



August 2010

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GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

GOD OF THE BEGGARS

By Ron Allen

In the year of the Sydney Olympics, 2000 AD, state and city authorities took steps to remove by reasonable force, the beggars and homeless persons from city streets. Many of the removed were taken up to one hundred miles away to trailer-parks and disused government buildings. Similar measures were used prior to the Atlanta games, and other more recent world sporting events.

Beggars are not a good look for host cities. When the Olympic caravan rolls into town with its celebration of all things excellent in the human body and spirit, beggars send a conflicting message. They cast an unfavorable pall over things. It's better that they not be seen—at least for a while.

In Mark chapter ten, Jesus has reached the final stage of his last journey to the Holy City. He comes to Jericho, a place of natural beauty. Its warm climate and fertile soils make it an oasis of palms and produce. It is affluent and extravagant.

From Jericho, the road leads upward and westward through rugged and dangerous country to Jerusalem. Close by the city,



...one of these beggars calls out to Jesus (Mark 10:46, 47). His name is Bartimaeus, and he is blind.

but outside of it, beggars line the way. As he passes out of Jericho, one of these beggars calls out to Jesus (Mark 10:46, 47). His name is Bartimaeus, and he is blind.

The journey to Jerusalem has been under way for some time. Jesus began it in the north, at Caesarea Philippi. At that time he plainly stated that he would go to Jerusalem where he would be rejected and killed by the leading men of

Israel. Twice more, as the journey unfolds, he reiterates this grim expectation of humiliation and death that awaits him. But these disturbing announcements are interspersed with wonderful events: healings, thrilling teachings; Peter, James, and John glimpse a glorified Jesus. Excitement and hope crowds out sober reflection on what Jesus means by his being killed and rising again. In fear of what else they might hear should he clarify it for them, they choose not to question him.

By the time Jesus comes to Jericho, he and his disciples are joined by a large number of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Word about him spreads quickly. Every time he speaks or does something amazing the crowd zings with expectation. There can be no doubt; something big is bound to happen at the Passover.

In the meantime, Jesus' growing popularity has become an issue for his followers. Celebrity intoxicates; power is seductive. To the disciples it looks like Jesus will arrive in Jerusalem (the place where any aspirant to leadership must find success) bearing the nation's hopes upon him. The more people link up with him the more pleased the disciples are that they belong to his inner circle. His success will mean success for them.

Prior to Jericho (Mark 10:35-40), James and John had approached Jesus in private, asking for plum cabinet posts in his new national administration. The other disciples overheard them and were outraged.

As Jesus' entourage exits Jericho, a pleading voice is heard above the general hubbub. It is the voice of blind Bartimaeus: "*Jesus son of David have mercy on me. But many who were with Jesus told him to be quiet*" (Mark 10:47, 48). We do not know with precision who tells Bartimaeus to be quiet, but we know they are *with Jesus*. They are disciples and enthused travelers seeking to shield Jesus from undesirable associations. They feel sure that Jesus is on his way to political triumph. To tarnish himself by loitering with beggars might compromise his progress. It is important to them that Jesus not be seen with human failures.

Those *with Jesus*—unconsciously—assume the role of his 'minders.' They wished to protect him from unpleasant

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EDITORIAL . . .

"We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

It is not a little surprising to read in Scripture, that there is that about 'seeing' which excludes what is meant by "faith." This is not what one would have thought—not at first, anyway. 'Seeing' can be a synonym for a kind of spiritual cognizance that might be called faith. At least there are those who would use the word that way. But Paul, writing to the Corinthians, wants us to know that 'seeing' is not necessarily believing.

He means to say that there is in faith, a component of not knowing; of not being sure, indeed, of not seeing at all. This was certainly the case for the patriarch Abraham who at God's instigation, left his homeland and set out "not knowing where he was going" (*Hebrews 11:8*). Excise this element of not being able to see clearly from faith and what is left is not really biblical faith at all.


There are times aplenty, when we might wish that faith was something other than this. We want God to enter our dilemmas and make his will known in absolute terms. This has its appeal, but if we never had to deal with ambiguity on our Christian journey, we would probably not feel we needed God very much.

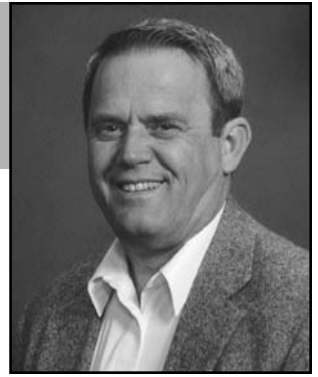
Moreover, faith of the kind we describe, adds a degree of spontaneity to our lives. A whiff of risk makes an undertaking more interesting, exhilarating, satisfying. Without faith, individuals would commence few worthwhile projects. The pioneering spirit would be gutted. Success would be so tame without the possibility of failure.

This applies to all areas of life: marriage, parenting, and vocation. Living by faith in the presence of these challenges means accepting the possibility of things not turning out as we planned; of our best efforts being frustrated. Faith in God does



not forestall every negative scenario. Decisions have to be made in the absence of total certainty of the precise outcome. Faith enables us to take responsibility for our lives knowing that God will never damn us for doing

our best. There is searching, groping, prayer and perplexity mixed with successes and reverses, because his purposes are often hidden. Whatever happens, God is sovereign, and he is able to make everything work for our ultimate good. 



Pastor Ron Allen

Book Review:

The Ragamuffin Gospel: First published by Multnomah, 1993.

Brennan Manning wrote the *Ragamuffin Gospel* for "the bedraggled, beat-up and burnt-out," the marginalized folks to whom Jesus ministered: the children, the ill, the tax-collectors, the women. In other words, the ragamuffins. Manning understands better than most that behind our facades of order and self-assurance are inadequacies that can find healing only in Jesus. While the powerful and religious elite challenged him, Jesus embraced and healed and fed the needs of the ragamuffins. Jesus delivered love, healing, and, most of all grace.

Grace is defined as the "freely given and unmerited favor and love of God." But, as Manning points out, we have "twisted the gospel of grace into religious bondage and distorted the image of God into an eternal and small-minded bookkeeper." In reality, God offers us grace immeasurable. Brennan Manning gently encourages us to embrace that grace in the face of our greatest needs. And Manning certainly knows whereof he speaks, having taken a journey from priesthood and academic achievement through a collapse into alcoholism. Manning came face to face with his need, finally abandoning himself to grace. And he invites us now to join him in a life of grace.

Manning is, without doubt, one of the most eloquent writers on the subject of grace because he openly shares his own pain and struggle to help readers deal with failure and inadequacy. And he sweetly challenges them to do the same.

-Patricia Klein.

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Good News Unlimited magazine also seeks to keep readers up-to-date on all aspects of **GNU's** ministries. This includes news on national and international radio broadcasts; public seminars, congresses, and Bible schools within the USA (as well as

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associations. They think to manage the publicity by preventing undesirable persons from getting close to him. They are excited to be traveling with the One whom they believe to be the Christ. Yet, instead of yielding themselves to the Christ that Jesus is, they take ownership of him, making him into a Christ of their imagination.

Though they accompany Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, they have no true idea about why he is going there. For us who come long after these events, it is easy to see how ignorant they are. But they are overwhelmingly normal, typical. They are the Olympic Committees, trying to make the human debris disappear so as to not spoil the spectacle.

See what happens when the disciples tell Bartimaeus to be quiet. He makes even greater noise: *“But he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me.’”* (Mark 10:48). And Jesus stops (verse 49). This is amazing. Doesn't he realize that he will do himself no favors by listening to that man? Yet he seems to know exactly what he is doing, and he does it with purpose and decision. He is not inclined to avoid Bartimaeus. He is not offended by his neediness. Bartimaeus is not to him an unfortunate diversion.

To everyone around him Jesus appears terribly naïve. He thinks and acts in ways that are incomprehensible to them. There is no one else like him. There is a glaring contrast between the thinking of Jesus and that of those who have attached themselves to him. He will not for a moment permit his disciples dismissal of Bartimaeus to stand. He overturns it. *“Call him,”* he says. So they called him, and when the beggar knows he is invited, he throws away his only worldly possession (his coat) and comes to Jesus.

If Jesus differs from his followers, there is also dissimilarity



He invites them to abandon their self-regard and participate in his gracious intention toward the blind man.

between those same enthusiasts and Bartimaeus. We know Bartimaeus is blind and penniless. He spends his life sitting by the roadside begging, listening to people talking. We may deduce that he has heard of Jesus of Nazareth before this day. He has heard tell of wonderful words spoken; of compassion

shown to women, children, the sick, and frail. News of Jesus' arrival in Jericho has passed by word of mouth up and down the highway. So when he knows Jesus is nearby, he realizes his chance has come, and he calls out, *“Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me.”* ‘Have mercy on me,’ is a form of address often expressed in the Psalms by persons in impossible circumstances. It means *‘I am in trouble; I need help; I am afflicted; I need someone to rescue me; I am trapped, and there is nothing I can do to extricate myself; I am forced to live below the dignity that is my right as a human being.’*


Those traveling *with* Jesus have no such desperations. They do not view themselves as candidates for mercy. They aspire to other things: promotion, rank, entitlement. They tell Bartimaeus to be quiet because he threatens to distract Jesus from the role they have assigned to him—the realization of their ambition.

But Bartimaeus will not be silent. He persists as one who has nothing to lose. He fights for Jesus' attention—against the discouragement served on him by Jesus' adherents. And he wins! Jesus listens to him and not the others. He has an ear for the beggars. The disciples are ready to set Bartimaeus aside and think no more of him. Not Jesus! Not ever will he sacrifice a relationship with the most negligible of beings, just for a political expediency.

By removing Bartimaeus, the disciples think to help Jesus on his way to triumph. The nature of his mission is alien to them. They are on their way to victory, Jesus is headed for defeat. They are on their way to great gain, Jesus is on his way to loss. They envisage acclaim; Jesus knows he will be condemned. They are in the world to *be served*, but Jesus comes to *serve*, and that is why beggars are not an unfortunate impediment to his purpose but the very substance of it.

The crowds milling around Jesus thrill to what might lie in store at Jerusalem. Though Bartimaeus cannot see, he is not the one who is blind. He is the only person who comes near, appreciating Jesus for the person that truly is. Jesus is Bartimaeus' Christ. Bartimaeus the beggar who sits on the outskirts, the one no one wants to see, who risks all in the hope that Jesus will notice and care for such a one as himself; not the Christ of those who told him to be quiet.

Jesus brings the good news of a love that is greater than any other love known. There is devotion greater even than the devotion of devotees. Yet, even they are not without hope. Even though the disciples try to thwart Christ's love for Bartimaeus, he does not abandon them to their lovelessness. *“Call him,”* he says to them. *“Call Bartimaeus to me.”* He invites them to abandon their self-regard and participate in his gracious intention toward the blind man.

To love as Jesus loves is an impossible mystery to his closest followers. Yet, they are not beyond the reach of that love. They are blind to it, but it is their only hope. Only by being caught up with Jesus in his ill-advised odyssey of compassion—so radically foreign to their best instincts—will the disciples enter into its mystery, its service, its joy. As it turns out, this miracle does occur for many who were there. So it is, and so it must be for us. 

WHAT DO YOU WANT MORE THAN ANYTHING?

By Desmond Ford

Why read the story of blind Bartimaeus? Because Bartimaeus represents me; he represents you. There he was in the city of the curse. Don't you remember? Jericho was a cursed city because of the evil associated with it. A curse had been made in the name of God that the builders would suffer; the inhabitants of it would suffer.

Bartimaeus lived in the city of the curse; a symbol of the whole world for this world is cursed. The curse of sin has brought a blight of sadness, pain, sorrow and condemnation, guilt and death. People argue about lots of things, but they cannot argue about the fact that this world is a mess, that every life has tremendous problems. All the sick men and women of Scripture represent us.

There were more blind people healed in the Gospels than from any other affliction. Why does the gospel stress blindness? Because, it is so dangerous. Look at that man walking on the edge of a precipice as if it were a plain. For all he knows it is safe. He is walking calmly and fearlessly—not because there is no danger—but because he is blind and does not know. In this life there are men and women who are wise and cautious in many things, but go on carelessly and cheerfully in daily life as if everything was safe for eternity, when in reality there are snares and pitfalls all around.

We were all born blind—blind to God, blind to duty, blind to truth, blind to our danger as judgment-bound sinners. Bartimaeus represents us all: blind, begging for happiness. Our begging begins in childhood when we are filled with eager hopes. When we become youths, though vexed and wearied, and often sent empty away, we still pursue great hopes. We may be deluded again and again till we grow sober and old, but we are still beggars begging for happiness.

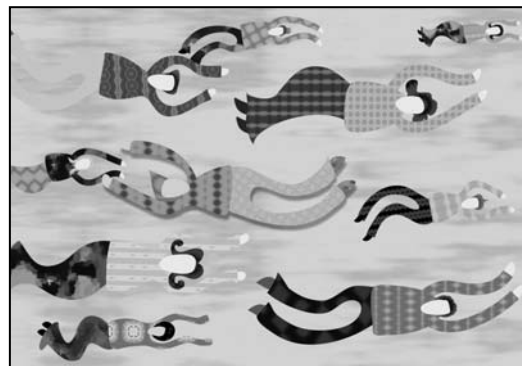
We are always trying to get out of the world what can only come out of God. God has put desire in our hearts for

something much bigger than anything the world can offer. You can take your pick, my friends. You can go with the crowd, or you can believe in Jesus despite obstacles, like Bartimaeus. You will have to be prepared to swim against the tide. A dead fish can float downstream but it takes a live fish to go against the current. If you go with the multitude you will certainly be deceived, disappointed, and lost. But, if like Bartimaeus, you are prepared to persist in finding Jesus despite what people say, then you will find him, and with him you will find all happiness, all joy, and everlasting life.

There's another thing about Bartimaeus: he had a true hierarchy of values. He yanked off his old coat and flung it aside. That was his covering by day and his shelter by night. He flung it away because he sought something more important. Lots of people who start to follow Jesus get tangled up by their garments of respectability, their reputation, or their social standing. The only one who will find Jesus is the one who wants him more than anything else.

When Paul became a Christian, he looked back on his past as a Pharisee, rich in the estimation of his fellow countrymen.

He looked back on that former prosperity and said: "I count it all but garbage that I might know Christ and be known by him."



You will have to be prepared to swim against the tide.

UPCOMING EVENT!

Pastor Ron Allen will be speaking about:

JESUS –Then and Now

What was Jesus' impact on the first Christians?

What does it mean for us, now?

Meetings will be held on the following dates:

September 17-19, 2010

Integrative Health Care Center

1025 South Mt. Vernon Ave., Suite C • Colton, CA 92324

Contact: (909) 783-2773 • Contact: (909) 954-6688

If you would like to attend this meeting, please call the number listed above at least four weeks prior in order to confirm.

September 24-26, 2010

Willowdale Evangelical Church

236 Finch Ave. E

North York, Ontario

(416) 759-9064

October 1-3, 2010

Banff's Full Gospel Church

Corner of Cougar and Squirrel

Banff, Alberta

Contact: (604) 309-9990