

**Date: October 28, 2018**

**Scripture: Mark 10:46-52**

**Title: BARTIMAEUS**

A man named Charley Boswell was blinded in World War II while rescuing a buddy from a burning tank. Charley had always been a great athlete so, after the war, he took up golf. And he was very good. Charley Boswell won the National Blind Golf Championship 16 times, once shooting a score of 81.

In 1958 Charley went to Ft. Worth, Texas to receive the coveted Ben Hogan Award in honor of one of the greatest professional golfers in history. Mr. Hogan agreed to play a round of golf with Charley. Charley said, "Would you like to play for money?" Hogan said, "That wouldn't be fair!" Charley said, "C'mon, Mr. Hogan, are you afraid to play a blind golfer?" Hogan was really pretty competitive so he said, "Okay, I'll play for money. How much?" Boswell said, "\$1,000 per hole." Hogan said, "That's a lot. How many strokes do you want me to give you?" Boswell said, "No strokes. I'll play you heads up." Hogan said, "Charley, I can't do it. What would people think of me taking advantage of a blind man?" Boswell smiled and said, "Don't worry, Mr. Hogan, our tee time is tonight at midnight!" Charley Boswell was a remarkable man. He didn't let his disability deter him from having a fulfilling life.

Today we want to talk about another remarkable man who was blind. Mark calls him Bartimaeus. The story takes place just outside Jericho. When most of us think of Jericho we think of Joshua and the battle of Jericho. But this story, Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Mobs of people are heading to Jerusalem for the same reason.

Jericho is very near Jerusalem. That means the streets of Jericho were filled with people on their way to the Holy City. That was important to Bartimaeus. These were primitive times and, through no fault of his own, Bartimaeus was a beggar. Crowded streets meant that he might receive a generous day's wage for his work as a beggar. In the day Bartimaeus lived, opportunities for work for a blind man, other than begging, were nonexistent. On the day our story takes place, the streets would be clogged with people, giving Bartimaeus the opportunity to receive more than the usual measly amounts he normally received in alms.

Little did Bartimaeus realize, this wouldn't be a normal day. An itinerant teacher was passing by the place where Bartimaeus was begging. His name was Jesus of Nazareth. Obviously Jesus' reputation had spread to Jericho, because Mark tells us that as soon as Bartimaeus heard Jesus was passing by, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Somehow he knew enough about Jesus, to know Jesus was of the house and lineage of David, and that Jesus could help him. Perhaps Bartimaeus was already one of those who believed Jesus was the Messiah.

His shouting made many of his fellow bystanders uncomfortable. They rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then something dramatic happened. Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to Bartimaeus, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Then Bartimaeus did something unusual. Mark tells us that “throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.”

Scholars tell us that for a blind man to throw aside his cloak in a busy crowd was risky. What if he wasn’t able to retrieve it? His cloak may have been the only thing he, a blind beggar, owned. He depended on his cloak in winter, to allow him to be out in the street begging. Could it be that Bartimaeus had enough belief in Jesus that he thought that perhaps he would be healed and would no longer need his cloak for begging? Or was he so enthusiastic about Jesus calling for him, that he simply acted without thinking? Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

As extraordinary as this request was, Bartimaeus wasn’t asking for anything beyond, what you and I take for granted. He just wanted his eyes to work properly. He wasn’t asking for a cushy lifestyle. He wasn’t asking to meet the woman of his dreams. All he was asking, was the opportunity to be able to see, so he could find a job and enjoy the beauties of life, that all of us enjoy. Jesus knew the kind of man Bartimaeus was and he granted Bartimaeus’ request. Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” Mark tells us that immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

There are some things about Bartimaeus that jump out at us as we read his story.

**First, obviously, he was disadvantaged.** Many great people have fallen into that category. Bartimaeus probably wasn’t only disadvantaged but, because of his disability, was also made to feel rejected. Even his name, Bartimaeus simply means “Son of Timaeus.” We don’t even know Bartimaeus’ given name. He wasn’t even important enough for them to have called him by any name except “Son of Timaeus.”

Religious people were probably small comfort, to his feelings of rejection. As you know from reading the New Testament, there were many people, in that time, who felt that a physical disability was a punishment by God. In their ignorance and superstition, they felt that someone surely sinned, if a child was born with a condition such as blindness. How many hearts have been broken because of someone’s outrageous interpretation of adversity? Bartimaeus had to put up with some of this. He was blind, and he was a beggar, and he was probably a social outcast.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged, all of us are. We all have our shortcomings. They may not be physical, they may be emotional. Perhaps one of the most dangerous disabilities is, living a privileged life, because we never develop the mental, and emotional and spiritual toughness that’s required for dealing with life situations.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged but, **Bartimaeus wasn't defeated.** When Jesus came by, Bartimaeus started shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." And when Jesus called for him, he threw off his cloak and jumped to his feet. I love that picture: a blind man leaping in anticipation.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged but, Bartimaeus was not defeated. He wasn't going to let people tell him to be quiet. When he saw the opportunity for healing, he jumped at it. He wasn't like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking, "What must I do to be saved?" then turned away sadly when he learned that he would have to choose between his wealth and Jesus. Neither was Bartimaeus like the man beside the pool of Bethesda, who, when Jesus asked him if he really wanted to be healed, made excuses for his situation.

Bartimaeus wanted to see, and he was willing to pay any price to achieve this goal. He wouldn't be defeated. What a difference an attitude makes in life. Thank God for the Bartimaeuses of this world, who will not be denied by their circumstances.

I recently read about building the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. It's an engineering marvel. Completed in 1883 and known for its granite towers and steel cables, the bridge took 14 years to construct. At least two dozen people died in the process of building the bridge, including its original designer.

That designer was an engineer named John Roebling. When Roebling came up with the idea of building this massive suspension bridge over New York City's East River to connect the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn, everyone thought he was crazy. But John and his son Washington set out to prove it could be done. After only a year of construction, John Roebling was killed in an unfortunate ferry accident. This left his son, young Washington, an inexperienced engineer, in charge of the bridge. But this is just one of the tragedies that befell the Roeblings.

Since part of the bridge was being built underwater, many workers began to suffer from decompression sickness. Young Washington suffered from this condition, to the extent, that he became paralyzed, deaf, and mute. But this wasn't going to stop him from building his father's bridge.

Able to move just one finger, Washington devised a system by which he could tap on his wife's arm and communicate with her. He continued to direct the construction of the bridge from his bed, giving instructions to his wife, who then passed them along to the crew building the bridge. For the next eleven years, Washington continued to work in this way, until 1883, when the Brooklyn Bridge was completed and opened for use. Today, 135 years later, the Brooklyn Bridge still carries more than 150,000 people each day safely to their destinations.

You have to admire any person, who through faith and determination, refuses to be defeated. Blind Bartimaeus was one of those people. Bartimaeus was disadvantaged. But he refused to be defeated and **was rewarded for his determination.**

Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus said, “Master! Let me receive my sight!” Jesus said, “Go your way. Your faith has made you well.” Bartimaeus’ world was totally dark when Jesus gave him the gift of sight. What a gift, Christ gave him. The gift of sight is one of the most precious gifts that God can bestow upon us.

**This is why Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus.** Listen to the last few words of this story: “Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way. Your faith has made you well,’ and immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed him on the way.” Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus Christ. All his life Bartimaeus had been blind, and finally Jesus set him free. He could see. What greater gift could Jesus give him than that?

Christ will not pass us by, if we are truly seeking him. He sees our need whatever it may be. Bartimaeus was disadvantaged, but he was not defeated. He came to Jesus and Jesus healed him. And he became a follower of Christ. May we see what Bartimaeus saw, that Jesus is the giver of every good thing in life. I hope we’re as wise as he. May we, too, follow Jesus all the days of our life Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.