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Ambitious Leaders, Barbimaeus (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the importance of servant leadership and being role models for others. He emphasizes that Christians should not think in terms of worldly categorizations or opinions, but rather provide leadership through service to others. Gregg also addresses some potential criticisms of the Bible, citing examples of compressing stories for brevity and highlighting the power of words such as "my great one" used to refer to Jesus. Overall, he encourages ambitious leaders to prioritize service to others and embody Christ-like qualities in their leadership roles.

Transcript

...rendered to the body of Christ. Peter said that in 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11. As everyone has received a gift, let him minister or serve it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

If you have a gift of the Spirit, it defines your service, your slavery, your contribution. It doesn't describe your privilege, it describes your contribution. If you have a gift of teaching, or if you have a gift of exhortation, or if you have a gift of ruling, because that's a gift of the same sort, or a gift of helps or whatever, that just describes what you contribute, how you serve.

You serve as a teacher, you serve as a giver, you serve as a helper, you serve as a ruler. And ruling in the body of Christ is a serving role. And like any serving role, you don't impose it on someone else.

You contribute it, you offer it, for the benefit of others. Now how this works out differently is, than say in a pagan corporation. In a pagan corporation, those who are ruling have authority over others.

That authority means that they make the rules and everybody else has to follow, or else they're fired, or whatever. They come under discipline, and they have to do what these guys say to do. But in the body of Christ, rulers are there for those who need rule.

Remember Jesus talked about a shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and going after the one

that's wandered away. The 99 don't need the shepherd at that moment, they're doing fine themselves. The one that wandered off needs the attention, and the shepherd goes and provides a service to that wandering one, and says, here's the way to go, come back home.

You don't impose service on people who don't want it, although some churches do. The service the elder provides is to feed the flock, to watch over the flock, protect the flock from wolves and heretics and so forth, and to be an example, as Peter said in 1 Peter 5. Remember when Peter was writing to the elders? In 1 Peter 5, 1 he says, the elders who are among you, I exhort, who am also a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed, shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers. Not dominating as overseers, but serving as overseers.

Not by constraint, but willingly, not for dishonest gain, actually filthy lucre, but eagerly. Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. The role of the elder is not to lord it over, not to have authority over, but to be an example.

The assumption is that the true Christian wants to follow Jesus. Young Christians in particular need role models. Probably everyone needs role models, no matter how old you get, it always helps to have role models.

People you admire and look up to, and are doing it better than you're doing it, and you kind of watch and see how it's done. But especially young Christians are in particular need of role models. And that's what the elders should be.

They should be older Christians, older men, whose behavior is a good role model. Now, if somebody doesn't follow their role modeling, they're not supposed to get bent out of shape and say, hey, I'm doing it this way, that's the way you're supposed to do it. A sheep wants to follow the shepherd for the most part, and hopefully most Christians will recognize a good role model and say, I want to do it that way too.

And the elder provides this service. He provides a model. He provides an example.

He says, well, here's, I've been walking with the Lord for 50 years, and here's what it looks like when you've walked with the Lord for 50 years. Here's what mature Christianity looks like. And you look at it and say, wow, okay, that gives me a vivid picture of how to act in this situation, how to respond to that situation, and I'll do it the way he does it.

That's what Paul said, essentially, about himself in 1 Corinthians 11. He said, be followers of me or imitators of me as I am of Christ. He put himself forward as a role model for the younger Christians.

And that's what all leaders are supposed to be. And Peter tells the elders to be that way.

But as soon as... There's so much tied together here that frustrates me.

There's so little of biblical thinking, it seems to me. Generally speaking, in Western Christianity, there's so much of tradition, so much of Western culture, so much of a whole bunch of other sources of ideas, psychology and others, that now have become the orthodoxy of what is considered to be evangelical Christianity in this part of the world, that biblical thinking has really fallen on hard times. And one of the areas where biblical teaching has taken a beating in the thinking of Christians is its failure to correct wrong thinking about authority and power and privilege and so forth.

I mean, Christians still think in terms of worldly categories and Gentile opinions about these things. And you can see that every time you find a church where the leadership is acting like they're the boss. They're thinking like the Gentiles.

Now, again, I say things about the church and the churches, and I don't want anyone to think that I think this is true of all churches. I know exceptions. I know pastors who are extremely humble, and they don't have this bad attitude.

I'm not trying to, with a broad brush, condemn all modern Christians. That just wouldn't be fair or right. Unfortunately, however, I don't think my experience is that unusual.

I think if you go around as many churches and be in as many churches as I've been in, and I think some of you may or may have already, then you probably have seen something very similar to what I've seen. Leaders who think like Gentiles instead of who think like Christ. Leaders who think that by having reached the rank that they now hold in the church, they have the privilege of being kowtowed to, and that their opinions should dominate the church and things like that.

And it seems to me like that's just what Jesus is saying they're not supposed to do. He says that's what the Gentile rulers do. That's the concept the Gentiles have of leadership.

The rulers of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you, he said. How could he be plainer? And he doesn't just leave it in the negative, he speaks positively. Here's what it should be like with you.

Anyone who desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever of you desires to be first shall be the slave of all. Now, Jesus had said in a passage that we looked at not very long ago, in Luke chapter 17, that Christians should see themselves as if they were slaves.

In Luke 17, verses 7 through 10, of course, Jesus is talking about actual slaves initially. When a slave comes in from working, his master expects him to work some more. He doesn't expect to take a break and have his master serve him.

He doesn't even expect thanks, in verse 9, Luke 17, 9. The servant doesn't even expect to be thanked for his loyal conduct. That's just what's expected of a slave. And so Jesus says in verse 10, so likewise you, when you've done all those things which you are commanded to say, we are unprofitable servants, or worthless slaves, some translations say.

We have done only what was our duty to do. So the mentality of the believer is to be like that of a slave. What does a slave do? He serves.

He serves without thanks, he serves without notice, he serves without congratulations, and he just keeps serving. And he has no privileges. He has no expectation of having his wishes granted to him.

He does everything obediently, and once he's done it, he doesn't say, now I deserve a break. But he says, I've just done what I'm supposed to do, is there anything else? Anything else necessary to be done? And so Jesus points out that the person who is the best Christian is the one who is best at being a slave. The person who wants to be a first rank in the kingdom of God is the one who has to make himself the lowest of all.

The one who wants to be a leader has to provide leadership as a service, not as something he sees himself as privileged in. And so Jesus is, of course, trying to correct the way that the apostles were thinking about the kingdom, about greatness in the kingdom, and about leadership in the kingdom. Actually, these very disciples were going to be the leaders.

No question about that. Jesus was calling these guys to be the leaders of the church. But as long as they had this unbroken, carnal, worldly way of thinking about leadership, it would have been disastrous for him to give them positions of leadership.

I wonder at this point whether Jesus' heart sank when he heard this discussion going on among them. They're all fighting among themselves. Yeah, you wanted to be the first, I wanted to be the first.

And here Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. He doesn't exactly have a lot of time left to get these guys straightened out. He's been working with them for three years or something like that, and they're still at this carnal stage of thinking, and it's not very many weeks before they'll be taken over the whole project, and he'll be gone.

And it must have been a little discouraging to him, but he sits down, and we don't read of real anger or impatience on his part here. He just sits down and patiently tells them, you got this wrong. You got to be like me.

That's what he says. After he tells them what they should be like, he says, he gives himself as an example in verse 45, for even the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. So he says, you've got two models

here of leadership.

One is the way the Gentiles do it. The other is the way I do it. He says, I'll be your role model here.

I'm the Son of Man. I didn't come, I'm not requiring people to serve me. I'm here to serve people, even to the point of dying for them.

When Paul talks about the humility of Christ in Philippians 2, he says, Jesus, you know, he existed in the form of God. He didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself and took on himself the form of a servant. And having been found in the form and fashion of a man, he humbled himself further even unto death, to the death of the cross.

That's the ultimate service he performed, was laying down his life for the sins of the world. So Jesus gives his own example for them. You need a role model here.

Don't role model after the rulers of the Gentiles, nor after the rulers of the Jews, for that matter, but role model after Christ. I didn't come to be served. Don't you expect to be served.

The only thing you should expect to do is to serve every time there's something to be done for someone else. And even to give your life, even as the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many. Now, I need to comment on something here.

It wouldn't be necessary to do so if not for the prominence, I guess, or predominance of Calvinism in the modern church. This statement in verse 45 is sometimes thought by Calvinists to prove that Jesus didn't die for everybody. You know enough about Calvinism to know that the third of the five points is called limited atonement.

Of the five points of Calvinism, the third is the limited atonement. And according to this view, Jesus didn't die for everybody. He just died for the elect.

This verse is thought to prove that point. This is one of the proof texts for the limited atonement. Jesus said he came to give his life a ransom for many.

Now, many isn't quite the same thing as everybody, just many. And the elect are the many. He didn't say he came to give his life a ransom for all.

Now, let me encounter with two observations, if I might. He didn't say how many. The fact is that many can mean all.

And sometimes it does. In Romans chapter 5, Paul is talking about the impact that Adam had on the human race and the impact that Christ had on the human race. And in Romans chapter 5, it says in verse 19, For as by one man's disobedience, that's Adam, many were made sinners.

How many? All were made sinners by Adam's disobedience. But it says many were made sinners. So by one man's obedience, many will be made righteous.

Now, in the second case, many doesn't mean everybody. But the first case, it does. The point that Paul is making is the distinction between one and many.

Adam was one man, but he impacted many. How many? Well, in that case, everybody. But the point is the disparity between the numbers.

Adam was only one. The people affected were a great number. Jesus was only one man, but the people affected positively by his obedience were a great number.

The idea is that one person can have an impact on a large company. The size of the company is not specified. It can be a portion of the whole or it can be the whole.

But in any case, whether it's everyone on the face of the earth or whether it's just some smaller group within them, the word many is applicable. And so, when Jesus said the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many, the word many is not in contrast to the word all. The word many is in contrast to the word one.

There have been cases in history where men have given their lives for another man. Jesus said, greater love has no man than this that he gives his life for a friend. And Paul said in Romans 5 that scarcely for a good man will one dare to die.

But sometimes, he said, occasionally for a righteous man, some would even dare to die. There are cases where a person might lay down his life for his friend. And that's a good thing to do, a very good thing to do.

But Jesus is pointing out, I'm going to lay down my life as a ransom, but I'm not just going to ransom one person. It's not just one life for one life. My life is going to ransom many people, a large number of persons.

But how many? Well, to answer that question, we could turn to 1 Timothy 2 and verse 6. 1 Timothy 2.6, obviously speaking about Jesus. If anyone wonders about that, you can just look at the previous verse. It says, who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.

So, look at also the two verses earlier, verse 4, 1 Timothy 2.4, that God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And then in that context, verse 6, Jesus gave himself a ransom for all. Presumably, the all in verse 6 is the same as the all in verse 4. All men, not just all the elect, all men.

Therefore, Jesus gave himself a ransom for how many? All men and women, all people. Therefore, when Jesus said he came to give his life a ransom for many, as I said, many is not in contrast to all, as the Calvinists would have it. Many is in fact all.

And all are many. But many is in contrast to one. One son of man is given his life, but not for one person, but for many persons.

For a company of people. For the whole human race, as a matter of fact. So, I bring this out only because this verse is used as proof text for a wrong doctrine, it seems to me.

When you compare scripture to scripture, it doesn't support that wrong doctrine. Okay, now. We have another story before the chapter ends.

Beginning with verse 46. Then they came to Jericho. And as he went out of Jericho, with his disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging.

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Then many warned him to be quiet. But he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man saying to him, be of good cheer, arise, he is coming to you. He is calling for you, excuse me.

And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said to him, what do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabboni, that I might receive my sight. Then Jesus said to him, go your way, your faith has made you well.

And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. Now here's a story where there's quite a few differences in the way the different Gospels tell it. This story of the healing of the blind man is found in Matthew, Mark, and in Luke.

In Matthew, it's found in Matthew 20, beginning with verse 29. And in Luke, it's found in Luke chapter 18, beginning with verse 35. But the stories are quite different.

And it's been one of the occasions for critics of the Bible to try to find, you know, mistakes or contradictions. For one thing, in verse 46 here, it says, when they came to Jericho, it says, they came to Jericho. And as they went out of Jericho with his disciples, the great multitude, blind Bartimaeus and Son of Timaeus sat by the road begging.

So it indicates that this happened as they were leaving Jericho, as they came out of Jericho, verse 46 says. Now Matthew also places this healing as they departed from Jericho. But Luke 18.35 says that it was as he was approaching Jericho that he did this miracle.

Or at least the impression is given that he did the miracle as they were approaching Jericho, not as they were going out of Jericho. Luke 18, verse 35, it says, then it

happened as he was coming near Jericho that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And it tells of the miracle.

So Matthew and Mark tell us that this happened as he was coming out of Jericho. Luke tells us it happened as he was approaching Jericho. Now, there's many ways to settle this, and some of you may just think, hey, that's a trivial matter.

It doesn't matter at all. I would agree. I don't think it's very major.

I think it's a trivial thing. But since it has been brought up more than once by critics saying, well, you see there, contradiction of the Bible, it does us good to spend a moment at least to consider what's going on here. There are a number of possible solutions to this.

It has been noted by modern evangelicals that more than one Jericho have been discovered not far from each other in excavations. There's the Jericho that was destroyed in the days of Joshua. And then on a different spot, there's another Jericho that was rebuilt and named Jericho.

And that in Jesus' days, there were still the ruins of the older Jericho as well as the rebuilt Jericho. This is what I've read. And some have felt that when Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, he went through both Jerichos.

And that when Matthew and Mark tell us that this miracle happened as Jesus was leaving Jericho, it means when he was leaving the first of the Jerichos he came to on the road, but before he came to the second one. And when Luke says it was as he was drawing near to Jericho that this happened, it would mean the second Jericho. So in a sense, he had left one Jericho and he was approaching another Jericho.

That is not impossible. I don't know that that's likely to be the right explanation, but there's nothing impossible about that suggestion. And the very presence of one plausible explanation removes the ability of a critic to say there's necessarily a contradiction.

As long as you've got one plausible explanation that's not absurd, you've removed the charge that there must necessarily be a contradiction here. And that would seem a possible explanation. I don't know if it's the right one.

Another explanation that's been suggested, and this might seem even less likely, but it's not impossible, would be that Jesus first encountered this man as he was approaching the city of Jericho. But when he was leaving Jericho, he encountered him again. He didn't heal him as he was approaching Jericho, but he healed him as he was going out.

That would make Luke's version just looking a little earlier than the others. Luke would then be telling us that not that Jesus healed him as he was going in, although having compressed the account, it would look like he said so. In Luke 18.35, it happened that as

he was coming near Jericho, a certain blind man sat at the road begging.

Now, that could be true even if Jesus didn't heal him as he approached Jericho. It may be that as Jesus left Jericho, the blind man postured himself at the other end of the town where Jesus was coming out, just like another guy in Jericho, Zacchaeus, knowing where Jesus was going next, ran ahead to anticipate Jesus' arrival there. The blind man may have had someone guide him to the other end of town, since Jesus passed him going in, and may have caught him going out.

It's possible. I don't know that that's the right explanation, but there's no reason that that suggestion could not be genuine. In which case, Luke going on in verse 36, saying, And hearing the multitude passing by, he asked what it meant, and he told it was Jesus, and he cried out to Jesus.

That would be skipping over the fact that the man had to go through Jericho or around Jericho to meet Jesus coming out. It would just be compressing the story into a shorter account than it might otherwise be. All I'm saying is, I don't know.

I can't put the whole picture together with the data we have, but there's nothing impossible about both versions being correct. It could be that Jesus was leaving one Jericho and approaching the other when this happened. It could be that it was the same Jericho in both cases, but the man met Jesus first going in, and then Jesus healed him as he was going out.

Yes, Jimmy? In Luke? In Mark? Well, it could be. In another case, you'd say, Then they came to Jericho, and as he went, meaning as he went coming to Jericho, there was sitting outside Jericho, this man. That would harmonize it okay with Luke, but we'd still have the problem in Matthew, because Matthew does indicate that this miracle occurred as he was going out of Jericho.

Matthew 20, verse 29 is where we have it there. 20, 29 says, Now as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him, and behold, now we have the next area of conflict, two blind men. Matthew tells us there were two blind men.

Mark and Luke tell us of only one. Now only Mark tells us the name of the guy. Luke just says a blind man.

Mark gives the name, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, which means almost certainly that Bartimaeus was later known to readers as a Christian in the church, because there's no reason why this particular blind man's name would be remembered, and even his father's name too. I mean, blind men were not so famous. I mean, they were beggars.

I mean, they weren't so significant that everybody would know their name and their father's name necessarily, especially generations later or years later when the gospel was written, unless this man had become a known figure in the church subsequently.

This would be, in a sense, recording the call of a man who became a significant Christian later, just like the gospels record the call of Peter and James and John by name, because they became significant later in the church. How significant Bartimaeus may have been in the later church, we don't know, but the fact that Mark speaks of him, gives his name, gives his father's name, and so forth, I think suggests strongly that he was later known in the church.

Likewise, Mark does something like that when he tells of the man who carried Jesus' cross out of Jerusalem. It says in Mark 15 verse 21, Now they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by to bear his cross.

Now, only Mark tells us that this man Simon, the Cyrenian, was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Well, why mention that? If this guy was just a visitor to Jerusalem, who happened to be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time, while Jesus was being marched out, and he was compelled by the soldiers to carry a cross, and that's all there was to it, why even remember the guy's name? And much less, why remember his son's name? Well, the mention of this man's name and his son's name suggests that all three, this man and his two sons, apparently became known to the church. When he says, oh, this guy is the father of Alexander and Rufus, suggests that Alexander and Rufus were known to the readers at the time that Mark wrote the gospel.

And there is a Rufus that Paul greets in Romans chapter 16, as he sends his greetings to many people in Rome, Christians, that he knew. In Romans 16, 13, Paul says, Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Meaning Rufus' mother had become like a mother to Paul, too.

But there was a man named Rufus, known in the church of Rome. Mark was probably writing his gospel to a Roman audience, Roman church, it is generally believed. Therefore, Rufus, if he was a known Christian in Rome, that fact would give reason for Mark, in writing to that church, say, well, the man who carried Jesus' cross was the father of Rufus, son of Alexander.

In other words, the mention of names, specific family details, about these otherwise fairly insignificant characters in the story, suggests that they were later known in the church, and Mark wanted to make sure that his readers knew, that these known guys we're talking about here, this guy Peter, this guy Matthew, this guy Bartimaeus, that you all know in the church, he first met Jesus on this occasion. He was a blind man, and so forth. Rufus was the son of a guy who carried Jesus' cross, and Mark gives those personal details, and only Mark tells us that this man's name is Bartimaeus, Luke doesn't give the man's name.

And Matthew, as I just pointed out a moment ago, actually says there were two blind men. That's interesting. It's not the only case where Matthew, or one of the other

Gospels, gives that kind of an added detail to a story.

We encountered it in the story of the man of the tombs. I believe Mark and Luke both mention a man of the tombs, but Matthew, if I'm not mistaken, mentions there were two. The other Gospels don't mention there were two.

They only mention one. Here we have Mark and Luke saying there was a blind man. His name is Bartimaeus, but Matthew tells us there were two blind men.

And, in the stories of the resurrection of Christ, and the post-resurrection appearances, there are a couple of Gospels that mention that the women coming to the tomb saw an angel there, and the angel made a certain announcement to them, and gave them some instructions. But two of the Gospels suggest there were two angels there. So you've got this phenomenon in the Gospels, that occasionally a Gospel writer or two will mention that there was a guy, maybe even mention his name.

And then the same story is told by others, and we're told there were two guys. And once again, this gives grist to the critics' mill of trying to find fault with the Bible. But there's no reason why that has to be a fault.

That Bartimaeus had a blind companion with him is something that could be mentioned or could go unmentioned, depending on how important it was to the reporter to give all that information. Now, it would occur to me that since Bartimaeus is remembered by name, and the other beggar, the other blind beggar, isn't even remembered in the accounts, or isn't mentioned in the accounts of Mark or Luke, that very possibly, Bartimaeus became a notable Christian, and the other beggar, once healed, didn't. Maybe didn't even remain, didn't ever become a Christian.

Matthew, since he was one of the twelve, and was present at the time, remembers the detail that there were two beggars, Mark and Luke, who got their information from my witnesses, but weren't there themselves. They only either remember, or perhaps they only think it's worthy of notice, that there was a blind man who said such and such things, that there were two they don't deny, they just don't mention. And I, frankly, don't see any reason for criticism of them for recording it the way they did.

Bartimaeus, no doubt, became a well-known figure in the later church. The other blind man probably didn't. Remember, there were ten lepers that Jesus healed, and only one came back.

Nine guys disappeared into Jewish society and were never heard from again, even though Jesus healed them of leprosy. Therefore, it's not... I mean, it is strange, but it's not unusual that Jesus might heal two blind men, one of them doesn't even care, doesn't ever follow him again. He just goes off with his healing and enjoys his life without Jesus.

The other one becomes a follower of Christ. Anyway, we can't really say why, but that is

a suggestion of why there might be the detail in Matthew that is omitted in Mark and Luke, but it's certainly, to my mind, it's wicked and malicious to say that the Gospels are contradicting each other or something. That's ridiculous.

Now, these blind men heard that Jesus was passing by, and they cried out, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David, have mercy on me, or on us, depending on the account. And they referred to Jesus as the Son of David. Now, they weren't just pointing out Jesus' genealogy because that's the way you talk to people.

They were calling him the Son of David to say they recognized him as the Messiah. Son of David was a term for the Messiah. Bartimaeus, we are told, was the son of Timaeus.

If that was just a normal way of calling people by name, then they would have probably said to Jesus, Jesus, son of Joseph, because that would have been considered to be who his father was. But they're not talking about his immediate father. They're talking about his ancestor who gives significance to his identity, and that's David.

Matthew 1.1 says, Jesus the Christ, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David. And Son of David is a term that obviously means Messiah. So, they're calling him by a messianic title.

They recognize him as the Messiah. They've heard about him before. And they cry out for mercy.

Now, initially, people warned the blind men to be quiet. Who it was warning them, I don't know. Was it the disciples again? They'd also tried to keep the people from bringing their children to Jesus.

Or were the disciples not involved in this telling the blind men to be quiet? Maybe the locals were thinking Jesus was too important to be bothered by them. Or maybe they were just so eager for Jesus to get into town that they didn't want him to be detained by these blind men or whatever. The people basically told the blind men to be quiet.

But these men were determined, and they shouted even louder, or all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. So, Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And there's detail here in Mark that isn't given in the others.

After the blind man is told that Jesus was calling for him, it says in verse 50, throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. Now, the story could easily be told without that bit of detail, but his garment was no doubt a particular garment that identified him as a blind man or as a beggar. And by throwing his garment off, and by the way, if he had not been healed on this occasion, if he had remained blind, he would have had to go find his garment again.

And as a blind man, that wouldn't be easy. He'd have to go searching around, where did

I leave that thing? Throwing off his garment, I think, shows that he was counting on getting healed. He's given up his old identity as a blind man and as a beggar.

Now, realize, of course, these people had never read the Gospels like we have. We expect, whenever we read of a blind man, that he's going to get healed, because that's normal in the Gospels. The Gospels don't usually mention a blind man, unless it's going to tell us that he got healed.

But how often, really, did blind men get healed, even in Jesus' day? Probably only the few times recorded, or maybe a few more. But most blind men never were healed, even when Jesus was on the earth. And prior to his coming, no blind men were healed.

And so, I mean, this blind man or these blind men would have to have tremendous faith that they were going to be healed, even against all odds, as it were. I mean, they really believed strongly that Jesus could heal them. And in that context where they'd never read the Gospels, or anything like we have, to give them reason to expect it, it shows that their faith was somewhat remarkable, because they had lived their lives.

We don't know whether they were blind from birth, like some, or had become blind since then. But no doubt, before Jesus passed away, they had resigned themselves to be forever beggars, forever blind. There's just no cure for blindness.

And they had almost certainly had to settle it in their minds that they were going to be blind the rest of their lives. And here's their one opportunity. This guy, Jesus, is coming near.

And they're told that he's near, and they can think of nothing else but that this man can heal me. And when Jesus says, or when they come and say, he's calling for you, Bartimaeus knew, this is it. This is it.

I'm not going to be blind anymore. And he was just sure that that which was impossible by any other means was going to be accomplished. And he throws off his beggar's garment, leaves it behind, comes to Jesus, and Jesus said, what do you want? What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabboni.

Now, the name Rabboni is sort of an extended form of the name Rabbi. I think it's more of an affectionate way of speaking to a rabbi. It means literally, my great one.

In fact, the name Rabbi means my great one. But this is an affectionate greeting. Mary used it also.

When she met Jesus after his resurrection, and he called her by name, and she suddenly recognized who he was, she said, Rabboni. It's not a common use, not a common title for Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus is frequently called Rabbi in the Gospels, but Rabboni is not quite as common.

And this man refers to Jesus as my great one. And even not so much in the formal term of respect, but more of an affectionate, casual way of speaking, he's confident that Jesus isn't going to be stuffy with him and that Jesus is his friend, obviously, that he could use this term. And he says, Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.

Now, Luke inserts here that Jesus said, receive your sight. Mark and Matthew don't mention that particular statement. But in Luke 18.42, Jesus says to him, receive your sight.

Here it just says, go your way, your faith has made you well. Luke 18.42 is where it says, receive your sight. Now, that's quite a command to give to someone who's blind.

Receive your sight. Well, that's easy for you to say. You know, it's like speaking to a dead body and saying, arise.

Well, that may be easy for you to say, but how is a dead body supposed to do that? Well, at the command of Christ, anything is possible. Even a dead body that has no power to rise, has power to rise if he commands it. Even eyes that are blind, a man who has no power to see, has the power to see if Jesus commands it to be so.

He said, receive your sight. And so, I guess, okay, you know, I didn't know I could, but if you say so, I receive it. And this, you know, illustrates what I've pointed out on other occasions, that when Jesus gives a command, that command contains power.

I believe it's in Ecclesiastes, it says, in the word of a king, there's power. Now, when Jesus commands it, it is possible to do whatever he commands, by his grace. Obviously, it took supernatural power for this man to receive his sight, or for the dead to rise, or whatever.

But that's just the point. If Jesus commands it, and it's an impossible thing, it goes without saying that he intends to provide the supernatural power necessary to do it. And that would include his ethical commands.

His command to you to, you know, to be merciful as your father is merciful. To love your enemies, or whatever. Those things seem impossible.

If your neighbor sins against you seven times in one day, and seven times comes and says I repent, well, forgive him. Seems impossible. The disciples' first response to that command was, Lord, increase our faith.

Just didn't seem like you could do that. But you can. If Jesus commands it, he intends to give the supernatural aid and assistance to do it.

He commanded these blind men, receive your sight. Go your way. Your faith has made you well.

One other detail is given by Matthew, that's not found here or in Luke. Mark and Luke leave this out, but Matthew tells us that Jesus, when they said, Lord, I might receive my sight, that Jesus had compassion, and touched their eyes. Mark and Luke don't mention him touching them, just speaking to them.

But Matthew 20 and verse 34 says Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. So that just, I mean, it's not particularly significant, except it is a detail that Matthew gives that's not given elsewhere. You could get the impression reading Mark or Luke that nothing was, no contact was made, only words were spoken.

But Jesus actually did touch them and laid hands on them, as it were, on their eyes. And it says, immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. So, this man followed Jesus.

He didn't just receive his sight and go his way. He received his sight and became a follower of Jesus. In Luke chapter 18, in the parallel, verse 43 says, Luke 18, 43, immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God.

That's the same expression that was used of the leper that came back, in contrast to the nine who didn't. The one who came back returned glorifying God. It says in Luke chapter 17, and verse 15, Luke 17, 15, Now one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned and with a loud voice glorified God.

Luke has recorded that, and now he records this, this particular blind man. He glorified God and followed Jesus. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God also.

Now, in Matthew's version, of course, in Matthew's version, we have the story told as of two blind men. And it indicates that they both followed Jesus, at least immediately after this. It says, immediately their eyes were opened, Matthew 20, verse 34.

And they followed him. Whether they both followed him permanently, we don't know. As I say, the fact that the name Bartimaeus is remembered in the account, suggests that he at least became a long-term follower of Jesus and was known by name in the later church to whom Mark wrote.

But the other man, since he wasn't remembered by name, I don't want to think uncharitably about him, but maybe he didn't continue following Jesus. He may have followed him down the road, but not become a long-term Christian disciple. Hard to say.

In any case, the healing of blindness is a very common thing in the Gospels. Jesus, I mean, fairly common. Jesus healed, I forget how many times, I think about six or maybe nine times, a lot of times, Jesus healed the blind.

And we've read several stories of it before. This was done as a symbol. At least in John chapter 9, he healed the blind man there.

It was a symbol of Jesus being the light of the world. And so the giving of physical sight to a man physically blind was sort of a physical token of the spiritual reality that Jesus came to give spiritual sight to those who were spiritually blind. And at least Bartimaeus, I think we can conclude, became not only physically seeing, but his spiritual eyes were opened also.

And he followed Jesus and glorified God. Led others to do so also, apparently. Okay, we stop there.

We'll pick up The Life of Christ another place next time.