

Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43

DIG: What is significant about the title Bartimaeus uses for Jesus as the Lord prepared to enter Jericho? How did that cry demonstrate faith that the crowd lacked? How is Bartimaeus different than the young rabbinical student (see II - The Rich Young Ruler)? Why are these two singled out for healing? Once healed, what do they do? Why? How does this relate to the concern of the talmidim? Why is this the last miracle recorded before the Triumphal Entry?

REFLECT: Have you felt Yeshua is too busy for you? Why? Is God out of the miracle-making business? In what ways do you feel spiritually blind? How are you less blind than you were six months ago? How has the Messiah opened your spiritual eyes? If Christ asked: **What do you want me to do for you?** what would you say?

Jesus was now on His way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with His twelve talmidim. Infinitely more important than that, however, He was going to suffer and die (Matthew 20:18-19a). He would be celebrating Pesach for the last time and then give Himself as the one, final, perfect Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world (Hebrews 7:27).

Bartimaeus was an example of how that nation of Isra'el *should have* responded to the Messiah. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Torah-teachers (pharisaic Judaism in general), along with the Great Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) were all spiritually blind. They needed to cry out for help, and the nation was surely in need of it. But they did not. If they'd only had **faith** in Christ, Isra'el would have been healed of her spiritual blindness.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Jesus' miraculous healing of **two blind men** in the vicinity of Jericho. But the accounts appear to be contradictory. **Mark and Luke** mention only one **blind man**, while **Matthew** mentions two. And **Luke** records that the miracle took place as **Messiah approached Jericho**, while **Matthew and Mark** record that it took place as **Jesus and His apostles were leaving Jericho**. Some see a contradiction between **Luke's** account, and **Matthew and Mark's** rendering.

The Jewish historian Josephus actually gives us the answer. The accounts are not contradictory, but offer different details. **Matthew** mentions **two blind men**, while **Mark and Luke** refer to the more prominent of the **two**, whom **Mark** actually identifies as

Bartimaeus. As for the relationship of the miracle to **Jericho**, in **The life of Christ** there were actually two **Jericho's**, the ancient settlement and the much newer Roman town (Josephus - War 4:459).¹²¹⁹ **Yeshua** may have been **leaving** the still inhabited city of **Jericho** mentioned in the TaNaKh (**Joshua 6; Second Kings 2:4-5, 15-18**), which was located near Elisha's spring, and approaching the B'rit Chadashah site of **Jericho** one mile north. It was built by Herod as the site of his winter palace, about five miles west on the banks of the Jordan river in the fertile Wadi Qelt and took advantage of the low elevation and warm weather. The name **Jericho**, meaning *perfumed*, describes the fragrant fruit trees and crops that were commonly grown there.¹²²⁰

As Jesus and His apostles were leaving the ancient city and approached the newer Roman Jericho, a large crowd of pilgrims followed Him going to the City of David for the Passover. In doing so, He put Himself under the jurisdiction of the Roman governor and the Sanhedrin. Just then, two blind men were sitting by the roadside, a common sight (no pun intended) in or near wealthy Roman city of Jericho, when they heard that Yeshua was going by (Matthew 20:29-30a; Mark 10:46a; Luke 18:35a)!

Mark focused on one, who apparently was spokesman for the **two** of them. **Bartimaeus**, an Aramaic name meaning **the son of Timaeus** (Hebrew: *bar-Timai*), **was sitting by the roadside begging (Mark 10:46b)**. The name **Bartimaeus** certainly adds to the drama of this encounter, because it actually means *son of the unclean*. Although **he** was probably unknown as a **blind** beggar, it is possible that **he** later became highly respected by the early messianic community and well known to **Mark** and those to whom **he** wrote. **Mark** could have been saying to **his** readers, in effect, "And do you know who one of those **blind men** was? Our dear friend and brother in **the Lord, Bartimaeus!**"

The trampling of the feet of the crowd told **Bartimaeus** that something unusual was happening. Hearing that **Yeshua** was **passing by**, **Bartimaeus** and his friend **asked what was happening**. When they heard that it was the famous **Jesus of Nazareth**, they cried out relentlessly for His attention: **Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us (Mattityahu 20:30; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:35b-38)!** **This title was, and is, common for the Messiah who would be the greatest descendant of King David, thus the messianic title Meshiach ben David was often used (Tractate Sukkah 52a; also see Mv - The Jewish Concept of Two Messiah's).**¹²²¹ This is the first time **Mark** uses the term **Son of David**. The fact that **Bartimaeus** used that title probably indicated that despite his physical blindness, **he** believed **Jesus** to be Israel's **Messiah (Isaiah 35:5, 32:3-4)**, in contrast to the blind unbelief of most Jews.¹²²²

The uproar and noise from the two outcasts was more than the crowd could tolerate, and they rebuked them and told the men to be quiet, possibly thinking that their cries spoiled the harmony of the moment. The word rebuked is in the imperfect tense, meaning that they continually rebuked them. They probably thought, "Why should these beggars make everybody miserable and take all the attention away from this important Rabbi." But they shouted all the louder, and this time they addressed Him much more reverently as Lord. The Hebrew could be *Adon* and thus thought to be addressing Him as *sir*. But since the context was their belief that Yeshua was the Son of David, this indicates that they cried out: ADONAI, Son of David, have mercy on us (Matt 20:31; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39)!

Jesus stopped and ordered the two men to be brought to Him. And He said to the crowd: **Call them**. So they called to the blind men, saying: **Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you**. Throwing their robes aside, which were probably spread before them to collect alms, they jumped to their feet and came (probably ran) to Messiah needing only the sound of His voice to guide them (Mark 10:49-50; Luke 18:40).

When they came near, Yeshua asked them the all-important question: **What do you want Me to do for you?** The question was not asked to get information. Christ already knew what they wanted, but His question encouraged them to express their personal need since that was the basis on which His miracles were being performed after His rejection by the nation (see En - **Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry**). "Rabbi," they answered, "We want to see". After expressing their personal need, Jesus had compassion on them and accordingly touched their eyes, even though one of them was called *son of the unclean*, saying: **Receive your sight. Go, your faith has healed you** (Matthew 20:32-34a; Mark 10:51-52a; Luke 18:41-43). The perfect tense emphasizes a completed action (their physical healing), with continuing results (their salvation). Some other rabbi or anyone in the animated crowd would never have reached out to touch those street beggars. But Jesus Christ was sent from the Father, revealing HaShem's heart for the people He loves.

Jesus used many different ways to perform His healing miracles. There was no formula. Sometimes the afflicted person was asked to do something on his or her own. Sometimes the Lord simply spoke a word, and sometimes He performed some action, such as putting His fingers in deaf ears or making salve from mud and anointing blind eyes. In this case, Christ touched their eyes. He healed with a word or a touch, He healed instantaneously, He healed organic maladies from birth, and He raised the dead.

It is significant that among the many self-proclaimed faith healers of history, including those of today, there is a significant absence of restoring sight and raising the dead. Many other afflictions can be faked or can be given temporary improvement by the power of suggestion working in a desperate mind. But where are the miracles of vision given to the **blind**? Where are the people whose eyes are permanently damaged or completely missing who have regained their sight by the laying on of the healer's hands? And where are the people who have been raised from the dead?¹²²³ When we *do* hear claims of raising the dead today, it always seems to be in some far off place. In today's world of the twenty-four hour news cycle, why is there no record of someone's life or sight restored. You would think that would be pretty newsworthy. But don't worry, **God** is still in the miracle-making business, no more so than the miracle of a new birth in **Christ** (see **Bw** - **What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith**), which happens somewhere every day.

Immediately they received their sight and followed Jesus along the road praising God (Matthew 20:34b; Mark 10:52b; Luke 18:43a). This word **along the road, or the way** is an important theme in **Mark's** explanation of discipleship (**Mark 8:27, 9:33, 10:17, 32 and 52, 12:14**). The imperfect tense gives us a picture of the joyful **Bartimaeus** and his companion continually following **Yeshua** in **the crowd** that was on its way to **Jerusalem**. Not only were the physical eyes of **the beggars** opened, but also the spiritual eyes of many in that **Jericho crowd**. **When all the people saw it, they also praised God (Luke 18:43b).**

Bartimaeus is a picture of early discipleship. **He** recognized his inability, trusted **Jesus** as **the One** to give him **God's** gracious mercy, **and when he had his sight restored he followed the Lord** as a loyal disciple. The fact that **they** had **their sight** restored suggests that these **men** had once been able to **see**. If so, **they** were more keenly aware of what **they** were missing than if **they** never had sight.¹²²⁴ It was ironic that although **Bartimaeus** was physically **blind**, he recognized **Yeshua** as **the Meshiach**, while the Great Sanhedrin and most of the other Jews in Isra'el were totally spiritually blinded.

This is a summary of **Mark 8:27** to **Mark 10:52**, just like the healing of a **blind** man at Bethsaida was a summary of **Mark 1:16** to **Mark 8:26**. It was not an accident that this is the last healing miracle that was recorded before the Triumphal Entry. **Bartimaeus was an example of what should have happened in the City of David; but his faithfulness stood in sharp contrast to the reception the Messiah would eventually receive in Yerushalayim.**