A visible sign – Jesus heals Bartimaeus

Text: Mark 10:46-52

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 35:1-7; Mark 10:46-52

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 122, 200, ‘Grace’ (City Alight), 180, 374, 531+532

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#36)

**Occasion:** Infant Baptism

**Theme:**  At Jericho, on His way to Jerusalem, a blind man called Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, who responds to his believing request for sight by miraculously healing him, with the result that he follows Jesus.

**Proposition:**  Come to Jesus in your spiritual blindness and poverty for healing.

**Introduction**

Blind people have a very difficult disability that profoundly affects their lives. Physically, to be blind is to be ‘*unable to see because of injury, disease, or a congenital condition (an abnormality from birth)*’. Our eyes are intricately designed, highly complex living structures.– It is irrational, illogical and frankly foolish to think that our eyes evolved to be what they are by random processes over long periods of time. Our eyes, like the other parts of our being, are ‘*fearfully and wonderfully made*’ (Ps 139:14). Sight is a gift from God our Creator. Wonderful are His works!

Today we witnessed the baptism of [Baby name] with our own eyes – unless that is anyone here is blind. We saw a small quantity of water being poured onto his/her head – not in sufficient quantity to give her/him a thorough wash all over and also lacking the soap that I imagine her parents use when [she/he] has a bath. The point is that [Baby name]’s baptism was not about a physical change to her outward bodily cleanliness, but rather points to her need for an inward spiritual cleansing. As a visible sign, baptism points to the cleansing from sin by the shed blood of Christ, through the work of his Spirit.

In his gospel, Mark records the many visible signs that Jesus performed that pointed to His identity as the promised Messiah and to His mission as the ‘*Saviour of the world*’ (John 4:42). One of these signs was the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida, as Mark records in chapter 8:22-26. In our text, Mark records a second detailed account of the healing of a blind man. This is the last miraculous healing that he will record before Jesus enters Jerusalem to die. What spiritual realities is the Lord pointing us to as we see Jesus healing the man called Bartimaeus by the roadside in Jericho? We’ll seek the answer to this question as we explore our text under three points:

1. A poor blind man meets Jesus
2. A pool blind man has faith in Jesus
3. A poor blind man receives healing grace
4. **A poor blind man meets Jesus**

You can’t see this with your physical eyes, but picture it in your mind: Jesus has arrived at Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. He is not travelling alone, but is walking ahead of his disciples who are followed by a large crowd. Together with Jesus and His disciples they are on their way to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Imagine the refreshing beauty of the low lying city of Jericho, known as the ‘*city of palms*’ being supplied by irrigating springs of fresh water. Not the ancient city destroyed when the Lord gave His people victory as they entered the promised land (Joshua 6), but the one rebuilt by Herod the Great about two kms south of the original site. Picture then, a lot of people on the move - now leaving Jericho about to climb up the main road to Jerusalem – a distance of about 24 km with an elevation gain of over 1100 m (Jericho is 400 m below sea level, 1127 m below Jerusalem). {It was about a man travelling down this highway and being attacked by robbers that Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)}.

As Jesus is leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, there is…can you see in your mind’s eye?...a blind beggar who is sitting by the roadside. There was nothing unusual about this; it would have been a very common sight back then. Physical blindness in Bible times was much more prevalent than it is in the western world today. In the gospels we see that Jesus frequently healed blind people (e.g. Matt 9:27-31; 12:22; 20:30-34; Mark 10:46-52; John 9:1-7). The most common cause was infection; for which there was little effective treatment back then.

In addition to not being able to see, the blind suffered because they had little opportunity to earn a living. As a result, in a society without a government funded social welfare system, the blind were often obliged to become beggars, unless family members or friends were able and willing to support them. The blind also suffered the reproach of others because of the common belief that affliction was a result of sin. Remember the man born blind as recorded in John 9. The disciples asked Jesus ‘*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*’ (v2).

So imagine this poor blind man begging for food by the roadside hearing, but not seeing, people passing by. Mark records that his name was Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, whereas in the parallel accounts: Matthew records that there were two blind men (Matt 20:29-34) who were both healed by Jesus as he left Jericho, and Luke records that there was only one blind man, whom he does not name (Luke18:35-43) who was healed by Jesus as he ‘drew near to Jericho’.

As you may be aware, Bible commentators and scholars have tried to come up with various suggestions to explain the differences in the three gospel accounts of this one event. I won’t go into all the details here, but sufficient to say that there is no entirely satisfactory explanation for the differences. Is this then evidence that the Bible is contradictory, as some people say? No. Scripture is God’s infallible Word, written by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I do have my own thoughts about what are actually insignificant differences between the three gospel records about the healing of Bartimaeus.

I think that this is what we could reasonably expect from the reports of different eye witnesses who may remember and emphasise some details and omit others. In fact, I would suggest to you that minor discrepancies like these are precisely what could be reasonably expected from three different reports of the same event. Such discrepancies are understandable from gospel writers who had not colluded with one another to ensure that the exactly the same details were presented by each one. Entirely identical details is what I would much more expect of a group of people trying to fabricate a false testimony about a made-up event that never actually took place.

So imagine the blind beggar Bartimaeus, when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, calling out “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” (47). Mark records that many people there rebuked the blind man for crying out to Jesus for help (v48). We do not know why they were telling him to ‘shut up’. Was the crowd impatient to get on their way to Jerusalem before the end of the day? Did they think Jesus was too busy to be bothered with a blind beggar? Did they have what we now called ‘donor fatigue’? Just sick and tired of having heard Bartimaeus’ pleas for help over the years on their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem?

Whatever the reasons, what we do know is highly significant, it is a remarkable sign in our text. Can you see it? ‘Jesus stopped and said “Call him”’ (v49). Jesus stood still and responded to the man who cried out to Him for mercy. This is a sign that Jesus, the divine Son of God, is in the words of Psalm 103, “*merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*” (v8). He shows compassion (v13). Jesus was busy doing His Father’s will, going up to Jerusalem to ‘*give his life as a ransom for many*’; but not too busy to have compassion on a poor blind man.

Jesus is the greatest man alive, the greatest human being who will ever live. He is truly the ‘*Lord of lords and King of kings*’ (Rev 17:14). Yet, He is not too busy for you. He is not indifferent to your need. Sure, He is not physically passing you by as you sit on the side of a road, but He is available to you and He says to you “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden*” (Matt 11:28). If you come, then one day you will see Jesus with resurrected eyes ‘*face to face*’ (1 Cor 13:12) in the New Heavens and New Earth. Imagine that! Now, let’s go back to Jericho and see that the poor blind man there had faith in Jesus.

1. **A poor blind man has faith in Jesus**

Bartimaeus could not see Jesus, but He knew something about Christ, exactly what we can’t be sure. In the light of the New Testament we know that the title ‘*Son of David*’ refers to the promise made by the Lord through His prophet Nathan to king David: ‘*When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*’ (2 Sam 7:12-13).

We do not know for sure that Bartimaeus realised that the signs and wonders that Jesus had been performing pointed to His identity as the promised Messiah. For example, as we heard earlier from Isaiah 35 (4-5): ‘*Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come… and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened*’. However, clearly Bartimaeus had heard some things about Jesus of Nazareth and believed that He had the power and authority to heal the blind.

When Bartimaeus was called to come to Jesus, how did he respond? Reluctantly? Slowly? Uncertainly? Doubtingly? No. When he heard the words from others “*Take heart. Get up; he is calling you*” (v49) what did Bartimaeus do? ‘*Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus*’. When people wanted to move quickly in those days, they took off their outer garments and ran! Bartimaeus knew what he wanted, knew what he needed. He knew that he was blind! So when Jesus asked Him ‘*what do you want me to do for you?*’, he said ‘*Rabbi, let me recover my sight*’ (v51). Not the unsure words of the father with the demon possessed son, as recorded by Mark in 9:23 “***If*** *you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*.” Bartimaeus was confident that Jesus was fully able to heal Him. After he could see, Jesus would say to him ‘*your faith has made you well*’ (v52). This of course does not mean that it was the faith of Bartimaeus himself that brought the healing, but rather than it was His faith in Christ that resulted in Jesus exercising His power to restore his blind man’s sight.

This healing is a sign for all those who have ‘eyes to see’. How so? How is this relevant to us? Some of us may have poor eyesight, in some congregations there may be people who are physically blind. Some of us have less income than others, but none of us are beggars who depend entirely on the generosity of those who pass us by for everything we have. So we are unlike blind poor Bartimaeus in many ways, yet. just as the physical, visible sign of [Baby name]’s baptism points us to spiritual reality – that [she/he] is a member of the church who needs die to sin and be raised to new life in Christ, so the physical healing of this poor blind man points to our spiritual blindness and poverty apart from Christ.

It seems very likely from his words ‘*let me* ***recover*** *my sight*’ (v51) that Bartimaeus had not been blind from birth. In this respect he was different then to the blind man in John 9. For a person born blind there is no experience of what seeing is like. Imagine that. Others could describe to you the reality of being able to see, but you would have to take their word for it. The Word of God reveals that all descendants of Adam, like you and me begin life spiritually blind. The Apostle Paul explains it this way to the Ephesians: “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*” (Eph 2:1-2).

Just as a physically dead corpse cannot see, so similarly, spiritually dead people are spiritually blind. Just like a person born physically blind, a person conceived spiritually blind does not know that they are blind unless someone tells them. So, a spiritually blind person needs to be told that as children we are all sinful from the time of conception and birth. [Parents’ names] will need to explain this to [Baby name] when [she/he] is old enough to understand. They will also need to help [Baby name] accept and believe that [she/he], like each one of us, has nothing that we can give, earn or borrow to purchase spiritual healing.

Without Christ we are all spiritually far poorer than Bartimaeus the blind beggar was physically poor. Jesus alone has the wealth that we need and that we lack apart from Him. He alone has the precious currency of His lifeblood which He poured out for many at Calvary in order to purchase the lives of all of God’s people. He truly gave His life as a ransom for many. Do you have the spiritual eyes to see the sign of Bartimaeus’ faith in Christ point you to your need of the same faith? [Baby name] is blessed to see her parents, many believing wider family members and her believing church family point her to her need for saving faith in Christ as her Lord and Saviour. He alone can heal her, you and me, which brings us to our third point:

1. **A poor blind man receives healing grace**

I remember how I felt when I woke up the next day after the laser eye surgery I had three years ago to correct my extreme short sightedness. I was elated and surprised. Everything looked so amazing. I had restored vision better than I could ever remember having. I didn’t need heavy prescription glasses anymore, just low magnification reading glasses for close up work. My eye restoration was not miraculous. It was possible because of the development of highly accurate laser technology capable of cutting the lens in the eye so that a small section could be removed to correct my short-sightedness.

Infinitely more importantly - Jesus healed Bartimaeus’ eyes miraculously. Mark records that Jesus said to the blind man ‘*Go your way, your faith has made you well*’. Immediately he recovered his sight. The blind man could see! Before that he could not see Jesus, but had to be led to Him until he could hear His voice asking ‘*what do you want me to do for you*’. Now Bartimaeus could see. Now Bartimaeus would be able to work for a living. He would no longer need to beg.

Notice that Jesus does not ask Bartimaeus to follow Him, He simply says ‘*go your way*’. In the original Greek language there is just one word ‘depart’. Where did Bartimaeus go? He willingly followed Jesus ‘on the way’. He went after Jesus up the 24 km road that led to Jerusalem. He became a true disciple – a man saved by faith having received the grace of God in Christ. Did Bartimaeus see the royal figure of Jesus enter Jerusalem on a young donkey? Did Bartimaeus see the bloodied, weary Jesus being led to Golgotha? Did Bartimaeus see the charge against his Saviour ‘The King of the Jews’? Did Bartimaeus see Jesus breath his last and die? We do not know the answer to these questions. However, as far as we know, Brothers and Sisters, I think we can expect to see Bartimaeus in the New Heavens and New Earth and we can ask him then!

What was so special about this man Bartimaeus, whose name appears but once in the whole of Scripture? Nothing. He was poor beggar who was blind. Someone many people just wished would shut up. Yet in God’s good plan and purpose, he came to hear about Jesus and there was a fleeting opportunity for him to meet Jesus in Jericho that day. We could say that he grabbed that opportunity with both hands! Despite the rebuke of those who told him to be quiet. Despite not being able to see Jesus, but only hearing His voice.

Friend, perhaps that is a little like your situation today? Perhaps there are those around you, perhaps in your own family, amongst those you work with or your friends who would tell you to stop looking for help from ‘religion’. Perhaps to stop believing that there is a Saviour? Perhaps to stop thinking that you have a sin and guilt problem before a Holy God? Friend, don’t listen to these voices, instead listen to the voice of Jesus who says to all who will hear: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.” (Matt 11:28-29).

There is a large crowd of people who are following Jesus today, even though we can’t see him with our physical eyes, we nonetheless know that He is alive and very much real. Around us today is just a small part of that large crowd of believing followers of Jesus. Friend, we invite you to join with us as we follow Jesus on the way – not to the city of Jerusalem up a steep mountainous path, but on the way that leads to eternal life. Jesus promises all who put their faith in Him new resurrection bodies able to see with perfect vision, able to see Him in glory - in the flesh in Paradise. Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus. Will you do something similar?

Brothers and sisters, friends, “*since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*.” (Heb 12:1).

AMEN.