

Bartimaeus: He Insisted on Being Heard

[Mark 10:46-52](#)

Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Faith

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By the time Jesus got to Jericho, Bartimaeus already had three strikes against him. First, he was blind, and back then that was not only a physical handicap but a moral one as well, because people considered blindness to be God's punishment for sin. They were wrong of course, but that's what they believed, so if God had punished Bartimaeus, why should anyone else give him the time of day? Second, he was a beggar, and that meant that his own family had disowned him. Why else would he be out on the streets? He was begging because he had no other means of support, least of all from his family. So if his parents and siblings were unwilling to support him, why should anyone else?

Third, he didn't even have a real name. They called him Bartimaeus but the prefix B-a-r means Son of, and Timaeus means Unclean or Impure. So Bartimaeus is more of a nickname than a real name; it means Son of Impurity or Child of Uncleaness. How would you like to put a name like that on your next job application? That reminds me of a good friend, a Presbyterian minister, who, when she was printing her own wedding bulletin, was in such a hurry that she inserted the Old Testament lesson from the previous Sunday's worship service without first reading it. Imagine her shock when, at her wedding, the reader intoned these words from Psalm 51: Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. And can you imagine the color of her mother's face when she had to sit through that reading? Now, for Cinda and her mother the shock was momentary, and they all had a good laugh afterward. But for Bartimaeus the pain was lifelong. No matter what he said, no matter what he did, no matter where he went, he was stuck with the name, Son of Impurity.

So, he was blind, he was a beggar, and he was branded with a pejorative nickname, three strikes! But don't count him out just yet. If he couldn't see, he could certainly shout: When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! The Greek word for shout out is kraxo, which sounds very much like our English word croak. And that's just what the ancient Greeks meant to convey when they coined this word. They were describing the raucous croaking of a raven, and in this text the word describes the harsh, grating prayer of a desperate man.

But do I dare call this a prayer? Shouldn't prayer be polite and courteous? Shouldn't we be mannerly and respectful when we pray? Ah, but listen to the Psalmist: I call upon thee (I kraxo thee, I croak to thee), for thou wilt answer me, O God. (17:6) Again, In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted and thou didst deliver them. To thee they cried (they kraxoed, they croaked) and were saved. (22:4) And listen to Jesus when Bartimaeus kept croaking at him: Call him here, he said. Summon him, bring him to me, clear the way so I can help this croaking man.

Have you come to this service with a burden too heavy to carry or a habit too strong to break? Are you sitting here with doubts too dark to admit or pain too deep to describe? I'm here to tell you that Jesus Christ hears our cries, however raucous or incoherent. When you pray you need not speak in a cultured voice or get your grammar just right. Don't worry about your vocabulary; just open your heart and cry out to God. Rest assured that the Jesus who heard Bartimaeus will hear you even if your prayer is little more than a croak!

Now let's move from his croak to his cloak: Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. That cloak was what he spread out in front of him to catch the coins people threw his way. That cloak was his tin cup, it was the source of his meager income, it was the badge of his beggary. And no doubt there was a part of Bartimaeus that preferred to hang on to that cloak, to stick with the status quo, to rely on the familiar rather than risk the unknown. For if Jesus did heal him, what would he do? He had no education, no work experience, no patron to finance his future. So perhaps he ought to keep his cloak, because better the enemy you know than the friend you don't know.

Are you clutching your cloak? Do you hesitate to apply for a promotion because you're afraid you might fail and be embarrassed in front of your colleagues? Are you living with a physical disorder because surgery is so painful? Having been divorced are you refusing to open your heart to a new commitment? My good friends in AA know that no one can be helped until they throw off their cloak. That's not quite how they put it, but the first step in the twelve step program amounts to the same thing: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol that our lives had become unmanageable. That's throwing off the cloak. That's turning away from self-captivity, whether to sickness or to sin, whether to guilt over the past or fear of the future. Bartimaeus threw off his cloak. He cast it away. He got rid of his psychological crutch once and for all because he didn't need it when he sprang up and came to Jesus.

You and I often make difficult what is essentially simple. We try to purchase joy at the mall when genuine joy is free. We read motivational books written by people as imperfect as we are while God's inspired Word gathers dust on our shelves. We travel to exotic shores searching for esoteric revelations when salvation is as near as falling on our knees. We go to great lengths to find new life when the first step is simple: come to Jesus. Place your life in Jesus's hands. Pour out your problems to Jesus's ears. Accept the acceptance Jesus offers. Trust the promises Jesus made. Do what Jesus tells you to do. Like Bartimaeus, come to Jesus.

Plato once said that we are like leaky pots. There is a hole at the core of our being, he said, so whatever we pour into ourselves quickly drains away. Yet we spend our years striving, buying, testing, trying to fill the leaky pot.

There is only one stopper that will plug that leak and only one ingredient that will fill the void. I have come, Jesus said, that you

may have life, and have it abundantly. Ó (John 10:10) Throw off your cloak and come to Jesus. He wants very much to say, "Go; your faith has made you well."