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GO FOR IT!

Today's Text: Mark 10: 46- 52

Extracts:

And when [Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus [Mk 10: 47-50]

Sir Richard Branson is the well-known owner of over 150 companies bearing the Virgin name (e.g., Virgin Airlines), employing over 5,000 workers and with a personal wealth of almost US\$3 billion.¹ He is working on an adventure to send paying tourists to the moon! As a child, Richard Branson was diagnosed with dyslexia, a learning disorder marked by a severe difficulty in recognizing and understanding written language, leading to spelling and writing problems. Branson was frequently embarrassed because he had to memorize and recite word for word in public. Consequently, he had terrible scores in the standard IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests. Even when at 17 he was able to start a student newspaper with a friend at Stowe School, Buckingham, England, his headmaster told him, "I predict that you will either go to prison or become a millionaire." But he stood on his grandmother's advice, "You've got one go in life, so make the most of it."

Richard Branson rejected the label put on him by his disability and the world. He recognized that IQ tests may accurately measure intelligence but not ambition. He went for it and today he is celebrated by his old high school as one of its famous alumni.² How about you? What are you hearing around you concerning your life, your future? What are you listening to concerning how limited you are by your natural, emotional and economic disabilities? Are you going to give up or disappoint all unfavourable expectations? Are you ready to go for it? Let us find out from this week's study, based on blind Bartimaeus' encounter with Jesus.

¹ Based on the following sources: John Shepler, "Richard Branson's Virgin Success The Incredible Triumph of an Enigmatic Entrepreneur", <http://www.johnshepler.com/articles/branson.html> ; and "Dyslexia Symptoms, Signs, Causes, Types, Diagnosis and Treatment," <http://www.medicinenet.com/dyslexia/article.htm>

² <http://www.stowe.co.uk/about-stowe/some-of-our-alumni/>

1. Introduction: Blind Bartimaeus was like us!

The Bible text for this week's study is from the Gospel according to Mark [**Mk 10: 46-52**]. It tells the story of a blind beggar called Bartimaeus who encountered Jesus in Jericho. The same story is reported in Matthew [**Matt. 20: 29-33**] and Luke [**Lk 18: 35-43**]. Let us not be involved in the debate as to whether there were two beggars (as reported by Matthew) or that the event occurred as Jesus was coming near Jericho (as reported by Luke) or when He was going out (as reported by the other two writers). The important thing is that the event occurred around Jericho, a city located near River Jordan. Let us try to imagine the setting for this story.

You may recall the great story about the fall of Jericho during the time of Joshua, when the children of Israel were on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. Jericho was a heavily fortified city which could not be captured by military prowess. So, God commanded Joshua and his forces to march around the city everyday for six days and to march seven times around it on the seventh day. Thereafter, he should shout [**Josh. 6: 1-5**]. They did as they were commanded and "it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat [and] the people went up into the city, every man went straight before him, and they took the city." Then they "utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman" [**vv. 20-21**]. Joshua put a curse on Jericho, saying, "Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city, Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates" [**v. 26**]. Several hundreds of years later, during the reign of the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, the husband of Jezebel, a man called Hiel from Bethel, tried to rebuild Jericho. As they laid the foundation, his firstborn, Abiram, died. As they were laying the gates, his youngest son, Segub, died, "according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua" [**1 Kgs 16: 34**].

It is to be expected that at the time of Jesus, old Jericho, the city of palm trees [**2 Chron. 28:15**], remained a desolate and sparsely populated place. In fact, the Parable of the Good Samaritan suggests that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho had become infested with thieves who attacked and stole from travellers [**Lk 10: 30**]. The Gospel accounts of Jesus' visit to the city suggest that He did not stay there at all. He just came in one moment and left soon after [**Mk 10: 46; Lk 18: 35-37**]. So, what can we conclude about blind Bartimaeus' situation? *He was blind and begging in a cursed city!* That is double tragedy.

Are we not in a similar place ourselves? After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God cursed Adam, saying, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it, all the days of your life" [**Gen. 3: 17**]. The Lord threw Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and placed cherubim with a flaming sword in all directions to guard the tree of life [**v. 24**]. Therefore, our earth had become cursed until Jesus "passed by" thousands of years later. Even so, have we given up our

sinful ways? Therefore, we are not any better than blind Bartimaeus. We are still disabled by poverty, drugs and fear of man. Some of us have already dug ourselves into a bottomless pit of error and they have not stopped digging! Some of us have inoculated ourselves against reality with self-righteous rationalization of their situation. The truth is that we are blind and live in a desert of want and despair. We may be occupying high office in government, church or business but we are lonely and unhappy. We may be able to afford the best meals that money can buy but we have no appetite. We may live in the most luxurious homes and sleep on the most comfortable beds but we stay awake all night. So, we all have a great deal to learn from how Bartimaeus got out of his mess and received healing and deliverance. He went for it. Jesus is passing by the door of your heart right now and offering you a rare opportunity to put an end to your disability. Are you ready to go for it?

2. Lessons from blind Bartimaeus' encounter with Jesus

For Bartimaeus, that day began just like any other day. If he was lucky, some good Samaritans might pass by and drop a few coins into his begging bowl. However, that day was going to be different. It would mark the end of his past and the beginning of the rest of his life. Here are the key developments that day:

a) *Bartimaeus heard about Jesus*

As he sat by the road side begging as usual, he heard the noise of a great multitude passing by. That was unusual. So he asked what was happening and they told him that it was Jesus of Nazareth that was passing by. He might already have heard about Him because as soon as he knew who was passing by, "he began to cry out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'" [Mk 10: 46-47]. Was he asking for alms or healing? Examine what he called Jesus- Son of David. That was His Messianic name. He saw Jesus beyond being a mere miracle worker. That was like asking for a relationship because beggars do not care for long-term relationships with alms-givers. Therefore, Bartimaeus was not satisfied to remain a blind beggar. He determined that that was the opportunity to do something about his situation.

How about you? For too long, you have been disabled by accident of birth, crippled by fear and despair, and blinded by inordinate ambition. Do you want to remain in that state? You may have heard of or read about Jesus. You may even be a "practising" Christian with a litany of debilitating material and spiritual problems. Jesus is passing by. He is knocking on the door of your heart, asking to come in. Are you ready like Bartimaeus to finally deal with your situation?

b) *But Bartimaeus was hushed!*

Many people who heard the blind man frantically trying to draw the Lord's attention "warned him to be quiet" [v. 48]. I can imagine some of the words they used against him, such as, "Shut up, you blind beggar!" "Do you think He is for people like you?" "Do you want to show Him the ugly side of this city?" They did everything to discourage him, to make him unambitious for a better future.

In like manner, people will discourage you. Family and friends will tell you not to disgrace their good name or wash the family's dirty linen before strangers. Professionals will tell you not to waste your time because if they could not help you, nobody else could. Yet, their words cannot comfort you or solve your pressing problem(s). Are you going to succumb to that? Bartimaeus did not. In fact, "he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" [v. 48]. The blind man could not be hushed!

c) *Jesus stood still!*

Jesus heard him and "stood still" and "commanded him to be called" [v. 49]. Jesus heard that shrill desperate lone voice out of the cacophony of voices of the huge crowd. Can you imagine that? Does that not reassure you that even though billions of people may call on the name of Jesus each moment, yet He cannot miss your weak voice? He will stand still for you!

You may remember the story of Zacchaeus, a man of "small stature" who wanted badly to see Jesus, but could not on account of the huge crowd blocking his access. So, he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree. When Jesus got there, He looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for today I must stay at your house" [Lk 19: 1-5]. All Zacchaeus wanted was a brief view of Jesus. Instead, he monopolized His attention for a whole night! You are that important to Jesus when you call on Him to deal with your situation.

d) *Suddenly his detractors began to encourage him!*

As soon as Bartimaeus had commanded the attention of Jesus, the same people that had tried to hush him up began to encourage him, saying, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you" [Mk 10: 49]. What a turnaround! In deed, as the popular saying goes, "Success has a hundred fathers; failure is an orphan!" Blind Bartimaeus had become a special person; one who could command Christ's singular attention. Everybody wanted to be close to him!

When you take that audacious step of faith forward and unexpected favourable results begin to show, your detractors, especially in the family and among friends, will become your first advocates. They will fill in the

blank spaces by embellishing your pain or hardship and how you remarkably overcame all odds!

e) *Bartimaeus threw aside his garment*

We are told that “throwing aside his garment, [Bartimaeus] rose and came to Jesus” [v. 50]. You can imagine how dirty and old that garment was. That had been his business outfit as a beggar for so many years. That had been the garment of his affliction and disability. He cast it off and came to Jesus because deep in his heart, he knew that he was not going to beg for alms any longer. So, when Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” he did not hesitate to say, “*Rabboni, that I may receive my sight*” [v. 51]. Remember that Mary Magdalene called the risen Christ Rabboni, which means Teacher [Jn 20: 16]. Therefore, Bartimaeus was not begging for bread; he was asking for a relationship! What garment are you wearing to cover your distress? What garment has the world given you for your disability? Jesus is calling you. Therefore, the time has come for you to throw away your garment of sin or shame, fear or pride, culture or religion. Throw it away and come to Him.

Jesus knew what blind Bartimaeus lacked because, as He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, our heavenly Father knows the things we have need of before we ask Him [Matt. 6: 8]. Yet, Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted done for him. This was necessary because God will not violate the free will that He has given to you. Much more, how can you thank God for something that you do not know about? That is why He requires us to ask so as to receive, seek in order to find or knock so that it will be opened to us [Matt. 7: 7]. Bartimaeus asked for a new way of life beyond his disability.

f) *Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus*

Jesus told the blind man, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” He immediately *received his sight “and followed Jesus on the road”* [Mk 10: 52]. The word of God says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [Joel 2: 32; Rom. 10: 13]. Bartimaeus confessed Jesus with his mouth and believed in his heart that He is the Son of David. With his heart, he had believed unto righteousness and with his mouth, he had made confession unto salvation [Rom. 10: 10]. Therefore, as Jesus personally confirmed to him, his faith had made him well –both physically and spiritually.

Having been thus healed, he could not return to the garment that he had cast off or the trade that he no longer could fit into. He had become a new man in Christ. Even though he was offered the privilege to go his way, he preferred to follow Jesus “on the road” [Mk 10: 52]. Peter tried to return

to fishing after the resurrection of Jesus but the zeal for that was gone. He caught nothing because from that point on, he was to catch men, no longer fish [Jn 21:1-17]. That was why he was able to win 3,000 converts at his first sermon after the Pentecost [Acts 2: 41].

You cannot take Christ's healing and restoration and return to your old life. If you do that, sooner than later, you will return because the need will return with a vengeance. Instead, remain with Jesus on the road to salvation, success and victory. That is what Bartimaeus did; that is what he has taught us all.

3. **Conclusion: Time to give up your spiritual blindness!**

There is the story of a man who came to an office where there was a bold sign on the wall saying, "ABSOLUTELY NO SMOKING!" He brought out a cigar and asked the receptionist, "Do you mind if I smoke?" The young lady answered, looking at the sign on the wall, "No Sir. In fact, that sign is not for illiterates!" The truth is that the visitor had eyes but did not use them. In like manner, we may have clear sight but if we do not see what we should see, we are blind! If we cannot see physically, how can we see spiritually? If we do not see spiritually, how can we walk by faith?

Bartimaeus was blind by human standards. Yet, he called Jesus the Son of David, His Messianic name, and Rabboni (Teacher), a relationship name. Therefore, he was spiritually alert even though he was physically blind. The word of God says, "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" [Ps. 36: 9]. If you have no personal relationship with Jesus, then your physical eyes cannot see because they cannot see the Light of the world [Jn 8: 12]. So, get up from your disabled state. Drop your begging bowl. Call on Jesus. He will hear and stand still for you. When He calls you, cast off your filthy garment of ignorance, shame, lack and sin. Go to Him and get healed.

Go for it!