

Mark 10:46-52  
October 27, 2024

## The Blind Man Saw

Biblical names are fascinating. One never knows whether the meaning of a name is a part of the message, or if it is just the name of a character in the story:

Abraham means Father of multitudes

Sarah means princess

Israel means wrestled with God

Peter means Rock

Jesus is a variation of Joshua, and means Savior

Even my name, Mark, means, consecrated to the god of war, that is, Mars. Apparently there were Jewish people in the time of Jesus that were naming their sons after Roman gods.

In all four gospels, with some variation, the story of the healing of the man born blind is told. In Matthew it is two nameless men on the road leaving Jericho; in Luke, it is one nameless man on the way to Jericho; and in John, there is a long narrative at an earlier place in the itinerary of Jesus, about a man whose blindness is healed at a place called, "The Pool of Siloam," after Jesus had spit on the ground to make mud, which he put on the man's eyes, and instructed him to wash in the pool. That may refer to a different episode altogether.

Only in Mark's gospel are we given his name, "Bartimaeus," which means, "honorable son," or, "precious son." In any case, it refers to this man who sat begging on the side of the road where blindness made him, ironically, less valuable, less honorable than his sighted neighbors.

Of course, he could have been merely the son of a man named Timaeus, and we should attribute no more significance than that to the name. Still, it is interesting that Mark tells us his *name*.

There are often two ways to interpret the meaning of a name; the symbolic and the literal. Because of his blindness, the man was a burden to his friends and family, and could not make a significant contribution to his community. Nonetheless, his name tells us that he was precious, valuable in God's eyes.

Additionally, it is not only the name that has meaning. The blindness itself has a literal as well as a symbolic power. To be sure, sight means physical sight, the proper functioning of the eyes. Sight also refers to the eyes of the spirit and of the mind, in this case spiritual understanding; the ability to understand the things of God, and of Jesus.

Also in this case, it is to be contrasted to the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders, and the of the people in general, and even the disciples, who are consistent in their failure to understand, though they were all physically sighted.

Sometimes we speak of the attainment of understanding as a light bulb turning on. The lights were off and they were stumbling in the dark. They could see the rocks on the road in front of them, but not the writing on the wall.

In all three of the so-called “synoptic” gospels, the encounter with the blind man is among the last of the events in the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and the Triumphal Entry into the city at the end of his life on earth.

It is significant that this healing takes place immediately before the arrival of Jesus into the Holy City for the Passover, because immediately the lessons got difficult.

It begins with the incident at the Temple, when Jesus overturns the tables of the money-changers and casts out those selling animals for the sacrifices; “my house was meant to be a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of thieves.”

He goes on to a series of contentious conversations with various groups of people; Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Temple Priests. There are strident parables, such as the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-12) that serve as parting shots at the leadership.

There was the last meal with the prediction of betrayals and denials along with empty oaths of loyalty; and there was the arrest and the trials, the

cross. Only then Resurrection. How could they possibly understand?

As they made their way to Jerusalem, some were suspicious that there was about to be an attempted coup, one that was almost universally sought after. Others were of the mind that any such coup was foolishness and would be put down easily and violently by the Roman government which was nearing the height of its power (they were not far wrong on this point, as is confirmed by the Jewish War 35 years or so later). Still others may have only been bystanders, curious, hanging around in case something did happen.

“Have mercy on me,” is the request of Bartimaeus, who is not likely to have been overly concerned with the political situation or international diplomacy, but in his physical blindness was perhaps closer to the knowledge of the truly important aspects of life. “I want to see.”

What was about to happen was the reconciliation of the world to God. It was the Forgiveness of Sin. It was the Resurrection of the Dead. One can't say for sure what the blind man knew, but he knew at least that something more was happening than just another run of the mill insurgency. It was bigger than that, and of a different nature.

It is really hard to put into words the meaning of the Christ event, hard to know what to name it. Even musical expressions and high art and poetry can only

go so far. We tend to tell our individual stories or see divine movement in history but about these things one can never be too sure. Nonetheless, we proclaim it.

We say with Paul in the 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them,” and, from Romans 5;

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Most of the people who were on that Jericho road; the disciples, the opponents, the leadership, the Romans, the curious bystanders, couldn’t see what was happening right in front of them. The blind man saw it better, and because he asked, was given better sight.

What the blind man saw, given who he was and what his life had been like, what he couldn’t possibly have seen without the help of grace, is still happening today, and will happen tomorrow. God’s kingdom is in our midst, it has been and it will be. We apprehend it, in so far as we are able, by faith, which is our *sight*.

We hear and often say that we are living through hard times, not really like the Great Depression or the Civil War, which are names given to the hard times of the past, but not totally unlike them either. We have other words; pandemic, recession, polarized. Some of the words are the same; injustice, war, poverty, disease.

It is hard for us to admit this, but in spite of all the advancements of modernity, of technology and knowledge, we have neither solved any of these problems nor solved the problem of the human predicament. All the technology in the world is powerless before it.

But like for them, so also for us, Jesus comes along on the way to his sacrifice, his victory., and heals our blindness. The Blind Man saw. May we also see! And may this sight be turned in us, into the love and grace from which it comes.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)