

The Faith That Saves: A Narrative Journey from Blindness to Discipleship (Mark 10:46–52)

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The Way of Seeing: Narratological Dynamics in Mark 10:46–52

The pericope of the blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52) not only serves as the culmination of the central section of the Gospel according to Mark but also constitutes a genuine literary device in which physical healing becomes a paradigm of discipleship. Beyond the miraculous nature of the event, the text constructs a dense network of meanings that challenges the reader, calling them to undergo an identity transition mirroring that of the protagonist.

An analysis conducted according to the categories of narratology—particularly following the model of James L. Resseguie—allows us to dismantle the linearity of the narrative to reveal the sophisticated architecture that underpins it. The interplay among the liminal setting of Jericho, the effectiveness of the rhetoric in the dialogues, and the characterization of the figures is not incidental but serves a precise shift in perspective. The plot, in its resolution “along the way,” does not merely bring an episode to a close but defines the disciple’s stance before the mystery of the Cross.

The following study integrates the framework of narratological analysis with necessary historical-critical insights to restore the fullness of a text in which every narrative detail ultimately constitutes a theological proposition.

Narrative Exegesis of Mark 10:46–52

Resseguie asserts that the aim of narratological criticism is to examine the literary nature of biblical narratives and to treat form and content as a single entity (Resseguie, 2008, p. 16). For this reason, our examination of this passage begins with the context in which the editor placed it before proceeding to examine all the literary aspects specific to this synchronic study.

Context

In the Gospel, the account of the healing of a blind man in Mark 8:22–26 and that of the blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46–52, which takes place at the end of the stretch of road described from Mark 8:27, form a frame around the central section of the Gospel, which consists of the three predictions of the Passion (Van Iersel, 2000, p. 113). These chapters depict Jesus teaching his disciples and the crowd about his mission and the necessity of taking up one's cross to follow him (Ossandón, 2012, p. 377). Jesus seeks to correct the disciples' conception of the Messiah, including that of Peter. This emerges from his words following the discussion about which of them was the greatest and the request of the sons of Zebedee found in Mark 10:32–45 (Ossandón, 2012, p. 383).

Setting

A new geographical reference introduces the episode of Bartimaeus: Jesus and his disciples, though not explicitly named, are heading towards Jericho, even though the action takes place as they are leaving the city—as suggested by the verb ἐκπορεύομαι. Jericho is a city well known in Scripture, mentioned many times in the Pentateuch and in the Book of Joshua (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 607). Its location—and more precisely, the exit from the city—is a clear sign of the final approach of Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem, the declared destination of their journey. Further information regarding the setting is provided by the

noun ὁδός (road), which appears both at the beginning and at the end of the episode (vv. 46, 52), forming an internal inclusion within the pericope and the entire section of the Gospel devoted to the theme of the road (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 609).

Rhetoric

Mark has a distinctive habit of beginning his accounts with a verb in the third person plural, indicating the presence of the disciples, followed by verbs in the singular. In the first verse (v. 46), although grammatically correct, the use of the absolute genitive is unusual and rather heavy, emphasizing the presence of both the disciples and the crowd (Focant, 2015, p. 438). Of particular interest is the use of the imperfect tense to indicate continuous action (four times Bartimaeus is the subject) and of the imperative mood (twice Bartimaeus asks for mercy; twice Jesus speaks with authority).

When the blind man hears of Jesus, in verse 47 he addresses him by the title “Nazarene.” This term is rare in Mark and recalls Jesus’ first exorcism (Collins, 2007, p. 509, n. 203). Furthermore, the blind man calls him “Son of David” for the first time in the Gospel, using a title typical of biblical tradition. The verb ἐλεέω (to have mercy) is rare in Mark and appears only in this episode and in one other passage (cf. Mark 5:19). These details emphasize Jesus’ importance as the Messiah and his power to heal (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 607–608). Bartimaeus demonstrates an accurate understanding of Jesus’ true identity, which is ironically significant since he is blind, whereas those who can see regard him merely as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Focant, 2015, p. 435). The repetition of the title “Jesus, Son of David” creates a sense of inclusion, echoing Jesus’ first appearance in Mark 1 (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 610).

In verse 49, Jesus intervenes by stopping and ordering that the blind man be called, using the verb φωνέω three times. The description of the blind man’s movement is striking: he casts off his cloak and leaps to his feet. This reference to the “cloak” (ἱμάτιον) which is “cast off” (verb ἀποβάλλω, the only instance in Mark) may allude to Scripture

(Ex 22:25–26 and Deut 24:12–13). The verb ἀναπηδάω (meaning “to leap to one’s feet”) is also unique in the New Testament and indicates the promptness of the blind man’s action (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 608).

The final dialogue of the episode begins in verse 51, where Jesus addresses the blind man asking him what he wishes him to do and uses the verb “to will” (θέλω), which already appears in the dialogue with James and John (10:35–36) and in the subsequent instruction (10:43–44). The verb used for “regaining” sight is ἀναβλέπω, which means “to see again.” Jesus states that the blind man’s faith saved him: the term πίστις that appears here was previously found only in the account of the healing of the epileptic boy. Faith appears to be directly linked to discipleship, since Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus (note the use of the verb ἀκολουθέω, a technical term for the disciple’s following) after his healing (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 611).

Characters

Bartimaeus emerges as the protagonist of the episode because, as the syntax shows, he is the subject of seven of the conjugated verbs used by the narrator, whereas Jesus is the subject of only three (Ossandón, 2012, p. 394). He is presented in considerable detail as early as verse 46, including his name, his paternity, his physical and social description, and his location (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 607). The blind man’s name deserves particular attention for its peculiarity. Proper names are frequent in the Gospel, but those of characters who undergo healings or exorcisms are typically not mentioned (Stein, 2008, p. 491). Bartimaeus is unusual in being a compound name combining his father’s name, Timaeus, which is unknown in the Jewish-Palestinian world (Van Iersel, 2000, p. 309–310). The formula “son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus” parallels “Son of David, Jesus,” since both patronymics refer to a filial relationship; however, the nature of the filial relationship differs given the different fathers (Focant, 2015, p. 434). Unlike the other characters who are in motion, Bartimaeus remains seated by the roadside in complete immobility. His status as a beggar is likely closely linked to his disability, which makes him a blind outcast, sitting outside the city. His condition

of marginalization is further highlighted by the fact that people attempt to silence him when he asks for help (v. 48). These descriptive characteristics emphasize Bartimaeus's dishonorable and socially excluded condition, which is about to be reversed (Focant, 2015, p. 434). Bartimaeus's reaction—instinctively casting off his cloak—serves as the ultimate sign of his faith; it represents a radical abandonment of his only security, performed with an unexpected agility that bridges the gap between his marginalization and his encounter with Jesus.

The first character to appear, although not explicitly named but understandable from context, is Jesus. His behavior is characterized by decisive action and few yet incisive words. When he stops and calls out to Bartimaeus, he immediately dispels any resistance and draws attention to himself. Furthermore, the command to have Bartimaeus come to him rather than going to him, despite the man's blindness, suggests a sense of superiority. Finally, Jesus' concluding statement offers a definitive interpretation of the episode and of Bartimaeus's identity (Ossandón, 2012, p. 394).

Along with Jesus, the narrator uses an absolute genitive to emphasize the presence of the disciples and a large crowd (v. 48: πολλοί), creating an anticipation of their future role as an obstacle in the story (Focant, 2015, p. 434). Initially, the narrator's mention of the crowd has no intrinsic significance; these are characters whom Resseguie would describe as extras. However, the role of the crowd undergoes a significant narrative transformation: initially acting as an antagonist by attempting to silence the beggar, they shift to the role of collaborators once Jesus calls Bartimaeus. This change of heart, expressed through their words of encouragement, highlights the communicative power of Jesus' authority. In this section of the book, especially in the passage where Jesus travels through Galilee, he seeks to avoid the crowds in order to instruct his disciples. With the exception of Jerusalem and its surroundings, he worked in all parts of the country (8:34; 9:14–29; 10:1). However, the audible presence of the crowd mentioned at the beginning of the account serves a very specific purpose: to inform the blind man that something extraordinary is happening (Van Iersel, 2000, p. 309).

Perspectives

Scholars generally tend to distinguish between “Mark” as the author of the Gospel and the “narrator” as the source of the narrative; the narrator may speak directly or indirectly through the characters. Most narrative critics believe that in Mark there is little distance between the narrator and the implied author, nor between the narrator and the implied reader/listener, even though these concepts remain distinct (Ossandón, 2012, p. 377–378). The text is narrated in the third person and the narrator is not one of the characters in the story, which allows him to employ various narrative techniques. In particular, he adopts Bartimaeus’s psychological point of view and, ultimately, hands over to Jesus to provide an interpretation of the episode (Ossandón, 2012, p. 380–381). In this manner, the narrator remains hidden behind the spatial perspective and, briefly, the psychological perspective of the protagonist. The internal verbs indicate that the narrator is adopting Bartimaeus’s psychological perspective. The fact that he hears Jesus approaching is particularly significant, as hearing is his primary means of contact with the outside world. The narrator shares Bartimaeus’s perception with the reader (Ossandón, 2012, p. 395–397).

In verse 46, Mark describes him as a “beggar” (*hapax legomenon*), relegating him to a category excluded from society; yet speaking of a blind beggar implies neither a positive nor a negative judgment on the part of the narrator. In verse 47, the reader hears Bartimaeus’s thoughts, and here too the narrator does not reveal his own viewpoint: he seems to be awaiting Jesus’ final statement. As the text continues, the author presents, in verse 48, the viewpoint of those who rebuke the blind man from a certain distance, through reported speech. In verse 49, however, the narrator shifts focus from Bartimaeus to the figure of Jesus, whilst in verse 50 he seems to sympathize once more with the blind man who obeys Jesus. The latter’s point of view remains hidden in verse 51, as does that of the narrator, who merely reproduces the words of Bartimaeus. Jesus embodies the role of normative guide in the narrative. Prior to the encounter with the blind man, Jesus had already demonstrated his power through commands that were promptly

carried out, such as the one to stop and have the blind man called. After Jesus' statement in verse 52, the narrator's voice reappears, following Jesus' point of view: this is unusual for the narrative, in that a character (Jesus) seems to know more than the narrator himself (Ossandón, 2012, p. 397–401).

Plot (or Narrative Structure)

In Mark 10:46–52, there are two types of plot: one of resolution and one of revelation, which makes it difficult to identify a suitable narrative division. Various models from modern narratology have been proposed, but each scheme presents problems. The exegete Ossandón suggests dividing the passage according to the model of Greek tragedy, namely, by scenes (Ossandón, 2012, p. 387–388).

This healing narrative stands out from others for its restraint in describing the illness and the cure. Bartimaeus is described only as "blind," whilst most of the narrative focuses on the beggar's heartfelt plea to Jesus, the obstacles placed in his way, and the dialogue between Jesus and the blind man. Bartimaeus's actions are also described in detail, both before and after the healing: "he 'sits' by the roadside, 'hears' people talking about Jesus, 'cries out,' 'cries out' again, 'throws off' his cloak, 'jumps to his feet,' 'goes' to Jesus, 'speaks' with him and finally 'regains his sight' and 'follows' him along the road . . . that is ten distinct actions, within the space of a few lines" (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 609). The healing takes place through just a few words from Jesus: "Go; your faith has saved you" (v. 52). The literary genre of the account of the blind man's healing could be a paradigm or a miracle narrative, at least in part, since there are no explicit gestures or words of healing (Focant, 2015, p. 438).

If we view the episode as a plot of resolution, we find in verse 46 the introduction of the setting and the characters (exposition). Here Bartimaeus receives particular attention, with essential information about his status—a blind beggar—and his spatial situation—sitting by the roadside—which provide elements for the plot of resolution. In verse 47, the action begins with Bartimaeus' cry for help, which,

however, encounters an obstacle in the opposition of “many” (v. 48). This initial complication disappears the moment Jesus orders the disciples to call the blind man (v. 49). In verse 50, Bartimaeus quickly goes to Jesus, but a certain tension remains because the reader does not yet know whether he will obtain what he has asked for. Indeed, Jesus’ question in verse 51 seems to open a new narrative thread. A similar request had been made in Mark 10:36, which, however, ended in a refusal. Bartimaeus’s desire reformulates the initial “contract”: the mercy he sought concerns the restoration of his sight. Consequently, the resolution comes in Mark 10:52 when Jesus proclaims salvation through faith and the blind man regains his sight. However, this manner of conclusion is rather unusual for a narrative resolution, in that Jesus’ words do not directly respond to what was requested: salvation does not come from his power but from the faith of the blind man, and the healing is described by the narrator without depiction of the miracle. It is quite reasonable to conclude that the theme of the episode lies primarily in the revelation of Bartimaeus’s faith rather than in the healing of his blindness (Ossandón, 2012, p. 388–391).

The passage also highlights the revelatory aspect. The focus is on the blind man’s recognition of Jesus and his placement of trust in him through repeated pleas for help, whilst Jesus identifies his faith as the decisive factor in his healing, relegating the healing itself to the background (Mascilongo, 2018, p. 611). It is Bartimaeus’s faith that saved him; the use of the perfect tense implies that salvation is the effect of something that precedes it. Indeed, the narrative gradually reveals the blind man’s faith through his words and actions (Gnilka, 2007, p. 582). The plot of revelation begins in verse 47 when he asks for mercy, showing his poverty and a particular knowledge of Jesus (“Son of David”). His perseverance, despite the opposition of “many” (v. 48), is the result of courageous and steadfast faith. The gesture of casting aside his cloak (v. 50) should be seen as the expression of an inner disposition: this garment was the poor man’s only possession, and he abandons it to take refuge in Jesus. This action constitutes the definitive proof of Bartimaeus’ faith. Had he not been absolutely certain that Jesus would heal him, he would never have abandoned his cloak; as a blind man, he

would have had no means to recover it later. By throwing it away, he symbolically strips himself of his past identity as a marginalized beggar to take refuge entirely in Jesus. He “burns his bridges” behind him, trusting that he will no longer need the cloak of a blind man because he will return from the encounter with his sight restored. His faith is immediately translated into obedience to Jesus’ call. The use of the unique verb ἀναπηδάω (“to leap to one’s feet”) underscores a promptness that overcomes his previous state of prolonged immobility by the roadside. This “leap” indicates that his faith has already begun the process of salvation even before the physical healing, moving him from the margin of the road toward the center of the “way.”

Bartimaeus’ faith also encompasses obedience to Jesus’ call. In Mark 10:51, he asks to regain his sight, expressing his trust in the One whom he calls ῥαββουί, thereby recognizing him as his teacher. Finally, in verse 52, Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the road, a detail of little relevance to a plot of resolution yet useful for one of revelation. Jesus does not call him as he did the disciples, but this apparent disobedience is consistent with Jesus’ invitation in Mark 8:34 (Ossandón, 2012, p. 391–393).

Conclusions

The interplay among the perspectives of the narrator, Bartimaeus, and Jesus helps us better understand the interrelationship between the plot of resolution and that of revelation. In this regard, Grilli states that it is intentionally a mixed genre, capable of drawing readers’ attention in multiple directions (Grilli, 2009, p. 146). Bartimaeus’ behavior in following Jesus unconditionally demonstrates that Jesus’ demands are not utopian and that the disciples should behave in the same manner. The lesson is clear and requires no explanation, and at the decisive hour the disciples will have to demonstrate whether they have learnt Jesus’ teaching (Ossandón, 2012, p. 401–402).

Bartimaeus is thus presented as a model of faith and of following Jesus. He combines his messianic confession with the willingness

to follow the Master's path, unlike Peter, who confessed Jesus as the Messiah but then rejected the cross. Bartimaeus abandons everything and follows Jesus, even though he had not been called, whereas the rich man does not wish to leave his riches behind. Bartimaeus asks to see Jesus and follows him immediately on the path of passion and death, unlike James and John, who ask for honor and receive an invitation to share in Jesus' destiny (Ossandón, 2012, p. 384).

Abstract

The Faith That Saves: A Narrative Journey from Blindness to Discipleship (Mark 10:46–52)

This article presents a narrative exegesis of Mark 10:46–52, the healing of Bartimaeus, interpreted as a paradigmatic story of discipleship. Using narratological methodology, particularly the model of James L. Resseguie, the study examines narrative structure, characterization, setting, rhetoric, and perspective. The analysis demonstrates that the episode functions not only as a miracle story but also as a revelation narrative in which Bartimaeus emerges as a model disciple. His faith, expressed through perseverance, recognition of Jesus' identity, and immediate following, contrasts sharply with the misunderstanding of the disciples. The pericope thus reveals that true sight means recognizing Jesus and following him on the way of the Cross.

Keywords: Bartimaeus, Mark 10, exegesis, narratology, discipleship

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