

The Language of the Text

Textual Criticism

There are no significant text critical issues with this text. In verse 47 there are manuscripts with alternate spellings of Ναζαρηνός. Codex Bezae (D) and Codex Cyprius (K) both use the nominative υἱός in place of the vocative υἱέ in verse 47. The use of the nominative in D and K reflect the readings in parallel accounts in the synoptic gospel texts. In verse 49 there is an alternative reading in several texts where φωνήσατε αὐτόν is changed to αὐτόν φωνηθῆναι. The alternate reading changes the imperative "call him" to the aorist passive infinitive "to be called".

Vocabulary and Grammar

The word ὁδός is used to bracket this passage. It is the last word in both the first and the last verse. The author notes that the story begins and ends on the way (or road). The word ὁδός was one of the first terms used to describe the early Christian Church.¹ The word ἀκολουθέω is used in verse 52 in the imperfect tense in the indicative mood which can be used to show a past time progressive or repeated action. Out of the 90 times ἀκολουθέω is used in the New Testament it is only used in the imperfect tense 12 times. Bartimaeus' response to Jesus' question in verse 51 uses the "Imperative ἴνα" plus a verb in the subjunctive mood. This indicates the request has the force of a command.²

Boundaries

The verses 46 through 52 form a complete story. The preceding text is James and John's argument over who will sit at Jesus' right hand. The following text is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Flow of the text

The text begins with Jesus and the disciples entering and exiting Jericho in the first verse. The rest of the passage consists of Bartimaeus' encounter with Jesus. Bartimaeus repeats the phrase "Son of David, show me mercy" twice when attempting contact Jesus. There is conflict within the text when the crowds attempt to silence Bartimaeus, and keep him away from Jesus. The story progresses linearly; the interaction between Bartimaeus and Jesus moves from call, to conflict, to contact, to healing, and concludes with following. Bartimaeus moves closer to Jesus throughout the text, and after regaining his sight stays with Jesus.

Literary Context

This scene comes at the end of Jesus and the disciples' journey to Jerusalem. It is similar to an earlier healing of a blind man in 8.22-26. These two scenes frame the final portion of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, before he goes to Jerusalem. However, the scenes have significant differences. In the healing at Bethsaida (8.22-26), the people facilitate the encounter between Jesus and the blind man, rather than try to stop it. The major conflict of the first event is that it takes Jesus two attempts to fully heal the blind man. The healing in the second account is instant once the blind man and Jesus break through the external conflict. Bartimaeus has a strong internal commitment to contact and then

1. Acts 9.2, BDAG, ὁδός, 3c.

2. Wallace, p. 476-7

follow Jesus. The crowd's antagonistic behavior in the second account reflects the increasing resistance of the world to Jesus' message, and points to the inevitability of the crucifixion. However, those who understand Jesus' message and mission are empowered to give their lives over to follow Jesus.

Use of Scripture

There are no direct quotations of scripture in this passage. Bartimaeus' use of the phrase "Son of David" alludes to King David's royal dynasty and the promise from God that David's house would rule Israel permanently (2 Sam 7.12-16). The title "Son of David" could be associated with the messianic promise.

Source Criticism

Since scholars regard Mark as the earliest gospel account, it is nearly impossible to determine what if any sources Mark used when composing his gospel.

Form Criticism

The passage follows the form of the healing miracles: introduction, conflict, action, confirmation, and reaction. Most of the account is tied up in the conflict stage. Verses 48 through 51 tell the conflict of the passage. The action, confirmation, and reaction are all contained in the last verse. The focus of the passage is not the healing, but the blind man's identification of Jesus and overcoming obstacles in order to encounter Jesus. It is also important to note that in the reaction stage Bartimaeus does not follow the typical pattern of praising God and going home, but instead continues to follow Jesus "on the way."

Redaction Criticism

It is difficult to see how Mark used his sources, since we cannot determine any sources for Mark's Gospel. However we can look at Mark's usage of terms and vocabulary. The word ἀκολουθέω is used in all of the Gospels, but it is used most frequently on a percentage basis in Mark. The most common context for the use of ἀκολουθέω is in the call stories of the disciples and descriptions of crowds following Jesus.

Socio-Historical Criticism

The honor/ shame society of first century Palestine is important to understand this text. Bartimaeus is of very low social standing in society due to his blindness. Jesus has some status because he is a respected teacher with crowds of people following him. This would explain why the crowd tries to prevent Bartimaeus from addressing Jesus. It would not have been customary for him to address Jesus directly. When Jesus does respond to him he uses people from the crowd as brokers to summon Bartimaeus and bring him over to Jesus. In asking for mercy Bartimaeus acknowledges his low status. He does not deserve what he is asking for, and he will be indebted to Jesus for showing him mercy.

Narrative Criticism

The narrator has a third person point of view with limited knowledge. The narrator does not know or reveal what any of the characters are thinking or feeling, only what people say or do. The road, blindness, the cloak, and the crowd are key symbols to understanding the text. Irony is also an important tool used by the author. The blind man can "see" Jesus for who he truly is. Another ironic element is the crowd's change of attitude toward Bartimaeus after Jesus calls for him. The author is attempting to show the reader that if you call upon Jesus in faith he will restore your "sight" so that you may follow him "on the way", even though the "crowds" and your "cloak" may be holding you back.

Interpretive Summary

The story of the healing of Bartimaeus is reminiscent of other miracle healing stories in Mark and the synoptic Gospels. These stories show the reader Jesus' divine power as well as the response of those who Jesus heals and those who witness the healing. However, as with any Biblical narrative there are multiple layers of interpretation and meaning. This text is no exception. In Mark 10.46-52, the healing of blind Bartimaeus, the author uses the "healing miracle" story form to demonstrate proper faith and discipleship.

The author stretches the miracle story form in order to illustrate discipleship and faith. As mentioned above, this story is concentrated in the conflict stage (stage 2) of the healing miracle form. The story also contains words typical of both miracle healing and discipleship accounts. This is similar to other miracle stories in Mark.³ In Mark 5.25-34, the story of the woman with a hemorrhage, Most of the account is made up of conflict and resistance. The final result is in question until the last verse when Jesus tells the woman, "your faith has made you well". The conclusion of the story is remarkably similar to the story of Bartimaeus. Again in the story of the woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit (Mk 7.25-30), the conflict is stretched over almost the entire account. There is an action and confirmation stage within the passage, but the author omits a reaction stage entirely.

In the parallel accounts of Bartimaeus in Matthew (20.29-34) and Luke (18.35-43) the authors edit the Markan account to conform more closely to a miracle form. In Luke, the author reduces the conflict portion of the story and adds a typical final stage reaction of the healed man giving praise and glory to God. In Matthew, Jesus now calls directly to the blind men and does not use people from the crowd to summon them. Jesus also touches their eyes in order to heal them, and does not declare them healed because of their faith. Both accounts drop the proper name making Jesus the center of the narrative as is typical of the form.⁴

The placement of the Bartimaeus account within the entire Gospel of Mark points to the author's intent to use the narrative as instruction on discipleship and faith. With the account of the healing at Bethsaida (8.22-26) discussed in the previous section, the two healing of blindness narratives form an *inclusio* to mark Jesus' final instruction to the disciples concerning his fate and their response before entering Jerusalem.⁵ Comparison of the two accounts also alludes to the progression of the overall narrative of the Gospel. In the first account the blind man was relatively passive when it came to seeking out Jesus. The people around him brought him to Jesus for healing. By comparison Bartimaeus had to overcome many obstacles before Jesus healed him. The healing in the

3. Achtemeier, p. 119

4. *Ibid*, p. 121-2

5. *Ibid*, p. 132

first narrative was labored and difficult, where once Bartimaeus reached Jesus he was healed instantly. After the first healing Jesus asks the man to stay away from the village, presumably to keep the healing secret. Bartimaeus in contrast stays with Jesus and presumably follows him and the disciples into Jerusalem. All of the events of the first account mirror the disciples confusion about Jesus and his mission. Healing comes easy to Bartimaeus because of his strong active faith. Now, the disciples should have that kind of faith. Jesus' final instruction in this section of the Gospel has prepared the disciples for the difficulties they will encounter in Jerusalem and beyond. They should be prepared to respond with the discipleship of Bartimaeus, and they are no longer expected to keep the "messianic secret" like the first man who had to keep his healing secret.

The author lifts up the minor characters like Bartimaeus as an example of faith, while the disciples are portrayed throughout most of the Gospel as fearful and lacking in faith. Their fear prevents them from understanding who Jesus is. Fear and ignorance are the opposite of faith.⁶ The minor characters have an openness to Jesus and a humble, persistent faith. Their persistence and determination of faith enables them to overcome obstacles. Their faith enables them to receive healing because they trust that God will act through Jesus.⁷ The author uses these characters of low social status as an ironic reversal with the specially selected disciples. Those who were handpicked for this mission cannot see the truth of Jesus throughout the Gospel, but the blind and the lame can see Jesus for what he is without any benefit of instruction. The reader then identifies with the minor character's humble, active faith while becoming frustrated with the disciples fearful and ambitious⁸ behavior.

In the Bartimaeus narrative, the author focuses upon his faith more than the restoration of his sight. His faith is demonstrated through persistence and trust, not special knowledge or belief. He would have probably continued to persist in faith if somehow the crowd was able to keep him away from Jesus, and he was not healed. His faith came prior to the healing it was not a result of it.⁹ The repeated imagery of the "way" is essential to understanding discipleship within Mark's Gospel. The "way" represents Jesus effort to bring the Kingdom of God to Israel. The "way" is especially important in the final journey to Jerusalem. The word occurs eight times during the account of this final journey.¹⁰ The "way" ultimately leads to the cross at the climax of the Gospel narrative. It also served as a metaphor for following Jesus for the early Christian communities. The use of ὁδός as an *inclusio* for the Bartimaeus narrative helps reveal the message as a discipleship account.

6. Rhodes, et al. p 123-5

7. *Ibid*, p 130-1

8. Mk 10.46-52

9. Achtemeier, p. 131-4

10. Rhodes, et al. p 68

In the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10.46-52) the author uses healing miracle narrative to provide an example of persistent faith and discipleship. Bartimaeus overcomes many obstacles in order to meet Jesus, and through his faith and trust that God would work through Jesus his sight is restored. After regaining his sight he continues to demonstrate persistent faith and discipleship by following Jesus "on the way" to Jerusalem.

Works Cited

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Appendix

Translation of Mark 10.46-52

And they came into Jericho. And while he and his disciples and the large crowds were coming out from Jericho, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting beside the way (road). And when he heard it was Jesus of Nazareth he began to call out and to say, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy." And many rebuked him in order that he would be silent. But he called out much more, "Son of David, show me mercy." And Jesus having stood said, "call him" and they called the blind one saying to him, "be brave, get up, he is calling you." Now having cast off his garment and jumped up, he went toward Jesus. And having answered him, Jesus said, "what do you want me to do?" Now the blind one said, "Rabbi, let me see." And Jesus said to him, "go away, your faith has saved you." And immediately, he received sight and continued to follow him on the way.