

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2021

MARK 10:46-52

TRADITIONAL

THE STORY OF BLIND BARTIMAEUS ACTS AS A BOOKEND IN MARK'S GOSPEL. IT CLOSES OUT A LONG SECTION THAT BEGAN BACK IN CHAPTER EIGHT, WHEN JESUS HEALED ANOTHER BLIND MAN – ONLY THAT TIME, JESUS HAD TO SPIT TWICE BEFORE THE MAN COULD SEE. THIS WHOLE SECTION HAS COME TO ITS CLIMAX HERE IN CHAPTER TEN, WHERE WE'VE BEEN WALKING WITH JESUS THIS MONTH. THE ITINERARY JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING, AS THEY TRAVEL FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM, HAS BEEN PRETTY ... *EVENTFUL*.

THEY START OFF ON THIS 85-MILE HIKE, STOPPING OUTSIDE CAPERNAUM LONG ENOUGH FOR JESUS TO TEACH ABOUT DIVORCE AND WELCOME THE CHILDREN WHO COME TO HIM. BUT THEY ARE SOON ON THE ROAD AGAIN, WHEN THEY RUN INTO THE RICH YOUNG RULER, AND JESUS TELLS THEM HOW DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR THE WEALTHY TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

AS IF THAT WEREN'T UPSETTING ENOUGH TO HIS DISCIPLES, JESUS GOES ON TO EXPLAIN – FOR THE THIRD TIME SINCE THAT FIRST BLIND MAN WAS HEALED – HOW HE WILL BE ARRESTED, BEATEN, AND KILLED, ONCE THEY

GET TO JERUSALEM. BUT ON TOWARD JERUSALEM THEY GO, AND ALONG THE WAY, JAMES AND JOHN ASK A SPECIAL FAVOR OF JESUS – WHICH DOESN'T MAKE THEM VERY POPULAR WITH THE OTHER DISCIPLES – AND JESUS TAKES THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH THEM HOW THOSE WHO WOULD BE GREAT MUST BECOME SERVANTS OF ALL.

IN THE SPAN OF FORTY-FIVE VERSES, WE'VE TRAVELLED FROM CAPERNAUM TO JERICO, JUST 15 MILES FROM JERUSALEM. THIS IS WHERE WE FINALLY MEET THE BLIND SON OF TIMAEUS, BEGGING BESIDE THE ROAD.

THEY CAME TO JERICO. THIS IS, QUITE LITERALLY, THE TURNING POINT. JERICO IS WHERE YOU STOP GOING SOUTH AND HEAD WEST, BACK OVER THE JORDAN RIVER. THE DISCIPLES ARE ABOUT A DAY AND A HALF AWAY FROM JERUSALEM. THE ONLY THING THAT LIES BETWEEN JERICO AND THE HOLY CITY, IS THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH. THEY HAVE JUST MADE THE TURN, AND COME THROUGH THE CITY OF JERICO, WHEN THEY MEET THE BLIND BEGGAR, BARTIMAEUS.

WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT BEGGING WAS NOT ADDRESSED IN TALMUDIC LAW. THERE IS NO HEBREW WORD FOR BEGGAR IN THE OT – WHEN WE SEE THAT WORD IN OUR ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS, IT USUALLY STANDS FOR THE HEBREW WORD THAT MEANS A WANDERER OR VAGABOND WHO ASKS FOR BREAD.[1]

JEWISH LAW DIDN'T ADDRESS BEGGING, BECAUSE THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN NO NEED FOR IT. IF PEOPLE TOOK CARE OF THEIR NEEDY FAMILY MEMBERS THE WAY THE LAW INSTRUCTED, NO ONE WOULD NEED TO BEG. YET, HERE WE HAVE A BLIND BEGGAR ON THE EDGE OF THE ROAD. AND HE KNOWS SOMETHING THE DISCIPLES CLOSEST TO JESUS APPARENTLY DON'T KNOW YET. HE KNOWS WHO JESUS REALLY IS.

BARTIMAEUS RECOGNIZES JESUS AS MESSIAH, THOUGH. HE KNOWS THAT JESUS HAS THE AUTHORITY AND POWER TO HEAL. AND HEALING IS WHAT BARTIMAEUS WANTS.

HE DOESN'T WANT A HANDOUT. HE DOESN'T WANT PITY. "THE PHARISEES WANTED TO OUTSMART AND TRAP HIM, THE RICH YOUNG MAN WANTED ETERNAL LIFE, JAMES AND JOHN WANTED GLORY, BUT THIS GUY, BLIND AND PARKED ON THE ROADSIDE, WANTS ONLY MERCY. HE DOESN'T EVEN SPECIFY THE NATURE OF THE MERCY UNTIL JESUS PUTS THE QUESTION TO HIM PLAINLY."<sup>[2]</sup> HE WANTS TO SEE AGAIN.

HE KNOWS HE CAN'T SOLVE HIS OWN PROBLEM, BUT HE KNOWS THAT BEGGING ONLY MEETS THE SUPERFICIAL NEEDS OF HIS POVERTY. IT DOESN'T ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THAT POVERTY – HIS BLINDNESS. HE KNOWS HE NEEDS A MAJOR CHANGE IN HIS LIFE, AND THE ONLY

THING THAT STANDS BETWEEN BARTIMAEUS AND THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS IS ... THE DISCIPLES.

THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT. IT'S THE PEOPLE CROWDING AROUND JESUS AS HE LEAVES JERICHO WHO DISCOURAGE BARTIMAEUS FROM CALLING OUT TO BE HEALED. IT'S THE CLOSEST FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO TELL BARTIMAEUS TO BE QUIET, TO LEAVE THE MASTER ALONE. THE VERY PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE CLOSEST TO JESUS ARE THE SAME PEOPLE WHO ARE KEEPING OTHERS AWAY FROM HIM.

THESE GOOD CHURCH PEOPLE – FOLKS LIKE US – ARE JUST TRYING TO KEEP THE RIFFRAFF OUT. THESE GOOD CHURCH PEOPLE – FOLKS JUST LIKE US – ONLY WANT THE BEST FOR JESUS. THEY DON'T WANT HIM TO BE PESTERED BY A NOISY, BOTHERSOME BLIND MAN WHO IS CREATING A TRAFFIC JAM THERE IN THE ROAD. MOSTLY, THEY DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT GIVING UP THEIR OWN SPOT NEAR THE MASTER, SO THAT SOMEONE ELSE CAN GET NEAR TO HIM.

BUT NOTICE WHAT JESUS DOES? HE STOPS WALKING. HE STANDS *STILL*. HE LOOKS BEYOND THE CROWD PRESSING AROUND HIM AND MAKES ROOM FOR ONE MORE. HE SAYS, "CALL HIM OVER HERE." THESE DISCIPLES, WHO SEE THEMSELVES AS JESUS' MOST LOYAL FOLLOWERS, WHO JUST ASKED HIM TO LET THEM SIT NEXT TO HIM IN GLORY,

THESE FAITHFUL FEW WHO WERE SHUSHING BARTIMAEUS MOMENTS AGO – THEY SUDDENLY HAVE TO ACT AS IF THEY CARE.

WHEN JESUS SAYS, “CALL HIM OVER HERE,” HE IS REMINDING THE DISCIPLES THAT FOLLOWING MEANS INVITING OTHERS TO FOLLOW. IT MEANS WELCOMING OTHERS INTO THE GROUP. IT MEANS MAKING ROOM FOR SOMEONE WHO WAS AN OUTSIDER AND INVITING THAT PERSON TO BECOME AN INSIDER.

WHEN BARTIMAEUS LEARNS THAT JESUS IS CALLING FOR HIM, HE THROWS OFF HIS CLOAK AND HURRIES TOWARD JESUS. AND JESUS ASKS BARTIMAEUS A SIMPLE, BUT REMARKABLE QUESTION:

*“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”*

WHAT MAKES IT REMARKABLE IS THE FACT THAT JESUS JUST ASKED THIS SAME QUESTION OF JAMES AND JOHN, WHEN THEY ASKED IF THEY COULD SIT AT HIS RIGHT AND LEFT IN THE KINGDOM. AND ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT JAMES AND JOHN PULL JESUS ASIDE SO OTHERS WON'T HEAR THEM ASK FOR PLACES OF HONOR? BUT THE OUTCAST BLIND BEGGAR BARTIMAEUS HOLLERS OUT LOUD FOR MERCY, AND HE DOESN'T CARE WHO HEARS HIS CRY.

WHEN JESUS ASKS HIM THE SAME QUESTION HE ASKED JAMES AND JOHN, IT HAS A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT RING TO IT: *“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”*

HIS REQUEST IS SIMPLE. HE WANTS HIS EYESIGHT BACK. UNLIKE THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND, BARTIMAEUS REMEMBERS WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE ABLE TO SEE. HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S BEEN MISSING.

IT'S GOT ME THINKING. . . WHAT IF I ASKED THIS QUESTION TO THE NEXT BEGGAR I ENCOUNTERED, “WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?” AND WHAT IF HE SAID, “I NEED \$10.” THAT STRIKES ME AS AN INVITATION TO PERPETUATE HIS PROBLEM. IT'S THE EASIEST THING FOR HIM TO ASK FOR AND FRANKLY, THE EASIEST THING I COULD GIVE HIM. BUT I THINK IT'S PROBABLY NOT THE KIND OF THING JESUS IS GOING FOR.

NOW, WHAT IF HE SAID, “I NEED TO GET SOMETHING TO EAT.” IN MY OPINION, THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF FAITH JESUS IS LOOKING FOR EITHER. STILL, I COULD GO GET HIM SOME FOOD AND IT WOULD BE A FAITHFUL ACT OF SERVICE.

BUT WHAT IF HE SAID, “I NEED HELP GETTING A JOB.” THIS IS WHERE IT GETS HARDER. THIS IS THE KIND OF FAITH JESUS LOOKS FOR AMONG THOSE IN NEED—PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR REAL CHANGE, WHO HAVE THOUGHT THROUGH WHAT THEY MOST NEED AND BECAUSE THEY

KNOW THEY ARE STUCK WITHOUT HELP, THEY ARE BOLD ENOUGH TO ASK FOR IT. DO YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENS NOW? HIS FAITH HIT THE BALL INTO MY COURT AND NOW IT BECOMES ABOUT MY FAITH.

FOR A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST, THIS IS WHERE THE PROVERBIAL ROAD MEETS THE RUBBER. HONESTLY, IT'S SO MUCH EASIER FOR ME TO WAIT FOR THE LIGHT TO TURN GREEN AND MOVE ON AND JUST TELL MYSELF THE STORY ABOUT THIS GUY THAT I HAVE ALWAYS TOLD MYSELF— THAT HE'S WHERE HE IS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HIS CHOICES AND IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM AND THE PRICE OF HELPING HIM IS JUST TOO HIGH AND BESIDES, I GIVE MY MONEY TO THE CHURCH WHO IS SUPPOSED TO HELP SOLVE THESE SITUATIONS.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING? IN WHAT WAYS ARE WE "BLIND" TO GOD'S KINGDOM? HOW HAVE WE LOST *OUR* VISION? HOW DO OUR IDEAS OF "WHO BELONGS IN CHURCH" PREVENT US FROM SEEING THE BARTIMAEUSES AROUND US, THE PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS WHO WANT TO BE HEALED BY GOD'S MERCY?

IT DOES NO GOOD TO ANYONE WHEN WE ONLY OFFER THIN SOLUTIONS, WHEN WE HELP JUST ENOUGH TO MAKE OURSELVES FEEL GOOD ABOUT DOING *SOMETHING*. "THAT KIND OF SERVING ONLY MAKES THE PROBLEM WORSE. J.D.

WALT WRITES, "WE MUST PRESS INTO THE DEEPER NEED OF THE OTHER. THIS IS NOT EASY. IT GETS MESSY. ... IT MEANS TAKING ON THE MIND AND MENTALITY OF JESUS WHO TEACHES US THAT WE COME 'NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE'." [4] THE REASON WE SERVE ISN'T TO MAKE *OURSELVES* FEEL BETTER; WE SERVE *IN ORDER TO SHARE CHRIST*.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR VISION, TO BEGIN TO SEE AS JESUS SEES? AND HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN JESUS CALLS *US* OVER AND ASKS WHAT WE WANT HIM TO DO FOR US? ARE WE BOLD ENOUGH, AND HUMBLE ENOUGH, TO SAY, "LORD, LET ME SEE AGAIN?"

JESUS TELLS HIM TO 'GO' JUST AS HE HAS TOLD OTHERS WHO HAVE RECEIVED MIRACLES OF HEALING TO GO. BUT THIS TIME, THE ONE BEING TOLD TO GO DOESN'T GO BACK OR GO AWAY. HE FOLLOWS JESUS *ON THE WAY*. HIS FAITH HAS HEALED HIM.

BARTIMAEUS GOES FROM "SITTING BESIDE THE ROAD" TO "FOLLOWING JESUS ALONG THE ROAD." HE JOINS THE OTHERS WHO ARE FOLLOWING JESUS TO JERUSALEM, AND THAT MEANS TO THE CROSS.

THE DISCIPLES WANTED TO PROTECT THEIR PRIVILEGED PLACE NEXT TO JESUS, BUT JESUS OPENS HIS ARMS TO ALL WHO WILL TRUST IN HIM. WHATEVER HAS BEEN

PREVENTING YOU FROM COMING TO JESUS, YOU CAN THROW IT ASIDE JUST AS BARTIMAEUS TOSSED AWAY HIS CLOAK. THERE'S ROOM FOR YOU AT THE FOOT OF JESUS' CROSS.

AND WHATEVER HAS BEEN KEEPING YOU FROM WELCOMING OTHERS TO JOIN YOU AT THE CROSS OF

JESUS, KNOW THAT YOU CAN LET GO OF YOUR NEED TO BE FIRST, SO YOU CAN BE THE SERVANT OF ALL, AND THERE WILL STILL BE ROOM FOR YOU, NO MATTER HOW MANY YOU INVITE INTO CHRIST'S PRESENCE.

MAY WE HAVE EARS TO HEAR, AND EYES TO SEE, THAT THERE IS GLORY ENOUGH AND MERCY ENOUGH FOR ALL OF US.