

## Bartimaeus. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 17 June 2015.

This morning we continue with our series of talks about Bible characters who feature in the gospels of the New Testament. Last week we met a blind man who our Lord healed in Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> and this week we meet a very different blind man who our Lord healed some time later<sup>2</sup> at Jericho.<sup>3</sup>

First then, the Bible narrative.<sup>4</sup>

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead of His disciples; and they were astonished, and as they followed they were afraid. And taking the twelve aside, He began to tell them the things which were about to happen to Him.<sup>5</sup>

And they came<sup>6</sup> to Jericho.<sup>7</sup> And as Jesus was going out from Jericho along with His disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus<sup>8</sup> a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus,<sup>9</sup> was sitting beside the road.<sup>10</sup>

And hearing a crowd travelling through the city, he asked what this was.

And they reported to him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.<sup>11</sup>

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And many rebuked him, telling him to be quiet. But he cried out all the more, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"<sup>12</sup>

And Jesus stood<sup>13</sup> still, and commanded him to be brought to Him.<sup>14</sup>

Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Have courage, rise up; He is calling you".<sup>15</sup>

And casting away his garment,<sup>16</sup> he rose up<sup>17</sup> and came to Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

And when he drew near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Lord,<sup>19</sup> that I may receive my sight".<sup>20</sup>

And Jesus, moved with compassion,<sup>21</sup> said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you".

And immediately<sup>22</sup> he received his sight, and followed Him on the road<sup>23</sup>, glorifying God.<sup>24</sup>

No doubt Bartimaeus was something of a fixture in ancient Jericho. And I guess that the description given of him in the gospel account just about says it all; he was 'a blind beggar'.

For Bartimaeus was a stranger not only to any of the benefits of wealth, but to any of the beauties of nature. Jericho itself was a most attractive city, a popular resort known in biblical days as 'the city of palms'.<sup>25</sup> And on the spring day when our Lord visited Bartimaeus's home town, the gardens there would have been a blaze of colour, with not only the Jordan valley but the majestic hills of Moab clearly visible in the distance. But what were all these bright and glorious sights to a man who couldn't see?

Yet, though unable to see, Bartimaeus could hear. It was nearing the time of the great annual Jewish Feast of the Passover, and, as every year, there was a constant stream of pilgrims making their way through Jericho *en route* to the Holy City. But, on this particular day, Bartimaeus's ears told him that something unusual was afoot<sup>26</sup> – that there was the sound of far more footsteps than normal,<sup>27</sup> and that the many voices around him sounded very different to the customary hubbub of excited conversations and songs. And so, his curiosity aroused, as we read, Bartimaeus 'asked what this was'.

The name 'Jesus' was very common in New Testament days,<sup>28</sup> and so, in their response, members of the crowd identified our Lord in the usual way, by reference to His home town;<sup>29</sup> 'Jesus of Nazareth' is 'passing by', they said. That was enough for 'the blind beggar'! Based no doubt on reports which he had heard of our Lord and His mighty works – very likely including the earlier healing in nearby Jerusalem of the man who had been born blind<sup>30</sup> (of whom we heard last week) – Bartimaeus recognised Him as Israel's long awaited Messiah, and loudly addressed Him, not as 'Jesus of Nazareth', but by His royal title 'Jesus, Son of David' ... 'have mercy on me!'. Clearly in this blind man's reckoning, this was none other than the one of whom the Old Testament prophet had written over seven centuries before, 'Behold, your God will come ... and save<sup>31</sup> you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened'. Bartimaeus may have had blind eyes, but he certainly didn't have blind faith – his faith was focussed clearly on Jesus.

But Bartimaeus's loud and noisy appeal for our Lord's mercy and pity didn't go down at all well with some of the crowd, who, possibly wanting to protect the Saviour from the disturbance, sharply told the blind man to 'be quiet'.<sup>32</sup> Why, as they saw it, should this nuisance of a beggar force *his* misery and troubles on the attention of the great Prophet from Nazareth?<sup>33</sup>

But Bartimaeus would have none of it. He refused to be gagged, and decided to 'go for it! No-one was going to deprive him of his one chance to escape from his world of darkness. It was now or never; so 'He cried out all the more, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And then we read what to me are four simply *amazing* words,<sup>34</sup> 'And Jesus stood still'. And you may wonder why I describe these words as 'simply amazing'? Well, just think for a moment.

As we read, our Lord was, at that very moment, 'on the road, going up to Jerusalem' – possibly still purposefully striding ahead of His disciples<sup>35</sup> – and what, pray, did Jerusalem hold for Him when He arrived there? Did we not read that 'taking the twelve aside, He began to tell them the things which were about to happen to Him'? And what were these 'things'? That he would then, and I quote, 'be delivered up to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will deliver Him over to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him'.<sup>36</sup>

He had indeed forewarned His disciples of this on many earlier occasions, but we are able to trace the reason for His forthcoming suffering at Jerusalem far further back than His words to His disciples. After all, it was for this that He had come into the world in the first place. For the cross which awaited Him at Jerusalem lay at the very heart and centre of God's eternal purpose to save fallen man. Jesus is, that is, 'going up to Jerusalem' to perform the most momentous work ever!

His journey had started in heaven, and the end was now in sight. For Jerusalem, His destination, lay no more than 15 miles away, and in just over a week's time He will be crucified there. There had never been a more important journey than this, nor a more important time than now; and nothing – but nothing – could deter, deflect or delay Him.

'Nothing could delay Him', did I say? And yet – marvel of all marvels – the prayer of one blind beggar stopped Him in His tracks!<sup>37</sup> Do you wonder then that I describe the statement 'And Jesus stood still' as 'four simply amazing words'?<sup>38</sup>

You may well know that this coming Lord's day, being the Summer Solstice,<sup>39</sup> will be the longest day of the year. But the Old Testament records a far more impressive 'longest day' than that. In brief, the book of Joshua records how that, in response to Joshua's prayer for more daylight hours to enable Israel to complete mopping-up operations after a spectacular victory over some Canaanite kings ... how that 'the sun stood still in the midst of heaven ... until the nation took vengeance on their enemies .... There has been no day like it before or since'.<sup>40</sup>

Impressive, yes. But I tell you, more impressive by far than the day when the sun in the heavens 'stood still' in response to the call<sup>41</sup> of Israel's military leader was that moment when the Son of God Himself 'stood still' in response to the call of a penniless blind man.<sup>42</sup>

And you heard the sequel. In response to our Lord's question, 'What do you want me to do for you?', Bartimaeus replied without hesitation, 'that I may receive my sight', and Jesus, we then read, 'moved with compassion, said ... "Receive your sight"', and 'Boom' – no surgery – no bandages – no ointment – 'immediately he received his sight'.<sup>43</sup> Bartimaeus could see! He could see the staring crowd, the waving palm trees, the hills of Moab, and, best of all, the face of Jesus.

And the last we see of Bartimaeus is when he, who had once sat '*beside* the road', 'followed Him (Jesus) *on* the road' – 'on the road', that is, which led to Jerusalem, and where, I suspect, this once blind man saw Jesus die – to 'save' him from more than his physical blindness.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John 9. 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> The healing in John 9 took place sometime during or prior to the Feast of Dedication in the December of the previous year, John 10. 22. The healing of Bartimaeus took place immediately before so-called 'Holy Week' in April, Mark 10. 46; 11. 1. ('The story of blind Bartimaeus forms in the three synoptic gospels the beginning of the last days at Jerusalem', J. N. Darby : *Letters : Volume II*, Page 252. Accessible at ... <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/letters/52156F.html>.)

<sup>3</sup> Compare the blind man healed at Bethsaida sometime earlier, Mark 8. 26. It may be no coincidence that Mark frames the journey to Jerusalem with two healing stories about blindness (Mark 8. 22-26; 10. 46-52), and this because that journey focuses largely on the Lord's ministry aimed at dealing with the disciples' 'blindness' in respect of the things of God.

<sup>4</sup> I take it that the account of the healing of the blind man in Mark 10. 46-52 refers to the same incident recorded in both Matt. 20.29-34 and Luke 18. 35-43. This case is argued well by Zane Hodges in his article, 'The Blind Men at Jericho' in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 122:488 (October-December 1965): pages 319-30. The following is an extract (and 'taster') from that article:

'From Matthew and Mark we gather that Bartimaeus and his companion sat near the gate from which our Lord made His exit from Herodian Jericho. But from Luke we may legitimately conclude that—before Jesus had even entered the city—the huge throng that accompanied Him had alerted the blind beggars to the Saviour's itinerary. We are forced, therefore, to admire the persistence of the poor blind men whose expectant faith led them to raise their cry for mercy before Jesus was even within earshot and—despite the undoubtedly repeated rebukes from the many who preceded Him—sustain their pleadings until the Lord had heard them. The fact that Mark mentions both the arrival and the departure of Jesus from Jericho (may) be a Markan hint that the events of the narrative span the entire journey through the city and so be an implicit confirmation of Luke's approach. In Scripture nothing is superfluous! Here were men utterly persuaded of the power of the Son of David who was passing their way. But they were blind. For this very reason they dared not be silent for even the shortest span of time. Were they to yield even momentarily to the remonstrances of the crowd, they might in that moment permit the Saviour they could not see to pass them by. Indeed, amidst the confusion and noise which always attends a large throng, they might well go unheard by their Lord unless they cried at precisely the moment He passed before them. Since that moment could not be observed by their sightless eyes, they had only one recourse. They must fill the air with their cries during the entirety of our Lord's trip through their city, and this is exactly what they did—from the time He drew near to Jericho according to Luke to the time He was going out of it according to Matthew and Mark'.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10. 32. Possibly Mark contrasts the disciples who see physically and ought to see spiritually with Bartimaeus, who has no physical sight yet sees spiritually because he believes in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David.

<sup>6</sup> The route from Galilee to Jerusalem via Perea passed through or by Jericho. But this is the only recorded visit of Jesus to Jericho.

<sup>7</sup> On his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus met two men at Jericho whose names have come down to us. I refer to **Zacchaeus**, Luke 19. 1-10, and **Bartimaeus**, Mark 10. 46-52.

(i) The one was very rich, Luke 19. 2; the other very poor, Mark 10. 46 (a beggar).

(ii) The one wanted to see Jesus, Luke 19. 3; the other just wanted to see, Mark 10. 51!

(iii) Both were determined that under no circumstances would they let the crowd deter or keep them back from obtaining what they wanted, Luke 19. 3-4; Mark 10. 48.

(iv) The Lord saw the one above the heads of the crowd, Luke 19. 5, and heard the other above the noise and tumult of the crowd, Mark 10. 48-49.

(v) When called, the one came down *quickly*, Luke 19. 6; the other got up *quickly*, Mark 10. 50 ('leaping, bounding up').

(vi) On the one occasion the needy man 'stood' and spoke to Jesus, Luke 19. 8 ('And Zacchaeus stood'); on the other occasion Jesus 'stood' and called for the needy man, Mark 10. 49 ('And Jesus stood' – literal translation).

(vii) Both found 'salvation' that day, Luke 19. 9; Mark 10. 52 (which is literally, 'your faith has saved you').

(viii) The one story ends with a saying of Jesus about the reason for the coming of the Son of man, Luke 19. 10 - the other story immediately follows a saying of Jesus about the reason for the coming of the Son of man, Mark 10. 45. (The man who 'sought to see Jesus', Luke 19. 3, found that, in fact, the Lord Jesus had 'come to seek' and to save a lost chief tax-collector, v.10!)

(ix) Both were changed men; neither could ever be the same again. Both called Jesus 'Lord', Luke 19. 8; Mark 10. 51 (literally 'rabboni', which signifies 'my great master/lord'), and both went on to prove that this was no empty title on their lips. The one 'gave' and 'restored'; the other 'followed Jesus in the way'.

<sup>8</sup> He is named only in Mark. Mark's mention of his name may well indicate that he was known in the early church. Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pages 39-55.

<sup>9</sup> Mark's translation of the name shows that he was writing for an audience unfamiliar with Semitic languages. See too Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, page 79.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 10. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 18. 36-37. Compare the so-called 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' of Luke 10. 30-37 ... 'There can be no doubt that, 'To whom can I become a neighbour?' was the question which our Lord Jesus asked Himself as He 'went about doing good', Acts 10. 38. It seems likely that this parable was spoken in the synagogue of Jericho for Luke

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tells us that the lawyer 'stood up' to address Jesus, v. 25, and records the next stop as being Bethany, v. 38. If our Lord was indeed speaking in the synagogue at Jericho, He was Himself about to travel up the very road He chose as the setting for His parable. No incident is recorded on that particular journey, but one is recorded on the next and last time that Jesus travelled that way. Matthew provides the details in the closing section of chapter 20 of his Gospel. On that later journey, when leaving Jericho for Jerusalem, the Lord encountered Bartimaeus and his unnamed companion, who, Matthew informs us, 'heard that Jesus was passing by', v. 30 (compare the language our Lord used to describe the actions of both the priest and the Levite), and who cried out for 'mercy', v. 31 (the word of Luke 10. 37). 'Jesus', we read, 'had compassion', v. 34 (the word He used to describe the response of the Samaritan), v. 21. And our Lord didn't 'pass by' on the other side, as everyone expected Him to do, even though He had every reason to do so at the time – for He was then on His way to Jerusalem to save the world! – reproduced from my article in *Precious Seed* (2009, Volume 64 Issue 2).

Interestingly, apart from this parable, Jericho is mentioned in the Gospels only in connection with this visit of Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 10. 47-48.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jesus standing in Matt. 27. 11; Luke 4. 16; John 7. 37; 20. 14, 19; 21. 4; Acts 7. 55; Rev. 1. 13; 3. 20; 5. 6. Chronologically: Luke 4. 16; John 7. 37; Mark 10. 49; Matt. 27. 11; John 20. 14, 19; 21. 4; Acts 7. 55; Rev. 1. 13; 3.20; 5. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 18. 40. It is clear from the gospel narratives that the Lord knew what it was to be busy. But it is equally clear that He was never too busy to allow Himself to be interrupted, and that He always responded graciously to any such interruptions. Cf. Mark 5. 24-34.

<sup>15</sup> Note the changed attitude of the members of crowd; they began by rebuking Bartimaeus, Mark 10. 48, then they encouraged him, Mark 10. 49, and finally they praised God for what had happened to him, Luke 18. 43.

<sup>16</sup> 'Casting away his garment'. Compare how Joseph left his garment in the house of Potiphar (Gen. 39. 12-18), and the unnamed young man (quite possibly John Mark himself) left his linen sheet in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14. 52).

Note the interesting list: 'There is a time to throw away (Eccles. 3:6). Put away the gods your fathers served (Josh. 24:14); put away the foreign gods (Josh. 24:23); they put away the foreign gods (Judg. 10:16); he left his garment in her hand (Gen. 39:12; Gen. 39:13); he left his garment beside me (Gen. 39:15; Gen. 39:18); Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak (Mark 10:50); the Arameans threw their equipment away (2 Kgs. 7:15); they jettisoned the cargo (Acts 27:18); they threw the ship's tackle overboard (Acts 27:19); they threw the wheat into the sea (Acts 27:38); he left the linen sheet and ran away naked (Mark 14:52); he leaves the ninety nine sheep to search for the one (Matt. 18:12; Luke 15:4); they left the anchors in the sea (Acts 27:40); the Philistines abandoned their idols (2 Sam. 5:21; 1 Chr. 14:12); the woman left her water pot (John 4:28)'. A. Colin Day, *Collins Thesaurus of the Bible*: 621 B4.

<sup>17</sup> He sprang to his feet – 'leapt up', Greek.

<sup>18</sup> Mark 10. 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> 'Rabboni' in Mark 10. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 18. 40 and Mark 10. 51. Each of his prayers were short, specific, and full of faith, Mark 10. 47, 48, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. 20. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Luke uses the same word translated 'immediately' (παραχρημα – 'at once') as he had back in chapter four verse 39, when recording the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. In both cases, Luke – spoken of by Paul in Col. 4. 14 as 'the beloved physician' – noted that the effect of the word of the *Great Physician* was both instantaneous and complete.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 10. 52.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 18. 42-43.

<sup>25</sup> Judges 1. 16; 3. 13.

<sup>26</sup> An intended pun: 'something unusual was *afoot*' and 'far more *footsteps* than normal footsteps'.

<sup>27</sup> 'A great crowd followed Him', Matt. 20. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Scholars refer to over 100 other men of roughly that period with the name 'Jesus'. 'Kloner goes on to discuss the name Yeshua, or Jesus. He states that this name is "a derivative of Yehoshua (Joshua)...Yehoshua/Yeshua is the sixth most common name used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel, borne by 71 of the individuals studied by Ilan" (1996: 18a). Ilan later came up with a total of 104 names (2002: 126-133, 449)', Gordon Franz. See ... <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2007/03/The-So-Called-Jesus-Family-Tomb-Rediscovered-in-Jerusalem.aspx>.

<sup>29</sup> See Matt. 26. 71; Mark 1. 24; 14. 67; Mark 16. 6; Luke 4. 34; 24. 19; John 1. 45; 18. 5, 7; cf. Matt. 21. 11.

<sup>30</sup> John 9. 1-7. Bartimaeus may also have heard of other blind men who had been given their sight by the Lord; see Matt. 11. 5 and Mark 8. 22-25.

<sup>31</sup> Compare 'your faith has *saved* you', Mark 10. 52.

<sup>32</sup> No doubt the disciples themselves viewed the blind man's loud pleas as an intrusion and as an imposition on our Lord's time, much as they had viewed the bringing of children to Him, Mark 10. 13. It is also possible that they viewed His journey to Jerusalem as a royal procession, and regarded it as impertinent to interrupt a royal procession. I suspect that they were impatient 'to get on with the business of setting up the kingdom (10. 37; 11. 9-10)', Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*, on Mark 10. 46-52.

<sup>33</sup> Matt. 21. 11.

<sup>34</sup> The clause happens to consist of four words also in Greek: 'και στας ο ιησους'.

<sup>35</sup> Mark 10. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Mark 10. 33-34.

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<sup>37</sup> ? He once said, 'Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out', John 6.37 – and He meant it!

In contrast to the attitude of 'the gentiles', who thought of greatness as lording it over others, our Lord had recently taught His disciples, "Whoever would be first among you must be bondservant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many", Mark 10. 44-45. Both His question to Bartimaeus ('What do you want me to do for you?') and His subsequent healing action illustrate His words '*not to be served, but to serve*'. His continuing 'on the road' to Jerusalem, Mark 10. 52, confirms His determination '*to give His life as a ransom for many*'.

Marvellously, on the way to give His life as a ransom for many, the Lord still made the time to 'serve' one blind beggar. Those who are truly great in God's kingdom will (as our Lord) always be prepared to set aside their personal burdens and to say to others, 'What do you want me to do for you?'

<sup>38</sup> What a wonderful Saviour, that, in spite of His own heavy burden, Jesus stopped to meet the needs of this poor blind man.

<sup>39</sup> 21 June 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Joshua 10. 13-14; cf. Isa. 38. 8.

<sup>41</sup> In all likelihood, Joshua's 'call' was a prayer: 'At that time Joshua *spoke to the Lord* ... and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still ..." ... There has been no day like it before or since, when *the Lord heeded the voice of a man*', Joshua 10. 12-14.

<sup>42</sup> 'Joshua once bade the sun and moon to stand still in the heavens, but here the Lord of the sun, and the moon, and the heavens, stands still at the bidding of a blind beggar!', J. G. Bellett, *Notes from meditations on Luke*, Comments on chapter 18. Freely accessible at: [http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/bellett/luke\\_med.html](http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/bellett/luke_med.html). The quote is *wrongly* attributed to J.N.D. by William MacDonald in his Believer's Bible Commentary: 'So Jesus stood still. Darby comments insightfully, "Joshua once bade the sun stand still in the heavens, but here the Lord of the sun, and the moon, and the heavens, stands still at the bidding of a blind beggar"' – so reads the opening note on Luke 18. 40-41.

<sup>43</sup> Each of the Gospel writers report that the cure was immediate (Mark εὐ θύς; Matthew εὐ θέως; Luke παραχρη̄μα). This is in marked contrast to the healings in the other reported cases of blindness, Mark 8. 23-25; John 9. 6-7.