

SIGHT TO THE BLIND

Matthew 20:29-34

29 And as they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. **30** And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” **31** But the crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, saying, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” **32** And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” **33** They said to Him, “Lord, that our eyes be opened.” **34** And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. **(Matthew 20:29–34, 2022 LSB)**

THE SETTING

29 And as they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. **(Matthew 20:29, 2022 LSB)**

Jericho, one of the oldest continually inhabited places on earth, sits on a plain about six miles west of the Jordan River and about nineteen miles east of Jerusalem. The elevation is about 850 feet *below* sea level, and 3,350 feet below Jerusalem, which is about 2,500 feet *above* sea level. People truly went up to Jerusalem from every direction, but especially from Jericho.

Jesus and His disciples had probably spent the night in Jericho on their way to Jerusalem. As He left the city, a large crowd followed Him. Passover was the following week, and many thousands were traveling to Jerusalem. The crowd would not have been like others during Jesus’ ministry. Their focus would have been on the coming Passover, and the importance of their journey.

You might know that there are fifteen Psalms that are titled “a Psalm of Ascent,” from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134. These were traditionally sung by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem,

especially for the high feasts. Psalm 134 brought them right into the Temple itself with these words:

A Song of Ascents. **1** Behold, bless Yahweh, all you slaves of Yahweh, Who stand in the house of Yahweh by night! **2** Lift up your hands to the sanctuary And bless Yahweh. **3** May Yahweh bless you from Zion, Who made heaven and earth. **(Psalm 134, 2022 LSB)**

As the pilgrims left Jericho that morning, they would have begun singing the Psalms of Ascent with these words:

1 In my distress I called to Yahweh, And He answered me. **(Psalm 120:1, 2022 LSB)**

And who is sitting there by the side of the road but two blind men, who hear these words ringing out from the crowd, and then realize that Jesus is with them.

TWO BLIND MEN

Matthew 20:30

30 And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” **(Matthew 20:30, 2022 LSB)**

“In my distress I called to Yahweh,” and what did the blind men do? They called out to Jesus as Lord, as the Son of David, as the source of all mercy.

Let’s remember that the blind – all disabled people, in fact – were at a huge disadvantage in the ancient world. Far beyond their blindness, these men endured a lifetime of suffering, hardship, and poverty. There were no schools for the blind. There were no seeing-eye dogs. There was no braille writing system. The cities and roads of the time made no provision for the blind. There was no social security, welfare, or disability. Israel was supposed to have

storehouses to provide for those in need: widows, orphans, the poor, and the disabled. But four hundred years prior, God had rebuked them for failing to keep the storehouses supplied (Malachi 3:8-11), and it appears that little had changed.

These two blind men cry out for mercy at the top of their lungs. The crowd tries to shush them, but they continue to shout. That is the limit of what they can do to help themselves. They are powerless over their condition as anyone could be. But they can cry out for mercy, and they do. They seem to be almost unaware that the crowd even exists. In their darkness, there is only them and Jesus.

JESUS STOPS

Matthew 20:32

**32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?”
(Matthew 20:32, 2022 LSB)**

This might seem like an odd question; isn't their need obvious? Not really. They might have wanted money. They were at the side of the road to beg money from pilgrims going to Jerusalem. They might have wanted the same from Jesus. So Jesus stops, gives them His undivided attention, and asks them what they want Him to do for them.

I wonder, what would you ask for if you suddenly had the undivided attention of the Lord of Glory? If Jesus suddenly stood before you and spoke like a servant – What do you want Me to do for you? – what would you say?

Jesus is both God and Man. He continues to give His undivided attention to those who call upon Him. Some insist that we need to pray to saints, and they usually argue that Jesus is either too busy to give us His attention, or that others in heaven might be able to persuade Him to answer. What an insult to His nature and character! Jesus is not confused or worn out

by all the people praying to Him. If everyone on earth right now stopped and prayed to Him in genuine faith, His ability to listen and respond to each one would not be challenged in the slightest. And because every aspect of our relationship with Him is based on His grace and the faith He gives us, no one has more influence than any other. He attends to us and hears us just as He heard these blind men.

THE REQUEST

Matthew 20:33

33 They said to Him, “Lord, that our eyes be opened.” (**Matthew 20:33, 2022 LSB**)

These men focus on what they perceived as their deepest need: their blindness. They want to see.

They don't want money. They don't want food. They want to see.

Their blindness is not a blessing to them. It is certainly a handicap and a detriment to living. It is not just inconvenient. Their personal security and survival are never guaranteed. They are at constant risk. They cannot go any significant distance alone; the road from Jericho to Jerusalem is treacherous to walk, but they would not be able to go from one side of Jericho to the other without help. Their blindness is at the very root of their suffering, and so they ask that He would take it away.

MOVED WITH COMPASSION

Matthew 20:34

34 And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight ... (**Matthew 20:34, 2022 LSB**)

Jesus was moved with compassion toward these two men; I want you to notice the order of things. He isn't moved with compassion when He saw them; He was moved with compassion when they cried out to Him in faith.

God's compassion is not automatic and universal. He certainly has no compassion for the devil. Neither will He experience the slightest grief when He casts the wicked into hell. He is not an unwilling slave of His own nature but determines His own nature. So He says to Moses in Exodus 33:19 (these words are repeated in Romans 9:15), "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I show compassion." No one compels Him to be gracious or compassionate. He is freely gracious and compassionate according to His own will.

Now, Jesus was moved with compassion. When? Not when He first caught sight of them, but when they called upon Him in honest, humble faith. Their faith, as all genuine, was a gift from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God granted them faith in Jesus' nature and authority. They believed that He was the Lord, and the Son of David, and that He could, if He was willing, show them mercy.

In turn, Jesus touches them and heals them. They instantly regain their sight. This was a true miracle. God's power was exercised for them. It was an act of re-creation. He rebuilt tissues and structures; He reconnected nerves; He corrected errors in their eyes or optic nerves or brains or all of the above and more. When it was complete, it was perfect. They didn't need glasses to take care of the rest. They didn't need dark glasses to shield them from the sunlight until they got used to it. They had been blind, as though they had never seen. Now they could see as though they had never been blind.

THEY FOLLOWED HIM

Matthew 20:34

... they regained their sight and followed Him. (**Matthew 20:34, 2022 LSB**)

So what did they do?

The world opened up to them in an instant. There was the sky above them, perhaps crystal clear, perhaps cloudy, perhaps dark and rainy, but all of it was there for them to see. There was the dusty, rocky ground around them, the hills rising to the west, the Plain of Jericho to the north, east, and south. There was the crowd of men and women and children, so much the same but each one different. There were their own hands and feet. There were so many things to see and take in. So what did they do?

They fixed their eyes on Jesus and followed Him. Their new sight enabled them to do what so few wanted to do: follow Jesus. In just a few moments, Jesus was on the move again, heading up into the hills west of Jericho, moving toward Jerusalem. And these two blind men were there with Him, close by Him. They didn't follow the crowd, and they didn't follow the road; they followed Jesus.

You know, I have questions all the time that aren't really answerable. For instance, look with me at the first words of the next chapter, Matthew 21:1-3,

1 And when they had approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. **3** "And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." (**Matthew 21:1-3, 2022 LSB**)

It could be that "two disciples" meant James and John; they had just wanted a promotion to positions of prominence in the Lord's Kingdom, and He reminded all twelve that His Kingdom is topsy-turvy; it is the servants who rise to the top. So maybe Jesus sent James and John to carry out this simple, lowly task. Of course, He might have picked out any pair of

disciples at all; with twelve disciples, there were 66 possible pairs to send. But Jesus may have sent these two men as well. Nothing would prevent the Lord from sending them. Perhaps Jesus said to them, “You two, use your sight for My glory; bring that donkey and her colt to Me.”

BRINGING IT HOME

Here are two things to consider.

First, we are saved for the sake of trusting and obeying Jesus Christ. It's described as “following” in this passage; these two men received their sight and made it their aim to follow Jesus.

I found that the word “follow” is virtually never used to describe Christians in the epistles. That is, once Jesus was no longer around to physically follow, His disciples were no longer described as “following” Him. Instead, His disciples “run” in Christ (that is used about ten times) and “walk” in Christ (that's used about 50 times). The word “walk” is often used to describe how someone lives. In that sense, to run means that we are to live in Christ with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. So, we are saved and delivered by Jesus Christ in order to live for Him, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling as God transforms us (Philippians 2:12-13).

The second truth to consider is that these two blind men did not prefer their blindness to sight. They didn't defend their blindness. They didn't want Jesus to affirm their blindness; they wanted Him to remove it as an invader and destroy it as an enemy and grant them the sight they had never had before.

Many today are living in spiritual blindness and prefer it to sight. They don't want Jesus to open their eyes; they want to continue to live in the darkness and have Him call it “light.” Jesus

talked about this in sobering terms. “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19). The Light is Jesus Himself. The darkness is the sin and wickedness of unregenerate people. Just as light and darkness are incompatible, Jesus and sin are incompatible. The wicked prefer their sin, their ‘blindness,’ to Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. They would rather remain blind and keep their sin than receive their sight and be freed from sin. They are so committed to their sin that they truly hate Jesus for calling them to forsake it and be cleansed.

This overwhelms me. I don’t even know how to respond to it, to be honest. What power do I have to persuade people that their sins are killing them, and only Jesus can give them life? The truth is that I have no power of persuasion at all.

But I am also deeply comforted by the promise of God. Paul says that “we have this treasure” – the Gospel – “in earthen vessels” – that’s us, weak and fragile – “so that the surpassing greatness of the power” when sinners believe and are converted “will be of God and not from ourselves.”

The same Jesus who saved me can save any other sinner. He doesn’t need my help to save them any more than He needed anyone else’s help to save me. My part, and your part, is to firmly, faithfully, kindly, gently, and unswervingly declare the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and then wait on our God to touch them and give them their sight.