

August 28 2016

Scripture Lesson

Leviticus 19:14

Luke 18:31-43

James 4:2-3

Sermon *A Blind Beggar Named Bart*

1. *His Blindness*
2. *His Belief*
3. *His Boldness*
4. *His Blessing*

Before I begin, I have a disclaimer: The following sermon was a conglomeration of 3 different sermons and ideas from Russ Clark, Brian Bill who is an on line Baptist preacher and also, yours truly.

Stevie Wonder (the singer) and Jack Nicklaus (the golfer) are sitting around the pool talking. Inevitably the conversation turns to golf and Nicklaus is surprised to find out that Stevie Wonder, who is blind, has been playing golf for years.

The golf pro can't believe it. He wants some details so Stevie Wonder explains how he does it: "My caddy stands out in the middle of the fairway and calls out to me. I listen for the sound of his voice and play the ball towards him. Then when I get to where the ball lands, the caddy moves further down the green, shouts out and I hit the ball again.

Nicklaus is obviously impressed but then asks, "But how do you putt?" The famous singer replies: "Well, I get my caddy to lean down in front of the hole and call to me with his head on the ground and his mouth just over the cup. I just play the ball towards his voice."

Nicklaus finds all this very amazing and then asks Wonder if they can play a round sometime. Stevie agrees but says that because people don't take him very seriously he only plays for money and he never plays for less than \$10,000 a hole. Nicklaus thinks about it for a minute and then says, "OK, that's serious money, but I'm up for it. When do we play?"

To which Stevie Wonder answers, "You name the night..."

This morning I want to talk about another blind man. Instead of being a professional golfer or a famous musician, this guy was wiped out by life. Because he was not able to see, he spent his days sitting by the fairways and highways, just waiting for someone to give him a shekel or a piece of bread.

Before we meet this blind man, I want to first set the context for you. Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be handed over to the gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will rise again.” The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about.

Without a doubt, Jesus is on a mission. He’s headed to Jerusalem. And the caravan of people that are following Him is growing at each rest stop. We see in Luke 18 that Jesus is now approaching the city of Jericho, which is about 15 miles from his final destination.

Since it is about 800 feet below sea level, Jericho has a climate that is tropical and at times very hot. The town is known as an oasis because of its fresh water spring and is called, “the city of palm trees.” It was in Jericho that the pilgrims gathered to make the final leg of the journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Passover feast. As Jesus heads into Jericho, He meets a blind man named Bartimaeus (or Bart for short). We know that’s his name from Mark’s account of the story. As we try to understand this incredible encounter between Bart and Jesus, we see four different stages that Bart goes through.

His Blindness

The first stage is blindness. Blindness was a very common problem in Palestine. Generally, one who was blind was never healed. Blind bearded Bart’s beleaguered and battered body...was...bum’d.

While Leviticus establishes that God’s people were to care for those who are blind, there was also a cultural and religious stigma against blindness. We see this especially in the account of another man who was healed of his blindness in John 9. There, as Jesus and the disciples were out walking, the disciples asked Jesus a question: “Rabbi...who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

And so, there is a sense in which those who were blind deserved their blindness. Many people thought this disease was a consequence of sin, either by the individual himself, or because of something the parents did. As a result, blind people were often ignored or even castigated.

Just as Jesus gives sight to those who are physically blind, so too He grants spiritual insight to those who are in moral darkness. This man knew he was blind, and so did everyone else. The first thing we need to do is to admit that we are just as blind in a spiritual sense as this man was in a physical sense.

Now when Bart heard the crowd going by, He asked what was happening.... You know, this man was pretty smart. He knew that there would be a mass of people in Jericho that day preparing to make the final journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. That’s why he was sitting by the side of the road with his hand out. He couldn’t see what was going on, but he could hear the commotion and excitement. And so he’s curious. He wants to know what was happening.

Perhaps he heard some unusual comments about a Healer who was headed to Jerusalem such as "...Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Bart's heart begins to race. Could it be, that the person He had heard of before was right here in front of him? It was almost too good to be true.

His Belief

The first stage is Bart's blindness. The second thing we notice is his belief. Notice how Bart addresses Jesus. "...Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd referred to the earthly heritage of Jesus—He was from Nazareth. That just lets us know where He grew up.

Instead of calling on Jesus as the guy from Nazareth, Bart expresses His messianic heritage. He is the Son of David, the one who the Old Testament has been pointing to as the Savior of the World. This blind man can see that Jesus is more than just a man from a small town in the north; He is the God-man, sent from Heaven to be the Savior of the world.

Bart was aware of his blindness, and his belief in Jesus was right on. But, he did more than just believe. He acted on what He knew to be true by his boldness.

His Boldness

Bart knew that he needed mercy because there was nothing he could do on his own. And so, he called out to Jesus, the Son of David, for mercy. In the first part of the story we see that the crowd of people is bothered by the blind man"...and rebuked him and told him to be quiet..."

The people who were leading the way may have been important city officials in Jericho. They wanted Jesus and his followers to see how beautiful their community was. They were probably embarrassed and even irritated when they heard Bart cry out for mercy. They wanted to shut him up and so they told him to knock it off and to be quiet.

It reminds me of what the city of Atlanta did when they hosted the summer Olympics. Before the games began, they removed all the homeless people who lived under an overpass because they didn't want their city to look bad. These officials from Jericho probably wished they had done the same. (Rio de Janeiro officials could have taken the same lessons in accommodations this year.)

I love the second half of the story,"...but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" This guy was really bold and courageous! He chose to not listen to the crowd and shouted out even louder than the first time. He broke all the cultural rules of etiquette. He didn't want Jesus to get away. This was his chance to receive some mercy and perhaps his sight.

As a result of Bart's boldness, "Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him..." Mark 10 tells us that Bart threw his cloak aside and jumped to his feet. Can you imagine how the crowd must have felt, especially those who had rebuked Bart? ...I picture everything getting real quiet... People are looking at

Bart and then at Jesus. Jesus orders some guys (maybe the same ones who rebuked Bart) to help him walk through the crowd so that he is face-to-face with the Messiah.

The question Jesus then asks Bart is very interesting. “What do you want me to do for you? Isn’t it obvious what Bart needed? Jesus knew what Bart wanted but He asked the question for Bart’s sake—and for the crowd of people who had gathered around. He wanted Bart to verbalize what it was that He wanted. I love Bart’s answer: “**Lord, I want to see...**”

Fast forward to today. Jesus is waiting for us to exhibit some boldness and to ask Him for what we need. James, chapter 4, says that “we have not because we ask not.” Maybe...you and I are not asking God for enough.

This ties in to the last point from the passage. Once we admit our blindness, and place our belief in Jesus as our only Savior and Lord, we can then be bold in our requests. That then leads to the fourth thing that happens: we receive a blessing.

His Blessing

In the story, we read, “Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’” Here’s a spiritual principle that we should never forget: Jesus is looking for more Barts today, people who will exhibit some faith, no matter how small it is, and cry out for mercy. Jesus loves to answer prayers like that by healing us from the inside out, granting us spiritual insight as he moves us out of darkness.

The passage tells us that, “Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.” When Bart got his sight back, he couldn’t help but break out into praise. He was thrilled!

A while back, I heard about a man from Madrid, Spain, who had been blind for 40 years and just had an operation on his eyes that was successful. For the first time he was able to see 4 of his 9 children and all 22 of his grandchildren. He was also able to gaze at his wife’s face. He liked everything he saw except for the image in the mirror. Here’s what he said, “I thought I would look better. I look really ugly and old!”

Now we don’t know if Bart had any grandkids or even if he was interested in looking in a mirror, but here’s what happened: Bart received, then he followed, and then he praised. Those who saw what took place also were led into a time of praise.

Bart the blind man became Bart the believer. He recognized his blindness, exhibited his belief by crying out with boldness and then received a blessing, which spilled over into others’ lives.

Bart experienced four things:

A change of focus: from darkness to the light.

A change of direction: from sitting to following.

A change of purpose: from begging to praising.

A change of scope: he was blessed in order to bless others.

I believe God wants us to recognize our blindness and beef up our belief in who Jesus is. He then wants us to exhibit some boldness by asking Him for mercy so that we can receive a blessing that can be passed on to others.

As we ready ourselves to meet Jesus and walk with him this morning and every morning; which stage are you and I at? Are we like the man from Madrid who was content with himself until he regained his vision; or are we like Bart who sat by the wayside and waited for something to change; or do we take Bart's action as a call? What do we need to do next?

Jesus is asking us the question this very morning: "What do you want me to do for you?" My answer is going to be "**Lord, I want to see!**"

And together we say "Amen".