

Sight for the Blind

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[0:00] So Mark chapter 10, 48, 46 to 52. I went to see my dad a few weeks ago and while I was there the cleaner came in.

! And her reaction was one that I've heard a bunch of times before. Ah, I can see who you are. You must be Bernard's son. To that I usually respond, ah, isn't my dad lucky to look like me?

Or something along those lines. But it is amazing. We look very much alike. And actually the older I get, the more I look like him. Now I love my dad very much.

And he'll be listening to this at some point and say, Dad, that is true. I do love you very much. And it is always a pleasure to meet people who know him, who have become his friends. But imagine if every time I was referred to it was always as, ah, that's the son of Bernard, because that's his name.

What if no one knew my name, but they only knew him? That would feel a little odd, wouldn't it? It would. And imagine that whilst my dad's name means heart of a bear, brave, strong, hardy, that I felt actually anything but.

[1:14] What if instead of having the heart of a bear, I felt that I was weak and feeble with the heart of a mouse? Every time I was called the son of Bernard, it would feel a bit of a joke, wouldn't it?

As if someone was mocking me. Because I was nothing like the one who should be the son of Mr. Bearheart. I wonder if the son of Timaeus, in our Bible reading today, felt like that growing up.

That's what Bar Timaeus means. It means son, Bar of Timaeus. Now, Timaeus is a name that means honourable and praiseworthy. And yet there was his son, Mr. Anything But.

A man with no name of his own, just a rather painful link to a father whose shoes, at least in the eyes of the world, didn't seem to be worthy of taking them off.

And that wasn't just the only problem Bar Timaeus had, of course. Because everything about Bar Timaeus was basically as bad as it could get. So look at those opening verses. Physically, Bar Timaeus was blind.

[2:21] Blindness is always a tragedy. I can't imagine what it would be like to be without vision, not to be able to see. But in those days, there was an extra burden to bear because disabilities like that were often seen as being a punishment from God.

And then there was his financial situation. Bar Timaeus was so poor that he had to resort to begging. Despite his father's good name, it seems that he didn't have a wealthy family to look after him.

There he was on the streets, poor, destitute, forced to rely on the charity of others to be able to eat and live. And if we're honest, there was no prospect of anything ever changing. And socially, Bar Timaeus was on the bottom rung of the ladder.

No name of his own, no status in the world. And combined with his circumstances, even his voice gets shouted down. He is so far at the bottom of the pile that when Jesus comes along and Bar Timaeus begins to shout out for help, the crowd tell him to shut up.

No name, no sight, no wealth, no prospect, no voice. A person at the bottom of the pile in every possible sense. And as he shouted out for help to the one person who could help him, the crowd did their best to drown him out.

[3:43] Now before we go on, I wonder if the reaction of the crowd reminds you of a reaction that we've seen a few weeks before. Are there echoes here? Back in verses 13 to 16, when the disciples turn the children away.

The children are flocking to Jesus and the disciples look at them and say, no, no, no, they're too young. They're too insignificant. They are not worthy to have any of Jesus' time and energy. Well, the crowd here are behaving in the same way, aren't they?

Having Jesus walking through their city would have been a big deal. They knew of his reputation. They'd been told some of the things he had said and done. And they don't seem to think that a blind, penless beggar like Bartimaeus has any right to ruin their moment in the spotlight. So they tell him to shut up and be quiet. He doesn't count. He's just a poor, blind beggar. Jesus won't be interested in him. Except he is interested.

Just as Jesus is interested in those little children, so he is also interested in poor, blind, begging Bartimaeus, the bottom of the pile, anything but honourable son of Mr. Praiseworthy.

[4 : 56] And so above the clamour of the crowd, Jesus hears a voice calling for help. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Now, interestingly, in the verse above that, Mark refers to Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, there's another name for us. Jesus, he's the chap from that small, insignificant, awful, Gentile-infested town. Do you remember what Nathaniel said when he was brought to Jesus or told about him?

Nathaniel said, Nazareth, he's from there. Can anything good come from Nazareth? So I wonder if the moniker that Mark is using for Jesus here is kind of maybe a slight on his reputation.

Jesus, oh yeah, he's done some great things, but he's that guy from nowhere, isn't he? The guy from the slums. The guy who is weak and unconnected to the people of power.

But notice Bartimaeus doesn't call him Jesus of Nazareth. What does he shout out? Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

[6 : 05] Somehow, blind Bartimaeus has a better spiritual insight than most of the sighted crowd. He looked beyond Jesus' postal address, his immediate family tree, to his true identity, his greatest ancestor, maybe even back to the promises that God had given to David that one day one of his descendants would be the Messiah and reign over a kingdom that would never end.

I think it's also true that Bartimaeus knew at least some of the promises surrounding the coming of that Messiah. Maybe the ones in Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 42, where a sign of the Messiah's reign would be the blind receiving back their sight.

And so it was that while the crowd were in the dark, the blind man sees Jesus for who he is and he shouts all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

Son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David, have mercy on me. Until Jesus hears and stops the crowd and calls for him to be brought to Jesus.

It's interesting how the crowd suddenly turn, isn't it? From putting him down to being messengers of hope. They had been put in their place, but to their credit, they learn the lesson and they do what Jesus said.

[7 : 24] They tell Bartimaeus the good news. Cheer up on your feet. He's calling for you. How those words must have thrilled his heart. Jesus was asking for him.

Notice what he does next. Verse 50, throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. Now as a poor blind beggar, that cloak was probably the only thing that Bartimaeus owned. Losing it would have been a catastrophe, but holding onto it would have slowed him down. So off it went. Cast aside as if no importance, as Bartimaeus made his way to Jesus as quickly as his legs could carry him.

I wonder if Bartimaeus' reaction, again, strikes a little thing in your minds, of a contrast here from someone earlier that we met in the chapter. Someone who wouldn't throw off all he had.

You see echoes of the rich young ruler's story here? Jesus calls him and says, follow me. But before you do that, you need to let go of all this.

[8 : 33] Sell everything you have and come to me. What does the rich young man do? He holds on and he won't come. Not so Bartimaeus. Nothing was going to hinder him.

He throws off everything that might hinder him and leaps to his feet and comes to Jesus as fast as he can. Actually, there's another contrast with that rich young man as well.

Remember his question a couple of weeks ago? What must I do to have eternal life? Contrast that with the cry of Bartimaeus, who offers nothing, promises nothing, claims nothing, yet simply pleads for mercy.

We'll come to that request in a moment. But don't lose sight of the fact that Bartimaeus comes to Jesus as empty-handed as those little children. He's got nothing to give.

The rich young man claimed to have obeyed all the commandments fully, or some of them at least. His request for spiritual help came with a CV to prove that he was worthy to make that request.

[9 : 39] Bartimaeus has nothing. He's got no name, no money, no prospects, no eyesight, no position or place in the world. Yet as he cries out to Jesus for mercy, it is his request that gets answered.

Friends, I don't know where you stand before God this morning, but if your church attendance today is to try and prove that by coming along to church or by doing the good works during the week, that you are somehow worthy of a place in God's eternal kingdom, that you're worthy of his forgiveness, worthy of having your prayers heard and maybe even answered, then I'm sorry, but you're going to go away disappointed.

The only way to receive from God all the wonderful gifts that Jesus died to win for you, the only way to receive all the privileges that God the Father longs to shower upon you is to come before him with empty hands and to ask for his mercy.

It's the same message Jesus gives all the way through the Gospels. Think back to Nicodemus, this great Pharisee, teacher of the law. He wants to know how he can be certain and Jesus says you need to be born again.

That is, you need to rely on God's saving work. You need a change of heart. You can't try and earn your way there through your religious devotion, through your good behaviour.

[11 : 06] Brothers and sisters, any confidence that we might have of a hope of eternal life cannot begin with us. It must begin and end with God and his saving work through Jesus' death on the cross.

It can't include a long list of our achievements. It can't be a CV of our qualifications. It must first and last be about what Jesus has done for us. So it must begin and end with a cry for mercy.

And that's what Bartimaeus gives here. He cried for mercy and Jesus heard him. And what happens next is just as beautiful.

Firstly, as we've seen, Jesus calls him. It's one of the wonderful truths of the Gospel message that God always hears and responds to those who cry out to him for mercy.

When we are empty, when we have nothing, when all our hope is gone, when we have no one else to turn to, the ear of Almighty God, the Creator, the one who is the sustainer of the world, is tuned to hear the cries of those who seek him.

[12 : 14] And he is never too busy. He's never distracted. He's never standoffish. He's never put off by our backgrounds or put off by our track records.

It doesn't matter what is in our histories. Bartimaeus, Bartimaeus, the one who is at the bottom of the pile with nothing to commend him, cries out to God for mercy and Jesus hears his cry and calls for him to come.

Friends, if you are hesitant about coming to God because you don't think you're good enough or you doubt God's love because you don't think you're worthy enough, then look at what happens to Bartimaeus here.

He cries out for mercy. Jesus hears him and calls him in. And I tell you, he will do that for you today. If you come empty-handed, whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever is in your background, cry to God for mercy and he will hear.

Secondly, Jesus has a conversation with him. He asks him what it is that he wants. Again, there's an echo of a previous passage here, isn't there?

[13 : 27] What did we look at last week? James and John come to Jesus and they say, Jesus, we'd like you to do for us whatever we ask. Give us a blank check.

Jesus says, well, what is it? What do you want? What do they ask for? They want power. They want glory. They want position. They want influence. What does Bartimaeus want? None of those things. He wants mercy.

He wants his eyesight. He wants to have his life back. And he places his firm trust in Jesus to do it. And we're not told here whether Jesus touches him.

It's not like the account in John's gospel where Jesus spits on the ground and makes mud and puts it on his eyes. There's none of that. Jesus just speaks a word. Verse 52, go.

Your faith has healed you. And such is the power and authority of Jesus that with a word of command the blind man receives his sight. And in an instant, Bartimaeus is able to see.

[14 : 31] The last thing that happens here shows the depth of Bartimaeus' faith because without turning back, without even going back to collect his cloak, without any prevarication or hesitation, Mark tells us that Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the road.

And here again, we've got the evidence of that deep faith that has been granted to Bartimaeus. A faith that was strong enough for him to call out for mercy. A faith that was strong enough to make this amazing demand of Jesus, give me my sight.

And now a faith that is strong enough to leave everything behind and follow Jesus on the way. What an amazing transformation. What a contrast to the man we met begging by the roadside.

The blind man can now see. The one with no voice has been heard. The one with no prospects now has a calling. And the one with no name or at least the name that was a bit of a joke now has a new name.

A name that, or his old name now fits him perfectly. Because having come to Jesus for mercy and having received that and followed him along the way, by God's grace, Bartimaeus is now a child of God.

[15 : 44] He, like all believers, has been adopted into God's family. Jesus, the son of God, is now his elder brother. Almighty God is now his father. He truly now is the son of honour and praiseworthiness because he is a true child of God.

He's inhabited his name. And 2,000 years later, we still know of him. There aren't many beggars who could say that from 2,000 years ago.

What a change. What a transformation. And it began as Bartimaeus cries out for mercy. So what does this all mean for us?

Well, let me pose you a question. A question that's often good to ask when you're meditating, on a piece of scripture. And it's this. Where do I fit into this story? See, you might be among those this morning already walking with Jesus.

And you know that there was once a time when you were blind to the truth of the good news of Jesus. Once, maybe years ago, maybe decades ago, there was a time when you had no hope of eternity, no eternal prospects.

[16 : 53] Once upon a time, God felt distant and unknowable. But there was a time, a moment, when, like Bartimaeus, you cried out to God for mercy and God heard your prayer and he saved you.

Now you know you are his child. You love him. Your faith is placed firmly in him. And if that's you today, then I hope these last few moments have just reminded you that all your journey of salvation is an act of God's grace, that it's all for him.

And as we finish our time together and we go out through the week, that you'll be going out rejoicing because of all that God's done. But don't let it stop there.

Turn that moment of thankfulness into a renewed commitment to follow Christ as Bartimaeus did. And if there are things holding you back, things from your old life that you still haven't let go of yet, then maybe today is the day to be like Bartimaeus, to leave them aside and to follow more wholeheartedly.

Maybe you're part of the crowd. Maybe if you're honest, as you think about the crowd, you can see elements in your character that are sadly a little reminiscent of the way the crowd tried to shut Bartimaeus up.

[18 : 16] You see, you don't, if you're honest, have much time for people like him. People who don't know Jesus, who are out in the world, who are the weak and the wounded, the least, the last and the lost.

And yet you've seen this morning that Jesus has unbounded compassion. So maybe something for you to consider is how you might grow in compassion for those who need Jesus but who haven't heard of him yet.

So maybe one thing for you to mull over is how you might pray for God's forgiveness for those times when, if you're honest, you've discouraged people either by your words or your actions from coming to Jesus and spend some time praying that the love of the Father that sent Jesus to the cross might fill your own heart more fully, that God might use you to bring people to him.

Or maybe, like Bartimaeus this morning, you are crushed and down, battered and bruised by life. Maybe you feel unloved and unknown. Maybe you know that there is nothing that you can do to change that and your hope for the future is at an all-time low.

If so, can I encourage you to be like Bartimaeus today and cry out to God for mercy? See, the heart of God the Father is drawn towards those who cry to him in that way.

[19 : 45] The arms of the Father are long enough to reach you in whatever hole or dungeon you find yourself in and however wretched and unlovable you feel that you are.

You need to know today that the love of God is deeper and higher and wider than you can possibly imagine. And know this, whatever shame or sin you are carrying around today, the blood of Jesus is powerful enough to wash away every stain and to bring you confidently into the presence of God. And as you come you'll find as Bartimaeus did a warm welcome a new freedom and a deep joy. And as your past is healed and your hope renewed well then you also will be able to walk the way of Christ with a new name and a privilege that you are now part of God's family. If that's you this morning don't wait. Don't let anything hold you back or anyone hold you back. Cry out to God for mercy. Come and receive all that he has to give for you. Let's pray. Father we rejoice in your mercy. [21 : 01] we thank you that it is there for all who call on the name of the Lord. May we hear and respond and follow you. Lord do your work in our hearts today we pray. Change us and lead us for our good and your glory. Amen.