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Blind Bart

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BLIND BART

In Jericho they called him Blind Bartimaeus. The beggar. I've renamed him Blind Bart. I'm not really certain why or how Blind Bart crept into my affections. Perhaps his underdog status—the sightless man no one wanted to see. Perhaps because of his handicap. Or, more likely, because of his unflinching “vision”—once he knew the “Light of the World” was nearby, no one could keep Bart away from him!

But that's the way it is with blindness. Once the afflicted realize that perfect sight can be attained, nothing will stop them from fleeing the darkness.

No one knows how long Blind Bart had been a sightless fixture on his corner in Jericho's outskirts. No doubt every resident of the town had grown accustomed to seeing him sitting there. That was his spot. His turf. His place of business. He was as much a part of Jericho as were the walls, the sand, and the trees. The children thought he had been born and grown

up there on that very corner!

The Bible says that Jesus passed through Jericho, and that as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway begging (Mark 10:46).

Picture it: There sits Blind Bart, whiskered, weathered, worn; his gray hair matted; his shoulders sagging under the weight of a sightless affliction. His clothes and skin appear joined in a mass of continuous wrinkles. His eyes look past those he's begging from. His ears do his real looking. He's not exactly what a good Jewish girl would look for in a husband.

Bart is accustomed to the usual bustle and noise of the city streets as travelers and residents pass by his place of business. After all, he “sees” with his ears—for one sense compen-

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sates when another has been rendered senseless. And today, his ears are “seeing” something unusual. Why so much bustle at this time of day? Why so many travelers? It’s not time for any feasts in Jerusalem. What’s happening? Blind Bart sits up, squinting his ears to get a better view.

Perhaps his 20/20 ears hear someone say the name. Perhaps he sticks out his cane and catches someone to ask what is happening. But one way or another, Blind Bart “sees” Jesus! The careless crowd seeks entertainment; he searches for the Light—Emmanuel! The sightless one perceives him whom the seeing eyes cannot see!

Struggling to his feet and cupping hands around trembling lips, Blind Bart cries out in desperation, “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47, KJV). Oh, how those lifeless eyes strain to see even the faintest evidence that Jesus has heard!

High Stakes

Keep in mind that Blind Bart is right in his element. He knows how to beg! He’s been doing it all his life. He is a professional—Jericho’s best beggar. But today, he’s begging for more, much more, than his daily bread. It’s light versus darkness. Freedom versus bondage. Perhaps even life versus death. So he doesn’t just call out and wait for an answer. Strain and hope as he might, his

dead eyes cannot discern whether his entreaty has been noticed. In this begging, there is no clink of coins or rude insults from passersby. As they sluff off his pleas, he cries again and again and again—his intensity fortified with desperation, “Jesus, thou son of David. . . . *JEESUUS!!!*, thou son of David. . . Haave MERCY on ME!”

Embarrassed that this lowlife should cast such a cloud over the visit of one so popular as Jesus, nearby residents tell Bart to shut his mouth—a demand that comes through the translators as “Many charged him that he should hold his peace.” Blind Bart just turns up the volume and quickens the cadence of his cries. The Bible says “he cried the more a great deal.”

Oh, what a sight! One so ignored, so despised for so long, now has the attention of the town. Maybe the beleaguered beggar could have struck the deal of the decade: “Let me hear the clink of shekels until my bag is full, and I’ll shut up.” But Bart’s “vision” is growing clearer. There’s more at stake here than sight. And somehow he knows that eternity has no price tag.

Jericho’s residents encircle Bart and wave their arms in an attempt to get the boisterous blind beggar to stop embarrassing them. But blindness does have its benefits. Bart can’t see them! Their contortions are wasted on dead eyes.

Spiritual Blindness

Physical blindness is a terrible thing, but spiritual blindness is even more so. It is not, of course, an affliction confined to Jericho. A man is assaulted on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho; and there is a Good Samaritan. But there is also a Levite and a priest who pass by the victim of assault (Luke 10:30-37). Pharisees who see themselves as righteous are shown to be lacking in the most elementary elements of spirituality. A young rich man is told "One thing you lack" (Mark 10:21, NIV). And it cannot escape our notice that it is often the so-called "righteous" who oppose Jesus and at last, crucify him.

So we shouldn't be surprised that it is likely the "righteous" inhabitants of Jericho who shout the loudest to quiet Blind Bart. From their viewpoint, they have the most to lose if the beggar's plea gets put higher on Heaven's priority list than theirs. If this were not their attitude, it would seem they would bring Bart to Jesus—if for no other reason, to prove that sinners don't deserve and don't get healing. And if he is healed—fat chance—his corner will be freed for something a little less irritating than his begging. But the sighted citizens of Jericho leave their blind beggar to clamor for a miracle of his own while they push and shove to get a glimpse of the great Miracle Worker.

"JESUS! JEEESUUS! Have mercy! MERCY! MERRRRRCYYYY!"

"Bart," someone snaps, "stop embarrassing us!"

"JEEESUS!! JEEEEESUUUS!!!! HAVE MERRRCYYYYY UPON. . ."

"Bart! Stop! He'll never come back here again if you keep. . ."

"JEEEEESUUUUS! PLEEEEE-EASE! HAVE MERRRRRC. . ."

"BART! Face it! The Healer doesn't have time for a worthless blind man! We don't know who sinned, your or your parents, but healing isn't for you!"

"JEEESUUUUS! JEEEEEEEEES-UUUUUSSSSSS! Over here! PLEEE-EASE! Don't leave!" Bart's eyes, though sightless, are not tearless! He wipes his nose, now working in sympathy with his eyes. "PLEEEEEASE! JEEESUUUUUUSSSSSS! HAVE MEEEEERCYYY UPON MEEEEE!" Those around Bart back away to avoid being struck by his flailing arms.

What His Ears Had Seen

Then, Blind Bart hears—or "sees"—it. Jesus stops, and the crowd stops with him. "Oh, no!" Some in the crowd throw their heads back and smite their foreheads. "Jesus heard him! How humiliating! We've been disgraced! Why couldn't Bart just. . ."

"Bring the blind man to me," Jesus directs a disciple.

And then, in the same way the

flow of the crowd changed with Jesus' stopping, so their thoughts and actions change with Jesus' words. "And they [the people—perhaps the same ones who had been begging the beggar to stop begging, and then ducked under and around his waving arms] call the blind man, saying, 'Be of good cheer, rise; He is calling you'" (Mark 10:49, NKJV).

As if they had to tell him! Blind Bart's ears had already "seen" it all. This is what he had been begging for. Strange isn't it, how people try to calm their conscience when they're caught in the act of being themselves. Now they're not embarrassed about Blind Bart—they're embarrassed about themselves.

What a momentous meeting follows! Oblivious to the gawking eyes of the crowd, Jesus and Blind Bart face each other. Bart's eyes seem to keep pace with the frantic beating of his heart as he strives to find some shadow—some blurred form of the Healer. Though his eyes are hopelessly dead, his faith is fantastically alive! Even the rustling birds in nearby trees stop their melodic warbling in anticipation of the coming exhibition of their Creator's power. Speechless, the crowd watches as the power-giving eyes of the Giver peer into the lifeless eyes of the beggar. An eerie silence settles over Jericho, the only noise, the wind whispering the power of the Creator through the arid desert air.

The Healer speaks: "What do you want me to do for you?" There is power and assurance in his voice.

All eyes bounce to Blind Bart. "Lord," Bart wipes tears from his eyes—"Lord, that I"—Bart tilts his head, straining to get a different angle, to see if Jesus is really there—"that I might receive my sight" (KJV). Bart's shaking hands point to his sightless eyes.

Jesus smiles, but Bart can't see it. "Go your way," Jesus says, as his hand tenderly touches Bart's trembling fingers, still perched on his cheeks below his eyes. No one in the crowd can tell who is shedding the most tears, Jesus or Bart. "Go your way." Jesus squeezes Bart's shoulder. "Your faith has made you whole" (NKJV).

"And *immediately*," says God's Word, "he received his sight" (Mark 10:52, NKJV). Immediately! No more begging, Bartimaeus. No more cane. No more helpers. No more dependence. No more street corners. No more humiliation. No more scorn. You're free, Bartimaeus. You can see. Your cries have been heard. Your faith has made you whole.

What power! What a Saviour! The Master doesn't delay, "You've suffered long enough, Bart. Your days of darkness are over. Faith such as yours is always rewarded. Come now, into the joy of my marvelous light!"

The noonday desert sun causes Bart to clamp his eyes shut as his

Let's find the 20/20 vision of the Bible. It's there. It's been there plain as day! We've just been blind to it. We've been sitting by the wall begging for morsels. Now Jesus invites us to sit down to his feast. Don't let any nay-sayers hush your request.

pupils for the first time work to regulate the sight. Then he sees his first sight on a hateful Earth—the loving face of his Creator. There's not a dry eye in town—including the two that have just been resurrected!

20/20 Spiritual Vision

20/20 vision. Few of us have it, either physically or spiritually. But, oh, how we, like Blind Bart, should be crying out—"JEEESUUUUS! Have mercy on me!" Nothing should stop us. The darkness of sin has kept us begging in the streets far too long!

But Jesus is not on Earth today. He won't pass through my town or yours. Or *will* he? The Bible says of Jesus: "He name is the Word of God" (Rev. 19:35, NIV). And that Word tells us that "In the beginning was the Word, . . . In him was life; and the life was the *light* of men. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. . . full of grace and truth"—the truth that "shall make you [and me] free" (John 1:1, 4, 14; 8:32, KJV).

Capture that truth and hold it close. Jesus is walking by us today through the pages of his book, the

Bible. The prophets declared that Jesus would come to "open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isa. 42:7, KJV). He did it for Blind Bart. And he'll do it for us—for you and me—today.

Let's find the 20/20 vision of the Bible. It's there. It's been there plain as day! We've just been blind to it. We've been sitting by the wall begging for morsels. Now Jesus invites us to sit down to his feast. Don't let any nay-sayers hush your request. Don't let the casual Christian diminish your hopes. One poor blind man 2,000 years ago proved that Jesus listens. That Jesus cares. That Jesus is powerful. That he is, indeed, the Light of the world.

20/20 vision. What a gift! What a miracle! Thanks, Blind Bart, for showing us how to see. As we begin our search for new vision, let us, like Blind Bart, cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" And as the careless crowd seeks to dampen our excitement, we must cry out "the more a great deal." Jesus will hear. Jesus will help. Jesus will heal! □