

The Bartimaeus Periscope
The Gospel of Mark Part Two
Mark 10:46-51

“Praise the Lord, oh my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. For the Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, and the Lord loves righteousness. The Lord reigns forever. Your God, O Zion, reigns for all generations.”

I've always been amazed at those rare souls who exist on this earth who accomplish much in this life in spite of the fact that their eyes do not function the way our eye's function. We may be near-sighted. We may be far-sighted. We may be short-sighted. We may even be broad-sighted. But at least our eyes can function. Their eyes, however, do not function at all because they are blind. Louis Braille never had the privilege of reading a book the way you and I read a book. So, he decided to invent a new language that allowed blind people to read by touching a sequence of raised bumps on a page. We now call that language Braille. Ray Charles never had the privilege of reading sheet music. He never had the opportunity to read *Every Good Boy Does Fine* on the Treble Clef or *Great Big Dogs Fight Animals* on the Bass Clef. But he could play and sing “just an old sweet song keeps Georgia on my mind” better than anyone I've ever heard.

Two weeks ago, when we last hitched our wagons to the Gospel of Mark, we saw two individuals, James and John, whose physical eyes that worked just fine. They could take in the magnificence of the sunrise from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. They could behold the glory of a lightning bolt and a tempest stirring on the Sea of Galilee. But when it came to seeing things from a spiritual perspective, they were blind as a bat. And that spiritual blindness produced the worst demand of Jesus in all recorded human history: “Good teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask!” Today, church, we are going to hitch our wagons in the Gospel of Mark to the story of man who was exactly the opposite. Mark wants us to know this man was exactly the opposite because he puts this man's story right after James and John's story. He could not take in the magnificence of the sunrise from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Nor could he behold the glory of a lightning bolt and a tempest stirring on the Sea of Galilee. But when it came to seeing things from a spiritual perspective, this man had perfect 20/20 vision. His name was Bartimaeus. He is the gold standard example that God saw fit to preserve for us in His Holy Word for understanding what seeing things with spiritual eyes is all about.

You see, people of God, in every circumstance; in every challenge; in every situation; and in every decision, you have two periscopes for viewing from which to choose. The first periscope allows you to see the issue with your just physical eyes and measure it by just what you see in front of you. That's the periscope James and John chose. It requires no faith at all. The only thing it requires is trusting in the flesh. Or you can look at the issue through the Bartimaeus Periscope. That one requires 20/20 spiritual vision. It requires tremendous faith. And it requires trusting in Jesus instead of what you see in front of you. So today church, I want to tell you what you will see when you look at things in your life from a spiritual perspective, through the Bartimaeus Periscope. They are the same things Bartimaeus “saw” even though he was blind. We find them in Mark 10:46-52.

⁴⁶Then 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. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So, they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.” ⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. 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.

1. No such thing as a bad circumstance (46)

- **Calling to Complain:** (1) The next time you buy a consumer good, and you call the manufacturer to complain about the way it works, there's a 95% chance the following will happen: (a) You call the 1-800 and immediately start complaining; (b) to which the other person on the other of the phone says “hang on. Let me transfer you to the right department.” (2) And the process keeps repeating.
- **If anyone had a right to complain about bad circumstances, it was Bartimaeus:** (1) He was from a sinful place: The text tells us that he lives in Jericho. It was a city so readily associated with sin that God used Joshua to annihilate it because of its depravity. It was the city Zacchaeus chose as the base of his operation when he was a tax collector exploiting the poor. And it was the place the man in the Good Samaritan was fleeing to after he left God's city, Jerusalem. (2) He was blind: What people thought about blindness in those days was much different than we think about it today. People associated blindness with sin and viewed it as God's punishment for sin. That's why they left them alone. (3) He was abandoned and reduced to begging: Mark pauses and tells us Bartimaeus is the “Son of Timaeus” because it's significant. In Aramaic, Timaeus means “a man of honor.” Thus, Bartimaeus is “the son of the man of honor.” Considering blindness was associated with sin in those days and Bartimaeus wasn't born blind (Jesus says “see again” in Luke 18), his father would have undoubtedly viewed his son's condition as a dishonorable one. That explains why he was reduced to begging in a sinful city. He was abandoned.
- **But today was a new day from Bartimaeus' perspective:** because Jesus was coming to town. And because Jesus was coming to town, God's grace was operable and entirely possible to experience from Bartimaeus' perspective.

- **App:** Jesus is in your town. He lives in your heart. And if he resides there, every circumstance is a provident occasion to experience the blessing of his presence. That's what it means to see your circumstances through the periscope of Bartimaeus.
2. **Great persistence indicates great faith (47-49).**
- **Method of Stone Cutting:** (1) The method of stone cutting has largely remained unchanged for thousands of years. (2) The stone cutter hammers away at the rock. (3) He might hit it a hundred times without so much as a crack showing in it. (4) But at the 101st blow it splits in two. (5) It wasn't just the one blow that split the rock in two. It was that one and all the blows before it. (5) That is the type of persistence Bartimaeus had.
 - **Bartimaeus' Persistence Was Not Without Obstacles:** (1) There was the obstacle of the crowd: Mark tells us the crowd rebuked him. Now the crowd is joining in the chorus of Bartimaeus' life. Be silent, Bartimaeus. (2) There was the obstacle of social etiquette: Blind beggars didn't approach or speak to rabbis in the 1st century. That would have been like a panhandler knocking on the door of a Fortune 500 company and asking to speak to the CEO not once, but twice!
 - **But Bartimaeus Overcame His Obstacles with Great Faith:** (1) Because of what he knew about Jesus: "Have mercy upon me, Son of David" is a revealing request. It (a) is a play on honor. The dishonorable "son of Timaeus" has asked the most honorable "Son of David" for mercy. But it is also (b) an appeal Bartimaeus constructed from the Psalms that centers on God being merciful to the brokenhearted and binding up their wounds. He knew Jesus' nature was different, so he appealed directly to it. That takes great faith to see Jesus like that. (2) Because of what he knew about himself: The text says that the moment the crowd shouted "silence," he called out to Jesus even more. Why? Jesus is town. The crowd can say what they want to. If he listens to them, Jesus leaves town and he's still blind. But if Jesus hears him, he's got a chance. That takes not only remarkable faith. It also takes great courage.
 - **App:** Jesus takes great pleasure in persistence in what you ask of Him. It's not a bother to him because it is a sign of great faith. Ask the Lord. Then ask Him again. And don't stop asking until he stops his walk out of Jericho and looks in your direction and gives you an answer.
3. **Leaving the cloak behind is more important than the reward (50).**
- **Miracle in My Son's Room:** (1) I walked into my son's room this week and witnessed a true, living miracle. (2) His room was spotless. His bed was made. His trash can was empty. His floor was vacuumed. No plates in sight. No cups in sight. Clothes were folded and put in their rightful place. (2) My wife didn't do it. I didn't do it. His sister sure didn't do it. (3) In the past, I would have to bribe him to put such an effort. But on this day, he put forth such an effort and did the right thing, not for a reward, but because it was the right thing to do. (4) Bartimaeus did also.
 - **Bartimaeus' cloak represents something:** (1) Mark tells us Bartimaeus "threw his cloak aside." That's important. It represents a way of life for him. It represents how he learned to survive. (2) A cloak was a tunic, a long robe without sleeves and Bartimaeus depended on it. He used it as a blanket at night and for clothing. But the most important way he used it was to collect what alms he received while begging. You see, Bartimaeus couldn't extend his hand to accept charity because he couldn't see when someone wanted to be charitable. The only thing he could do was spread his cloak/tunic in front of him and hope the alms landed on it as they were being tossed. Then he could pull his tunic towards him and collect the alms. (3) Only his cloak/tunic provided him with those rare moments of comfort and safety in his life.
 - **But Bartimaeus' decision to leave his cloak behind also represents something:** (1) It's the most remarkable part of the passage because he leaves his cloak behind before Jesus even heals him. (2) Bartimaeus recognizes that the cloak is an obstacle; one that resigned him to the fact that he had to just "settle" to survive. But to be well, he could settle no more. Jesus was in town and just the opportunity to engage him meant he was willing to leave the cloak behind, regardless of whether Jesus healed him.
 - **App:** What cloak are you hanging on to today that represents a "settling" in some way? When we settle, we've resigned ourselves to continue to live in blindness and look for any fleeting source of comfort in that blindness. But God doesn't want us to settle. He wants us to do the right thing because it's the right thing. And that right thing is following Jesus because he is in town.
4. **God involves you in His answer to your requests (51-52).**
- **Prayer Quote I Ran Across:** "Be grateful if God answers your prayer. But be more grateful when God makes you the answer to someone else's prayer." Good quote. But it is incomplete without another sentence: "And be not surprised when God makes you the answer to your own prayers."
 - **Bartimaeus Played a Part:** (1) Jesus said to him "Your faith has healed you." It's perfect tense in the language of the NT. That means it started in the past and extends to the future: (a) Have mercy upon me, Son of David; (b) Leaving his cloak behind were Bartimaeus' contributions to the miracle of being able to see.
 - **God Restored His Sight:** What's interesting here is there is no dirt and spittle involved like in other accounts of Jesus giving sight to blind. He restores by divine decree.
 - **But God Gets the Glory:** Then the strangest thing happens. Jesus tells him to "go." But Bartimaeus doesn't go. He follows Jesus along the road. He's the only person on the receiving in of a public miracle in the NT that follows Jesus immediately after the miracle itself.
 - **App:** The truth is Bartimaeus had seen Jesus clearly long before the miracle took place. Now his physical sight helped him put his feet forward and his cloak still on the ground behind him. May we see Jesus like Bartimaeus did from this day forward. And leave our cloaks behind also. Amen.