

Mark 10:46-52¹

46 They came to Jericho. And as he was going from Jericho² with his disciples and a large crowd, the Son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside (along the way). 47 And hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”³ 48 And many rebuked him, so that he would be silent, but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴ 49 And Jesus stood still and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take Courage! Get up! He is calling you.”⁵ 50 So throwing off his

¹ In the previous passage, we listened in on a conversation that James and John had with Jesus. They wanted to sit at Jesus right and left hands when he is in his glory. Their question is sparked not only by the anxiety they feel after Jesus’ final declaration concerning his death and resurrection but it is also sparked by their apparent misunderstanding of his messianic/kingdom rule: it involves suffering and the way of the cross. Their eyes have yet to be open to the work of God in their midst; to the One who is the bearer of God’s Kingdom.

² It might appear that mentioning Jericho is just a passing reference indicating the current location of Jesus and his entourage, but in reality it serves a much larger purpose within Mark’s narrative. On the one hand, Jericho signifies how far Jesus has traveled since the end of Mark 8 when he was passing through Caesarea Philippi at the northern-most point in Judea. In the last two chapters, Jesus and his disciples have covered a lot of ground and as they pass through Jericho they are only twelve miles east of Jerusalem. But there is a greater biblical significance undergirding Mark’s referencing of Jericho. The biblically astute reader will remember that Jericho “was the first city captures by the invading Israelites and the staging ground for the conquest of the rest of Canaan under Joshua. Jesus, the new Joshua, likewise begins his climactic ‘invasion’ of Judea by passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem (Joel Marcus, *Mark 8 – 16* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009), 758).” Following this scene is Jesus’ “triumphal” entry into Jerusalem, thus we come to see that the “staging area” that launches the final phase of Jesus’ ministry begins in Jericho.

³ In the midst of the commotion following Jesus’ exodus from Jericho, a blind beggar cries out from the along the side of the road asking for the mercy of Jesus. Within Mark’s Gospel, Bartimaeus is only the second human being who speaks of Jesus using highly charged religious/political titles (Eugene Boring, *Mark* (Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, 2006), 305). One might wonder why Bartimaeus uses the title he does, opting for Son of David when he learns that it is Jesus of Nazareth passing through. As Mark informs us that Jesus is the Son of God in chapter 1, here in chapter 10, as Jesus makes his way closer to Jerusalem, we gain insight that he is simultaneously Son of David. Within the larger scope of Mark’s Gospel we come to learn who this man is who walks throughout Judea teaching, preaching, healing, and converting. He is more than a prophet.

⁴ In response to the blind beggars’ brashness, the crowd following along with Jesus begins to rebuke him, telling him to be silent. It would seem that the crowd had determined that Bartimaeus was getting in the way of Jesus’ ministry. Rather than allowing him to persist in his petitioning, the crowd rebukes him. But this only eggs Bartimaeus on to be even bolder. As Mark informs us, he begins crying out even more in an attempt to catch Jesus’ attention.

⁵ This is an ironic moment in the midst of Mark’s narrative, for the crowd that once rebuked the man now encourages the blind man to come to Jesus. The irony lies in the fact that “the blind man in our story ‘sees’ with a strangely piercing vision, and the sharpness of insight (Son of David), together with the urgency of

cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.⁶ 51 And Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?”⁷ And the blind man said to him, “Rabbouni,⁸ I want to be able to see.” 52 Jesus said to him, “Go, your faith (trust?) has saved you.” And immediately he was able to see and followed him (Jesus) on the way.⁹

his request (Have mercy on me), induces Jesus to stop and call for the petitioner to be brought forward. Jesus himself, then, overrules the resistance of his supporters in order to confront the needs of the person who has accosted him. He thereby transforms the rebuking crowd into a supportive one; instead of trying to shush Bartimaeus, they now encourage him by telling him of Jesus’ summons. This sudden change of heart is a comic but realistic touch; charity, like hatred, can be contagious, and an authoritative figure’s concern for the down-and-out can quickly convert popular hostility into benevolence (Marcus, 764).”

⁶ It is not a matter of simply reporting the blind beggar’s actions; rather in reporting that the blind beggar casts his cloak aside, Mark subliminally informs us that there is something larger in scope happening here. As commentator Eugene Boring points out, “Two overlapping explanations are suggested by the imagery: (1) It is not merely historical reminiscence of detail added for color, but a further indication that this is a call/discipleship story. The mantle in which he slept and which he spread before him beside the road to collect alms seems to be his sole possession and means of his livelihood; his casting it away corresponds to the other disciples leaving their boats, tax desk, and ‘everything’ and provides a dramatic contrast to the one most recently called to follow and who made a great refusal (10:21-22). (2) Throughout Mark, clothing is often symbolic of the significance of the person, and, like the name, partakes of the reality of the person himself (Boring, 306).” All of this is to say that the cloak is representative of the blind man’s identity as a beggar and is the means by which he collects his meager earnings. In responding to the call of Jesus, he casts his cloak aside “leaving his nets” to follow Jesus and symbolically enacting the “new” life of sight he is called into by forsaking the “old” life of blindness.

⁷ Just as Jesus asked James and John what they would like him to do for them, so Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he would like to have happen. While the immediate and obvious answer is Bartimaeus’ desire to have his sight restored, there is a deeper level of meaning within the subtext of this passage.

James and John requested of Jesus a selfish and self-serving desire. By contrast, Bartimaeus asks that his personhood be restored and in this way he is opened up for a life of discipleship that had otherwise been hidden from him. While James and John initially left everything to follow Jesus, they lost the vision of what his mission and ministry were really about. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, does not take Jesus for granted but begins to see again in a new and fresh way. Beneath the surface of his question, and the very practical desire to see again, lies an ardent desire to see and to apprehend not only who God is in the flesh of his humanity but also to see and know what it truly means to follow this God.

⁸ This is an interesting form of a word related to rabbi yet it carries a greater depth of meaning. It is believed that rabbouni “may have a more exalted nuance than rabbi; in rabbinic traditions, ribbon and other related words are often used of God than of human beings, and in Mark itself, the character who calls Jesus rabbouni is praised for his faith (10:51-52) whereas those who call him rabbi are either ignorant (9:5-6) or treacherous (14:45) (Marcus, 760).”

⁹ In response to Jesus’ encounter and literal salvation (related to healing), Bartimaeus follows Jesus, much as a disciple would. Jesus called him and now he receives and responds to that call by casting aside his former life to follow this one whose ministry is larger and deeper than a simple miraculous healing. As we heard at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, “Prepare the Way of the Lord,” so now we are invited into a vision of the way of the Lord as he approaches the Holy City, and in the back of our minds, we should hear the words of Isaiah 35:1-10:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and signing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given

to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, and the grass shall become reeds and rushes. As highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.