

2 LENT  
FEBRUARY 20/21, 2016

1<sup>ST</sup> MARSHALL  
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ISAIAH 42:1-9; MARK 10:32-52

*The Eyes of Truth*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



*You will know the truth...and the truth will make you free.*

Our bible passage for today signals the **end** of the ***beginning*** of Mark's Gospel. Remember how he starts his story? John the Baptist anchors himself in the wilderness outside of Jerusalem. There he preaches with a ***passion*** that incites **huge crowds** to **hike** out into the desert. There they are baptized in the Jordan River, a dramatic act for repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

It's also a **stinging rebuke** of **worship** at the Temple – that which was intended to help people experience repentance and forgiveness seems to have lost its relevance. We're told that people from the **whole Judean countryside** and **ALL** the people of **Jerusalem** were coming to him – including even Jesus, the Son of God.

That's our introduction to the Lord...it's his cue to **come on stage**, to **take the field**, to **enter the game**...and from that moment on, Jesus' ministry unfolds... Ironically, he won't set foot in the holy city of Jerusalem until 3/4ths of the way through Mark's story – not until chapter 11, which marks the ***beginning*** of the **end**.

Martin Kahler, a German theologian, once called Mark's Gospel a *passion* (or **crucifixion**) *narrative with a long introduction*...

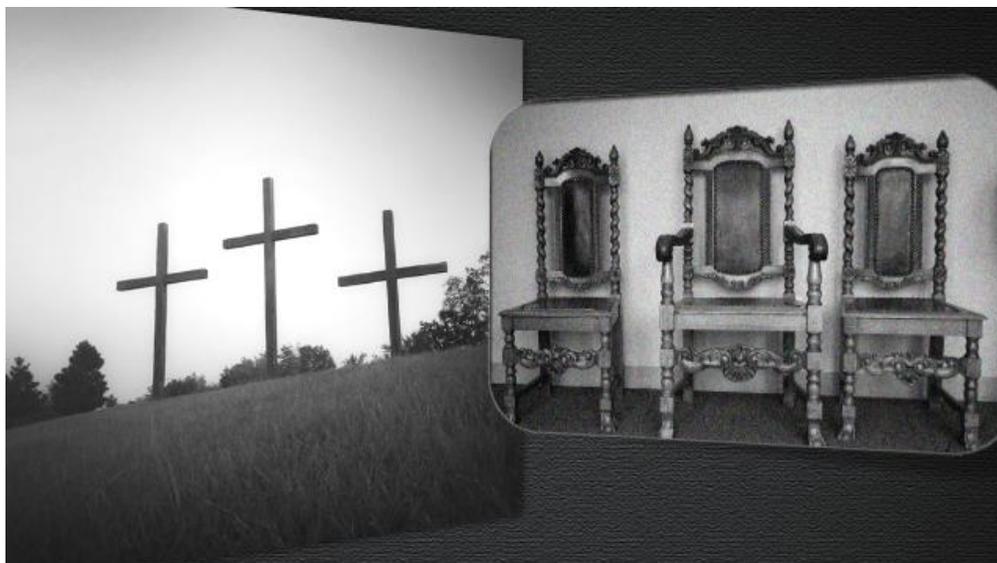
and in many ways he's right. In fact, today's passage starts with Jesus, again, trying to prepare his disciples for the horror that's about to happen.



*See, he says to them, we're going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.*

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in the last two chapters that Jesus has explicitly explained what will happen. He has told them ***the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth...*** and they still don't get it!!

As **soon** as he stops talking, the **moment** he draws a breath, the **second** he pauses to collect his thoughts...**James** and **John**, two of the inner circle of disciples, who have seen and heard things the others haven't, who really should be among the **first** to see the truth about Jesus...prove beyond a doubt that they really don't get what he's saying at all!



*Teacher, they say, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you... Now, I'm sure that **I** tried that approach on **my** parents...I know for a fact that our kids tried it on us: *say YES to whatever I ask* – yeah, right!*

And I just can't help but picture Jesus shaking his head – as he listens to their sel-fish, self-centered, self-absorbed request...*give us the seats of honor when you take the throne* – we got your back!!

The **truth** is staring them in the face, has been clearly spoken into their ears, is standing right in front of them...and **they don't see it**. Jesus says to them: *you don't know what you're asking...*

Time and time again through these pages of scripture, that truth comes cycling back: Those who **should** get it about Jesus, **don't**...while those who have **many** reasons **not** to, **do**...



The word PROTAGONIST has three main nuances in its definition. A *protagonist* can be either:

- a leading character in a drama, or
- a main figure in a real situation, or
- an advocate or champion of a cause.

Certainly the word *protagonist* describes **Jesus'** role in the Gospel story, right? But I think it's **also** true of those people we've met along Jesus' journey who **shouldn't** get it about Jesus, but still **do**:

- Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue whose daughter was **dying**,
- the **nameless woman** who'd been bleeding for 12 years,
- and in today's story, the starring role goes to **blind Bartimaeus**...

Here's a question for you: **When a person was suffering back in those days, what did people say was causing that person's pain?**

Yeah – it's the story of **Job**, right? **Job** is God's *shining star* of **humanity**. So certain is God that Job will never abandon him, that he lets the Devil ruin Job's world by taking away: his family, his business, his health – everything he holds dear – it's all destroyed. Job has three friends come visit, and for seven days they sit with him in silence because his **grief** is so **great**...what a beautiful ministry of **presence**...if

only they'd kept their **mouths shut!**

Because the minute Job speaks, his friends feel it's **their** duty to convince him that he's obviously being **punished** by God for some **terrible sin** – and that **all** he has to *do* is confess it, so God can **forgive** him and **restore** his fortunes, his family, his future...

That was true during Job's time, it's what the disciples believe as well. Someone who is sick, or blind, or a victim of tragedy is simply **earning** their **just rewards**, they're just **getting** what they **deserve**.

But blind Bartimaeus will have none of that **bull-ony**... When he **hears** that Jesus of Nazareth is walking past, he begins to **shout**, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!!!* His neighbors, who are **insulted** by this sinner's audacity, his impudence, his nerve, try their best to shut him up. But he only cries out **louder**, *Son of David, have mercy on me!!!*



Do you remember the **rich man** in our story last week? He runs up to Jesus, calls him Good Teacher (which Jesus doesn't seem to like), then asks the Lord, *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* Jesus goes over the commandments, and the man says, *I've kept them since I was a kid!*

**Jesus**, looking at him, **loved** him and said, *You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor and **come follow me**.* When

he heard this, he was **shocked** and went away **grieving**, for he had many possessions.

It's very interesting to **compare** these two: the rich man and Bartimaeus.

- Both seek out Jesus.
- Both honor him with a title.
- Both are enduring some kind of struggle.
- Both have a specific request.
- And both receive an answer.

This is like an acted-out formula for prayer, isn't it?

- They come to the Lord.
- They praise his name.
- They're seeking relief from a malady, a problem, a pain.
- They both name what they want.
- And they both receive an answer.

- Yet, where one **turns away** from Jesus with a **heavy heart**,
- The other **leaps** to his **feet** and becomes a **follower** of the Lord.

- The rich man, who has everything, **can't see** the **path** that leads to God.
- Blind **Bartimaeus**, with nothing, sees who brings God's kingdom to us.



It's beautiful, isn't it? In a **heart-warming** sense for the one, and a **heart-wrenching** sense for the other...Jesus offers **healing** to both...but for the **rich** man, the cure for **his** struggle feels like it will cause his **death**... **Bartimaeus**, on the other hand, tosses aside his cloak and follows Jesus on the way of the cross – the road to **death** for **One** man...which becomes a **gift of new life** for the **world**.

That, I think, is what we're supposed to take away from these stories. **James and John** join the **rich** man in trying to figure out a way to **make the system work**...for **them!** **All three** of those guys are **happy serving God** –it just that they **also** want to hold on to a **big chunk** of the **world's treasure** as well.

Jesus tells them all, *The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

In his book Written In Blood, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little **boy** whose **sister** needed a **blood** transfusion. She had a rare blood type that she **shared** with her **brother**. The fact that **he** had recovered from the same disease two years earlier made the chances of success even greater. The doctor carefully explained all this to the little boy, pointing out that without the transfusion his sister would die.

*Would you be brave and give your blood to your sister?* the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip began to tremble. Then he smiled and said, *Sure, for my sister.* The two children were wheeled into the hospital room - Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy.

The boy smiled at his sister, and watched as the blood traveled out of his body, down the clear plastic tube. Then his smile faded, and as he lay there feeling weak he looked up and said, *Doctor, when do I die?* Johnny thought that giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life so that she might live. Yet because of his great love for her he was prepared to pay the price.

(<http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-troy-borst-stories-17383.asp>)

*You will know the truth...and the truth will make you free.*

Bartimaeus teaches us to:

- Be honest about our needs/our wants/our desires...
- Be bold in our prayers – as Jesus said, *Ask for whatever you will in my name...*, and
- Be confident that our faith will make us well – on good days and bad, in **sickness** and in health, when we're **aware** of God's **presence** or **convinced** of his **absence**...
- And Bartimaeus teaches us to **follow Jesus** on his way to the **cross**, being **willing** to **see** the **world** with the **eyes** of **God** and **serve** the world with a **sacrificial heart**.

**For then we shall know the truth, and the truth will make us free.**

Amen.