

On the Way to Jerusalem 3 – The Healing of Bar-Timaeus a blind beggar

The Context:- The last stage of the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem is the setting for the ultimate healing miracle in the Gospel of Mark. It is told as an eyewitness account of the healing of a specific individual and as such could have been used by the Christian Church as it is here in Mark's gospel, as a vehicle for instruction on certain aspects of Christian discipleship.

Jericho is only some 15 miles (25 kilometres) from Jerusalem but there is a great difference in altitude. Jericho is 258 metres below sea level (-846 feet) while Jerusalem is 754 metres above sea level (+2474 feet).

The Encounter:- Mark 10, verses 46 – 52; There is the unusual use of the name of the blind beggar. It may be that the man was later a disciple of Jesus and a member of the early church. For whatever reason we do have his name on record! Bar-Timaeus means "son of Timaeus" an important way of linking one generation to another. In this version of the story, Jesus and his disciples had passed through Jericho and set out on the road up to Jerusalem itself. (verse 46). As in many countries, a beggar sat at the roadside would be a common sight. Here we have one who asked what was happening and why there was a big crowd passing on the road. A good opportunity to shake the begging bowl! However Bar-Timaeus wanted more than just a few coins! Verse 47 – The reply to his question inspired him to cry out upsetting those around him who tried to shut him up (verse 48). He kept on calling until he had a response! (verse 49) His request is for a restoration of his sight (verse 51), which because of his faith is answered!

The Teaching:- On this occasion there is no teaching by Jesus himself. As I said above, it may be that Bar-Timaeus became a member of the early church. There are a number of points that need to be made and may have been used in the witness and ministry of the early church.

- 1) The beggar was blind, unable to see Jesus and he depended on the witness of those who could see. He was asking the right question and acted upon it. (verse 47)
- 2) He recognised Jesus as "The Son of David" which was a traditional messianic title. In contrast to many of the hierarchy who doubted the claims of Jesus, Bar-Timaeus although physically blind was able to "see" who Jesus really was. (verses 47 - 48)
- 3) The call of Jesus did not come direct to him. It was passed on by the disciples of Jesus.(verse 49)
- 4) On hearing that Jesus was calling him he responded immediately! (verse 50)
- 5) "*He threw off his cloak*". (verse 50). I wonder if he went back for it before following Jesus? I have a feeling it is meant to represent the leaving behind of the old way of life in response to the call. Compare Mark 1, verses 18 and 20 and Matthew 9, verse 9 with Mark 10, verse 21 – 22 and Matthew 8, verses 18 – 22.
- 6) The phrase "*he . . . followed Jesus along the road.*" Can also mean "*he . . . followed Jesus in the way.*" The early believers were known as "the people of the Way" so Bar-Timaeus was identified as a disciple of Jesus: which may be the reason that his name is on record!

As we approach Good Friday and Easter Day, we need to be aware of those who are on the fringe and maybe asking questions as to what it is all about. We should be ready to answer questions and encourage people to come to Jesus who knows, understands and responds to our every need.