

Westside Kids' Adventures

Prologue:

In our last episode, Fish witnessed the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. His disciples now understood he was truly the Son of God. Peter also attempted to walk on water when he saw Jesus, but his faith weakened and, as he was sinking, Jesus rescued him. Fish later described the miracle to the other kids. After an argument with some Pharisees, Shammash took the Westside Kids to a vacant stone hut, where they stayed the night. He told them that the next day the book would take them to Jerusalem. We rejoin the Westside Kids as they are waking up to what may be their last day of adventure.

Episode 5: Jesus Heals a Blind Man (John 9:1-41)

“Oh, my aching back,” said Max as he pulled himself up from the hard ground inside the hut where the Westside Kids had spent the night. He could see that the others were waking up as well. “I can’t wait to sleep in my own bed again.”

Joey yawned, “Three meals a day – that’s what I miss.”

“Hey, look. There are some coins on top of Papa Jim’s journal,” said Fish. “The only person who could have left that money for us is Shammash.”

“He knows we’re going to be hungry,” said Willow. “And he must want us to use the coins to buy some food once we get to Jerusalem this morning.”

“Then let’s get going. I’m starving,” said Abby.

Before leaving Capernaum, the kids opened the book to page five to see what Papa Jim had recorded in his journal. The picture was simple. He had drawn a wooden cross at the crest of a hill, and underneath the cross only one word appeared: “Saviour”.

“Of course,” said Abby. “That’s the word for Jesus that Shammash said to think about.”

“It must tie in with what we’re going to experience today, like the other pictures in the journal,” said Joey.

By now the kids were quite used to the routine of grabbing onto the book, spinning for a while, and then arriving at their destination. But something quite unexpected occurred this time. For a brief moment, though their eyes were open, they could see nothing at all, just blackness, as if they were temporarily blinded. They felt a brief sense of panic and confusion, but then, as quickly as the sensation came on, it left them. Their sight returned

and they were greatly relieved. In the next instant, they found themselves within the city walls of Jerusalem.

Although the kids didn't talk to one another about their brief experience with blindness, they each had a better appreciation of being able to see.

After buying and consuming a breakfast of bread, fruit and nuts, Willow suggested they all go to see Herod's temple. Everyone eagerly agreed, and after getting some directions from a local merchant, the kids soon found themselves staring at the massive walls that enclosed the inner temple.

As they walked towards one of the gates to enter the courtyard around the inner temple, they saw a man sitting by himself near the entry, begging for coins. At that moment, he appeared to be searching with his hands for a wooden walking stick that had fallen just out of his reach.

Abby walked over, picked up the cane, and handed it to him, saying, "Is this what you were searching for, sir?"

"Oh thank you, child. I need it to find my way as I cannot see," he said.

"If you need to go somewhere nearby, maybe my friends and I can help you," said Abby.

"Oh, that is so kind of you. My name is Bartimaeus, and I spend most every day here hoping people will have mercy on me and give me a few coins or perhaps some food."

Abby said, "I'll be right back." She walked back to her friends and suggested they take the change left over from breakfast and donate it to Bartimaeus. But at that very moment, she saw a familiar group of men passing by. It was Jesus and his disciples.

They heard the disciples asking Jesus about Bartimaeus. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered them saying, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

While the kids were trying to understand what Jesus meant by "night is coming", they saw him spit on the ground and make mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the blind man's eyes with the mud and said to Bartimaeus, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."

As Jesus moved on with his disciples, The Westside Kids went over to Bartimaeus and asked him if they could assist him in getting to this pool that Jesus had called Siloam. Bartimaeus replied, "I would be eternally grateful."

After getting directions from a person standing nearby, the kids and the blind man walked to the pool near the outer city wall and assisted Bartimaeus in getting down to it to wash his eyes. As soon as he did, he stood up and cried out with joy, praising God; for his eyes had been opened and he could see!

They hurried back to the temple area with Bartimaeus to thank Jesus, but he was no longer there. Instead, they saw some of Bartimaeus' neighbours.

"Could this really be Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus?" said one.

"It is he," said another.

"It looks just like him, but he was blind since birth. How can this be? How were your eyes opened?" asked another.

"But I keep telling you," said Bartimaeus. "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?"

"I don't know," replied Bartimaeus.

But some of them were still not satisfied. So they took Bartimaeus to the Pharisees, and the Westside Kids followed along.

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened Bartimaeus' eyes, and that angered the Pharisees, for this was against Jewish law. So again, they asked Bartimaeus how he had received his sight.

"Jesus put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see," said Bartimaeus matter of factly.

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?"

There was a division between them, so they asked him again, "What do you say about

him, since he has opened your eyes?”

Bartimaeus replied, “He is a prophet.”

The Pharisees still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight. So they asked his parents, “Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

His parents answered, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough. He will speak for himself.”

“Why aren’t his parents defending their own son?” asked Max.

“Remember yesterday in Capernaum?” said Willow. “Those Pharisees said our parents would be thrown out of the synagogue if we were followers of Jesus. I’m sure that’s what Bartimaeus’ parents are afraid of.”

So the Pharisees said to Bartimaeus, “Give glory to God. We know this man Jesus is a sinner.”

To which Bartimaeus replied, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

The Pharisees again asked him, “What did he do to you, how did he open your eyes?”

Bartimaeus became frustrated and said, “I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”

And the Pharisees felt insulted and said to him sternly, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not even know where he comes from.”

Bartimaeus answered, “Why, that is amazing! You don’t know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

The Pharisees were not used to being lectured, especially by a beggar, so they lashed out at Bartimaeus. “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” they shouted, and they cast him out.

Bartimaeus, who had felt great joy at having just been given his sight, now felt sadness at having been cast out of the synagogue. The Westside Kids tried to cheer him up. But since they weren't familiar with Jewish law, they didn't know that being cast out of the synagogue in that culture meant a lot more than not being able to attend services.

As it happened, Jesus heard that Bartimaeus had been cast out, and he found him and Jesus asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

Bartimaeus replied, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”

Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”

“Lord, I believe,” said Bartimaeus, and he worshiped Jesus.

And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”

“Uh oh,” said Max. “Some of the Pharisees heard that! Here they come again, and they don't look at all happy.”

“Are we also blind?” said the Pharisees in anger.

And Jesus replied bluntly, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”

The Pharisees continued to hurl accusations at him, but Jesus just went on his way.

As for Bartimaeus, he felt a renewed sense of joy. “I need to return to my family now,” he said. “How can I ever thank you for the help you gave me when I was still blind?”

“We were just happy to play a small part in helping you regain your sight,” said Abby.

“But it was Jesus who gave you your sight, and we got to see that incredible miracle. So perhaps we should be thanking you,” said Fish.

“Well, the thanks goes to Jesus,” said Bartimaeus. “I no longer have to beg at the temple gate, and though my family and I may still face some persecution from the Pharisees, I now know the truth: that Jesus is Lord, and I will follow him and his teachings from now on. I must now say good-bye, but you will always be in my heart. God bless you all!”

And with that, Bartimaeus departed, at first walking, but soon he was trotting, and then he was running at full speed as he disappeared in the distance, and the kids could hear

him laughing and praising God at the top of his voice.

“Am I the only one with a tear in his eye?” said Joey

“I think we’re all going to miss him,” said Willow.

“Yeah, Bartimaeus was quite a guy,” said Max.

“Actually, I was talking about Jesus,” said Willow, and she began to weep.

“I know how you’re feeling,” said Fish. “I think we all feel that way. We’ve been blessed to have these adventures and see these miracles; to be so close to Jesus and his disciples, and to see what Jesus did for so many. It’s hard to leave this behind because there is still so much more to the story.”

As the day was giving way to evening, Abby said, “Why don’t we head to the outskirts of town where we can have some privacy, and maybe Shammash will show up again before we go home.”

They all agreed that was a good plan and within an hour they found themselves outside the city at the edge of an olive grove. As they sat down beneath a great olive tree, they prayed together giving thanks for the amazing experiences they’d had since they left home. They also gave thanks for all they had learned about Jesus, his miracles and the faith he was building in his disciples and his other followers.

There was a sense of sadness at knowing this adventure would soon be over, but also a sense of fulfillment in how all these experiences had helped to build their personal faith in Jesus.

“I must admit,” said Max, “when we first started out I thought this seemed a bit crazy, but now I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Just as expected, Shammash walked up and sat down beside them and tried to comfort them. “I understand that you are feeling some sadness in leaving, but remember that Jesus is *always* with you, whether here, at your home or wherever your life takes you. If you place your faith in him, he will never leave you or forsake you.”

“I believe that,” said Fish, “but at the same time, I sort of feel like we’re leaving halfway through the story. There’s a lot more that happens after this isn’t there?”

“Yes,” said Shammash. “This wasn’t Jesus’ last miracle, but it was important for you to see how Jesus proved to everyone during his time on earth that he is God the Son, and

only through him can a person be saved from their sins and have eternal life with him. That is why Jesus is called our *Saviour*.”

“So why wouldn’t the Pharisees see the truth in Jesus? Why did they reject him?” asked Max.

“The Pharisees were convinced they already knew the truth, and their hearts were hardened. So when the truth was presented to them through Jesus healing Bartimaeus, they were blind to it and they rejected Jesus.”

“I think I understand,” said Joey. “Jesus is the truth.”

“The five miracles you have witnessed all speak to who Jesus is and why the disciples followed him even though their faith at times was weak,” said Shammash. “The fact is we are all sinners, every one of us, so we are all in need of a Saviour. As it says in 1 John 4:14:

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.

“That is the gift Jesus wants to give you: himself. It’s why you have been given these adventures,” said Shammash.

“But now the time has come for you to return home,” said the old man. “Use the book. Sadly, I must say good-bye to you unless or until, God willing, we meet again.”

And then Shammash walked deeper into the olive grove and faded out of sight.

“Well, folks. I guess it really is time to head back home,” said Fish.

“I think I’m finally ready,” said Max.

“Me too,” said Joey.

“I’ve got the book ready,” said Willow.

“Okay, one last time, let’s all grab on,” said Abby.

And one last time, the Westside Kids grabbed onto Papa Jim’s journal, and as they began spinning, the memories of all they had experienced began flooding through their minds. Eventually they began to slow down and a blurry image of the attic came into view. But before they stopped, something Shammash had said popped back into their minds. He

said, “*until we meet again.*” What did he mean? Was this their last adventure? Or was there something else in store for the Westside Kids? Only time would tell.

THE END