

Believing is seeing.

Text: Mark 10:46-52 for 10/28/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

“Seeing is believing.” Is that a true statement? To believe means to have a firm conviction that something is true or exists. Yet many of the things we believe in are things you cannot see. We believe in peace. We believe in freedom. Yet you cannot see either one of those things. For those things the statement, “Seeing is believing,” just doesn’t make sense.

“Seeing is believing” is also not how God define belief, or faith. God says in his word that **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”** (Hebrews 11:1). God’s definition is the complete opposite of “Seeing is believing.” This truth comes out in this portion of Mark’s Gospel that is before us. As Jesus deals with the request of a blind man we learn that ...

Theme: Believing is seeing.

- I. Believing is seeing ourselves for who we really are.
- II. Believing is seeing Jesus for who he really is.

Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem. Mark tells us that Jesus makes a stop in Jericho which is about a day’s walk from Jerusalem. We don’t know how long Jesus was in Jericho, but it was long enough to attract a large crowd, since Mark tells us, **“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”** (v. 46). Notice that Mark mentions this crowd separate from Jesus’ disciples. These people were not necessarily disciples of Jesus. They may have been attracted to Jesus because he was someone famous, or because of the miracles he performed. Whatever the reason they seemed compelled to keep following Jesus.

As the group comes walking out of Jericho they walk past a blind man named Bartimaeus. All we know of him is his name, and that he was a blind beggar. Like all beggars he had nothing. He relied completely on the kindness of others to help provide for him and feed him. For Bartimaeus it was just another day, until he hears that Jesus is coming.

When Bartimaeus hears who it is, he immediately begins to call out: **“Son of David, have mercy on me”** (v. 47)! Notice the words Bartimaeus uses here. He does not call Jesus by his name. Instead he calls him the “Son of David,” which is an Old Testament title used to describe the coming Messiah, the heir to King David’s throne. Bartimaeus, who was unable to see with his human eyes, sees something in Jesus that the crowd was not able to see. Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the Savior, the One God promised to send to set his people free.

But how would Bartimaeus have known about Jesus? Word of Jesus’ miracles, healings, and teachings had spread across Judea. Bartimaeus would have heard about Jesus from some of the different people passing by him, or those stopping to help him. The words of Christ that he heard created faith in his heart. He heard and believed, and in believing he saw! In his faith Bartimaeus does not cry out to Jesus asking for his sight, or for healing, even for a miracle. He simply cries out for mercy. The Holy Spirit had convinced Bartimaeus that Jesus had the power to do so much more than heal him. The Spirit convinced him that Jesus had the power to save him. Prompted by his faith this man cries for mercy to the Son of David.

But as he calls out to Jesus for mercy some people in the crowd try to silence him! Mark tells us that **“Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet”** (v. 48). This man was simply asking for help, and some in the crowd try to stop him. Why would they do that? Did they think that Jesus was too important of a person to deal with this lowly beggar? Did they think they were better than Bartimaeus? Or maybe some in the crowd felt that Jesus attention should be focused on them.

That rebuke could have stopped Bartimaeus. He was nothing but a blind beggar who had

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nothing to offer anyone. Why would Jesus listen to someone like him? He was a sinful man who did not deserve the attention of the almighty Son of God.

This is where we see the strength of Bartimaeus' faith. Even in the face of rebuke, he cries out all the more to the one who can save him: **"Have mercy on me!"** This blind beggar could see so much better than that crowd of people. He knew Jesus was the merciful Messiah. And even though he had every reason to doubt that Jesus would respond to his cries, Bartimaeus believed Jesus would have mercy on him. He took his focus off of his own sinful self and put it on Jesus. That focus gave him the courage to cry out to the merciful Messiah.

So, where do we fit into this picture? Where do you see yourself in this account? Are you one of the disciples, gladly following Jesus and learning from him? Are you one of the people in the crowd rebuking Bartimaeus for his cries of mercy? Or are you Bartimaeus, calling out for Jesus' mercy in the face of adversity? We may think we are like Bartimaeus, calling out to Jesus in the face of doubt and uncertainty, but how true is that?

How often are we more like the disciples? We sit at Jesus' feet year after year learning from him, and sometimes we still don't get it. Just one chapter earlier in Mark's Gospel we are told that Jesus had been teaching his disciples about his death and resurrection, yet **"they did not understand what he meant"** (Mark 9:32). Or how often are we like people in that crowd? We see someone whom we feel is not worthy of Christ's attention and we try to silence them. How often do we hinder others from coming to Christ because of our own selfishness, or self-righteousness? How often are we the opposite of Bartimaeus, so that when we are faced with some severe trial or adversity in life we call out to Jesus doubting that our prayers will be heard? Worse yet, we may even stop praying completely. We focus our vision on ourselves and question if we are worthy enough to call out to Jesus.

In one way you and I are just like Bartimaeus: we are helpless beggars without anything worthwhile to attract Jesus to us. No matter what we do, no matter how good we do it, nothing we do will ever come close to the perfection God demands of us. In our natural, sinful state we are not worthy to call out to Christ, or to have him respond to our cries for mercy.

But when things seem darkest, that's when the Spirit opens our eyes to see a light only faith can see. The Spirit focuses our eyes of faith on the merciful Son of David and encourages us to cry out to him even more in our anguish and distress. In the guilt of our sins the Spirit calls out to us through the Word of God, saying "Jesus is your Savior! He gave up his perfect life to pay for your sins of doubt. He shed his blood to wash away your sinful self-righteousness. He has atoned for all of your sins, and now he calls you to be healed in his forgiveness." So, like Bartimaeus, we keep crying out to our merciful Lord, because believing is seeing! In faith, we see who we are by nature, and we recognize our desperate need for a merciful Savior. Jesus is the merciful Son of David, so we know that we can call on him for the healing forgiveness that we need and that he will answer.

But believing is more than just seeing ourselves for who we are. Believing is seeing Jesus for who he really is. Even though the crowd tried to silence him Bartimaeus kept calling out to Jesus because, by faith, he saw Jesus for who is really is. And Jesus acknowledges Bartimaeus faith. Mark tells us, **"Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus"** (vs. 49-50). Bartimaeus' actions display his faith. First, he throws aside his cloak. It was possibly the only earthly possession he had. He got his cloak out of the way because he wanted nothing to hinder him from coming to his Lord. Then we are told he

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jumped to his feet. He is excited to come before his Savior.

Jesus did not disappoint his believing child. He gives Bartimaeus the opportunity to express his faith. **“What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see’”** (v. 51). As the all-knowing God Jesus knew exactly what Bartimaeus wanted. Yet in love, Jesus encourages Bartimaeus to pray; to speak to his Lord and ask for that which he longs for. In this simple act we see how our merciful Savior also loves us and encourages us to speak to him.

And in Bartimaeus’ response we hear his love and reverence for his Lord. The word Bartimaeus uses in addressing Jesus is *Raboni*, which means “Dear teacher.” This is a beautiful and unique word. It is only used 2 times in the New Testament: here and when Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as Raboni, “dear teacher,” outside Christ’s empty tomb. The faith of Bartimaeus is expressing his love for his Savior. And Jesus mercifully grants Bartimaeus’ request, saying to him **“Go. Your faith has healed you”** (v. 52). That faith was a gift from God, and that faith trusted in the all-powerful Son of God.

But things don’t end there between Jesus and Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus’ faith responds to Jesus’ healing. We are told that, **“Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road”** (v. 52). Bartimaeus didn’t run off to celebrate his new-found freedom that his restored vision gave him. In stead he used that clear vision to follow the one who saved him. By faith Bartimaeus became a follower of Christ, and now worked to walk in the footsteps of his Lord.

Jesus has restored our vision. We came into this world spiritually blind and dead in our sins. On our own we had no power to restore our spiritual vision or do anything to bring ourselves closer to God. But Jesus, our God and Savior, in his great mercy has restored our sight, freed us from our spiritual blindness, and brought us into his family of believers. The faith that Jesus has blessed us with wants to do what it can to follow Jesus. With the eyes of our hearts opened to the truth of God’s word our faith is moved to action. First, recognizing our own unworthiness before God, we repent of our sins and focus our hearts on Jesus’ merciful forgiveness. Then we come to our Lord, throwing aside anything that would get in the way of worshipping him and praying to him. We set aside our thoughts and desires, our pride and our reputation, anything that would hinder us from praising Jesus for saving us. Finally, we follow Jesus, doing our best to follow where he leads and walk in his footsteps. By faith we see Jesus for who he is: the merciful Son of David who freed us from our spiritual blindness, saved us from our sins, and blessed us with a perfect, unending life.

Believing is seeing. It is seeing who we are by nature, and equally as important, seeing who we are by faith. Believing is seeing Jesus for who he is: our Savior God who, in mercy, washed away our sins, and filled us with a new life that trusts in him. By faith we “see” Jesus as he guides us through this life and into the eternal life to come. Amen.