

### **Talks On Miracles - 3. The Lord recovering the sight of blind Bartimaeus**

Whilst by no means one of the most spectacular miracles which Jesus performed, is one which is described in Mark's Gospel, of His recovering the sight of blind Bartimaeus. There were in fact a number of occasions when the Lord restored the sight of a blind person, and you may be familiar with these. But we have chosen to speak of this one in particular; the description of it being in Mark's Gospel, at the end of Chapter 10.

The Lord was at the time making His way to Jerusalem for the last time. The Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand, and already the disciples were sensing some kind of impending crisis. It was only days before the events of Palm Sunday and thinking seems to have been in terms of the imminent establishment of His Kingdom. Much displeased as the others were about it, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, had, for example, asked the Lord for positions of authority, one on either side of Him. And so it was that "they came to Jericho", one of the oldest and most notable of all the Biblical cities. As to how long He stayed there we don't exactly know. The other Gospels tell us of different things which happened while He was there.

But as He departed "with His disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side, 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'. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

As we have seen previously in this present series of talks, the miracle stories do two things. In the first place they describe an event in time the reality of which we are not questioning. Whilst we may not fully understand how the Lord healed sicknesses and fed multitudes of people, nevertheless we accent that He actually did so.

And, in the second place, they speak to us of healing and restoration on the spiritual plane in the lives of people today. A deeper meaning is involved which, without question touches upon the lives of us all. To be blind on the spiritual level, or so far as the mind is concerned, is to lack understanding. And this is abundantly clear even from everyday observation and experience. The student in a class room who cannot understand what is being taught tells the teacher that he cannot "see" what he is getting at. And then again in the Scriptures. When the Lord spoke of guilt with relation to sin He said to the Pharisees, "If you were blind" or, in other words, if you did not know or understand, "you should have no sin: but now you say, we see; therefore your sin remains. " (John 9, 41). "The blind in the word" wrote Swedenborg "mean those who are without truths, either from ignorance, or from not understanding them." (Apocalypse Revealed 210). In effect, this means all of us. There is much that every person does not know or understand; truths and teachings which as yet we have not seen or fully grasped.

Bartimaeus' predicament then, is our predicament. And the story about him unmistakably involves us all. People for example say they cannot "see" how the Lord can be said to be a God of love when there is so much suffering in the world. We are assured of the continuity of life after death but here again some cannot "see" how this can be so. Surely also in our own personal experience there are teachings and concepts which as yet we do not properly understand; truths which as yet we do not comprehend. How then can sight be given to us? How can there be understanding when it has not been there before? Take the person who cannot see that there can be a God of love. How is he able to come into an understanding of what's involved?

The first thing we notice about the healing of Bartimaeus is that it took place in Jericho, and this in itself is highly significant. Jericho stood at the entrance to the Holy Land just across the Jordan River. It would have been one's first introduction to Canaan, and it signifies "instruction in the knowledges of good and truth, which knowledge" it is said ", are what first introduce a person into the life of religion, or the Church". (Apocalypse Explained 700<sup>15</sup>).

If then the Lord is to be able to lead us to see what we have not been able to see - to understand and to comprehend - to open our eyes where before they have been closed; we must be endeavouring to learn and trying to know.

If we are to come to a reasonable understanding of Providence, for example, clearly we must be prepared to read and think and to listen to instruction about it. Though at first we were incapable of seeing what was involved, by reason of our efforts to learn and to know, understanding can at last begin to come to us.

Excited at the prospect of a possible cure and when told the Lord had called him, Bartimaeus "casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus". It seems an insignificant and unimportant point and of no real consequence to the story, but this is far from so. What is spoken of here so far as you and I are concerned, is not the garments with which we clothe our bodies, but the ideas and opinions, the truths and falsities with which we clothe our minds. If the Lord is to give us understanding and lead us to see things which have not previously been seen, we must be prepared to abandon the reservations, the prejudices and the old ideas we have had about them. We can't help getting thoughts and attitudes about people and about life fixed in our minds, but these, like a garment, more often than not need to be cast to one side. Let us just stop and think for a moment.. How can the Lord bring a person to see the implications and importance of the Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", for example, if all the while that person stubbornly clings to the idea that stealing in certain circumstances is permissible? Then again, how can the Lord open our eyes to the reality and wonder of life after death while we are clinging to some false idea of bodily death being the end of it all? These are things which, as we've seen, have to be cast on one side. The pre-conceived ideas and mental reservations we have must be abandoned.

It strikes us as being absurd and unnecessary, when we stop and think about it, that the Lord should have questioned Bartimaeus asking him what, he was wanting. That, we feel, must have been only too obvious. He seems to have wanted him to say it, "Lord, that I may receive my sight. Even though, He knew what was wrong, the Lord wanted Bartimaeus to identify the problem himself. And this teaches us, concerning the Lord, that though He knows our weaknesses even before we bring them to Him, He wants us to identify them ourselves. It is only when we become conscious of particular areas and particular issues, and shortcomings in our lives that He is able to help us. We can say that we are "evil", and genuinely feel it, but unless we make ourselves aware of particular evils that acknowledgement doesn't get us very far. We can also say that we are blind and in darkness, that we are ignorant and need enlightenment; but the Lord wants us to isolate and identify the particular issues where we most keenly feel our "blindness". He knows them, but He wants us to pinpoint them, also. And then He can set to work and help us.

Perhaps nothing is more striking in the story than the confidence Bartimaeus had in Jesus and the way in which he looked to Him for a cure. When onlookers and bystanders tried to quieten him he wouldn't be quiet and, instead, cried out more loudly. Once again it comes back to us. So long as our minds are open to the Lord and we on our part are looking to Him, convinced of the help He can bring us, He will give us the understanding which we lack. It's like when people read the Bible where there is no acknowledgement of the Lord; no looking to Him; no thought about Him; people get very little, if anything, from it. But where there is an acknowledgement of Him; where people are consciously thinking of the Lord as they read, so much more can be had from their reading. We understand; we "see" so very much more of what it is saying to us. It's the Lord who brings light into our minds, and we must read with Him, (so to speak) beside us. Then we "see" what we simply didn't "see" or realise was there before.

The Swedenborg Program – Number 95.

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