

# Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus

## Mark 10:46-52

Background Information by R4 Ministries <https://rfour.org>

**Key Verses & Theology:** These are provided to help leaders think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

*48 Many people sternly ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' It's very possible that Bartimaeus was an annoying, persistent man who talked too much and too loudly and that's why the people tell him to be quiet. But there are also some class distinctions at play in this story that we might not catch since we're not living in Jesus' time and culture. Jesus, as a teacher (or rabbi), had elevated standing in Israelite culture. His position was a revered one – a rabbi was a Very Important Person. So to have a blind man yell for Jesus' attention is like, in our time, a homeless person demanding an appointment with a Fortune 500 CEO. The people telling Bartimaeus to be quiet aren't just annoyed with him (if they are at all), but are enforcing normal social codes of conduct. Bartimaeus, though, keeps yelling because he knows that normal social codes of conduct won't help him see because if such codes did make him see, then he would've already been seeing.*

*49 Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And the disciples called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, Jesus is calling you.' So even though Jesus' job/role fits the people's understanding of a VIP, Jesus certainly does not function like the Israelites expected VIPs to function (or how we expect VIPs to function, for that matter). Jesus hears Bartimaeus crying out and he responds to that cry. Jesus stops what he is doing (stands still) and offers his time and attention to Bartimaeus. Notice, though, the positions of power in the story: Jesus stands still while Bartimaeus, though blind, is the one who must come to Jesus. As we'll see in the next key verse, this power move isn't just for show. There's an identity issue at stake here.*

*50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Just like we have visual cues today that identify individuals who are blind (for example: A German-shepherd dog with a certain type of harness; a white cane or a cane with white markings at the end of it) so did the Israelites have identifiers for those who were blind in their time. Often, too, someone who was blind could not support himself and therefore wore the clothing of a beggar. Jesus, in standing still and granting an audience to Bartimaeus, gives Bartimaeus the opportunity to step outside the identity the Israelite culture has placed on him. Bartimaeus rises to the occasion. He throws off the signaling clothes of a beggar and blind man (his cloak) with energy (sprang up) and does not shy away from Jesus but approaches Jesus directly. Then when Jesus asks, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Bartimaeus does not mitigate his language. Instead he stays as bold as when he first started crying out to Jesus and says, 'My teacher, let me see again.'*

## **Themes to Focus on from the Scripture:**

**Identity** – We see the crowd tell Bartimaeus that he is not to talk. In response, we see Bartimaeus cry out all the louder. We see Jesus using his position of culturally-granted power to call Bartimaeus forward. We see Bartimaeus throw off his identifying beggar clothes to approach Jesus. Finally, we see Jesus using his position of God-granted power to give Bartimaeus a new identity of One-who-can-see. When we choose to approach Jesus, when we cry out for God's help, we start to shed the identities that the world gives us. As we shed those false or half-true identities that the world places upon us, then we are better able to see. And with our better vision, we see what Bartimaeus sees: Better vision comes from God. Jesus shows us how to better pay attention to God, so it makes sense to follow Jesus. Which is why Bartimaeus follows Jesus after he can see.

**Crying Out** – Many of the identities that we accept from the world (represented by the crowd in this story) are identities that tell us to be quiet, that tell us to not ask for help, that tell us to not question how things are, that tell us to not look weak or vulnerable. These identities keep us from receiving the fullness of life God intends for us. Usually, in order to more fully experience the life God intends for us, we have to first act against what we've come to believe about ourselves as told to us by the world. Bartimaeus demonstrates how this might look by crying out even as the people around him tell him to stop it. This is not an easy thing to do. This acting against what we've come to believe about our own self usually takes a longer frame of time than the story of Bartimaeus illustrates. It's helpful to remember then, why we cry out in the first place: Because living life God's way is better...as demonstrated by Bartimaeus' healing.

**Surrender/Healing** – Often I hear individuals wanting to understand what will happen before they move forward, before they leave their known/safe zones. When explaining a possible forward step to a group of people, I try to clarify as many ambiguities as possible because when ambiguity remains, people will often use that ambiguity as a reason to stay put. As humans, we often want to know what we're getting ourselves into and why we should put effort and energy into getting there. So what's interesting to me about this story is that Bartimaeus doesn't get to see until *after* he cries out and releases his identity as a beggar. It's only once he's actually moved and placed himself in front of Jesus that he gets to see. He left behind his old identity and received a new identity, but for a scary few moments in-between, he has no identity. And that's what surrender is. After Bartimaeus surrenders, then he experiences sight. He gets to see after, not before, his actions.

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## Questions for reflection by R4 Ministries [www.4four.org](http://www.4four.org) and [rotation.org](http://rotation.org)

- What kind of things do people cry out in need for?
- When we cry out to God for help, other people might tell us that we're foolish. Or they might tell us to be quiet. What do people sometimes say to poor people who are crying out for help? ("Get a job!" ?)
- But as we see in the Bartimaeus story, God can heal us, but being quiet about our needs so that we don't bug God, or other people, does not save us.
- One of the ways Bartimaeus experiences healing is by being able to see. Whenever we read a story about blindness in the Bible, we have to remember that blindness is also a "metaphor", a "sign" or code for something else as well. Blindness is not always just physical. What can people be "blind to"? Blind to others needs. Blind to God. Blind to their own sins.
- When we pay attention to God, when we keep asking God for help, then we will be able to "see" things differently than we did before.
- Scripture, prayer, worship, Sunday School, guides, --these are all things which help us "see" truth, see needs, see sin, see solutions, see ourselves as God sees us. How does God see us?
- When we ask God for help, God helps us to see in ways that we couldn't see before. God helps us see his message. God helps us see Jesus. God helps us see people differently.