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Recovering the sight of the Blind

Mark 10:46-52

This story of *‘blind Bartimaeus’* is written in all three synoptics gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke[[1]](#footnote-1) and each tell the story with **some** differences in detail around the central fact that *Jesus healed him of blindness*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

These **minor** differences are:

1. Mark and Luke only mention **one** blind man named Bartimaeus but Matthew mentions **two blind men** andso perhaps there were two who werehealed by Jesus but Mark,[[3]](#footnote-3) *who was not there at that time*, focuses his full attention upon Bartimaeus because Peter either *knew* or befriended him when they *walked* in the crowd that went with Jesus to Jerusalem that very same day.[[4]](#footnote-4)

2. Luke[[5]](#footnote-5) writes the healing took place as Jesus was ***approaching*** Jericho whereas Matthew and Mark say it happened when he was **leaving** Jericho: from the days of Joshua there was an *‘old’* Jericho[[6]](#footnote-6) and then a *‘new’* Jericho[[7]](#footnote-7) just under 2 klms south of it, so, when Jesus was leaving the first Jericho, He was then approaching the other.

It is important to be aware that this story is a *‘limited subject’* because the purpose of **all** stories in the Bible are theological – ie: biblical stories are more ***about God*** rather than anything else - health, wealth or poverty are all related to the blessings or sufferings that come with human life in a material world, however, the Bible is primarily there to **teach us about God**.

And so, the theological message **about God**[[8]](#footnote-8) here, is that Bartimeaus *was blind* [[9]](#footnote-9)– the Greek means *“stone blind”* and whilst nothing is said about what caused it, accidental, hereditary or disease,[[10]](#footnote-10) the theological message here is that God heals human suffering through Christ.[[11]](#footnote-11) [[12]](#footnote-12)

It is important to also remember that God also heals human suffering through the many professional people such as Doctors of Medicine, Surgeons, Specialists and a plethora of other professions.

Early 1980s I was ministering on the Far South Coast of NSW and a local Doctor there had received a Coral Ridge[[13]](#footnote-13) blessing - *slayed in the Spirit* and so he put aside his stethoscope and Prescription pad in exchange for a free Bible and a *‘Spirit filled’* prayer for his patients.

The locals quickly told him to get back to his Stethoscope and Prescription pad or get out of town, which he did and was replaced by a wonderful and caring Doctor who was much loved in time to come. God has given us many forms of healing for which we must be thankful!

In the days of Jesus, blindness was widespread in the ancient Greco-Roman world[[14]](#footnote-14) and it is very likely that several different causes, including diseases, caused the loss of sight.

Tracoma[[15]](#footnote-15) may have been as common then as it still is in some parts of the world today,[[16]](#footnote-16) causing blindness in infancy by rubbing itching eyes.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Blind Bartimaeus did not have the pleasure of seeing the wonderful and marvellous things God gave us eyes to see and to enjoy:

*family and friends*

*the beauty and wonder of the earth*

*the heavens which tell of the glory of God*

*and so on.*

Blindness cuts off all the wonders of the natural world and all the skills and creativeness of artistry, writing, poetry and family and friends.[[18]](#footnote-18)

As one of the major cradles of Western civilisation, **Greece** once laid claim to many of the Seven Wondersof the Ancient World and Bartimeus, as his name implies, was Greek as was his father Timaeus.[[19]](#footnote-19)

To Greeks, **sight** was special, in fact, they had so many words for *sight and seeing*, they were known everywhere as the *“people of the eye”.*

*‘To see’* had such significance for Greeks, in their religious beliefs they created **icons**[[20]](#footnote-20)as *‘windows to heaven’* and which helped them to stay focused on God and their christian faith.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Importantly, Greeks believed **Luke** – gospel writer and doctor, was the Father of Greek iconography and *such was the importance of their acute ‘sense of sight’* that**scenes of violence and tragedy** from history such as battles, murders, suicides were forbidden in stage productions and actors wore masks so no one could see their facial expression.

And so, in Greek tradition *“bloody deeds were too horrible for the eye and so they forbid vivid descriptions to lay hold of the sensitive mind.”* [[22]](#footnote-22)

Bartimaeus had probably heard of the miracles of Jesus, especially, the healing blind people and so being very keen to see again, when he heard Jesus was near him[[23]](#footnote-23) – he called out loudly but there was strong vocal opposition[[24]](#footnote-24) from this sizeable crowd, who, perhaps regarded him as a sinner who deserved to be blind[[25]](#footnote-25) and so, he called out again in a voice that was *rough and raucous”!* [[26]](#footnote-26)

In the Old Testament there are several Hebrew[[27]](#footnote-27) words used to encourage the early Israelites to trust God when the going was troublesome and in this sense, *“to see”*, *“to behold”* and *“to consider and imagine”* the goodness God: written some 1,600 times.

The New Testament uses a Greek word which is blepo ) and is used some 80[[28]](#footnote-28) times: it too has the basic meaning ***“to put hope and trust in God”*** and in the fuller sense, to *“wait for the Lord” as in being patience for the* fulfillment of what has been asked of Him.[[29]](#footnote-29)

So, from the opening pages of Genesis, through the Prophets, and ultimately through Christ as Saviour of the world and to the closing pages of Revelation, we learn of God the Father as the **God of restoration**[[30]](#footnote-30) and in particular, the ultimate restoration, *“He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”* So assured and certain, He states, *“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

To Greeks, this kind of *‘seeing’* gives access to being true and wholesome which Plato famously stated, that the *‘eye of the soul’* is better than 10,000 eyes for there is only one thing which gives full meaning to life … to see the handiwork of God, which draws humans ***to*** God, and in this contemplative *self-giving* to God is to aspire to the true purpose of human life which is to love and respect God for who and what He is.

Bartimeus, Son of Timaeus had none of this for he was blind and for how long, we do not know, but in the past he must of heard something about Jesus and when he found out He was passing by, surprised, he cried out in a ‘loud voice’[[31]](#footnote-31) – *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me …”* and Jesus healed him with the kindness that is born in His heart as mercy.

In the Eastern world, *“sitting”* on the side of the road as Bartimaeus was, is usually understood as a sign of grief – mourning to the level of despair - an abandonment of hope. This is confirmed by two things.

1. When Bartimaeus was told Jesus was calling for him, he *“****threw*** *off his cloak”* and he *“****sprang up****”* and went to where Jesus was standing. That cloak was everything to him: his warmth, protection, blanket,

2. When Jesus asked him, *“what do you want me to do for you?”* Bartimaeus said, *“let me see* ***again****”* which indicates that he had probably lost his sight – possibly from an early age.

Shortly after Jesus commenced His ministry at Galilee, he went into the synagogue at Nazareth, His place of birth and stood up and read from the scroll of Isaiah ….

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

He then stated, *“today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* [[32]](#footnote-32)

As Jesus was heading towards Jerusalem with that large crowd, they were going to to attend the annual Passover. It would be the last Pass

over in the life and ministry of Christ.

Jesus was stopped at Jericho by blind Bartimaeus[[33]](#footnote-33) who pleaded with Him to have mercy on him and restore his sight and he did: in doing so, Jesus gave Bartimaeus the wonderful opportunity to state clearly and therefore the Messiah.

Mark records that when Jesus said to him, *“Go [forth] your faith has made you well”* that*,“immediately he regained his sight and followed him on his way.”*

No doubt this was a powerful object lesson of the power of faith – to give testimony to whole reason this story is recorded by three of the gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke.

If Bartimaeus is applauded for his faith by Jesus it must surely have the greater meaning than just ‘teacher’ to something more like, *‘my lord’* or *‘my master’* . As such, this only happens twice in the New Testament, here and when Mary Magdalene said to Him, *‘my lord’* and *‘my master’* [[34]](#footnote-34)… another person of great faith!

Throughout his ministry Jesus healed[[35]](#footnote-35) many blind people: he used spittle, sent one to wash in the pool of Siloam, used the laying on of hands, and He touched them and they were all made well and thereby fulfilling the prophetic words of Isaiah[[36]](#footnote-36).

Whereas in the many stories of Jesus healing people, the emphasis is placed upon the miracle of Jesus but in this story of blind Bartimaeus the emphasis is placed on faith in Jesus and history tells us that Bartimaeus never left Jesus again but stayed with Him to Jerusalem where Jesus was put to His death.

We have good reason to believe that Bartimaeus, with his sight restored[[37]](#footnote-37) walked with Jesus and the many others on this last trip to Jerusalem where Jesus was arrested and crucified under Roman rule of injustice

If this message concluded here it would not be the full picture of sin, suffering and healing.

Deuteronomy 28.28 is often quoted that for sinners, *“the Lord will inflict you with madness, blindness, confusion …”* and so on, and is therefore seen as justification that God punishes people for their sins accordingly.

Unfortunately, this is one of the major causes for discriminary attitudes towards human suffering. In Kenya alone, 3.2m are said to be discrimated against because they suffer disabilites – not only Kenya but the whole world over leans to this conclusion.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Over the years, countless people have interpreted blindness and other disabilities as God **punishing** people because of their sin.[[39]](#footnote-39)

But the greatest surprise of all was when Jesus healed a different man much earlier in His ministry – a man *‘blind from birth’* and the disciples asked whose sin caused it, his or his parents.

Jesus said, *“neither this man nor his parents sinned … but that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”*

Was this the same with Bartimaeus?

Blind from whenever to – perhaps – being the last person Jesus healed in His ministry of mercy and kindness.[[40]](#footnote-40)

*Now isn’t that a stunning jewel of theology and something very well worth thinking about.*

1. . Matthew 20.29f, Mark 10.46f and Luke 18.35f. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Matthew speaks of ***two*** blind men but Luke and Mark speak only of one. Mark alone records a name Bartimaeus, *the son of Timaeus* which indicates a knowledge of him. It is also likely that Mark records his thse names because Bartimaeus became a well-known person in the early church. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Mark is identified as the interpreter of Peter. On the linguistic side, this may well mean that the Aramaic flavor of the Gospel is a faithful reflection of Peter’s spoken word. Certainly Mark is the “most Aramaic of the gospels.” Introduction to the New Testament, Everett F Harrison, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Revised Ed., 1971., p183 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . In those days it would have been at a long day’s walk of 18 miles. Bartimaeus is said to have walked with Jesus and the others who were going to Jerusalem for the Passover. Nothing is known of Bartimaeus after that. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . Luke was the only Gospel writer to have been accurate in his medical analysis, for example, by portraying a paralysis with precision using Hippocratic expressions and terms. As both a physician and a narrator, Luke appears as an expert witness, with the medical know-how for authenticating miracles. The New Bible Dictionary, IVP, London, First Edition, 1962, p1344. Item *b. The Roll.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . The ‘old’ Jericho was violently destroyed by Joshua’s invasion circa, 1600-1300BC. Excavations of the site produced little evidence of its existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . Bartimeus lived in Jericho which is assummed to be the new one. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . In New Testament times, the ‘book’ (*biblion*) was a roll as used for the law (Mark 12.26 and Luke 4.17). It formed as a scroll (Rev 6.14) made up of sections of papyrus (q.v.) the inner bark of which (*byblos*) was used. The Greek (*biblion*) could be used of any, or unspecified, form of written document, including registration lists (Phil 4.3’ and Rev 13.8) The ‘books’ (*plural ta biblia*; John 21.25 & 2 Tim 4.13, hence our ‘Bible’) came to be a term for the collected Scriptures. Where a small scroll was in mind *biblaridion* was used (Rev.10.2-10) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . The preceeding section of Mark 8:22-10:52 is about the disciples' partial spiritual blindness regarding who Jesus is and what he came to do. Three times in this section Jesus predicts his impending death and resurrection while the disciples remain in the dark. See Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . The Greek word  is an adjective and therefore simply means ‘human blindness’. A common cause of blindness in the Southern Mediterranean was heredity which causes blindness at birth or a later date. This is confirmed by the fact that the New Testament uses  36 times and 12 more in the transf. sense. High consumption of alcohol and other excesses was a problem in those days too. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . There are 223 English words today that describe human suffering which are based on Middle-English *undergo, endure and tolerate.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . Generally, in those days it was regarded as impossible to cure blindness through surgery even though operations for cataracts was as early as the 3rd Century BC. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . Coral Ridge blessings came from a Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida under the ministry of D James Kennedy. It started in 1974 and by 1984 it had reached millions around the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . Professor Lisa Trentin, Classical Studies, University of Ontario in her written work, Exploring Visual Impairment in Ancient Rome, writes, “blindness and varying degrees of visual impairment were widespread in the ancient Greco-Roman world.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . Trachoma is the leading preventable cause of blindness worldwide. It's very contagious and almost always affects both eyes. Symptoms begin with mild itching and irritation of the eyes and eyelids. They may progress to blurred vision and eye pain. Antibiotics treat early-stage trachoma. Surgery is required in later stages. Access to clean water and improved sanitation are key to prevention. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . Trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness in the world today. As many as 229 million people live in areas where they are at risk of developing this crippling disease. Fred Hollows Foundation. October 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . The New Bible Dictionary, 3rd Edition, IVP., Nottingham, 1996, p449. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . Add to this misery and deprivation that sometimes blindness was seen as a punishment from God for sin in the family and blind people are often taken advantage of and become the victims of theft. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . *Timaeus* is one of [Plato's dialogues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato#Dialogues), mostly in the form of a long monologue given by the title character [Timaeus of Locri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timaeus_of_Locri), written c. 360BC. The work is a theoretical exposition of the cosmos describing the creation of the universe before the coming of humanity. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . Icons are considered to be an integral part of the Orthodox Christian Church and Luke regarded as the ‘Father’ of iconography. They serve to remind the people of the stories of the Bible, but they are also used in prayer. During the days of the Iconoclast Controversy (730-787AD) and in (813-843AD) icons were banned by those who felt that using them was against Christianity. Empress Theodora eventually restored the use of icons on the Orthodox Church in 843AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. . From the birth of the Eastern Christian tradition, a icon was a representation of sacred personages or events in mural painting, mosaic, or wood. These icons are considered an essential part of the church and are given special liturgical veneration. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. . Booklet, The Appeal to the Sense of the Sight in Greek Tragedy, written by Professor Rufus B Richardson, Dartmouth College, published by John Hopkins University (1869-1896) Vol 16, pages 41-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. . Isaiah the prophet had written of the coming Messiah 700 years earlier of the coming Messiah who would open the eyes of the blind and they receive their sight (35.5, “then the eyes of the blind shall be opened”, 42.7 “to open the eyes of the blind” and 43.8 “bring forth the people who are blind, (yet have eyes) which Matthew wrote of in 11.5, Luke in 4.18 and John in 4.18. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. . The crowd opposed Bartimeaus but when Jesus called him to come to Him, the crowd encouraged him to do so. An interesting minor point which adds credibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. . Jews and many other people believed that illness and disability were punishments from God for sin. It is speculative of the writer to be the case here. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. . The Greek here () means he made a guttural, rough and raucous sound similar to the croaking of ravens or of an ass. Primarily used in context of crying or calling on God in some individual or national emergency. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. . Several Greek words are also used, however, the Hebrew is the weighter ones. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. . Some scholars estimate its usage as 132 in the New Testament if it can be accepted as “to notice” or to perceive by “the sense” or to “discern”. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. . In the NT it is in Matthew 20 times, Mark, 15, Luke 15, John 17, Acts 14, Paul 28, Hebrews 8 and the Book of Revelation 13 times. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. . The Greek word apokatastasis means ‘restoration’. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. . Greek which literally means to make a loud voice because of pain, fear or surprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. . Recorded by Luke in chapter 4 commencing at verse 14 which came from the Prophet Isaiah 61.1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. . It is most unusual that Bartimaeus was “named” as this was not a general practice in those day, thus, adding to the possibility that Mark gained this information from Peter who, at least, told him the story. The additional information, “son of Timeaus” adds to this consideration. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. . As recorded in John 20.16 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. . Jesus is said to have performed 40 miracles of healing. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. . The Messiah would “recover the sight of the blind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. . Approximately 18 miles, mostly and uphill incline of half a mile over the distance and with hot dry soil with ‘moist air’ on the Mediterraem side and ‘arid’ on the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. . Pauline A Ofieno, Biblical & Theological Perspectives on Disabilities in the Disability Studies Quarterly – the first journal in the field of disability studies – blindness, dumbness, leprosy and paralysis. Volumne 29 No. 4 (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. . See John 9.1-5 which refutes it in the most surprising of ways.. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. . It is held that the healing of Bartimeaus was so incredible that it made a profound impact on the people who witnessed it in the “crowd” passing through Jericho that day and those who heard of it, and not only in Jerusalem, but of the many who attended the Passover from from countries from afar as Jews were compelled to do. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)