

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You have given us life. Help us therefore to accept our personal circumstances as Your gift to us, and the arena in which we must live our faith;

teach us to know and love Your ways,
energise us with a desire to do Your will,
inspire us by Your vision of the future,
and grant us peace in the knowledge of our salvation.

We rejoice to live the disciplines of faith by which we walk into life eternal, with You, our Saviour and our Lord; AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WATER

1. For yourself

Praise God for the gift of water and pray for those who do not have easy access to this precious resource

2. For your friends and family

Pray for the health of those you love, pray for each of them and their different conditions or other health problems

3. For the church and its work

Pray for your church especially those who clean it and keep it good order; for without water, where would they be?

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for those areas of the world that do not get enough water and need rain. Pray for those who suffer the effects of drought, this is a continual problem in the world even though it only hits our news headlines occasionally

Meditation

Is this the time we have been waiting for my friend?

When people are fooled and lead astray
By those who reject God's Word?

When false prophets regularly appear
Claiming to be all things to all people?

When the world is consumed by war
Because nations have turned on each other?

When earthquakes and famines cover the world
But the end has clearly not yet come?

When many of God's people fall from faith
And are reduced to hating each other?

When the Church of God is hated by nations
Because of the name of Jesus?

When those who believe are handed over
Yet those who endure know salvation?

When at dead of night and unexpectedly
The 'thief in the night' will surely come?

Yes, this is the time, my friend, this is the time.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho, then as He was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus) a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout out, saying,

'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to keep quiet; but he cried out all the more,

'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said,

'Call him here.'

So they called the blind man and said to him,

'Take courage and get on your feet; he is calling you.'

⁵⁰ Then he jumped up, flinging his cloak aside and came to Jesus. He said to him,

⁵¹ *'What do you want me to do for you?'*

The blind man replied,

'Teacher, let me recover my sight.'

⁵² Jesus said,

'Go on your way, your faith has made you well,'

He recovered his sight immediately, and followed Him on the way.

Review

After the extraordinary tension of His discussions with the disciples about their place in the Kingdom of God (see previous reading 10:32-45), Jesus continued His journey south to Jerusalem. On His way he passed through Jericho, about 15 miles east of Jerusalem, and His attention was caught by the shouts of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. In yet another great story about Jesus' healing ministry, Bartimaeus was healed, and then joined in with the throng of people walking with Jesus to Jerusalem (10:52). This simple but beautifully written story emphasises the speed with which the whole incident happened; Bartimaeus only just managed to catch Jesus' attention, but when he did, the few brief moments he had with Jesus were enough for him to receive his healing. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, and this was the last instance of Jesus healing someone before He went into Jerusalem (11:1-11).

There are many important features of this story, but this section of Mark's Gospel, from 8:22 to 10:45, has been dominated by Jesus' attempts to teach the disciples about faith and what it would mean to live according to the values of the Kingdom of God. It had not been easy! However, this part of Mark is defined as one section of the Gospel not just by Jesus' teaching of the disciples. At the beginning of the section we read about Jesus' healing of the blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26), and at its end we read this story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. It is as if Mark used these two healing stories to reinforce the idea that between them, the disciples were given the teaching that would open their blind eyes and deaf ears. Earlier, after Jesus had told the parable of the sower, He spoke about the importance of the disciples role in breaking through Isaiah's prophetic curse, 'they may look but not perceive, and may listen but not understand ...' (4:12, see Isaiah 6:9f.).

The contrast between the two healing stories is also very informative. The healing at Bethsaida took two attempts by Jesus to complete, and it ended with a typical instruction to the man to refrain from passing on information about what had happened to him (8:26). In our reading (10:46f.), which comes after Jesus opened the eyes of the disciples so that they could begin to see His nature and work as Messiah, there was no hesitancy on Jesus' part. He did not forbid the man to speak, indeed, he was welcomed onto the pilgrimage to Jerusalem!

We should conclude therefore that Jesus had completed the teaching He wanted to give to the disciples, and He was ready to move on. Jesus was now ready for His own work and ministry to be exposed to public view

in Jerusalem because God's time had come for Him to go to Jerusalem. Once He entered the city, Jesus had one intention alone, which was to fulfil the work of the Messiah according to God's will. His task was to submit to being 'handed over' to the authorities for His sacrificial death and consequent resurrection (8:32, 9:32, 10:33,34). At this point in time, nothing else was important to Jesus, and from this point onwards in Mark's Gospel, no other healing miracles are recorded.

The story of blind Bartimaeus has been an inspiration to many people for centuries, because his persistence and faith been an example to many who seek the touch of the Lord. As Bartimaeus called to Him, Jesus was clearly intent upon His final journey to Jerusalem, the crowd were not interested in helping Bartimaeus at first, and the disciples played no part in the story. Yet he persisted to call out and seek healing from Jesus, and eventually, his cries were heard and Jesus indicated that he was willing to help him (10:49). Bartimaeus was not going to let this opportunity slip away (10:47-49), and when Jesus called him, he abandoned his cloak and came immediately (10:52). The faith Jesus drew out of him was sufficient for his healing, and also his transformation into one who 'followed Him (Jesus) on the way.'

Going Deeper

There are a number of spiritual features to the story that are worth exploring further, not least those which are hinted at by the way in which Bartimaeus described Jesus. If you read through the passage, you will find that he used a number of very important titles for Jesus, quite purposefully. What do these titles mean? And why did Bartimaeus use them? These and other questions help us discover more about this important healing miracle of Jesus.

The journey, the disciples and the large crowd.

At the beginning of the story, Mark tells us that Jesus had come to Jericho and was going straight through. He confirms our mental picture gained from the previous verses that Jesus was making the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem with both the disciples and 'a large crowd'. This was no real problem for those who were travelling, because most of Jesus' compatriots were used to the journey to Jerusalem for the great festival events. The feast of Passover was drawing near (as we will soon discover – 14:1f.) and it may have even been the case that Jesus was amongst the general crowds heading for Jerusalem at that time. Nevertheless, Jesus was the centre of attention for a significant number of these people. It cannot have been the disciples alone who thought that Jesus was the Messiah, and every imaginable expectation was thrust upon Him as He made His way. We might wonder how Jesus could bear all this and still hear the call of one individual in real need, but the story of blind Bartimaeus tells us that Jesus can perceive this need and respond to it with love and grace even within the clamour of a thousand other voices.

The sight of beggars on the roadsides leaving a city was common in Jesus' day. Travellers needed resources to pay for their needs, and beggars would call on wealthy travellers for charity or 'alms'. Blind people were often reduced to the life of a beggar because they could not make the expected economic contribution to a family which was expected of a man or woman and although some larger more wealthy families could support one or two members of the extended family who were impaired in some way, poorer families could not. Begging was a part of life in first century Judaism, and they were used to attracting attention because it was their livelihood.

It would have been likely that other beggars, with various disabilities, would have sat by the side of the road going out of Jericho to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, however, had heard about Jesus and he had the temerity to believe that the man who everyone was talking about would be prepared to pay attention to him. He had faith.

Blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus

The main feature of this story is the manner in which Bartimaeus called out to Jesus with persistence until Jesus responded. No-one else was interested in his shouting, so why did Jesus stop and notice him? Bartimaeus' faith may well have shown in his words even before he had a chance to show it face to face with Jesus. He called out 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Some see in this shout no more than a beggar's call, using flattery to get the attention of his target; for the title 'Son of David' was a far more elevated title for the Messiah than any other used by anyone else in the whole of Mark's Gospel! We can reject the more cynical interpretation of what Bartimaeus said because without doubt, we all respond to the intonation of what is said to us, and Jesus was skilled in understanding people's hearts. In Bartimaeus he heard someone calling out to Him in need, but addressing him with this great historic title 'Son of David'.

David was the first great king of Israel (after the failed king Saul) who united God's people around one thousand years before the time of Christ, and each of his descendants who reigned in Jerusalem had been called a 'son of David' (2 Chronicles 1:1, 35:3, Ecclesiastes 1:1). These 'sons of David' reigned more or less continuously from the time of David until 597BC when Jerusalem was overrun by the Babylonians and the

monarchy (and the Temple) was destroyed. After that time, the prophets helped the people of Israel come to terms with what had happened by explaining to them that God would send a new 'Son of David', His 'Anointed One', the 'Messiah', who would do God's will and save His people. This was the 'Son of David' which people expected, and the title was one of the noblest which could be used of the Messiah.

Bartimaeus called out to Jesus twice using this title (10:47,48), but it is also noticeable that Bartimaeus also knew the title 'Jesus of Nazareth' (10:47). This is easy for us to gloss over because we are used to it, but this is in fact the first place that someone describes Jesus like this in Mark! Although Bartimaeus did not shout this, it is something he must have made known in telling the story, and Mark thought it significant enough to mention. The explanation of it is, however, a little obscure. It was thought by some that the Messiah would come from Nazareth because of a certain way of understanding Isaiah 11:1; 'a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow from his roots ...' The Aramaic word for 'branch' in this prophesy sounds like 'nazorean', and because of the messianic nature of Isaiah's famous prophecy and his mention of the 'stump of Jesse' (meaning David, Jesse's son), some expected the Messiah to come from Nazareth (as is seen in Matthew 2:23 and John 1:45f. for example). Bartimaeus certainly knew enough about Jesus to have picked this up. He knew that he needed Jesus

Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus

Despite the difficulties of his circumstances, Bartimaeus knew enough to believe that if he could only stand before Him, Jesus would heal him. When Jesus came by on his way to Jerusalem, he knew his only chance had come, and his persistence paid off when Jesus eventually heard him and summoned him to ask about his need. Jesus must have known perfectly well that Bartimaeus was blind, but His question; 'what do you want me to do for you?' drew out the blind man's faith. Bartimaeus then replied to Jesus using a word which only occurs in one other place in all the Gospels; he said 'rabboni', meaning 'great teacher' (10:51). Most of us know this to be what Mary called Jesus in that stunning moment when she recognised His presence in the garden after His resurrection (John 20:16). It was therefore a unique word which Bartimaeus used, one almost of gratitude and affection, as appropriate for one who was respected and honoured far above all else.

This was the 'faith' Jesus saw in Bartimaeus', and Jesus neither touched him nor performed any dramatic actions on him (as He had done for the blind man in Bethsaida – 8:22-26). He said; 'Go on your way, your faith has made you well.' Nothing else was needed, and Jesus healed Bartimaeus 'with a word', by accepting the faith he showed and pronouncing him well. Older versions of the Bible often have the translation 'your faith has saved you', but the meaning of the text is clear. Bartimaeus had been set free from the bondage of his blindness, and in the liberty he now experienced, he was free to join Jesus on the road to Jerusalem (10:52).

Discipleship

Application

The story of blind Bartimaeus and his healing is appealing to us because it speaks to us about faith which is persistent, which will not allow others to get in the way and holds Jesus in the highest regard. Bartimaeus was also prepared to jump up and follow Jesus' word in an instant and do his bidding (10:50). This is a vastly different story of Christian discipleship than what we have heard in previous studies in which the disciples had misunderstood Jesus time and time again, and it is refreshing. There is an implicit connection between the disciples and people who have been following Jesus for a long time, and between Bartimaeus and new Christians who have recently come into a church or fellowship. Long-standing disciples often find it hard to change and hear Jesus' challenges afresh, but new Christians appear to exude energy and have few inhibitions about their relationship with Jesus; long-standing Christians will sometimes be familiar with following Jesus in certain ways, and new Christians will take risks that others would find difficult. Such a characterisation is not always accurate, but we have all seen something of this within the life of the church. It is important for us to remember that each has their place within the church, however. Christ does not want us to compare ourselves with each other, but inspire each other to acts of Christian love and mercy; and the story of blind Bartimaeus is an inspiration to many.

When Bartimaeus called to Jesus out of the crowd, many of us can sympathise with him and his expression of need. Just how does Jesus respond to the individual needs of everyone for whom He cares? In the end, we can never fully answer this question, but we know that Jesus responds appropriately to each one of us when it matters. He responded to blind Bartimaeus when he needed a touch of healing and blessing, and He will respond to us when we need the same. God's care for us all is a mystery, but the fact that He does care goes a long way to sustaining us in our faith.

Questions for groups

1. How does the story of blind Bartimaeus teach Christians today about faith?
2. Which is more important for this story and its place in Mark's Gospel; the healing of Bartimaeus or the faith of Bartimaeus?
3. Discuss the titles we use for Jesus today, and what the title 'Son of David' and 'Jesus of Nazareth' mean to Christians today.

Discipleship challenges

- *Each of us tend to use certain words to describe Jesus when talking to Him in prayer, for example; 'Lord', 'Lord God', 'Jesus Christ', 'Almighty God'. Write down the words you most commonly use. If you are in a group, share your own list with others and ask them to explain their preferences. If you are by yourself, open the Bible at the Psalms, and reflect on the different titles used there.*
- *Pray for those who have difficulty with their sight and seek help because they are not able to obtain a complete healing of their eyesight problems, despite modern technology and healing methods.*

Final Prayer

Almighty God, we give You thanks for the great journey of faith upon which we are embarked. May we never be unwilling to accept new challenges, and may we never fail to use the discernment You have given us so that all we do and say will be to Your great praise and glory. AMEN
