

Mark 10:46-52

I wonder how many times the healing of blind Bartimaeus has been told from pulpits around the world and down through time? I wonder how many times his story has been told in Sunday schools and youth groups? I wonder how many times Bartimaeus told his story to his friends and to anyone who would give him an ear? One imagines you could not number them. It is such a great story of a man's faith.

There are four things about Bartimaeus' faith that are worth being reminded of again and again.

Firstly it was a faith that did not rest on "seeing is believing".

How many times do we hear people say, "When I see it then I will believe it?" That is the craziest statement because every day we act on things we do not and cannot see. Most of us will say we have never seen electricity but we know it can do extraordinary things and by faith let it switch on lights or cool us down.

Bartimaeus by virtue of his blindness could never have seen Jesus do miracles but after about three years of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem he had concluded that what he heard about Jesus was true. This was in stark contrast to the people of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had been teaching and healing throughout Galilee and the hometown was very impressed with his ability to teach and by the rumours swirling around him but they would not believe in him. They took offence at him for no better reason than that they knew him and his family as locals. They would not believe and thus Jesus could do hardly any miracles there (Mark 6:1-6).

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There is every good reason for people to believe in Jesus today but some people just won't believe. There is good reason to believe that the New Testament documents have been transmitted to us reliably, that the writers wrote the truth about Jesus, that he really died and rose again and that what he claimed about himself is true. Yet despite these good reasons for faith, some will not believe because they have some gripe with the church or because of some other irrelevant reason.

However Bartimaeus' belief was also a thought-out belief. He did not just believe Jesus could cure him because he was a miracle worker but rather he had thought about what he had heard Jesus said and did and concluded that Jesus was in fact the promised Son of David. He had heard the news about Jesus and reflected upon his person and work and concluded that he was the promised Messiah. In this respect his faith was grounded in what could be reasonably taken as fact and then reflected upon with the scripture promises of the Old Testament prophets in mind and arriving at the conclusion that Jesus was the promised Messiah. It is this type of faith that is commended. We recall the words of the risen Jesus to Thomas, the doubter, "You have believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe".

Secondly it was a faith that would not be discouraged.

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming, he made a point of being beside the road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho. The multitude of pilgrims and the many disciples would travel that way to the Passover celebrations. Bartimaeus would intercept him on his journey. However he had many obstacles to overcome in gaining Jesus' attention.

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Jesus was focussed in his travel. Mark writes a little earlier that Jesus was walking ahead of his disciples in such a determined manner that the disciples were not only amazed but frightened. Jesus was so focussed that he called his disciples around him and for a third time explained that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise (10:32-35). Diverting Jesus from his life's calling to heal someone would be difficult.

The crowd would also prove to be a tough obstacle. The sheer noise of a large crowd travelling with Jesus would also make getting his attention difficult. Not only that but as he was calling out, many in the crowd told Bartimaeus to desist. Mark tells us Bartimaeus met the rebukes of the crowd by crying out all the more. He believed the one who could liberate him from his world of darkness was passing by and he was going to make every effort to secure that enlightened world by Jesus.

His faith was not going to be dampened by discouragements from man or even eternal purposes of God. He was like the Syrophenician woman who desperately wanted her demon-possessed daughter healed. She desired, like the dogs under the table, to receive the children's crumbs (7:24-30). Bartimaeus was determined and his perseverance was rewarded. Blind he may have been but when called by Jesus, he immediately sprang to his feet and bounded toward his voice.

Thirdly it was a faith clear in its intent.

When Jesus asked him what Bartimaeus wanted him to do for him there was no long silence or being overawed by the occasion. He knew exactly what he wanted and was confident Jesus could do what he so desperately wanted. He boldly petitioned Jesus, "Rabboni, let me receive my sight".

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Jesus response was immediate. He received his sight. The Messiah had come. He offered sight to the blind. The time of salvation was upon Israel (Lk 4:16-21). What Nazareth would not receive, Bartimaeus did receive. He believed it wholeheartedly and would not be deflected by anything, including any last minute doubt.

Fourthly he followed Jesus.

Bartimaeus having received his sight did NOT go off with his family or mates to celebrate his new-found sight. He certainly was thankful for his sight but his chief concern was to receive the Messiah and not just the sight he would give and so, ambiguously, Mark writes Bartimaeus “followed him in the way”.

We have every reason to believe this WAY, was the way of Christ, the way of Bartimaeus' cross, just as Jesus was on the way to his cross. There were many, many people healed by Jesus and Mark records many of them but there are only three who are called by name, presumably because they were well known in the church when his gospel was written in Rome. One of those names is Bartimaeus.

Friends, today is the day of salvation. Today is the day for forgiveness of sins, for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for life eternal. Believe in the Messiah, don't be deflected from the gift of life in him by anyone or anything.