

# life matters

## Jesus Loves People with Disabilities

Vol.15, No. 3

Down through the ages, people with disabilities have endured added suffering as a result of unbiblical worldviews.

a publication of

- Pagan Greek and Roman philosophers advocated abandoning babies who were born with disabilities.
- In medieval times, children with disabilities were considered “changelings” – subhuman, Satanic beings.
- Social Darwinists and the Nazis sought to eradicate disability through eugenics and the death camps.

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The account in John 9 of the man born blind reveals an attitude common in Jesus’ day. The disciples supposed his blindness was a punishment for sin, either the man’s or his parents’. This idea flowed from an Old Testament explanation of blessings and curses, as found in Deuteronomy 28.

Even though original sin brought suffering and death, the book of Job makes it clear there’s not always a one-for-one relationship between sin and the bad things that happen to individuals. Jesus corrected His disciples by saying that sometimes a person is given a disability in order to show the glory of God. This is exactly what happened when Jesus healed the paralytic.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus encountered many people with disabilities during his sojourn on earth. One notable example was Bartimaeus, a blind man of Jericho. Several significant points about disability can be made from Mark 10:46-52:

**1 Society had sidelined Bartimaeus.** He literally sat by the side of the road. When he excitedly called out to Jesus for attention, the crowd tried to silence him, in viola-

tion of Leviticus 19:14 – “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind.”

Rather than helping him find gainful employment at a task he was capable of doing, society’s shortsightedness reduced Bartimaeus to begging. And, like the disciples who earlier in the day had attempted to bar children from meeting Jesus, they demeaned a person with disabilities and kept him from finding the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

**2 Although he lacked the gift of sight, Bartimaeus could spiritually discern who Jesus was.** While others identified Jesus as merely a man from Nazareth, Bartimaeus somehow recognized Him as the Messiah, having called him “Son of David.” He also correctly discerned his own spiritual condition in relation to Jesus, being in need of mercy.<sup>3</sup> How many people with 20/20 vision were able to make that discovery during Christ’s earthly ministry?

Jesus’ followers must recognize people with disabilities as those who may have spiritual gifts and be capable of leading others to Him.

**3 Bartimaeus was bold and brave in his persistent cry for help,** despite being outnumbered and outshouted. When others wouldn’t listen or counted him out, Bartimaeus refused to be quiet. When called, he made his way to Jesus.

People with disabilities must make their needs known, and we who have no disability have a duty to help them.

**4 Jesus refused to by-pass a person because of his disability.** Instead, he turned the crowd’s annoyance to elation. His invitation meant God doesn’t see vulnerable, helpless people as interruptions but wants to include them. Truly, God does exalt the humble!<sup>4</sup>

“Cheer up! He’s calling you!” is not only what we say to people with disabilities, but to everyone. The Lord is filling His banquet hall with “the crippled and blind and lame.”<sup>5</sup>

**5 Jesus asked Bartimaeus what He could do for him.** To put this in contemporary terms, even though He knows all things, Christ “empowered” the blind man to articulate his need. Likewise, caregivers who aim to be like Christ do not presume to know what someone we’re helping wants or needs, but will courteously solicit their input and then submit to their choices.

**6 Jesus acknowledged Bartimaeus’ faith and gave him another choice.** Unlike the rich young ruler of Mark 10:17-22, once he was healed Bartimaeus dropped everything to follow Jesus. The Master said, “Go your way;” and Bartimaeus decided his way was God’s way.

All people need to know that whether our bodies are whole or not, our spirits are broken by sin. We all need Christ, in Whom we find healing, acceptance, and purpose.

**YES!** Jesus loves people with disabilities. The early church courageously rescued children born with disabilities from the trash heaps of the Roman Empire and took them into their homes.<sup>6</sup> How well are we reflecting that kind of compassion?

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