

Lord God, heavenly Father, who through Your Son Jesus Christ mercifully opened *Bartimaeus'* eyes, restoring his sight, we humbly ask You, with Your Word so enlighten our hearts that, seeing You in Christ, Your Son and our Redeemer, we may in all temptations and afflictions look only to Your mercy and at all times find comfort and deliverance; through *the Same*, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 83)

And they came to Jericho; and as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

In Christ Jesus, the merciful Son of David, dear fellow redeemed:

As a child you remember crying out in the night for one of your parents. It could be as simple as you were thirsty or as critical as you were frightened by eerie sounds or shadows. As a parent many of you know that there are times during the night when you hear the cry of your children, you are hoping they are only crying out in their sleep and will soon settle back down so that you do not have to disrupt your sleep. But with the second and perhaps even third cry the feelings of desperation and inevitability take over. The cries intensify and the covers are reluctantly thrown back with the feet exposed to the cold night air.

The blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus was the child crying out in the darkness in our text. Those in the crowd moving past him behaved as the reluctant unsympathetic parent attempting to quiet him down to no avail. But Jesus was that perfect sympathetic parent eagerly attending to his needs. Whether we have physical maladies, which cause us to identify with Bartimaeus, we all share

with him his spiritual sickness that desperately causes us to cry out for mercy and salvation.

Let us examine this last miracle of Jesus recorded by the evangelist Mark before the account of Jesus' suffering and death and observe this: **The Cries of Faith in the Savior Alone Save.**

I

These cries were not coming from a shallow self-absorbed beggar seeking temporary help from a famous miracle worker. Not at all, listen again to what he cried out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He was acknowledging Jesus to be the Christ, the Savior promised by God from the very beginning of the history of sinners. His cry ran deep within his very soul as a sinner in desperate need of mercy in so many ways.

But notice how unsympathetic the crowd, which even included Jesus' disciples, responded to this man's cries. They scolded him and told him to shut his mouth. We have seen this before, like when the Canaanite woman cried after Jesus for her demon-possessed daughter. The disciples pleaded with Jesus to send her away, because she was bothering them.

What would cause this crowd following Jesus to show such little care for this man in his pitiful predicament? Well, sadly many of us know the answer all too well. How many times have we looked with disgust, treated with disregard, the beggars that have lifted up their voices when we went by them? Feelings and thoughts like these might have filled our hearts and minds: *"I can well imagine what self-chosen ill behavior led to this person's demise; any help will only be abused; I'm busy going about my business, I do not have time for such a lazy ingrate."*

After all, Jesus was going about dispensing His pearls of wisdom to those who were hanging on His every word. These whiney sounding cries were piercing thru such a contemplative setting, disturbing the important work of this great teacher sent by God. It is the healthy and strong who seek to improve themselves who deserve to receive even more from this famous teacher. That, of course was the exact thinking of the self-righteous Pharisees, to whom Jesus said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Are you eager to invite to receive of the riches of Jesus's gracious heart those who are noticeably poor of spirit, hurting souls that seem to be in such great need? Or are you more likely to invite the strong and self-dependent with whom you identify? After all, they will have something to give back instead of crying out for more.

II

When Bartimeaus was being shushed and left behind, "he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" Only a heart of faith in Jesus as the merciful Lord sent by God would raise its voice even louder over the discouraging unsympathetic response of the self-righteous crowd. Obviously, to be able to respond in this way, it was not the first time Bartimeaus cried out to be heard by his merciful Lord. While he remained blind after countless prayers for healing, he knew and trusted that all would be well with him for the sake of the One who was coming to save him and all sinners. Perhaps he often prayed the 34th Psalm: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." The Lord was now near to him, so very near indeed.

Jesus then stopped and told the crowd to call Bartimeaus to Him. They did with a change of tone: "Take heart. Get up; He is calling you." Throwing off his cloak, which had been sheltering him in his misery, he enthusiastically sprang to his feet and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

Jesus actually says: "your faith has saved you!" Faith in Jesus as Savior receives something far greater than healing of the body, it saves poor sinners in this life and forevermore. Then we read: "immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him on the way." What way was Jesus' on? Again Jesus was on His final journey on His way to the cross of our salvation. Bartimeaus followed his Savior in full trust that all he and every sinner needed was being provided by the Savior. Jesus told him, "go your way". In faith it was now natural for him to go the way of the cross with Jesus.

Fast forward a few more weeks to the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, there *"Jesus was being tempted. It was not pretty. He was*

*shaking, sobbing, sweating – even sweating great drops of blood – and crying out [just as Bartimaeus cried out under the weight of his great burdens]. [Jesus was now] overwhelmed, not calm and composed at all. He looked like He was getting the worst of it in this struggle with temptation. It is not enjoyable to dwell on this, to look closely at Jesus' sufferings, to strip away the soft halo we put around all of this when we are reading the Bible in its perfect English and coming to church in our best clothes. If we look at this the way it really is, we can hear Jesus crying and whimpering, and also wailing and sobbing which is what it says in Hebrews (5:7), not that He was silently suffering but uttering 'vehement cries and tears,' in fact He had lost all sense of decorum and was completely beside Himself, really not in control and emotionally drowning. He was sinking under the burden of sin [your sin, my sin, the sin of the entire world]. He had not given in to the temptation and He had not sinned."*¹

So, far beyond just sympathizing with Bartimaeus, Jesus also could empathize with him. For again the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but was without sin. This is what our faith is in – a real Savior, not a painted Savior with no skin in the game, so to speak. Jesus truly is our holy Substitute who hears our every cry for salvation of body and soul and provides all that we need, especially the forgiveness for all our sins. Yes, even our sins of ignoring those neighbors in need and following Jesus in self-righteousness instead of humble repentance.

Your cries of faith in the Savior alone save you, my fellow redeemed. When the devil, the unbelieving world and your own sinful flesh tell you to be quiet and fade away and not bother the "Great Teacher". Take heart and know that your Savior is calling for you to come to Him and receive the rest secured for you and all people with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Come now, let us once again this Lenten season follow Him to the cross of our salvation. Many are your afflictions as the Lord's righteous one, He alone will deliver you out of them all, just as He had done for Bartimaeus. Amen.

¹ Funeral Sermon by Rev. Jerome Gernander, Princeton, MN, 2016; under the theme: **CHRIST HELPS THOSE WHO ARE TEMPTED** based on Hebrews 2:15-18, 4:14-16.