**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-052**. **BARTIMAEUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging."*

*Mark 10:46*

The narrative of this miracle is contained in all the Synoptical Gospels, but the accounts differ in two respects--as to the number of men restored to sight, and as to the scene of the miracle. Matthew tells us that there were two men healed, and agrees with Mark in placing the miracle as Jesus was leaving Jericho. Mark says that there was one, and that the place was outside the gate in departing. Luke, on the other hand, agrees with Matthew as to the number, and differs from him and Mark as to the place, which he sets at the entrance into the city. The first of these two discrepancies may very easily be put aside. The greater includes the less; silence is not contradiction. To say that there was one does not deny that there were two. And if Bartimaeus was a Christian, and known to Mark's readers, as is probable from the mention of his name, it is easily intelligible how he, being also the chief actor and spokesman, should have had Mark's attention concentrated on him. As to the other discrepancy, many attempts have been made to remove it. None of them are altogether satisfactory. But what does it matter? The apparent contradiction may affect theories as to the characteristics of inspired books, but it has nothing to do with the credibility of the narratives, or with their value for us.

Mark's account is evidently that of an eye-witness. It is full of little particulars which testify thereto. Whether Bartimaeus had a companion or not, he was obviously the chief actor and spokesman. And the whole story seems to me to lend itself to the enforcement of some very important lessons, which I will try to draw from it.

**I. Notice the beggar's petition and the attempts to silence it.**

Remember that Jesus was now on His last journey to Jerusalem. That night He would sleep at Bethany; Calvary was but a week off. He had paused to win Zacchaeus, and now He has resumed His march to His Cross. Popular enthusiasm is surging round Him, and for the first time He does not try to repress it. A shouting multitude are escorting Him out of the city. They have just passed the gates, and are in the act of turning towards the mountain gorge through which runs the Jerusalem road. A long file of beggars is sitting, as beggars do still in Eastern cities, outside the gate, well accustomed to lift their monotonous wail at the sound of passing footsteps. Bartimaeus is amongst them. He asks, according to Luke, what is the cause of the bustle, and is told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. The name wakes strange hopes in him, which can only be accounted for by his knowledge of Christ's miracles done elsewhere. It is a witness to their notoriety that they had filtered down to be the talk of beggars at city gates. And so, true to his trade, he cries, Jesus ... have mercy upon me!

Now, note two or three things about that cry. The first is the clear insight into Christ's place and dignity. The multitude said to him, Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. That was all they cared for or knew. He cried, Jesus, thou Son of David, distinctly recognising our Lord's Messianic character, His power and authority, and on that power and authority he built a confidence; for he says not as some other suppliants had done, either If Thou wilt Thou canst, or If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us. He is sure of both the power and the will.

Now, it is interesting to notice that this same clear insight other blind men in the Evangelist's story are also represented as having had. Blindness has its compensations. It leads to a certain steadfast brooding upon thoughts, free from disturbing influences. Seeing Jesus did not produce faith; not seeing Him seems to have helped it. It left imagination to work undisturbed, and He was all the loftier to these blind men, because the conceptions of their minds were not limited by the vision of their eyes. At all events, here is a distinct piece of insight into Christ's dignity, power, and will, to which the seeing multitudes were blind.

Note, further, how in the cry there throbs the sense of need, deep and urgent. And note how in it there is also the realisation of the possibility that the widely-flowing blessings of which Bartimaeus had heard might be concentrated and poured, in their full flood, upon himself. He individualises himself, his need, Christ's power and willingness to help him. And because he has heard of so many who have, in like manner, received His healing touch, he comes with the cry, Have mercy upon me.

All this is upon the low level of physical blessings needed and desired. But let us lift it higher. It is a mirror in which we may see ourselves, our necessities, and the example of what our desire ought to be. Ah! brethren, the deep consciousness of impotence, need, emptiness, blindness, lies at the bottom of all true crying to Jesus Christ. If you have never gone to Him, knowing yourself to be a sinful man, in peril, present and future, from your sin, and stained and marred by reason of it, you never have gone to Him in any deep and adequate sense at all. Only when I thus know myself am I driven to cry, Jesus! have mercy on me. And I ask you not to answer to me, but to press the question on your own consciences--Have I any experience of such a sense of need; or am I groping in the darkness and saying, I see? am I weak as water, and saying I am strong? Thou knowest not that thou art poor, and naked, and blind; and so that Jesus of Nazareth should be passing by has never moved thy tongue to call, Son of David, have mercy upon me!

Again, this man's cry expressed a clear insight into something at least of our Lord's unique character and power. Brethren, unless we know Him to be all that is involved in that august title, the Son of David, I do not think our cries to Him will ever be very earnest. It seems to me that they will only be so when, on the one hand, we recognise our need of a Saviour, and, on the other hand, behold in Him the Saviour whom we need. I can quite understand--and we may see plenty of illustrations of it all round us--a kind of Christianity real as far as it goes, but in my judgment very superficial, which has no adequate conception of what sin means, in its depth, in its power upon the victim of it, or in its consequences here and hereafter; and, that sense being lacking, the whole scale of Christianity, as it were, is lowered, and Christ comes to be, not, as I think the New Testament tells us that He is, the Incarnate Word of God, who for us men and for our salvation bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, but an Example, a Teacher, or a pure Model, or a social Reformer, or the like. If men think of Him only as such, they will never cry to Him, Have mercy upon me!

Dear friends, I pray you, whether you begin with looking into your own hearts and recognising the crawling evils that have made their home there, and thence pass to the thought of the sort of Redeemer that you need and find in Christ--or whether you begin at the other side, and, looking upon the revealed Christ in all the fulness in which He is represented to us in the Gospels, from thence go back to ask yourselves the question, What sort of man must I be, if that is the kind of Saviour that I need?--I pray you ever to blend these two things together, the consciousness of your own need of redemption in His blood and the assurance that by His death we are redeemed, and then to cry, Lord! have mercy upon me, and claim your individual share in the wide-flowing blessing. Turn all the generalities of His grace into the particularity of your own possession of it. We have to go one by one to His cross, and one by one to pass through the wicket gate. We have not cried to Him as we ought, if our cry is only Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. We must be alone with Him, that into our own hearts we may receive all the fulness of His blessing; and our petition must be Thou Son of David! have mercy upon me. Have you cried that? Notice, further, the attempts to stifle the cry. No doubt it was in defence of the Master's dignity, as they construed it, that the people sought to silence the persistent, strident voice piercing through their hosannas. Ah! they did not know that the cry of wretchedness was far sweeter to Him than their shallow hallelujahs. Christian people of all churches, and of some stiffened churches very especially, have been a great deal more careful of Christ's dignity than He is, and have felt that their formal worship was indecorously disturbed when by chance some earnest voice forced its way through it with the cry of need and desire. But this man had been accustomed for many a day, sitting outside the gate, to reiterate his petition when it was unattended to, and to make it heard amidst the noise of passers-by. So he was persistently bold and importunate and shameless, as the shallow critics thought, in his crying. The more they silenced him, the more a great deal he cried. Would God that we had more crying like that; and that Christ's servants did not so often seek to suppress it, as some of them do! If there are any of you who, by reason of companions, or cares, or habits, or sorrows, or a feeble conception of your own need or a doubtful recognition of Christ's power and mercy, have been tempted to stop your supplications, do like Bartimaeus, and the more these, your enemies, seek to silence the deepest voice that is in you, the more let it speak.

**II. So, notice Christ's call and the suppliant's response.**

He stood still, and commanded him to be called. Remember that He was on His road to His Cross, and that the tension of spirit which the Evangelists notice as attaching to Him then, and which filled the disciples with awe as they followed Him, absorbed Him, no doubt, at that hour, so that He heard but little of the people's shouts. But He did hear the blind beggar's cry, and He arrested His march in order to attend to it.

Now, dear friends, I am not merely twisting a Biblical incident round to an interpretation which it does not bear, but am stating a plain un-rhetorical truth when I say that it is so still. Jesus Christ is no dead Christ who is to be remembered only. He is a living Christ who, at this moment, is all that He ever was, and is doing in loftier fashion all the gracious things that He did upon earth. That pause of the King is repeated now, and the quick ear which discerned the difference between the unreal shouts of the crowd, and the agony of sincerity in the cry of the beggar, is still open. He is in the heavens, surrounded by its glories, and, as I think Scripture teaches us, wielding providence and administering the affairs of the universe. He does not need to pause in order to hear you and me. If He did, He would--if I may venture upon such an impossible supposition--bid the hallelujahs of heaven hush themselves, and suspend the operations of His providence if need were, rather than that you or I, or any poor man who cries to Him, should be unheard and unhelped. The living Christ is as tender a friend, has as quick an ear, is as ready to help at once, to-day, as He was when outside the gate of Jericho; and every one of us may lift his or her poor, thin voice, and it will go straight up to the throne, and not be lost in the clamour of the hallelujahs that echo round His seat. Christ still hears and answers the cry of need. Send you it up, and you will find that true.

Notice the suppliant's response. That is a very characteristic right-about-face of the crowd, who one moment were saying, Hold your tongue and do not disturb Him, and the next moment were all eager to encumber him with help, and to say, Rise up, be of good cheer; He calleth thee. No thanks to them that He did. And what did the man do? Sprang to his feet--as the word rightly rendered would be--and flung away the frowsy rags that he had wrapped round him for warmth and softness of seat, as he waited at the gate; and he came to Jesus. Brethren, casting aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, let us runto the same Refuge. You have to abandon something if you are to go to Christ to be healed. I dare say you know well enough what it is. I do not; but certainly there is something that entangles your legs and keeps you from finding your way to Him. If there is nothing else, there is yourself and your trust in self, and that is to be put away. Cast away the garment spotted with the fleshand go to Christ, and you will receive succour.

**III. Notice the question of all-granting love, and the answer of conscious need.**

What wilt Thou that I should do unto thee? A very few hours before He had put the same question with an entirely different significance, when the sons of Zebedee came to Him, and tried to get Him to walk blindfold into a promise. He upset their scheme with the simple question, What is it that you want?which meant, I must know and judge before I commit Myself, But when He said the same thing to Bartimaeus He meant exactly the opposite. It was putting the key of the treasure-house into the beggar's hand. It was the implicit pledge that whatever he desired he should receive. He knew that the thing this man wanted was the thing that He delighted to give.

But the tenderness of these words, and the gracious promise that is hived in them, must not make us forget the singular authority that speaks in them. Think of a man doing as Jesus Christ did--standing before another and saying, I will give you anything that you want. He must be either a madman or a blasphemer, or God manifest in the flesh; Almighty power guided by infinite love.

And what said the man? He had no doubt what he wanted most--the opening of these blind eyes of his. And, dear brother, if we knew ourselves as well as Bartimaeus knew his blindness, we should have as little doubt what it is that we need most. Suppose you had this wishing-cap that Christ put on Bartimaeus's head put on yours: what would you ask? It is a penetrating question if men will answer it honestly. Think what you consider to be your chief need. Suppose Jesus Christ stood where I stand, and spoke to you: What wilt thou that I should do for you?If you are a wise man, if you know yourself and Him, your answer will come as swiftly as the beggar's--Lord! heal me of my blindness, and take away my sin, and give me Thy salvation. There is no doubt about what it is that every one of us needs most. And there should be no doubt as to what each of us would ask first.

The supposition that I have been making is realised. That gracious Lord is here, and is ready to give you the satisfaction of your deepest need, if you know what it is, and will go to Him for it. Ask! and ye shall receive.

**IV. Lastly, notice, sight given, and the Giver followed.**

Bartimaeus had scarcely ended speaking when Christ began. He was blind at the beginning of Christ's little sentence; he saw at the end of it. Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee. The answer came instantly, and the cure was as immediate as the movement of Christ's heart in answer.

I am here to proclaim the possibility of an immediate passage from darkness to light. Some folk look askance at us when we talk about sudden conversions, but these are perfectly reasonable; and the experience of thousands asserts that they are actual. As soon as we desire, we have, and as soon as we have, we see. Whenever the lungs are opened the air rushes in; sometimes the air opens the lungs that it may. The desire is all but contemporaneous with the fulfilment, in Christ's dealing with men. The message is flashed along the wire from earth to heaven, in an incalculably brief space of time, and the answer comes, swift as thought and swifter than light. So, dear friends, there is no reason whatever why a similar instantaneous change should not pass over any man who hears the Good News. He may be unsaved when his hearing of it begins, and saved when his hearing of it ends. It is for himself to settle whether it shall be so or not.

Here we have a clear statement of the path by which Christ's mercy rushes into a man's soul. Thy faith hath saved thee. But it was Christ's power that saved him. Yes, it was; but it was faith that made it possible for Christ's power to make him whole. Physical miracles indeed did not always require trust in Christ, as a preceding condition, but the possession of Christ's salvation does, and cannot but do so. There must be trust in Him, in order that we may partake of the salvation which is owing solely to His power, His love, His work upon the Cross. The condition is for us; the power comes from Him. My faith is the hand that grasps His; it is His hand, not mine, that holds me up. My faith lays hold of the rope; it is the rope and the Person above who holds it, that lift me out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. My faith flees for refuge to the city; it is the city that keeps me safe from the avenger of blood. Brother! exercise that faith, and you will receive a better sight than was poured into Bartimaeus's eyes.

Now, all this story should be the story of each one of us. One modification we have to make upon it, for we do not need to cry persistently for mercy, but to trust in, and to take, the mercy that is offered. One other difference there is between Bartimaeus and many of my hearers. He knew what he needed, and some of you do not. But Christ is calling us all, and my business now is to say to each of you what the crowd said to the beggar, Rise! be of good cheer; He calleth thee. If you will fling away your hindrances, and grope your path to His feet, and fall down before Him, knowing your deep necessity, and trusting to Him to supply it, He will save you. Your new sight will gaze upon your Redeemer, and you will follow Him in the way of loving trust and glad obedience.

Jesus Christ was passing by. He was never to be in Jericho any more. If Bartimaeus did not get His sight then, he would be blind all his days. Christ and His salvation are offered to thee, my brother, now. Perhaps if you let Him pass, you will never hear Him call again, and may abide in the darkness for ever. Do not run the risk of such a fate.