

Traveling Through Job and Mark 10

For the last month we've taken a broad sweep of the Book of Job for our Old Testament Lessons, and we've spent time in Mark 10. Today we'll wrap up our time with both these passages. Last Sunday's Gospel told of two brothers – James and John – who asked Jesus for high positions in the kingdom He has come to make. They couldn't grasp that the kingdom Jesus came to establish was upside down in comparison to the world's standards. Today we're going to examine the encounter between Jesus and blind Bartimaeus. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to Mark 10:46-52. **Read Mark 10:46-52.**

In both Scripture passages today, we catch a glimpse of unwavering faith in the face of suffering and isolation. When we have a persistent faith – even in the suffering – we open the door to life-changing transformation and to a deeper understanding of God's mercy. In a nutshell that's what we're going to talk about with the rest of our time this morning. We need to understand that the events occurring in Mark 10 are happening as Jesus and His disciples are on the way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. In Mark's account, immediately following our lesson today, comes the Triumphal Entry – Palm Sunday – with Jesus riding into Jerusalem and being hailed as King by the population.

So Jesus has gathered quite a following. He's becoming popular with the people. He's also a real threat to the powers that be in the political-religious establishment in Jerusalem. Our Gospel lesson opens by telling us, "Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging," (Mark 10:46).

Blind Bartimaeus

I want to pause here a minute to think about Bartimaeus. He's blind. We aren't told how that happens. Something happened with him, though, and he lost his sight. When I was in school at Hardin-Houston, there was a kid in my class who gradually lost his sight. He passed away a few years back. During our school years, as he was gradually losing his sight, he had a rough time, just navigating hallways.

We have a student at the school this year who has problems with his vision. My heart goes out for him. Growing up and having six eye surgeries of my own between ages 4 and 12, I know how tough it can be when eyes aren't aligned and working together. It makes it nearly impossible to read. And then of course, Bartimaeus in our story was living in a time when Old Testament ritual laws were still in place, and people

with eye defects – any physical defects for that matter – were barred from serving as priests, even if they were born into the Levites.

We don't know Bartimaeus' backstory though – only that his name means, “son of Timaeus.” It's a Greek and Latin name that means “honored,” or “highly prized.” So apparently Bartimaeus' dad was someone relatively important to the people in that area. And here's his son, sitting on the roadside, begging.

Pretty Hopeless

See, in those days, there was no welfare. No social security. No retirement or pension. And it didn't matter if you were rich and famous – if something happened and you became disabled, too bad. If you were disabled, or you caught a disease – you were put out – even by your own family. You were left homeless and destitute on the edge of town. You became dependent on the kindness of strangers for everything. Sounds pretty hopeless, doesn't it?

So here's Bartimaeus – someone's son – begging on the side of the road.”When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (verse 47). Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is passing by. He calls out to Jesus, without hesitation. Bartimaeus' cry is raw and desperate. He's endured months, possibly years, of blindness and dependence on others for survival.

Pay close attention to what the crowd did. “Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet,” (verse 48a). In other words, “Be quiet Bartimaeus! Jesus doesn't have time for you.” Now that's a polite way to say it. I'm certain there were people in the crowd that day who were more blunt and to the point. The crowd around Bartimaeus urges him to keep quiet, because his suffering somehow disqualifies him from the attention of Jesus.

Sound familiar? The Book of Job speaks about a man who is “blameless and upright,” (Job 1:1), who loses his health, wealth, and family in a tragic sequence of events. Like Bartimaeus, Job experiences the isolation and judgment of the people around him. His wife encourages him to “curse God and die,” (2:9), and his friends repeatedly tell him that he must have sinned to deserve his suffering. In both instances, the person who is suffering faces physical and social burdens – and their voices are unwelcome.

Gone to the Dogs

What does Bartimaeus do? “He shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Mark 10:48b). He cries out even louder than before. Bartimaeus is persistent. That's remarkable, especially considering how he's been rejected and minimized by the crowd. See, he had this disability, and because of that, he was viewed as less than human – maybe more like a dog.

Kendra, the girls, and I have a couple dogs. Jack's a beagle, and he stays outside except when it gets really cold, and Smokey's a mini-bernedoodle who lives in the house with us. Of course, these are our pets. So we treat them fairly well – unless Smokey chews stuff he's not supposed to, and then he might get swatted or zapped with the shock collar. These are dogs I like.

How many of you have Facebook? I've not been regularly on Facebook for a little over a week now because it's a time waster – there's too much to do, and I'm running short on time. Last winter, though, there was the case of the mysterious, uncatchable German Shepherd running around the north end of Sidney. Do you remember that?

People couldn't get close to it, because it would growl, and run away from them. They would try to feed it, and coax it into pens and stuff so that the dog warden could catch it. It would sneak in at night and eat the food, and then tear up bird feeders, and terrorize other animals in the area. I don't know if they ever caught it. The entire north end of Sidney was having fits on Facebook though, because their neighborhoods had "Gone to the Dogs." But the point is, the dog was a nuisance. That particular dog was one that most people did not like.

Bartimaeus the Pest

And that's the view the crowd took with regards to Bartimaeus. He's a pest, a nuisance. They wanted to keep him marginalized and on the fringes of society. He doesn't "fit in" with the rest of us – he's not like us – he should just keep his mouth shut and stay away. Maybe someone even said, "Bartimaeus, you're as good as dead, 'don't trouble the Master,'" like they told Jairus, when he asked Jesus to help his sick daughter who had died, back in Mark 5.

Bartimaeus must have known a little more about Jesus than the crowd did, though. Because he shouted even louder to get Jesus' attention, "Have mercy on me!" This faith-filled cry is met with a response from Jesus. "Jesus said, 'Call him.' So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you,'" (Mark 10:49).

This is where we see the character of Jesus. We see the nature of Christ's heart – He is not put off by Bartimaeus' status, rather, He welcomes the cry of faith. The same is true of Job; though Job wrestles with his understanding of God amid unimaginable suffering, he remains steadfast in his faith, continually seeking answers from God and refusing to curse Him. In both Bible stories, we find faith that defies opposition and refuses to settle in silence.

Bartimaeus could have quieted down, and listened to the crowd. Job could have listened to his friends, and accepted that his suffering was a punishment. Both guys recognize that they can only find healing, truth, and purpose in God. They're great examples to us to hold to our faith – even in times of crisis when we feel overwhelmed – or when others question our hope.

Bartimaeus does something next that reveals his deep faith. “Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus,” (verse 50). That cloak was all the guy had. The totality of his earthly possessions – that was it. He spread that cloak out day after day in the sun, to sit on, for people to throw their change on. And he would wrap up in it to keep warm in the cold nights. He’s leaving his life behind with the expectation that Jesus is going to do something profound in his life which only God alone can do.

What do You Want Me to do for You?

“‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see,’” (verse 51). Several Bible versions translate the word translated as “see” in the NIV as “see again.” The word in Greek indicates that Bartimaeus had previously been able to see, but lost his sight, and now wants it restored. Jesus doesn’t ask Bartimaeus “What would make you happy?” He’s not offering to write a check – I’m sure that would provide some temporary comfort. It’s not to get rid of all the bad people, the mean, rude people around him – another way Bartimaeus could have been comforted, to be sure. Instead, Jesus invites Bartimaeus to put into words what his greatest desire is. And it’s to be able to see again. “Let me see again.”

That’s huge. Because in seeing again, in having his sight restored, Bartimaeus returns to society. He stops being an outcast. He stops depending on people’s charity because he can work again and earn a living. He can go home to his family. But notice what happens next.

“‘Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road,” (verse 52). Bartimaeus is transformed by his healing and his encounter with Jesus Christ and follows Him along the road. In the Gospel narratives there are a few other people who leave possessions and families behind to “follow Jesus.” People like Peter, James, John, Matthew. What do we generally call them? The Apostles, the disciples.

Bartimaeus followed Christ to Jerusalem, and according to Church tradition he was still in town when Jesus was crucified. He became a disciple – a follower – of Jesus Christ. God met a blind, suffering man with compassion, and transformed him. In this story, what have we missed? Would we have been in the crowd, telling Bartimaeus to keep quiet when he started shouting? Or would we have seen him as Jesus saw him? Not as a problem to be solved or an issue to debate, but as a human being, with the ability to decide, determine, and choose.

Let Me See

“Let me see,” Bartimaeus cried out that day, long ago, in Jericho. Maybe that should be our plea to God, too. It comes down to what type of people we are. Are we among those who are telling the outsider, the stranger, and the marginalized to be quiet? Or are we those who say, “Cheer up! He’s calling you!”

Tuesday night is New Hope's turn at the Alpha Center, to provide a chapel service and meal to some of Sidney and Shelby County's marginalized people. Many of them are homeless, and battling a variety of mental illnesses. Sometimes, like Job's friends, we become calloused to the suffering around us, and say things to the effect that "they've made poor decisions in the past which have resulted in their current hardships." But friends, that's not for you and I to decide. Only God alone is the Judge.

We are called to serve. You are needed there, to help with meal prep, to serve the people, and to be a witness of the love of Christ through your interactions with them. And, in a powerful, mysterious way, we live into another statement Jesus made in the Gospel, "By their fruits you will know them," (Matt. 7:20).

We Also Have Blindnesses

We have blindnesses that need to be healed. It's a sure thing that we need to hear the voice of Jesus calling us and asking us what we need. We are part of those to whom He has come. But we often – knowingly or unknowingly – hoard the Message, the Voice, the Partner with whom we walk as though He were our special possession and not the One who came for the whole world. Like James and John in last week's lesson, we want to claim a place of honor as our right.

But what walking with Jesus teaches us – and it's a hard lesson for us to hear and to learn, because we can be stubborn mules at times – is that we aren't the ones guiding the path. He is. We aren't the ones who determine where to go. He does. We surrendered that right and that particular responsibility when we decided to follow Him.

God hears our cries – but also meets us where we are. Whether we find physical healing, or spiritual insight, we have an assurance that God is present. God is faithful. Bartimaeus saw that. And so, like Job, like Bartimaeus, take courage! God hears your cries. "Cheer up! He's calling you." And He'll use you to do great Kingdom things – if you let Him!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You heard the cry of the blind beggar when others would have silenced him. Teach us to be attentive to the voices others ignore, that we might respond through the power of the Spirit to heal the afflicted and to welcome the abandoned for Your sake, and the sake of the Gospel. Amen.