

‘Jesus of Nazareth
Passeth by’

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“J E S U S O F N A Z A R E T H P A S S E T H B Y.”

“ And they came to Jericho : and as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging.

“ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, (Thou) Son of David, have mercy on me.

“ And many charged him that he should hold his peace : but he cried the more a great deal, (Thou) Son of David, have mercy on me.

“ And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth thee.

“ And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

“ And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee ? The blind man said unto Him, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

“ And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. (“ Saved thee ”—margin.) And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.” (Mark x. 46-52.)

WE frequently find in the Gospels incidents which illustrate very fully the way in which a sinner lays hold of Christ. In this Scripture we have a lovely picture of a seeking Saviour and a seeking sinner, and how they met. In the Gospel of St Luke we find the text that is at the head of this paper—which was (as it were) preached to this blind man. A very short sermon ! “ Jesus of Nazareth passeth by ! ” And Jesus

never passed that way again! Bartimæus had come to the turning point of his history; and had that day passed, he never would have had his eyes opened, for Jesus was then on His way to the Cross. And the difference between the Lord's journey on that day and now, is this,—He was on His way to the Cross, where He accomplished the work of redemption, shed His precious blood, died, and rose again; and having finished His work there, He is now on His way to the judgment and the glory!

It is because of that judgment, which must come, that I would now urge on every unsaved soul who may read these words, that which we find so blessedly characterized Bartimæus--that is *promptness*! The deep necessity of seizing the present moment, for it may never come again. How often moments like this, in the history of souls, are slighted, and they never return. “I shall have plenty of opportunities; people do not often die as young as I am.” Such like ex-

cuses are pleaded by those who would procrastinate. But I would warn you. There is one sin more terrible than any in a man's history, and that is his *last*! Souls float on easily down the stream of time; they go quietly out of the world, perhaps without any fear of hell. Some are exercised, and for a time are in an agony of conviction, but the many slight the warning, the fond entreaty of the father, the mother, or the friend, as to the solemn eternity which lies beyond time; and it comes to a moment when God says, as it were, “Let him alone!” and his heart is hardened. It is a solemn, deeply solemn thing, this hardening of the heart. And the more solemn when we think of God doing so. We have an example of this in Pharaoh. God warned him in nine solemn judgments, and then, as it were, gave him one chance more. Pharaoh did not yield his will to God; he hardened his heart against God, and God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he went to destruction.

“ In the face of such a fact, I would press on every sinner the need of promptness in the matter of salvation. The Lord is long-suffering: He *waits* on His road to judgment, but at any moment the day of grace may have closed.

We find it more difficult now than in the earlier days of the Church to press the fact that at any moment the Lord Jesus may come. The enemy of Christ and his people has succeeded in almost blotting out the hope of the Lord’s coming—a truth held by all at the first. The Word of God describes it as—“ In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet shall sound.” So sudden will be the coming of the Lord for His own, and the transit of the blood-bought throng from earth and the grave, to the Father’s house on high!

No figure of speech could give a more true idea of the sudden, (to many, alas !), unexpected action, and yet Satan has almost succeeded in blotting out this truth. But for this also Scripture has

prepared us. In Matt. xxiv. 48, we read,—“The evil servant shall say in *his heart*, my lord delayeth his coming.” From his *heart* comes the thought. He is not living as he would like his Lord to find him: his heart is set on earthly things, and he does not desire his Lord to come. To cover what his heart says, he settles that there is much to be done before the Lord can return—the Jews have to be converted, and such like things. Treat all such theories as the voice of the evil servant. *Nothing* has to happen before Christ may come *for* His own; and with that event the day of grace closes for all who have listened to the message of salvation! The denial of this truth, which should have such power in the conscience of the sinner, is immense loss; but I press earnestly and affectionately on you, and say, “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.” Will *you* allow Him to pass in the day of grace, and meet Him in the day of judgment for the first time—like Pharaoh?

We find three kinds of blindness in the world. There is physical blindness, like that of Bartimæus. His sightless eyeballs never gazed upon the light of the sun, as we may suppose. Then there is another kind of blindness—that of the mind, of which Scripture also speaks—soul blindness, which is of the god of this world. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not (we read), lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them,” (2 Cor. iv. 4.) Such see no beauty in Jesus to desire Him—fatal blindness, unless removed. The blinded one in such a case is “lost!” Then there is mental blindness, as we say, That man is an idiot.

Bartimæus was blind, but “He *heard* that Jesus passed by.” God’s resource for the blind sinner is the “hearing of faith.” This was the avenue to his soul. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” (Rom. x. 17.)

Remark the little word “when,” (v. 47.) Bartimæus might have said—Here is a golden opportunity; I will get me a harvest to-day from this multitude. Perhaps crowds like this were not often to be seen on the roadside between Jericho and Jerusalem. The great multitude were following Jesus to-day; He had many followers, but few friends. He might reason thus,—I will speak to Jesus some other time, and gather the silver coins to-day. Such an opportunity will not come again, and Jesus may be met at any time. But he did not reason thus. How many do so! I will give myself to my gains *now*—get rich; perhaps at some craft that is not as it should be—then I will retire. I wish to be saved, but I must attend to other things now, then I will look after my soul.

But Bartimæus felt that the *present* was too great an opportunity to lose: it might never come again. “When” Jesus passed by he cried out. He was

in earnest, and his promptness to use the moment was lovely to behold. It was his turning point! Saints and sinners have all their turning points. If he had missed his, the opportunity had never come again. We boldly say this, for Jesus never did pass by that way again. He was on His way for His last entry into the City of Solemnities —to Jerusalem, where, after a few days, He was crucified. He was on the road to the Cross that day. He is on His road to the Judgment now, and the Cross is past—His work there is done.

But a man with a need in his heart will be prompt, will be in earnest,—and "when" Jesus was passing he cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me"!

Have you, my reader, an unsatisfied need in your heart? This may meet the eyes of some whose hearts Christ has satisfied; but I speak to those whose hearts are still unsatisfied. Do

such feel their need? Then cry out, and Jesus will stop—your cry of need will arrest His steps just where you are at this moment. When was there a cry of need which He refused on earth? Will He refuse the cry of need now that He is in His glory? Will He not stay His steps, as it were, as on that day, and meet the need—fill the void of your heart?

"And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called." In three of these Gospels we have this tale told in a different way. In Matt. xx. 32, it is simply "Jesus called." This is the sovereign call of mercy through grace. This belongs to God alone. Then in Mark x. 49, it is Jesus "*commanded him to be called.*" This shows the instrumental call; of the preacher, for instance. What a word for those who preach the Gospel—for the ambassador of God's grace. In Luke xviii. 40, Jesus "*commanded him to be brought unto Him.*" This was done

by the earnest effectual guiding hands of others. It encourages the believing wife to bring her unbelieving husband under the sound of the Gospel: the parent to bring his child: the child the parent, if still unsaved. It is the earnest, seeking, guiding hand and heart of some soul, whose eyes have been opened, to bring those dear to him—others, to hear the word of His grace.

Oh, the deadness of those who believe, in this service! In many places "the Gospel" becomes, through the inertness of Christians themselves, a dead form. How often has the Lord answered the faith of those who have brought others to hear the word of grace preached, in saving the souls of those who have been brought! It is sad, sad, indeed, to see the empty seats in many a meeting-room, where an earnest preacher, who longs to bring souls to Christ, finds that his heart is chilled by the empty benches, and

vacant listlessness of those who are there.

"But many charged him that he should hold his peace" (v. 48.) They try to hinder his coming to Christ. The devil always finds ready instruments for this service. Those who labour beside one in the factory—in the counting-house, &c., are ready with their scoff for the anxious, seeking soul. But there are many ways of hindering besides the open taunt. I will tell you of one. Christians criticising the Gospel that is preached. I remember reading of one case in point. A Christian lady brought her unconverted husband to hear a preaching of the Gospel. The servant of the Lord who spoke that night was "no great preacher," as people say. On their way home she remarked the failures—the poverty of the address; she was pulling the whole thing to pieces, but on turning to see why she got no response from her husband, it was to see the tears coursing

down his cheeks. On asking him what was the matter, he replied—“Ah, I found Christ to-night in that preaching,” or such words. How condemning to her—for what she derided was God’s instrument in saving her husband’s soul; she—a Christian too. It was God’s quickening word to the soul of her husband! O take care how you criticise the Word preached in the ears of the unsaved! Christians are often thus the greatest hinderers of the Gospel, by their careless ways, their speech, their lack of wisdom.

In saying this it does not excuse the sinner in the least; he is responsible to come to Christ, and God will hold him so. He does not come, because his *will* is against God. In the judgment scene of Matt. xxv., it is the absence of good, not the commission of evil, for which the sentence is passed. “Ye did it not unto one of these My brethren, . . . ye did it not to Me.”

And “Jesus stood still;” and thus

He waits on you in grace, because "He delighteth in mercy." And Bartimæus, "casting away his garment, arose and came to Jesus." How many things are allowed to hinder the soul in coming to Jesus? Some garment or other which must be cast aside.

Job was a righteous man—none like him in all the earth. And Job wrapped his garment closely around him, and it kept him from being fully in the presence of God in heart and conscience. He had to pass through deep trials—a history that fills forty-two chapters in the Bible, all concerning one man—before he would cast aside the garment of his own righteousness. Righteousness was really there, but he looked upon it as his own, and it obscured the grace which had really produced it in his ways. At the close of the book he cast it aside, and abhorred himself, repenting in dust and ashes. *Then* the Lord accepted Job!

Balaam had a garment too. He

"loved the wages of unrighteousness," and he used the truth of God against the people of God. He said, "Let me die the death of the righteous;" but he never said, "Let me live the life of the righteous." His garment clung to him till it was too late.

The young Ruler, too, had one (Mark x.)—rich and ardent—whom "Jesus loved." He saw in him the traces of man as he once had come out of the hands of God, "very good." Much doubtless that was lovely in nature was found in him. But his "great possessions" were his garment. Jesus said to him "go and sell that thou hast"—cast aside the hindering garment, and he went away grieved. He could not part with his garment—he preferred it to Christ. An anxious sinner, with a need in his heart, never "went away grieved" from Jesus.

Herod, too, had a secret garment; he loved his lusts. John the Baptist preached and reproved him. For a

time he gave up his sins ; " He did many things, and heard him gladly." The garment was only laid aside for a time ; by and by he wrapped himself in it—gave way to the desires of the flesh, and ended in beheading John, who had told him faithfully of his ways. Then at last he shook hands with Pilate in condemning Jesus, and in the solemn scene before the crucifixion when he spoke to Jesus (Luke xxiii.) " He answered him nothing." His time was over—his heart was hardened ; Jesus had no word for him.

Do I address an indifferent soul like Gallio, " who cares for none of these things ? " A garment of indifferentism may cover your heart like his. God has opened the very heavens, and sent down its best treasure, that man might be blessed. O cast it not aside ; do not go on your way heedless of the call of mercy, and still reject the Saviour. You see I am pressing the sinner's responsibility upon you. If I were preaching

the other side of the Gospel, I would rather seek to unfold the heart of God, and show you His love in the gift of Christ; the perfectness too, of Jesus, in doing His Father's will; but I am seeking rather to press your responsibility to come to Him—to receive Him—to cast from you whatever hinders your coming as a *lost* one to the Saviour's feet. You are "lost," "dead;" your life is forfeited, but nothing is asked of you.

And Bartimæus, "casting away his garment, arose and came to Jesus." And Jesus answered, and said unto him, "What wilt thou that *I* should do unto thee?" Jesus expected nothing from him; and all actions on your part also, as on his, would be working. But hear what Jesus says —"What *wilt* thou?" Have you a *desire*? He who came from heaven, died and rose, and went on high, waits (as it were) to serve the poor sinner, who comes as a suppliant to Him.

What is the request of Bartimæus? "Lord, that I might receive my sight." And Luke (ch. xviii.) tells us of the echoing reply from the heart of God. "Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee." Faint and tremulous was the request of faith, but clear and blessed the response of the Lord—the echo of heaven—"Receive thy sight; thy faith *hath* saved thee." Not a doubt remains—his eyes are opened, and he is saved.

Have you, reader, a need to bring to Him? Will you trust Him? and God's heart will bless you to the full. It was so with the poor prodigal (Luke xv.); he asked a servant's place, and the Father's heart exceeded all his expectations; He kissed him and received him as a son. It was more than the echo of the desire: the answer of grace ever exceeds the request of faith. It was so with the thief on the cross. He asked a place in the kingdom, but received one in Paradise that day.

And Bartimæus opened his eyes, and the first object before him was the Lord! The beauty of the Lord was before him—the object for eternity. What will the joy of the most blessed saint be throughout eternity? Surely the same object—Jesus! Jesus only! And "he followed Jesus *in the way.*" It was then the way to the Cross, now it is the path of rejection to the glory. He is on His way to the kingdom and glory. Then follow Jesus in the way; suffer with Him; true in heart to Him in the day of His rejection, and when He takes His place as "King of kings," you shall reign with Him!

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