

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

Bartimaeus – Blessed Interrupter

Mark 10. 32ff

March 15, 2015

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, ³³ saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ "They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

³⁵ *James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." ³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" ³⁷ They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" ³⁹ They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. ⁴⁰ "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." ⁴¹ Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. ⁴² Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³ "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

⁴⁶ *Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." ⁵⁰ Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" ⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

We're looking at the cast of characters in the story of Jesus Christ. There are a lot of characters, some of whom appear again and again and become fairly well-developed characters (e.g. Simon Peter) and others who come and go in a paragraph or less.

Among the minor characters are a number whom scholars call, “the suppliants”. Mark’s version of the story includes thirteen of these suppliants, people who come asking for help. They are all needy people. Some are “up and outers” (successful or powerful but in some sort of crisis and needing help). Most are “down and outers” like today’s person. He is actually named...maybe because Mark’s readers would have known him or could have gone to see him for themselves.

This man, Bar-Timaeus, the son of Timaeus, is like many of the suppliants a FOIL to the disciples. A foil is a literary device in which one character appears next to another in order to highlight some quality in one character by contrast. So, e.g. in *A Christmas Carol*, Fred, Scrooge’s nephew is a foil to Scrooge himself. Fred’s open-hearted compassion contrasts with Scrooge’s anger and frugality.

In *Cinderella*, the wicked stepsisters are FOILS to Cinderella – her kindness is seen in contrast to their cruelty. So...the suppliants...mostly, nobodies “and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs” (Flannery O’Connor), the suppliant’s faith EXPOSES and spotlights the lack of faith in the disciples and these freaks and lunatics show that the disciples have NOT arrived...as we saw last week, the disciples should be praying “I believe – HELP my unbelief” ...and week before, “I see – but I don’t see!”

Let’s look at this example – I think it’ll clear it up –

- 1) Nearsighted Watchmen
- 2) Clear-sighted Blind Man and
- 3) Insights from the Road, man

This is the end of the Road...the phrase, “on the road” is found in the first and last verses of today’s text. It’s the close of the middle section in Mark’s account – sometimes called “the Way section” – they’ve been on their way up to Jerusalem.

“On the WAY”...Jesus Christ has been saying, “Good! You know that I am the Christ – well don’t tell anyone until you know what a Christ IS...YOU SEE, BUT YOU DON’T SEE!”

And now for the third explicit time, Jesus tells them that AS the Christ, He will suffer. He takes them aside, looks into their eyes and lays it out plainly:

*"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles."*³⁴

"They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

And they’re so apparently conditioned to think of the Messiah or Christ as the Great King whose mission it would be to lower taxes and make us safe with free cable and internet access... they were so culturally programmed that the words about a suffering, dying Messiah just couldn’t POSSIBLY mean that – must be a symbol, a riddle, a joke.

And – BTW – if those guys were that culturally conditioned...is it possible that WE are too?

And just to show HOW far off they were – two of the right hand men, the inner circle, the watchmen, they take this opportunity to ask, “Yeah... uh... whatever...but look, Lord, Messiah...when You DO take the podium or the throne in Jerusalem in just a few days...we would like to be standing next to You in Your hour of glory (Hey, it never hurts to ask!)”

And here Jesus points to His reason for coming to the end of this road... “I’m coming to do what ONLY I can do...you can’t HELP Me...you can’t drink the cup I’m going to drink...I will drink (Isa. 51.17) ‘the cup of God’s anger; the chalice of reeling ...drained to the dregs.’ I am come to be have a Hard Rain fall on Me, and be baptized under the justice of God against sinners... and YOU can’t do that with Me (you’ll meet the same end...you’ll die for being associated with Me) but only I can drink this cup and stand under the deluge of My Father’s justice that sinners deserve.”

The ones who will join Me in My glory...will be two thieves...because when I enter Jerusalem I’ll be “Throned Upon the Awful Tree” between thieves.

And THIS reality...is the New Way...the end of one road and the start of another...a new way of doing power in the Kingdom of Grace, the Upside-Down Kingdom – where the greatest will be the servants ...and I will lead the way. For even I the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give My life a ransom for many.”

The watchmen, the ones who hold the Keys to this New Kingdom... they see but they don’t see... they believe but “Lord, help their unbelief”...Nearsighted Watchmen.

And yet here He tells it plain – I am going to stand in your place...to take what sinners deserve. To pay your debt and be charged with YOUR crimes, “to give My life a ransom for many.” (Big Word!)

Then they came to Jericho...last town before the steep climb up to Jerusalem. And at the gates of the city...among the huge and growing crowds...there is heard a loud and bothersome noise; it IS the voice of the FOIL – a suppliant!

His name is known... “Son of Timaeus” (I think Mark was telling his first readers, “Go to Jericho – ask for him by name – he’d love to tell you the story himself!”) And whereas the Watchmen who OF ALL PEOPLE must have excellent vision, but as the Watchmen are hopelessly myopic/nearsighted/legally blind (how unexpected) SO NOW WE MEET A BLIND MAN who sees quite clearly (how unexpected).

He is shouting words that are bad-mannered and RUDE. “Have mercy on Me!”

But much worse than that, these words will incite a riot...pilgrims are filing in through Jericho and up to Jerusalem...the streets are getting crowded for the upcoming holiday...there's electricity in the air and this "Son of Timaeus" yells, screams these politically loaded words, a title, "Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

This is the title you NEVER use...it's like saying "commander and chief"... it has a definite connotation and everyone knows THIS is the title that belongs to the One True King to whom even Rome must bow – this is the name of Messiah!

"Hush!", they say! "Quiet! You'll get the Roman's attention! You'll get us all in trouble! You don't just throw that TITLE around! QUIET! Have some dignity!"

"Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more...he will not be quiet...He shouts, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And Jesus...STOPS. Mark put that word FIRST in the Greek sentence to heighten the tension. STOP!

The disciples had kept the secret...but somehow this blind man sees what no one else had seen. He clearly identifies Jesus the Nazarene as the Messiah, the Son of David. The watchmen are nearsighted but the blind man is CLEARSIGHTED! Upside-down Kingdom!

And Jesus the Nazarene calls for the man...and now all of a sudden this "embarrassment to the lovely city of Jericho"...this rude-boy...has been recognized by the celebrity...and that makes Bar-Timaeus pretty important. The uncaring crowd is suddenly caring, "Take courage, stand up! He's calling for you!" and he throws aside his cloak (which is like a guitar-case for a street musician...that's where you collect the money!) ...throws aside his source of income...and jumps up like a frog and came to Jesus.

"What do you want Me to do for you?"

"My Rabbi", says the man, using a title that ONLY the disciples of a rabbi should ever use (who does this guy think he IS!) "MY RABBI, I want to regain my sight."

And Jesus Christ says, "Well YOU already see more than anyone sees! Go! Your faith has made you well!"

So...after acknowledging the man so the crowds had to recognize him as a man (not just a nuisance) ...and giving him a voice ("Say it out loud – what d'ya want?") and then this MIRACLE of the New Creation – this is how it will be when the Kingdom comes in its fullness as the Prophets foretold (Isa 35.3-5).

And NOW the man once “by the road” (see v.46) where he lived OUT of the mainstream...sidelined and...NOW He is with Jesus “ON THE ROAD”.

And he’s free to “Go!”, says Jesus. “You can return to normal life” ...and THAT brings us to our final point.

Nearsighted Watchmen...Clear-sighted Blindman and last, Insights from the Road (man!)... What does this man’s experience tell us about “faith”? That’s what John Houmes talked about last week (Faith is a Wrestle – Lord, I DO believe...HELP my unbelief!) and the week before, “I see men like trees walking” (i.e. I see...but I don’t see...my vision depends on YOU Jesus Christ). So what contribution does THIS passage make to our understanding of True Spirituality and the life of faith?

Well, for one thing, the son of Timaeus is free to go back to life as usual... he’s free from the side-lines and free as Jesus said (v. 52) to, “Go!” but...He doesn’t go on his own way...he joins Jesus on the road... Somehow, inwardly, joyfully, he is allured by Jesus Christ...He follows Him “on the way”.

Remember, those are technical words for Mark – Jesus Christ is on His way, “on the road” to Jerusalem to die and this LIBERATED man, Bartimaeus, is using his freedom to follow. In Luke’s version of this story, Luke adds this detail, “Immediately, he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.” (18.43)

And this IS what happens, down to this very day, when people actually meet Jesus Christ in faith. It’s GRACE...and grace is something different from religion and morality and also different from that appetite-driven loose life that so often passes for freedom in our culture.

In other words, the insight from the road, man – what this man’s experience illustrates is something different from the forced-regimented religious life and different from the “if-it-feels-good-do-it” life.

He’s free in the truest sense of the word because HE SEES! He sees that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of goodness, truth and beauty – and why would Bartimaeus or anyone else want to walk away from that? He’s free to stay in the company of the King of the New Creation who is fixing all that’s broken.

He somehow knows what the nearsighted disciples would later see clearly and that is that Jesus Christ is the LOVE OF GOD expressed to the suppliants, to those who are aware of their need, who can’t fix themselves and who come to the Son of David.

He, Jesus Christ, is about to go into Jerusalem, motivated by a desire to vindicate His Father whose Law has been broken. And motivated by compassion for those like Bartimaeus and like

us, out of love for Law breakers and sinners, He goes as a ransom to take our place. All the hatred that sinners have for God will be shown to Jesus Christ as He is handed over to the Nations and “They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again...”

This is what must happen in order for the debt to be paid and in order for the New Creation to dawn. And this Blind – Man whose faith SAW that Jesus Christ was the Son of David and who DARED to call Jesus the Nazarene “my Rabbi”... He follows NOT to earn something from Jesus and not because he’s forced or out of some weird “pay-back” motive ...but because HE SEES Jesus for who He is and HE WANTS TO BE IN HIS COMPANY.

The insight from this man’s following... it tells us that faith is born in an environment of desperation and dissatisfaction. It’s NOT possibility thinking or positive thinking...It’s putting our confidence in another Person...In the One God promised...a King, better than David...a King who will liberate His people at infinite cost to Himself.

And among them, among the redeemed, are prostitutes and lunatics and abusers and people so desperate that they throw away manners...and in His ransomed sinner train is now this son of Timaeus who threw away his “guitar-case”, his cloak...He is not longer a beggar but now a prince... an adopted son of God, a trophy of grace.

Christianity is for needy people who are convinced they don’t measure up...don’t have what it takes and yet see that they are loved by God...ransomed by God...and when they hear Jesus the Nazarene call them...it liberates them to follow...ON THE ROAD.

They’ll fall...and they’ll get up...fall...and get up...they will sometimes misuse their freedom but always return to the road where Jesus walks because to be walking with Him is only way to really be free.