

Sermon Study
Bartimaeus: Real Positivity
Mark 10:46-52

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” 50 Throwing 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.

I like this guy, this beggar named Bartimaeus, I like him because of the way he was able to ignore everything around him and just focus on Jesus. I like this because that’s what we really need to do sometimes. We need to ignore everything else and just focus on Jesus. There is so much around us; so much that happens to us; so much that shouts at us to divert our attention to things we can really do nothing about. And sometimes as a result, we feel quite helpless. Have you been feeling helpless lately? Many people do in these times. Much of what we hear seems to reinforce the idea that there is really no hope for us or our future.

- So have you (or have you ever) felt helpless? Care to share?

- What are some things to which you are tempted to give your attention that you can really do nothing about.

That’s why I like this blind beggar so much. If there’s anybody that had a reason to simply give up and resign himself to his plight, it would be him. But he refused to do that. Just consider his situation. He was blind and most of the religious crowd of that day incorrectly thought he was blind for a reason....they thought his parents had done some horrible sin and that God was meting out punishment on them by blinding his son. In other words the prevailing opinion that Bartimaeus heard all during his life is that he must be under a curse. Just think of how this would weigh you down! With everyone telling you that you were cursed, you would feel like giving up. But that just didn’t seem to be an option for Bartimaeus.

And furthermore, since there was no such thing as a safety net or welfare he was reduced to sitting by the busy streets each day and begging. Think of how humiliating that would be. Already people thought he was cursed. Now he would have to beg like a dog. How demoralizing! All sense of dignity would be flushed away as he held out his hand to passers by. But that was not the case, Bartimaeus soldiered on and seemed to have quite a bit of dignity still intact.

- *The idea that God punished people in the here and now for particular sins was not peculiar to Israel, it is often still thought today. You ever felt that God was punishing you in the here and now? How did you punch through it?*
- *JESUS was punished for our sins. Those who do not believe in him, will ONE DAY have to pay the price of their own sins, but now now. Right now we are in a time when God allows most everybody to live in relative blessing. (See Matt. 5:45 for more discussion on this) With regard to the punishing in the here and now, there is a verse that speaks to this as well if you want to trace it out: John 9:1-5*

For when Jesus came by, he was bold to shout out. This was not a man who was resigned to his fate! This was not a man who was ready to give up. That becomes clear. When he started shouting, many in the crowd said "Shut up Bart!....Who do you think you are, calling to the teacher like that!" But that didn't stop him! He got louder and shouted all the more! This guy is energized! What is driving him? So many hurdles, so many road blocks, so many reasons to quit and yet he punches through. How?

- *What "road blocks" might prevent people from coming to Jesus in our day? Are there also self-installed road blocks?*

What he was shouting reveals his secret. He shouts "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This is profound! David lived and died hundreds and hundreds of years before, but this man sees Jesus as the Son of David. What's so special about that? Well, you got to remember that God promised David that his throne would last forever and that it would eventually be occupied by the Promised One, the Messiah, the Christ. So this blind man saw Jesus as the Messiah! At sometime in his life he had no doubt heard what Isaiah had said about him, Isaiah said that the Son of David would "Open the eyes that are blind" (Is. 42:7). He heard the promise in the word and now he held God to it. So the secret to this guy's tenacity and amazing sticktoitiveness was his faith.

Some would say he just has a positive attitude. It's true that he did. But it wasn't some nebulous positivity that was based on a vague notion of success. Nope. This was a positive attitude that was based on the reality of a God who has promised to heal and to bless; the positive attitude was directed at the person of Jesus Christ who embodied that promise.

- *At least 30 years ago, the hot new trend was "The power of positive thinking." Everyone was instructed to think positively and then good things would happen....some even went so far as to say that they could alter reality through it. But eventually this faddish philosophy crumbled away because it wasn't based on anything other than a vague notion of success. Being Positive is not wrong....Bart was certainly very positive. His positivity was based on something real. What was his positivity based on?*
- *Okay, so what about the Blind man today who asks Jesus to restore his sight, and the answer comes back....no. What are we to make of that? Talk about that for awhile without looking at the next bullet point....see if you can come to some understanding as to why our Lord does not say "Yes" to everything we ask.*

- When asked to teach us how to pray Jesus taught us to think of God as our Father. To answer why our father in heaven sometimes says no to us, let's ask the Fathers in the group why they sometimes say no to their children's requests. Does this mean that you hate them? Does this mean that you have ceased to exist? Does this mean that you are not listening? Furthermore: Play an imagination game.....a game of what if. What if God answered in the affirmative for every prayer everyone in the world asked? What kind of world would that be like. Furthermore: Can you recount a time when God saying something besides yes to you in prayer was actually a blessing?

And his positivity was not misplaced! For Jesus stopped in his tracks, and says to those who were near him, "Call him!" The blind man scrambles to his feet, leaves his precious cloak behind and quickly felt his way to Jesus. I imagine the crowd, at last parting. He stands before Jesus and Jesus asks that most wonderfully open question "What do you want me to do for you?" Bart replies "Rabbi, I want to see!" And Jesus says "Your faith has healed you." He received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Bart is a marvelous example of how faith can cut through the clutter and clatter of life in this broken world and live according to God's positive assurance. He heard the word and he believed it.

- What is some of the "clutter and clatter of life today?"

So how about you? Are you living according to God's positive assurances? Or do you instead get caught up in all the stuff that is hitting you. Perhaps you need more proof that God will do right by you don't you? Well just a few days after he restored Bart's sight he gave you that proof. He gave the world all the proof they needed to know that God was willing to bless: He went to the cross to die for us all.

Paul explains to the Romans 5:5 about the hope that is ours and it's basis in Christ's willingness to die. He says "and hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by his holy Spirit.....God demonstrates his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:5 &8) You can probably think of a lot of reasons why God wouldn't care for you or love you, But the scripture is clear...his love is demonstrated, you cannot escape it, he died for sinners, he died for you.

- He does knowing that Christ died for sinners assure you that he will do right by you

Then in Chapter 8 of Romans Paul applies it to us even further he says "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things." (Rom. 8:32) So you see, in the Person of Christ Jesus, you have every reason to be positive and to get past all the negative things you might see all around you. He will do right by you no matter what.

But there's more, Jesus is now risen and lives and reigns from the right hand of God the Father. He is our great high priest who intercedes for us and now stands before each of us saying exactly what he said to Bartimaeus "What do you want me to do for you?" A marvelous, wonderful, gloriously open question. Made open for you by the full atonement for your sins. You are a child of God now. He will take care of you. He will bless you. He will do right by you. There is nothing you cannot ask him. "Ask anything in my name!" Says he. So do it. Perhaps you asked before and you didn't get what you thought you might need. Rest assured, Jesus has something better in store for you; rest assured that he will do right by you. You have been given everything you need to be like Bart and to become energized in your life. Every reason to shed off those dark feelings of helplessness and instead live by faith. AMEN

- How can living by faith actually be the ultimate positive thinking?