

SERMON: October 28, 2018 Running to Jesus
TEXT: Mark 10:46-52
SUBJECT: Trust with total abandon
THEME: Bartimaeus gave it all – trusting completely in Jesus.
PURPOSE: That we would want to trust God as Bartimaeus did.
PICTURE: Bartimaeus

Our scripture today comes to us near the end of Jesus' ministry. He has been teaching and preaching and healing down in the region surrounding Galilee, and is now heading up the mountain to go to Jerusalem.

Jericho was (and still is!) a large city, and a major gateway up to Jerusalem. It's about 15 miles if you could go straight, but the mountains make it rather circuitous. It would take you 6-8 hours, depending upon your hiking ability.

I want for you to do an experiment with me right now. I want for you to close your eyes. Our story today is about Bartimaeus, a blind man, so I would like for us to experience, just for a minute, what it would be like to be blind.

(CLOSE EYES)

Listen. What do you hear around you? What can you tell about where you are?

(SILENCE, TAKE ANSWERS)

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Okay, you can open your eyes. What did you hear?

For Bartimaeus, his ears were his life. He sat here, outside the city of Jericho, because that's where the traffic was! The government would regulate who could beg, and where. Bartimaeus had been issued a "permit" of sorts – his beggar's cloak. He also had the right to sit in this place to beg, although he probably slept here because he had only been given a general location, not a specific spot. If he left every night to go someplace else, somebody else might take the best location.

Bartimaeus had learned through the years how to differentiate who was coming by, based upon their footsteps, their smell, what they were talking about. He could hear the jangle of equipment on the donkeys or camels of the traders. He could hear the bells on the outfits of the priests. He could hear the slow shuffling of the masses who walked by.

By the cadence of a person's footsteps, Bartimaeus could pretty well identify who was passing by, and what technique he should use to possibly get a donation. As a beggar, you get to know your audience!

So this day, which seemed like any other day, Bartimaeus is out asking for alms. He doesn't expect anything different – being ignored by most, hostility from some, gifts from a few.

But something different happens – he hears a crowd. This is good and bad – although there may be more people there to potentially give gifts, crowds usually meant that they were heading somewhere purposefully and wouldn't be paying much attention. This would be good for pickpockets, but for the legitimate blind beggars like himself, he stood a good chance of being stepped on and pushed around.

Bartimaeus listens to the crowd, trying to determine what its constitution might be. Was it a political rally? Was it a Roman garrison? Was it a great official who might take pity on him? He strains his ears to hear what is going on –

And he thinks he hears the name “Jesus”. Common name – related to the name “Joshua”. It means “Deliverer, Rescuer”. So which “Yeshua” is this?

Bartimaeus strains his memory to recall what famous Yeshua's he has heard about, as people talk along the road. He hasn't travelled much himself, but he listens. And he thinks back to a conversation he overheard about a Yeshua, a Jesus, who had been doing miracles up in the Galilee.

It seems that this Jesus also had royal lineage – a descendent of King David. And if he's heading up to Jerusalem, that would make sense – that would explain the crowd and all of the excitement.

I think, at this point, Bartimaeus wasn't sure what to ask for. His intention that day was to spread his cloak (kind of like a street musician sets out their instrument case) and get enough alms to buy some bread and maybe to have enough to store in a pocket of his cloak. He wasn't saving up for a vacation; he didn't have a house payment. He just stayed here all day, slept here all night, and woke up the next morning to go through the same think all over again.

It could very well be that everything that Bartimaeus had in the world was on his back right now. The cloak, as I said, was the uniform of the beggar. It was his shelter at night, his wallet, his pantry – everything that he knew.

So let's pick up the story again –

⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

So what do you think? At this point, was Bartimaeus thinking about being healed, or just getting a nice contribution?

(TAKE ANSWERS)

I don't know that there's really a right or wrong answer here – we'll have to ask Bartimaeus when we get to eternity!

I think it could go either way. But I'm also interested in the crowd's reaction to Bartimaeus – why did they tell him to shut up?

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I remember back a few years ago when a political rally was happening in Ft. Myers, and they closed down almost the entire city for hours so that the convoy could whisk through without any kinds of distractions. All of the homeless people were relocated and areas of the city were fixed up along the path that the caravan would take. We didn't want this important person to see anything that might besmirch the character of our fair city!

I think this is what was happening here in Jericho – the people didn't want Jesus to think that there were dirty parts of the city! Bartimaeus was an embarrassment to them, and he should just keep quiet and know his place!

Let's continue with the story –

49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

Think about that for a minute – what did we just say about the cloak?

(TAKE ANSWERS)

This was Bartimaeus' livelihood – his identity – his home at night; his shelter in the rain; his wallet, his bank, his everything! Without it, he would be less than nothing!

I want to ask you to do something again – reach into your pocket or your purse, pull out your wallet, close your eyes – and throw it as far as you can!

No, no, no! Don't do that! You might hit somebody!

But what would be your feelings towards that? You might be willing to do that here in church, but what if I asked you to do it in downtown New York in a crowded subway station?

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What was Bartimaeus thinking? He was blind! What would cause him to do something like this?!?

This is the point of the story. This is the crux. This is why Mark remembered this story so vividly that he included it in his Gospel.



http://www.gurdonbrewster.com/images/artwork_full/bartimaeus.jpg

This is not a passive, setting aside for later use kind of thing. Bartimaeus throws his cloak aside, jumps to his feet, and finds his way towards Jesus.

I have two theories of why this happened -

A – Either Bartimaeus believed that Jesus was able to heal him, so he could come back and find his cloak again; or

B – Bartimaeus didn't care whether he got his old life back; he believed that whatever Jesus had to offer was better.

I'll let you think about that for a while –

(SILENCE)

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So then Jesus asks a question – to me, one of the most ridiculous questions ever asked -

¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

Really, Jesus? You're talking to a blind man, who has just left everything behind to come be with You, and You ask THAT? What do you THINK he wants?

Okay – in reality, I have never found Jesus to ask a question that He didn't know the answer to. Jesus never wastes a question.

So if Jesus already knew the answer to this question, why did He ask it of Bartimaeus?

(TAKE ANSWERS)

I think that Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to be clear on what he was really asking for. If you really want to be healed, that means leaving your old life behind. All of the habits, hang-ups, and hurts of the past need to left back there – in the past. You will have to forgive those who have wronged you. You will see things that you never saw before, things that you never knew existed. Your heart will be broken in new ways; your old friends may not want you around anymore. Are you sure this is what you want?

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

A typical day – that changed when he met Jesus. Never in his life had Bartimaeus EVER thrown his cloak away! Never had he jumped up and hurried towards something or someone, not caring what happened to all of his possessions!

I always ask the group on Wednesday, "What does God have for our congregation to hear from this scripture today?" Sometimes I'll say, "What does Marco need to hear from this today?"

Rather than give you their answers, what do you hear God saying to you?

(TAKE ANSWERS)

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I hear "abandonment" – not that God has abandoned us, but that Bartimaeus was so excited, so enthusiastic that he knew that anything else that used to be important to him didn't matter anymore – nothing mattered more than being with Jesus.

We hear this in other scriptures – Peter, out walking on the water with Jesus; Paul, reflecting on his life while in prison; Moses, being called by God at the burning bush. ***There are times in our lives when God makes the choice so clear that we know that any other pathway is not going to get us where we want – only God will do.***

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Think about your walk in faith. We can somewhat trace it to Bartimaeus' experience here.

First, there is a time when we don't really know God. This would be Bartimaeus before knowing Jesus. As his life goes on, he starts to hear things. Other people shared their experiences with Christ, and Bartimaeus overheard. He wasn't a believer yet, but he was starting to listen.

That, incidentally, is the best way to share your faith. A "witness" isn't some 5-minute commentary about how wonderful God is and how other people should believe in Him; your witness is simply your experience with God. A witness on the stand in a courtroom isn't asked, "What does so-and-so say about what happened", but "What did you see?"

Your witness is simply your experience with God. You may not even be aware that other people are watching you, listening to you, hoping to hear a word of hope or healing. But they are. And Bartimaeus started to hear about Jesus.

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And then came the day when he discovered that Jesus was near. He didn't really know what to expect, but he wanted to find out more. Just like I had heard about Jesus all of my life, but it wasn't until I was 12 years old that I began to realize that this "God-stuff" was real! I began paying attention and listening even closer.

Bartimaeus, when he realized that Jesus was there, called out. "Have mercy on me!"

And Jesus responded to him – "Call him. Bring him here." And Bartimaeus, hearing that Jesus was calling him, leaped up, abandoned his old life, and came to Jesus.

And Jesus asks him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Bartimaeus trusted Him with his deepest desire, leaving nothing out – and Jesus answered it – "Your willingness to trust Me is your strength. Your faith has healed you."

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There are lots of ways we can go with this story. Which character do you connect with? Some of us are Bartimaeus; some are the disciples; sometimes we have to admit that we are the ones that may stand in the way of others coming to Jesus. It happens.

But the thing I want for you to think about today -

How enthusiastic am I about Jesus?

There are times in my life when I have been on fire for Jesus! I know that Jesus loves me and wants for me to be His friend! I'm not concerned with what other people think about me; I just wanted for everyone to know Jesus!

There are other times when I become more subdued. I don't believe that I've fallen out of love with Jesus; I just sometimes get caught up in the things of the world and forget my first love. But thankfully God has not given up on me, and sometimes, when I'm quiet, I

can hear it again – the quiet murmur through the silence that I am beloved and forgiven; I am welcome in His presence.

Have you given up to Jesus with total abandon? Have you said to Him, “Lord, You are worth more than anything I could ever gain on this earth. I surrender it all to You – please heal me, use whatever I can give for Your glory.”

Amen.