

**Blind Bart**  
**Mark 10:46-52**  
**ABC 12/31/23**

I always enjoy Advent & looking again at the importance of Jesus' incarnation but I'm always happy to get back to a normal routine. With that being said, we're back in the gospel of Mark this morning. In Mk 10:46-52 we come to the last healing miracle in Mark's gospel & the final event before Jesus enters Jerusalem. Today we see blind Bartimaeus see the light. But whatever we learn about Bartimaeus, whatever we see about what he knew about Jesus, whatever we say about his refusal to be passed by by Jesus, Bartimaeus isn't the hero of this story; Jesus is. He's passing through Jericho (where he met Zaccheus, Lk 19:1-10) & going to Jerusalem to accomplish what His reason for coming to earth was. He's going to be arrested, tried, tortured, & killed there. He's going to be **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (Jn 1:29). But before He gets there, He heals Bartimaeus. Back in Mark 8 Jesus healed another blind man (22-26). These 2 healings frame this section of Mark's gospel (8:22-10:52). These 2 blind men who were healed by Jesus stand in contrast to the spiritual blindness of the Jewish religious leaders & the blurred vision of the disciples. This passage is also the hinge to what follows. Bartimaeus cries out **Son of David** which prepares us for Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (11:1-11), where the pilgrims cry out, **Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!** (11:10). Jesus is the promised Messiah from David's line, who is about to enter Jerusalem to fulfill His messianic role by dying on the cross. 46-52

Bartimaeus, in many ways, is an unremarkable man, one with no influence nor importance. He has a problem he can't solve. But Jesus is passing through Jericho, making His way toward the reason for coming to earth. All of history has been moving toward this moment where Jesus would offer Himself up as a willing sacrifice for sin. But in His compassion He stops & makes time for blind Bartimaeus. Look at it this way: We're Bartimaeus! We're unremarkable people with a problem we can't solve. But Jesus is a compassionate Savior even when He's on a divine timetable to die on the cross. He's moving quickly toward His death. Before his Triumphal Entry, Jesus passes through Jericho, a beautiful city recently refurbished by the Herodians, who made it the site of their

magnificent winter palace & was known as *The City of Roses*.<sup>1</sup> For Jesus, the end of the earthly road was in sight. Nevertheless, He'd perform one final healing miracle, before entering Jerusalem to fulfill the will of His Father.

**1. The Sinner's Plea** (46-48) Jericho is an oasis in the Judean desert about 17 miles northeast of Jerusalem & 10 miles north of the Dead Sea. It & Damascus are considered among the oldest inhabited cities in the world. It's also one of the lowest, lying 825 feet below sea level. A winding road, made famous in the parable of the good Samaritan, rises 3,500 feet from Jericho to Jerusalem. There were 2 Jerichos in Jesus' day. The old city, which was either uninhabited or sparsely settled, was the one conquered by Joshua & the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land. The new city, located a mile to the south, had been built by the Hasmoneans & expanded by Herod the Great. Luke says this event occurred as Jesus approached Jericho (Lk 18:35), while Mark locates it **as He was leaving Jericho**. That there were these 2 Jerichos may explain why Matthew & Mark say the healing took place while Jesus was leaving Jericho, the ruins of the OT city, while Luke says it occurred while He was approaching Jericho, the NT city.<sup>2</sup> It's said that Mark Antony gave Jericho to Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, as a token of his affection.<sup>3</sup> The **large crowd** undoubtedly included pilgrims heading to Jerusalem for Passover, but throughout Mark's gospel the crowds demonstrate Jesus' popularity among the people.<sup>4</sup> I'm sure people traveling to Jerusalem for Passover were thrilled to be heading there with Jesus. As they traveled, they came upon literally, *the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus sitting by the road*. Matthew refers to 2 blind men who were healed (Mt 20:30) while Mark refers only to Bartimaeus, possibly because he became well-known in the early church. Whatever the case, there's no contradiction. 2 blind men were healed but Mark only focuses on one of them. Beggars were a common sight in those days (Jn 9:8). Without a social welfare system, begging was the only means of support for those who couldn't work or didn't have family to care for them. A spot on a well-traveled road was a prime location. Only Mark gives this man name, & this is the only time Mark names someone Jesus' healed, although he named the

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, p 69

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, p 113

<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 417

<sup>4</sup> Mk 1:33-34, 37; 2:2, 4, 13; 3:7-9, 20; 4:1, 36; 5:21, 24, 30-32; 6:14-15, 31-34; 7:24; 8:1-3; 9:14-15, 30.

father of the girl raised from the dead, Jairus (5:22). It may be he wants to underscore the irony that one whose name means *worthy of honor*<sup>5</sup> is treated so shabbily by the crowd at 1<sup>st</sup>. Mark gives us the translation, **the son of Timaeus**, followed by the Aramaic name, **Bartimaeus**. The order is unusual, since Mark normally provides the Aramaic name 1<sup>st</sup>, followed by **which means ...** or something similar (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34). Perhaps the order is because his father, Timaeus, was known to the church. The name itself is also unusual because *bar (son of)* is Aramaic, but **Timaeus** is a common Greek name.

It seems the sounds of the multitude moving along with Jesus attracted Bart's attention & curiosity. In Luke's parallel passage we're told, **hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was** (18:36). Apparently, someone told him Jesus was walking by & it seems he'd heard of Jesus because he knows more about Jesus than most.<sup>6</sup> **47-48**

**Jesus** (Joshua; Yeshua) was a common 1<sup>st</sup>-century name, so **the Nazarene** or **of Nazareth** was used to distinguish Him from others. But Bartimaeus cries to Jesus as **Son of David**, a title that appears to have just been coming into common use in Jesus' day as a designation for the Messiah.<sup>7</sup> According to 2 Sam 7, the Messiah would be David's greater son, the heir to his throne (cf Mk 11:10; Lk 1:32). He would be the King who would bring the fulfillment of all the promises to Abraham & David. Isaiah 11:4 says of the coming King from David's line that **with righteousness He will judge the poor, & decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth**. Ps 72:12 similarly says this King will **deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, & him who has no helper**, which seems to parallel Bartimaeus' circumstances & cry for help. These, together with Isaiah's expectations for healing & restoration in the messianic age, when **the eyes of the blind will be opened & the ears of the deaf will be unstopped** (Is 35:5; cf 29:18-19; 61:1), provide the background for the use of **Son of David**. Of course, Jesus was famous as a miracle worker & rumored to be the Messiah. Putting this together, Bartimaeus cries out for **mercy** from the One he hopes will bring healing & deliverance to Israel. Bartimaeus' proclaiming Jesus as the **Son of David**

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<sup>5</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, p

<sup>6</sup> RC Sproul, *Mark*, p 273

<sup>7</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 468

prepares us for Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, where the crowds will herald **the coming kingdom of our father David** (11:10). Up to this point, Peter is the only human who's openly acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah in Mark (8:29). Now, as Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem, a blind beggar shows remarkable spiritual insight by recognizing Him as the coming King on David's throne. That Jesus doesn't rebuke or correct the man shows He accepts for Himself the **Son of David** title, even if He'll qualify it in Mk 12 (35–37). He kept repeating, **Jesus, Son of David**, a blatantly Messianic title. What does Bartimaeus ask for? **Have mercy on me**. He knew he didn't deserve anything. According to Jewish thought at that time, his blindness was God's curse on him due to his sin. In asking for mercy, undeserved kindness, he acknowledged he was a sinner. In other words, his mind saw the light before his eyes did.<sup>8</sup> Someone once bluntly asked Helen Keller, *Isn't it terrible to be blind?* To which she responded, *Better to be blind & see with your heart, than to have 2 good eyes & see nothing*. So it was with Bartimaeus. Perhaps blindness has its benefits. Bartimaeus had a lot of time to think, without visual distractions, to contemplate & see with his heart. He thought about Jesus & came to an exalted view of Him, realizing his own darkness & need & who Jesus was, which opened him to God's grace. Bartimaeus' cry came from a profound sense of helplessness & it brought God's grace to his life.

The **many** who rebuke the man aren't identified, but we can safely assume they're the larger group of followers & pilgrims accompanying Jesus to Jerusalem, perhaps even including the disciples. The reason for the rebuke isn't given. But most likely a blind beggar was viewed as too insignificant to bother someone like Jesus. This fits the context, where the disciples had rebuked those bringing *insignificant* children to Jesus earlier in this chapter (10:13–16). The crowds around Jesus didn't share His character. They saw this blind guy as an interruption. Bartimaeus won't be silenced, however, & he cries out even more. He's making himself heard. He was crying & yelling at the top of his lungs. He was desperate, even frantic. He's persistent which is an important sign of faith in Mark's gospel & is frequently rewarded by Jesus (2:5; 5:23, 34; 7:27–29, 32; 8:22; 9:24). The turning point of this passage isn't Bartimaeus's persistence. All the persistence in the world, all

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 116

the crying in the world wouldn't help if Jesus isn't full of mercy. Jesus stops for one man though not because Bartimaeus had great earthly importance. He doesn't stop because of what's in this man but because of what's in Jesus Himself: compassion (Mt 20:34).

**2. The Savior's Power** (49-52) Remember, Jesus is on the way to the cross & yet Jesus has time for this blind beggar. What a window into our Savior's heart. He's alive today doing in a far more exalted fashion the things which He did while here on earth. Even today, He's attentive to all our cries, even when a million of us cry to Him at once. The cry of one in need is far sweeter to Jesus than the shallow hallelujahs of the crowd. Are you hurting? Do you feel helpless? If so, understand that your plea will be heard by Jesus. As in the case of the sick woman in 5:30, Jesus responds to a desperate plea for help amid the bustling crowd. Jesus does the unthinkable & He calls this poor, blind beggar to come to Him. It's one thing for us to call on the Lord. It's something else when He calls on us. That's where our true redemption lies. What we see here is the Lord Creator standing before His broken creation. The Creator God standing & looking at the horrible effects of sin. There was a time on earth where there was no blindness, no sickness, & no suffering. But here is Jesus viewing the ravages of sin. The Creator is standing before His broken creation; this is why He has come. He has come to make all things new. This is exactly why He's here. As we've sung this month, *He comes to make His blessings known, far as the curse is found.*<sup>9</sup>

It's interesting that the **many** respond to Jesus' authority & change from obstacles to advocates for this man. Jesus' response changed the crowd's attitude toward Bartimaeus, at least for the moment. Curious, hoping to see Jesus perform another miracle, **they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you"** (49). From sternly telling him to be quiet they now tell him to **take courage & stand up. Take courage** means *to be firm or resolute in the face of danger or adverse circumstances.*<sup>10</sup> It's translated variously as **cheer up** (NIV), **take heart** (ESV), **have courage** (HCSB) or **don't be afraid** (CEV). In contemporary English we'd probably say, *It's alright* or *It's okay*. The man responds immediately, without doubt or hesitation. His **cloak** was

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Watts, *Joy to the World*, #224 in our hymnal

<sup>10</sup> BDAG, 444; Mt 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mk 6:50; 10:49; Jn 16:33; Act 23:11

probably an outer cloak, which may have been wrapped around his shoulders or laid on the ground to collect alms given to him. But he tosses it aside to come to Jesus. The emphasis seems to be on his exuberant joy that Jesus would notice him rather than any sense of leaving his old life behind.<sup>11</sup>

Mark's point is that Jesus calls & the man responds. He jumps **up & came to Jesus. 51**

As in the case of the Syrophenician woman (7:24–30) & the man with the demon-possessed boy (9:14–29), Jesus doesn't immediately heal the man, but starts a conversation intended to provoke his faith. Jesus made Bartimaeus express his desire so He could strengthen his faith. **Jesus answered & said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?"** Does that sound familiar? When James & John came to Him with a request, Jesus asked, **What do you want Me to do for you?** (10:36). They went on to make their cheeky request that one of them might sit on Jesus' right hand & the other on His left hand in glory. How different was Bartimaeus' answer when Jesus asked him the same question Bartimaeus said, **Rabboni, I want to regain or receive my sight!** (51). **Rabboni**, a heightened form of *Rabbi*, appears only here & in Jn 20:16 where Mary Magdalene used it when she met Jesus on the morning of His resurrection. Bartimaeus wasn't asking for status. He wasn't asking for glory. He wasn't asking to be exalted in Jesus' kingdom. He wasn't even asking to be delivered from his poverty. He was begging the Lord for something that almost every human being already enjoyed. He simply wanted to be able to see. He makes no demand for glory but cries out from his wretched poverty that he wants to see. The disciples see Jesus as a Messiah who will bring them mastery & glory. Bartimaeus sees Him as the Son of David who brings healing & sight. Jesus can't grant the disciples' request for power, but He can grant a blind man's request for vision. Unlike James & John, who thought they deserved something, he knew he deserved nothing. He sought only **mercy**, to receive what he didn't deserve. Blind Bart stands in stark contrast with the behavior of the disciples as they squabbled among themselves for status & rank. The high King of heaven, the Son of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity, God incarnate, offered to serve a lowly, outcast, & unworthy sinner. **52**

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<sup>11</sup> RT France, *Mark*, 424

In view of the fact that faith is itself God's gift (Eph 2:8), it's nothing less than astounding that Jesus in several instances praises the recipient of the gift for exercising it. This proves the generous character of His love. It appears that when Jesus made Bartimaeus well by restoring his sight, He also blessed him spiritually.<sup>12</sup> The statement, **your faith has made you well**, can refer to physical rescue (13:20; 15:30, 31), preservation of life (3:4; 8:35), bodily healing & restoration (5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52), or spiritual salvation (8:35; 10:26; 13:13). Both physical & spiritual restoration seem to be in view here, since the man apparently follows Jesus in discipleship. Jesus doesn't touch him (1:31, 41; 5:27, 41; 7:33–34; 8:22–26) or make an authoritative pronouncement (2:11; 3:5). He simply announces that the healing has taken place. Bartimaeus' sight is immediately restored. The appropriate response is discipleship, to follow Jesus. The verb **began following** stresses *the beginning of an action, with the implication that it continued for some time*.<sup>13</sup> In context it simply means he accompanied Jesus along the road, but it echoes previous calls to discipleship & implies a faith commitment (1:18; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21, 28).<sup>14</sup> Imagine how it was for Bartimaeus. Blind at the beginning of Christ's sentence, he was seeing at the end of it. No surgery. No eye patches. No adjustments. Just immediate sight. He saw the gawking crowd. He saw Jericho & its palm trees. But the 1<sup>st</sup> thing he saw was the face of Jesus. Luke tells us, **Immediately he regained his sight & began following Him, glorifying God; & when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God** (18:43). In some extra-biblical literature, Bartimaeus appears, along with others whom Jesus has healed, as a personal witness for Jesus at his trial before Pilate. It's reported, *another Jew hastened forward and said: 'I was born blind; I heard any man's voice, but did not see his face. And as Jesus passed by I cried with a loud voice: "Have mercy on me, Son of David". And He took pity on me and put His hands on my eyes and I saw immediately.'*<sup>15</sup>

This is a simple story of a miraculous healing but it sets the stage for the climax of Mark's story. Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem as the **Son of David**, the messianic King predicted in Scripture. It's there that the next act in the drama of redemption will unfold. The faith & restoration of

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 422

<sup>13</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p 544

<sup>14</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 472

<sup>15</sup> *Acts Pil.* 6:4

Bartimaeus' sight stands in contrast to the stubborn spiritual blindness of the religious leaders, who will oppose Jesus & plot His death. It's in contrast to the dimness of the disciples to grasp who Jesus is & what He must do, in spite of His repeated & clear declarations of His coming death. As the Messiah, the **Son of David**, God's agent of salvation, Jesus came not **to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many** (10:45). Though unwavering in His commitment to reach His goal (10:32), Jesus still hears the cry of a blind beggar & takes time to help him. Bartimaeus is among the lowest of the low in Israel's society, a blind beggar with little more than a cloak to his name. Yet he's in a better position to receive God's blessings than the rich young ruler Jesus met earlier (10:17-31). While he lists his good deeds he hopes will earn him eternal life, Bartimaeus cries out for mercy. He comes empty & receives the gift of physical healing & spiritual sight. The rich man comes with his life full of riches & has no room for God's grace, the only thing that provides entrance into the kingdom of God. The poor, the sick, the blind, the oppressed, the outcast, these are the recipients of God's grace. This theme began in Mark's gospel with the call of Levi. Jesus didn't come to call the self-righteous but sinners, those who recognize their need of Him (2:14-17). The prideful & self-righteous religious leaders reject Him & the kingdom He proclaimed & so receive blind eyes & deaf ears (4:11-12), while blind Bartimaeus regains his sight by crying out to God for mercy. This theme of God's love for the lowly & the outcast is even more prominent in Luke's gospel. Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, magnifies God, who humbles the proud & exalts the lowly (Lk 1:52). The repentant prodigal's return is celebrated with a great feast, while the self-righteous older brother refuses to attend (15:11-32). The poor beggar Lazarus, who suffered so much in life, now sits at the messianic banquet beside Father Abraham, while the rich man suffers in Hades (16:19-31). The humble & repentant tax collector leaves the temple justified, while the self-righteous Pharisee receives no forgiveness. Why? Because **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted** (18:14). This means we must recognize our own status as sinners saved by God's grace alone. Which should create both gratitude to God & humility toward one another. & God's love for the lost should prompt us



to show the same love & concern for those on the margins of society, whether the poor, the disabled, or those weighed down by life's burdens.

Beside Bartimaeus's cry for mercy lies his equally important acclamation that Jesus is the **Son of David**. Mark begins his gospel by announcing that Jesus is the **Son of God**. This title, like **Son of David**, expresses the fundamental continuity between Israel's hopes for a Savior & the suffering role of the Messiah. Jesus is indeed Israel's King, the promised Messiah who will reign forever in power & righteousness on David's throne. In the book of Revelation, the climax of the biblical story, Jesus is the **the root & the descendant of David** (Rev 22:16), who comes in judgment riding on a white horse & with a sharp sword of judgment coming from His mouth (19:15). He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (2:27; 5:5; 19:15; cf Ps 2:9; Is 11:4). Yet at His 1<sup>st</sup> coming, the Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb who was slain (Rev 5:6–10), whose conquest isn't over the armies of Rome, but over the powers of sin, Satan, & death. He's here to give His life as a ransom for sins, to break the powers of darkness, & destroy the works of the devil. Mark's portrait of Jesus throughout his gospel is structured around this dual focus. In the 1<sup>st</sup> 8 chapters Jesus comes on the scene as the mighty Messiah & Son of God with divine authority over disease, demons, & nature (1:1–8:30). Yet beginning with Peter's confession, He reveals that the path to glory is through the cross (8:31–15:47) & He tells His disciples to take up their crosses & follow Him. Bartimaeus serves as a model disciple. Not only does he come humbly, asking for mercy, but when the crowd tries to silence him, he persists in his cry. True discipleship involves not only a persevering faith, but also a willingness to leave all & follow Jesus. After being given his sight, Bartimaeus **began following Jesus on the road**. The healing he's been given is an opportunity to follow the path of Jesus. Discipleship means giving up pride & self-interest & seeking God's kingdom 1<sup>st</sup>. It's significant that while James & John seek the best seats in the kingdom, Bartimaeus asks only for mercy. Jesus asks both the same question: **What do you want me to do for you?** Yet their motives are very different. James & John seek power & glory; Bartimaeus wants only to see. True discipleship means seeing the world God's way & submitting our life to His purpose & will. In the final analysis, it was all of Jesus. Jesus came to him, because blind Bartimaeus couldn't come to Jesus, & Jesus called forth

his faith. Bartimaeus was *saved* both physically & spiritually, & he followed Jesus. Scholars say the reason Mark preserves Bartimaeus' name maybe that he became a pillar in the Jerusalem church. He followed Jesus, witnessing the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday, the horror of the crucifixion, & the joy of the resurrection. What do we learn from all this? For one thing, we're to say what the crowd said at Jesus' request: *Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you!* We're to reach out to those to whom the Holy Spirit has shown their sin & helplessness. What are such people to do? 1<sup>st</sup>, they're to cry to Him: **Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!** 2<sup>nd</sup>, they're to come to Him & tell him what they want: *Lord, take away my darkness, my sin. Give me life!* Jesus was passing through Jericho, never to come that way again. If Bartimaeus hadn't responded, he wouldn't have had another chance. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by some of those around us today. Are we praying for them? Are we bringing them to Jesus?

Bartimaeus understood he was a sinner, under God's judgment, & in need of mercy. He acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, who came to save His people from their sins (Is 53:5-6; Mt 1:21), & as his sovereign Lord. Jesus' response shows He doesn't ignore those who cry out to Him for mercy (Mt 11:28; Jn 6:37). He's deeply compassionate over the plight of hurting & lost sinners. Finally, although Jesus has absolute power over disease, He didn't come merely to heal the sick but **to seek and to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). The lessons of this passage aren't, *Here's what faith looks like* or *how to get God's attention* or *buck up & believe*. The lessons are that Jesus is glorious in mercy. No matter where you are, no matter who you are, no matter what your struggle is, if you run to Him you'll find mercy that greets you in your time of need. We are Bartimaeus. We have nothing to offer. We have a problem that's as unsolvable as his blindness, it's called sin. We can't do anything to deliver ourselves from it. Our hope is that this Messiah would call us & touch us by His grace, & we are made whole. He is the only Hero we need; His name is Jesus & He came for & is calling you today.