

**“Blind Bartimaeus”**  
**Mark 10:46-52**  
**April 27, 2025**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

**The Reading of the Word**

We return this morning to the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Along the way he continues his ministry to his disciples and to those in need.

With that in mind, we come to Mark 10:46-52.

As we do, please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Mark writes:

<sup>10:46</sup> And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</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!” <sup>48</sup> And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup> And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” <sup>52</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

**Prayer of Illumination**

Lord, your testimonies are wonderful;  
therefore our souls cling to them.  
The unfolding of your word gives light;  
it imparts understanding to the simple.  
Therefore we long for your word  
and your commandments.  
Turn to us now and be gracious to us,  
as is your way with those who love your name.  
Make your face to shine upon us, your servants,  
and teach us your statutes.  
Grant all of this, we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.

[Based on Psalm 119:129-135]

## **Introduction**

We come this morning to the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

Now, there's a number of things we could consider from this text.

For one thing, we could focus primarily on the aspect of sight and blindness. But we considered that theme back in February, when we looked at Jesus healing another blind man, back in Mark 8. [<https://www.faithtacoma.org/mark-nicoletti/seeing-and-not-seeing-peters-high-low-and-buffalo-mark-822-91#>] So we won't focus on that specific theme this morning.

But there are other themes to consider. As one commentator points out, it's worth reflecting on this passage both from the perspective of Bartimaeus, and also from the perspective of the crowd. [Wright, 144-145]

This week, we'll consider these events from the perspective of Bartimaeus. Next week we might return to this text and consider it again from the perspective of the crowd.

But this morning, as we consider this passage from Bartimaeus's perspective, what we see here is that when we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, bring our need to him, and then follow him on the way.

Let me say that again: When we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, bring our need to him, and then follow him on the way.

Let's break that down together.

## **When We Are in Darkness**

First, this text is focused on times when we are in darkness.

That is Bartimaeus's state when we encounter him in this text.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, with a crowd, for the annual Passover feast. The crowd is traveling together, excited, filled with anticipation.

Bartimaeus, meanwhile, is a man we find outside the city gates of Jericho, a man, whose blindness, in the ancient world, condemned him to darkness, poverty, exclusion, and begging. [Ferguson, 175]

Bartimaeus is marked here by what he lacks.

And while our lives may not be marked with lack as severely as Bartimaeus's was ... there are still many traits we may share with him and experience ourselves.

As one commentator puts it: “We all have something, by no means necessarily a physical ailment, that we know is getting in the way of our being the people we believe God wants us to be and made us to be.” [Wright, 145]

What is that something for you?

Maybe for you it’s the darkness of doubt. You struggle with belief and with faith in God. You long for eyes of faith, but you feel like you are sitting in spiritual darkness.

Or maybe for you it’s the darkness and isolation of sin. Your sin, whether known to others or kept secret, has left you feeling isolated, alone, and in the dark.

Or maybe for you, the need you feel right now is not primarily about your sin, but about your brokenness. Like Bartimaeus, you are experiencing brokenness and suffering – whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or relationally.

Or maybe it’s the loneliness and isolation of Bartimaeus that you share in – a lack of close relationships, or a sense of disconnection from others.

Or maybe for you it’s some other need.

It can look different for each of us, but what is it for you right now? How might you share in some aspect of Bartimaeus’s need as we see it here?

Whatever the details may be for each of us, our text this morning is focused on times when we find ourselves in darkness.

### **Jesus Calls Us to Listen to the Testimony of Others**

And the next thing we see here is that when we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others about him.

Now ... that might seem strange, because we don’t have a description of that in this text ... but it’s actually implied by Mark in a couple of ways.

First of all, it’s what Bartimaeus must have done.

Blind Bartimaeus, by definition, couldn’t have seen the miracles of Jesus. And on top of that, he also couldn’t have been present for the recent miracle most relevant to him. When Jesus earlier healed a different blind man, that took place in Bethsaida, but Bartimaeus was far away in Jericho.

And so the only way that Bartimaeus could know who Jesus was and what Jesus could do was to listen to what others told him – to listen to the testimony of those who had seen Jesus’s work in their own lives.

We’re not told who talked to Bartimaeus, or what exactly they said to him.

But we know that Bartimaeus must have listened intently. He must have weighed what he heard seriously. Because from it he draws life-altering conclusions.

As a result of what he's heard, in verses 47 and 48, he identifies Jesus as the "Son of David." This was the title for the great King who was to come from David's line. This title, as one commentator puts it: "carries explicit messianic overtones and shows that [Bartimaeus] looks to [Jesus] as the Messiah who can bring healing and wholeness." [Edwards, 330]

And so the conclusions Bartimaeus draws from the testimony he has heard didn't end with Jesus's kingship.

Along with that, he also determines that Jesus was able to help him in truly miraculous ways. His request for healing in verse 52 is bold, but based on what he had heard, Bartimaeus is confident that Jesus is able to do it.

And then, along with that, Bartimaeus concludes from what he heard that in addition to being able, Jesus would also be willing to help him. He concludes that Jesus is the kind of King who will show mercy. And so that's explicitly what he asked for in verses 47 and 48: mercy.

All this – all these conclusions about who Jesus really is, Bartimaeus determined based on what he had heard from the testimony of others.

And then, having seen Bartimaeus do that, Mark calls us to do the very same thing.

In fact ... I want to argue that Mark is urging us to listen to the testimony of Bartimaeus today, just as Bartimaeus listened to the testimony of Jesus's followers on that day in Jericho.

Let me explain what I mean.

This past week, as I reflected on this passage, I spent some time with Richard Bauckham's book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, a work focused on the role of eyewitness testimony in the New Testament. And Bauckham argues that such testimony plays a much more important role in the New Testament than we often realize.

And one way it shows up, that we often miss, is in the use of names in the gospel accounts. [For what follows, see Bauckham, 39-66, 79, 261-262, 285]

Bauckham asks: Why are some people named in the gospels, while others aren't? Of course there are examples with obvious answers: The Twelve Apostles will, of course, be named, along with public figures like Herod and Pilate.

But while most ordinary people who show up in the gospels remain unnamed – why do some particular ordinary people get named? For example, why is Bartimaeus named here, while the last blind man Jesus healed in chapter eight was not named? Or an even more interesting question: Why is Bartimaeus named here in Mark ... but when the same story is told in Matthew and Luke, his name is gone?

Theories have been suggested. One theory put forward sometimes, among those who are skeptical of the historicity of the Bible, is that as time went on, names were added, to make the account more vivid and engaging. [Bauckham, 40-41]

The problem with this, as Bauckham points out, is that the use of names seems to go in the opposite direction chronologically. It's not the later synoptic gospels that add names to stories that were

missing names in earlier accounts ... but it's the earlier accounts that have names, and the later ones that sometimes drop them.

It's generally assumed by commentators and critics that the Gospel of Mark was written before Matthew and Luke.

But there are multiple names given in Mark's account that are then absent when Matthew or Luke retell the same story. And, in fact, "in no case does a character unnamed in Mark gain a new name in Matthew or Luke." [Bauckham, 42]

What explains this?

Well, one explanation that makes sense of this pattern is if the purpose of including these names of ordinary people was so that readers could connect the story with a real-life eyewitness, who was still accessible to them. If Mark wrote before Matthew and Luke, then more eyewitnesses would still be alive and accessible while Mark wrote. And so when Mark wrote, he would have reason to include those names – citing his sources, in a sense – a living source that readers could still track down. And for that reason, Mark named them, and gave identifying information about them – such as in Bartimaeus's case, where Mark highlights Bartimaeus's father's name – a name that was unusual for a Palestinian Jew. [Bauckham, 79] Mark is helping his early readers seek out the individual who had witnessed these events.

But a few years later, when Matthew and Luke were writing, those individuals may have died, slipped into obscurity, or become more disconnected to their broader audience, and so they dropped the name. [Bauckham, 46]

Reinforcing this theory is a geographical pattern we see as well.

Many of the witnesses named in Mark were located in or near Jerusalem (and that would include Bartimaeus, described here in relatively nearby Jericho). These individuals would have been known in the Jerusalem church. [Bauckham, 46]

And this connection to the Jerusalem church might have had special significance for Mark's original audience. Mark likely wrote his gospel from Rome, and to Christians in Rome. [Köstenberger, 235-237] And, as Bauckham points out, at this time there were close contacts between the Jerusalem church and the church in Rome. [Bauckham, 52 n.49] And so, named eyewitnesses in the Jerusalem church may have been individuals that the Christians in Rome had some kind of access to.

All of this supports the idea that when Mark names an ordinary person – as he does here with Bartimaeus – he's telling us specifically whose testimony that story has come from.

Now ... all of the gospel accounts came from witnesses to the events described. Mark likely drew much of his account from what the Apostle Peter witnessed. Matthew and John were often present themselves for the events they described. Luke is explicit that he has sought out eyewitness testimony for his gospel [Luke 1:1-4]. The gospel accounts are not legends embellished over time, but they are historic descriptions based on the testimony of eyewitness accounts.

But some eyewitnesses were closer to the action than others. And Bartimaeus was likely one such example. He was an eyewitness who was known to others in the early church, one whom Mark had likely heard this story from directly, one who probably continued, throughout his life, to tell

others of what he had experienced in his interaction with Jesus on that day. [Bauckham, 39, 45, 47]

In other words, most likely, our text today is not just the account of someone who saw Bartimaeus healed ... but what we've heard this morning is most likely the account of what happened, as told by the very man who experienced it: by Bartimaeus himself.

Most likely, what we have before us this morning, for our consideration, is Bartimaeus's testimony.

And just as Bartimaeus listened to the testimony of other witnesses as he sat there that morning in Jericho ... so Mark now urges us to listen to the testimony of Bartimaeus as we sit here this morning in Tacoma.

And we should take that to heart.

And really, we should do the same with all the testimony about Jesus that the Lord has placed in our lives.

That includes the Scriptures, which are historical testimony, from God, about who God is and what he has done.

And also it includes what we hear from other Christians about what Jesus Christ has done in their lives.

We are surrounded by testimony to who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he can do.

And Mark urges us here, to follow the example of Bartimaeus, and to listen to that testimony, and take it to heart.

And so what we see, in all this, is that when we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, about him.

### **Bring Our Need to Him**

But Mark doesn't stop there. Because essential to this story is what Bartimaeus does next.

And what we see next is that: when we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others and then bring our need to him.

Bartimaeus is not content just to hear of what Jesus has done for others. He wants to experience Jesus's work himself.

In verse 47, Bartimaeus cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then, in verse 51, when Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus replies, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."

Bartimaeus boldly brings his need to Jesus, and as he does, he resists two temptations.

The first is the temptation to passive silence. The crowd in verse 48 urges Bartimaeus to shut up – to be quiet, to stop calling to Jesus. But Bartimaeus ignores them. Instead, we’re told that he cried out to Jesus “all the more.”

Though other people, or even our own hearts, may often tempt us to be passively silent about our needs before God, Bartimaeus resists that temptation.

But second, even as he refuses to be silent before Jesus, at the same time, Bartimaeus also resists the temptation to wallow in his needs.

The question in verse 51, when Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” is striking in a few ways. But one is that it confronts Bartimaeus with the question of whether he really wants to be healed. [For another example of this, see John 5:6] Because sometimes we don’t want to be healed. Sometimes we don’t want our broken situation fixed ... because it’s become familiar ... we know it ... it’s become core to how we think of ourselves, or how we relate to others ... and so to actually be healed would be scary ... and mean venturing into something new and uncertain.

Just as there’s a temptation to be silent about our needs ... so there’s also a temptation to wallow in our need – to complain about it ... but to not really want to be helped out of it, or freed from it.

But Bartimaeus resists both of these temptations. And as he does, he pushes us to ask ourselves: What needs, what problems, have we been silent about before God? What have we been quiet and prayerless about with God ... because someone has convinced us, or we’ve convinced ourselves, that to be really spiritual we should be silent before God about our needs ... rather than calling out to him?

And at the same time, are there needs or struggles ... where, if we’re honest ... as much as we might complain about our situation or our difficulty ... we don’t really want to be freed from it ... we may lament our situation ... but we prefer the struggle to the unknowns of deliverance.

Bartimaeus, by his example, urges us to resist these temptations, and to call out to Jesus with our needs.

And like Bartimaeus, we’re to call out to Jesus openly and honestly about where we’re at, and what we need.

We’re to acknowledge that we are beyond our own strength and abilities, and we need his help. [Edwards, 330]

We’re to call out to Jesus not on the basis of our strength, but on the basis of our weakness. [Ferguson, 177]

As Sinclair Ferguson puts it: it is a “fundamental law in God’s kingdom” that “there is no other way to come to Jesus but on the basis of our need and his adequacy to meet it fully.” [Ferguson, 2177]

And so Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, asking not for what he’s earned, or what he deserves, or what is rightfully his based on how clever, or smart, or good, or capable he is – no, Bartimaeus calls out asking for mercy. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” he cries.

That’s a good prayer to imitate.

And it's a prayer Jesus responds to.

First, in verse 49, Jesus stops, and he hears.

And that's significant.

Jesus, at this moment, is part of a large crowd, traveling to Jerusalem. There is excitement and anticipation. He has set his eyes on the cross and then the resurrection – two of the most significant events in world history that he's about to accomplish. That's what Jesus is on his way to do ... but when Bartimaeus calls out to him for mercy ... Jesus stops ... and he hears. He takes time to give his full attention, even to one of the least of these, who is calling out to him. [Ferguson, 177]

And he will do the same with us. [Ferguson, 178] Even as he rules over nations and world history, even as he reigns over the stars and the galaxies, even as he sits on the throne of God, as King, even as he does all that, when you cry out to Jesus for mercy ... he will stop ... and he will hear you ... just as he did with Bartimaeus.

But he won't stop there. Because next, in verse 49, he calls Bartimaeus closer to himself.

And he does the same with his people still today. When we cry out to Jesus, he will not leave us far off. He will draw us closer to himself.

And then, once Bartimaeus is before him, Jesus does something even more shocking. In verse 51, Jesus relates to Bartimaeus as a humble and loving servant. By which I mean: He serves Bartimaeus.

Jesus doesn't treat Bartimaeus as a social problem to be dealt with as efficiently as possible, but he addresses him as a person. [Edwards, 330-331] He asks him: "What do you want me to do for you?" – a question that a servant would ask a master.

And in the same way, though Jesus is rightly our King and our Master ... in his incredible love, he condescends to us, and he cares for us – he serves us in the midst of our brokenness and need.

And as he does, he speaks words of assurance to us. We see this in verse 52, as Jesus assures Bartimaeus, saying, "Your faith has made you well."

Jesus assures his people with his words. We find it throughout the Scripture, and we hear it weekly here in worship, in our assurance of pardon, among other places. As we come to Jesus in faith, he assures us that he will care for us.

And finally, in verse 52, Jesus heals him. Bartimaeus is given his sight.

Now, when it comes to our different ailments and struggles, sometimes Jesus heals us in this life ... and other times he will heal us in the life that is to come: when he will return, and raise his people from the grave, and make all things new – wiping away sin, and death, and sadness forever.

Some aspects of our redemption we have to wait for.

But other aspects, Jesus offers to us right now. And I think that in this passage, Jesus alludes to some of the deeper healing that we can have here and now, in this life.

The phrase Jesus uses in verse 52, as Mark records it, uses a Greek term that could mean “healed” ... but could also mean “saved.” [Edwards, 331] And in fact, in Greek, it’s the same phrase Jesus uses when he declares to a woman in Luke that her sins are forgiven. There the phrase is translated: “Your faith has saved you.” [Luke 7:50] And it’s the same phrase Jesus uses here. And so, while the ESV is right to translate Jesus’s words in verse 52 as “Your faith has made you well.” you could also translate it as “Your faith has saved you.” [Wright, 144]

And so, I suspect that Jesus is alluding to something deeper than this healing here. I suspect that he’s saying that what we see playing out here is what was promised by the Prophet Joel, that with the coming of God’s kingdom, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” [Joel 2:32; Ferguson, 177]

Here, in this text, we are reminded that, even now, this very day, our deepest ailment – our deepest need: our spiritual estrangement from God, our Maker – can be remedied this very minute, if we would call out to Christ in faith, asking him for mercy.

Jesus here reminds us that, this very day, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

And so that’s what he urges us to do.

When we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, and then bring our need to him, crying out to him for mercy ... because he will care for us – he will save us.

### **And Then Follow Him On the Way**

That in itself is such an encouragement – such a picture of what faith in Jesus looks like.

But our text doesn’t actually end there.

Because in verse 52 we read that “Immediately” Bartimaeus “recovered his sight” ... and then, after that, Mark writes, Bartimaeus “followed [Jesus] on the way.”

“Immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.”

When we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, to bring our need to him, and then follow him on the way.

This story ends with Bartimaeus following Jesus.

And Jesus doesn’t twist his arm to get him to do this.

Jesus is actually clear in verse 52 that Bartimaeus is free to go wherever he wants. But Mark tells us that, given that freedom, Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus on the way. [Horne, 146]

Because after being cared for by Jesus, Bartimaeus knew there wasn’t anywhere else he’d rather be than following Jesus.

And he was so excited to follow Jesus, that he seems to have left one of his few possessions behind.

In verse 50 we're told that Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, and when he leaves with Jesus in verse 52, we're never told about him going back to retrieve it. [Horne, 146]

Assuming that Bartimaeus is the source of this story for Mark, this element has that ring of a remembered detail from him. We can almost imagine Bartimaeus smiling as he recounts it: "I was so excited that I threw off my cloak, and left it behind. And after he healed me, I was so enthralled by Jesus that I didn't even think to go back and get it. I just started marching with him towards Jerusalem."

The cloak may have been for warmth [Edwards, 330], or it may have been something he laid out to receive money in when he begged [Wright, 143], but either way, Bartimaeus was ready to leave all things behind in order to follow Jesus on the way.

And the way was not necessarily easy. The journey from Jericho to Jerusalem was 20 miles long, with 3,500 feet of overall elevation along the way [Edwards, 329]. And for a man who had been a blind beggar up until moments ago, this might have been a real physical strain for him.

The way Jesus was going was hard. But still, Bartimaeus happily – joyfully – joined Jesus on the way.

And we are called to do the same.

The way of following Jesus is not easy. The way can be long. The way can be steep. We may find ourselves having to leave behind things we previously had treasured: things that are dear to us, or dreams we once longed for.

But even so ... where else would we rather be? Who else would we rather follow than the one who gave us life, and who will give us eternal life, when in faith, we simply cry out to him for mercy?

When we are in darkness, Jesus calls us to listen to the testimony of others, bring our need to him, and then follow him on the way.

## **Conclusion**

In our darkness ... in our need ... in our loneliness ... we are often tempted to seek wholeness in so many ways ... but only one way can truly make us whole.

Jesus stands before us now ... just as he stood before Bartimaeus so many years ago.

And so, brothers and sisters, let us hear the testimony of who he is.

Let us cast aside every voice that would silence us.

And then, let us cry out to him this very day: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And as he hears us, and cares for us, and loves us, and saves us, let us get up, and go to him, and follow him on the way.

Amen.

**This sermon draws on material from:**

- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Bayer, Hans. Introduction and notes to Mark in *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Let's Study Mark*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999.
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- Keller, Timothy. *Jesus the King*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2011.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009.
- Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church's core value of "Reformed Catholicity"), and also (following the Apostle Paul's example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.