they have blessed the lives of those around them or even of those they might have met only briefly. God is at work in all kinds of ways that we don't easily see – another form of blindness! So do be encouraged as you, with Bartimaeus, follow Jesus along the road.

Questions: What is it you would like Jesus to do for you or a loved one today? How can you in the context of your daily life make sure time with God doesn't get squeezed out?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that everyone matters to you. Help us to live that truth out in our daily lives. Amen.