

Follow: The Model Disciple

Mark 10:46-52

Can you imagine going from the complete darkness of being born blind to suddenly and dramatically being able to see?

We make sense of the world by using our 5 senses and if we were suddenly granted a new sense that engaged with reality in a new way our entire perception of the world would be different.

I read recently about the time when doctors were first learning to safely perform cataract surgery and people who were born without sight were suddenly and dramatically able to see. One of the major difficulties of receiving sight is the complete inability to wrestle with depth perception and the vastness of space. If you are blind your world is small and manageable. But when you can see, now you realize just how big the house is, the field, and the forest. One doctor described this rather humorous response to wrestling with depth perception.

“He practiced his vision in a strange fashion; thus he takes off one of his boots, throws it some way off in front of him, and then attempts to gauge the distance at which it lies; he takes a few steps towards the boot and tries to grasp it; on failing to reach it, he moves on a step or two and gropes for the boot until he finally gets a hold of it.”

This is the difficult part that shows us how disorienting a complete change of perspective can be. His understanding of reality and himself changed dramatically. And this is exactly why a blind man receiving his sight is such a beautiful and appropriate picture of the moment of faith that puts us on the path to discipleship. Our entire grasp of the world has been altered. Listen to the way the same author described the sheer wonder and joy of sight.

On the other hand, many newly sighted people speak well of the world, and teach us how dull is our own vision. To one patient, a human hand, unrecognized, is “something bright and then holes.” Shown a bunch of grapes, a boy calls out, “it is dark, blue and shiny... It isn’t smooth, it has bumps and hollows.” A little girl visits a garden. “She is greatly astonished, and can scarcely be persuaded to answer, stands speechless in front of the tree, which she only names on taking hold of it, and then as ‘the tree with the lights in it.’” Some delight in their sight and give

themselves over to the visual world. Of a patient just after her bandages were removed, her doctor writes, "The first things to attract her attention were her own hands; she looked at them very closely, moved them repeatedly to and fro, bent and stretched the fingers, and seemed greatly astonished at the sight." One girl was eager to tell her blind friend that "Men do not really look like trees at all," and astounded to discover that her every visitor had an utterly different face. Finally, a twenty-two-old girl was dazzled by the world's brightness and kept her eyes shut for two weeks. When at the end of that time she opened her eyes again, she did not recognize the objects, but, "the more she now directed her gaze upon everything about her, the more it could be seen how an expression of gratification and astonishment overspread her features; she repeatedly exclaimed: 'Oh God! How beautiful!'"

Yes. The gift of physical sight is beautiful and completely life altering and spiritual sight even more so. Now, over the past couple of months we have been studying a portion of Scripture dedicated to the idea of discipleship. This section begins and ends with stories of blind men being healed. We are meant to read the entire section as the story of the disciples being given sight. Look back at 8:18 where Jesus questions if they are spiritual blind. Then let's read this story in 8:22-26. The disciples are like the blind man here. They see partially and Jesus continues to work and teach in order to bring them to full sight. Now turn over to 10:46 and we come to the last story of this section and notice how it begins. Same wording as the first story of the blind man, just a new location.

What's the point? This story shows us a model disciple. This is what it looks like to go from blindness to sight and we are meant to learn from this man and how he responded to the Lord Jesus. So, today, we want to see **4 qualities of a blind man given sight that mark true disciples.**

1. Knows His Need (vv. 46-48)

Let's get into this story. Look at the beginning of verse 46. If you've been with us you know that Jesus and his disciples are on a journey toward Jerusalem and now they are getting quite close, within a day of Jerusalem. They have crossed the Jordan River and come to Jericho. Here's a map to help you get your bearings.

As he's leaving Jericho and beginning the hike up to Jerusalem, which would have been about 20 miles away, there was a man sitting by the roadside. Look at the rest of verse 46.

Now, we have already encountered a man who the disciples would have thought was the perfect addition to their group, the rich ruler of chapter 10. He was interested in eternal things, he had money, and he had a high moral standing. Bartimaeus here is pretty much on the opposite end of the social ladder. Not only was Bartimaeus blind, which many would have taken to mean he had sinned somehow and was displeasing to God, but he is begging and clearly is quite poor.

But what's so instructive about Bartimaeus is that he has a very clear understanding of his need. Look at verse 47. No doubt he had heard of Jesus and the miracles and healings he had done and Bartimaeus clearly has a solid grasp on his own need. So, he begins screaming out to get Jesus's attention. This is the same word used of demons crying out in the gospel of Mark. He's not casually calling out for an audience. He's literally freaking out, doing everything he can to get Jesus to turn his way. Look at verse 48.

We don't know why they rebuked him, perhaps they thought Jesus had better things to do, but notice how Bartimaeus responds to this rebuke. He ups the volume level, begging for Jesus to take pity on him. Now, we'll talk about the name he gives Jesus, "Son of David", in a few minutes, but for now let's talk about Bartimaeus's obvious sense of desperation.

He knows his own need. He's fully aware that this is his shot. Compare this sense of desperation to that of the rich young ruler earlier in chapter 10. He was interested, but probably thought he was almost in heaven as it was. Bartimaeus has no delusions of grandeur.

Now, earlier we talked about how the experience of becoming a disciple is like having blind eyes opened and experiencing the world with an extra sense. It's a complete reorientation. The first part of that reorientation is coming to grips with exactly how needy and desperate you and I are because of our sin. People talk about the big questions, the great mysteries of life, and one of those questions is who am I? The correct answer to that question is that I am a human, made in the image of God, who has been blinded and broken by sin.

It's a heavy weight to bear, but you will not cry out for sight until you know you are blind and desperate. But Bartimaeus does not stop with the recognition that he is blind. That recognition drives him to the mercy and love of Jesus. And that's our second quality.

2. Knows God's Love (vv. 49-50)

Our need for mercy and recognition of our sinfulness must cause us to turn to God and see him as willing and able to meet our needs. If asking the question "Who am I?" causes me to recognize my sin, then we must ask the next big question, "What is God like?" as we come to grips with our sin.

Is God an angry, blood thirsty, vindictive God? Is he constantly fed up with me and frustrated with his creation? God certainly does not allow sin in his holy presence, but it's for that very reason that He send Jesus to earth to redeem his sinful and loved people. God is willing and able to extend mercy to those who "see" that they are blind. Notice how Bartimaeus begs Jesus for mercy and notice how Jesus responds in verse 49. Jesus is making this journey with a massive entourage of people. Bartimaeus is the least important person around. Yet, Jesus stops and gives him his full attention. With a merciful and loving God like this, the response of verse 50 makes perfect sense.

Those who follow Jesus do not only know that they are blind and in need of a Savior. They know that there is a Savior whose love is so great that it brought him to earth to die for them. You cannot be rescued from blindness unless you have one with the power and mercy to heal and you cannot be freed from sin without a God who delights in forgiving and washing away sin. And when you put both of these together, right self-perception and right God-perception, you get faith.

3. Believes God's Son (v. 51-52a)

Look at verse 51. This is the same question Jesus asked James and John in 10:36. Notice the entirely different response here. James and John were seeking personal glory and focused on self. Bartimaeus doesn't ask for alms, which is what you would expect of a blind beggar. Instead, he asks to be healed. You do not ask an ordinary man for healing from blindness. To learn what he believes about Jesus go back to verses 47-48.

Twice in these verses he calls Jesus the Son of David and clearly connects that title to the request for mercy. This title is only used one other time in Mark and it's on the lips of Jesus in chapter 12. So, what does he believe regarding Jesus that brings him to use this title here?

This title is clearly connected back to the Old Testament promises that God would raise up a descendant of David who would rule and reign over his kingdom forever. The OT prophets taught that this individual wouldn't just reign as a political ruler, but that his kingdom would bring peace and prosperity forever. Listen to Isaiah 9:6-7. The Davidic Son would come and set things right.

Faith here, exercised by Bartimaeus, is not just faith that Jesus can heal. It's a set of beliefs about who Jesus is. Bartimaeus may not have all the details, but he gets this right. One author said it this way:

"To truly 'see' involves faith to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David." – Robert Stein

And Jesus makes this clear in the first part of verse 52. Bartimaeus has cast himself on the Messiah for healing and this desperate dependence is, according to Jesus, faith. Notice the end of Christ's words here, "your faith has made you well." This is the word that is often translated "saved" and also speaks of physical healing from time to time. Now, those don't always go together and certainly not every Christian will be free from pain and sickness. But the point is that Jesus provides both because He is the Messianic King.

The physical healings that he performed while on earth were like an appetizer of the full eradication of sickness and pain in His eternal kingdom. The salvation we receive now is a foretaste of the full and final freedom from sin we will experience in that kingdom as well. Both come through the King.

Now, as we've seen over and over again, when Jesus calls to a person, he calls for all of that person. Listen again to how this section got started in 8:34-38. But when you've received spiritual sight, it's natural to join him on the path of discipleship.

4. Follows God's Son (v. 52b)

Look at how Bartimaeus responds in verse 52. This comes naturally to Him. Why? Because his fundamental disposition has been changed from one who depends on self to dependence on God. He immediately follows Jesus on the way. This is not accidental language and I'm not making too much out of this. What has Jesus been telling people to do throughout this section on discipleship? Follow him. 8:34; 10:21.

Throughout this section Jesus has been on "the way". The journey to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. We've seen repeatedly that this journey will end in Jerusalem and this man immediately begins to follow on this very path.

This man's whole life has been altered. His perception of reality has been transformed. And what is the most obvious, natural thing to him? To follow the one who healed him.

And of course, this has been the point of this entire section. When we "see" who Jesus is as the Davidic Messiah and Son of God, our grasp of reality will be so changed that we must deny self, take up the cross, and follow Him. Anything else would be a denial of His Lordship and the placing of self on the throne.

But the beauty of denying self is the words found in 8:35.