

Mercy for the Darkness

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Grab your Bibles and let's go to Luke 18 and we're going to continue with our study through the Gospel of Luke and we come to a powerful section where the Lord shows amazing mercy. Luke 18, beginning in verse 35,

35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. 36 Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. 37 They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40 And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, 41 "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!" 42 And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." 43 Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

In thinking over this text this week, I was reminded of how often our Lord with repetitive firmness has publicly rebuked the Pharisees of his day. He constantly was correcting their theological error. He was publicly correcting them. He was shaming them and embarrassing them from time to time. I mean, he was real, if you will, stern and manly to correct the Pharisees and yet we come to another section and Jesus walks along and he shows this bountiful mercy for this poor, desperate blind man named Bartimaeus. Now, in our day and time, we've warped the concepts of truth and mercy and we've warped the concepts of standing for something and having convictions but also having a heart of compassion and mercy and I think that's what makes us love and honor and treasure Christ is because we see in him things that we don't necessarily expect to see. I mean, the human idea is either to make Jesus this lowly, meek, pushover who would only care and show grace to everybody for everything or there are some who maybe see him only as a harsh, hard and cold, almost warlike figure commanding attention and obedience from all but he's neither of those things. He on one hand will forcibly, powerfully, repetitively correct error with manly firmness yet turn around and with the greatest grace and mercy reach out to the hurting.

Our Christ is both of those. As a matter of fact, if you study the Scripture, there are two distinct things that seem to get God's attention quicker than most other things. 1. Multiplying wickedness. The Scripture would tell us and does tell us that there is a point when men become so brazen and hard-hearted and open in their vile wickedness that it stirs God's wrath to action. But the Scripture also shows us very clearly that when a broken and contrite sinner cries for mercy, it stirs God heart of compassion. Both of those seem to get God's attention according to the biblical text.

Let's look at this mercy for the darkness. Mercy for the darkness. Maybe your life has a good bit of darkness in it today, darkness from within and also darkness from without. Stuff maybe has come into your life and you have nothing really to do with it but it breaks your heart. It leaves you lonely or desperate or discouraged. Well, I want to tell you our God is a God who has mercy for the darkness. He cares.

Let's look at blind Bartimaeus and as Bishop J. C. Ryle in his excellent commentary on the Gospel says, "Here is a vivid picture of spiritual things." So as we look at the actual historical narrative, we want to be true to the text but we want to see the obvious parallels to spiritual truths that come jumping out of this. First of all, notice his darkness. Bartimaeus, his darkness and, first of all, notice he had a darkness that came from within. In verse 35, it just clearly says he's a blind man. His primary affliction came not from without, it was his own eyes. It was in his own body. His eyes were blind. Physically he had a malady and all he knew was darkness. He'd never seen a sunrise and he had never seen a sunset. Most likely he's been blind from birth. He likely had never seen his mother and he had never seen his father. He's never seen the colors of spring. He's never seen the blue of the sky. His world was a world of darkness.

Now, Bible historians and historians in general would tell us that this was very common in this day. As a matter of fact, there's a secular writer who was a contemporary of this day that said that possibly half of the population of this region of the world in this day, the male population at least he would say, had eye problems. Many of them blind. Many of them just diseased eyes. It was difficult to see. There were a lot of factors but the harsh environment, the glaring sun, the sand and the dirt that would be in their environment and also the unsanitary conditions left so many people with difficult eye diseases and eye problems and some with blindness. It was prevalent and so it is in our day when we think of the spiritual parallel of how many today are in the darkness of sin. As a matter of fact, the Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All men have an inward darkness. Every person who has ever been born since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden have been born with a black darkened heart. It's a spiritual darkness from within.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:11, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." You see, they had Jewish dietary laws and they thought if we eat only spiritually clean foods, we'll be clean and pure before God. But if we were to eat spiritually unclean foods, then we would become defiled and sinful before God and Jesus says, "No, that is wrong. That is absolutely wrong. Those dietary laws were just symbols and figures to teach you a deeper spiritual

truth." He says, "In reality, the darkness and the blackness is not what goes into you. What's black and dark is already there. What comes out of your mouth shows the darkness and the blackness, not what came into you." The main core issue, you see, is not the behavior one exhibits but the nature one possesses. The behavior of lying and cheating and killing and hating and on and on we can go comes from hearts that are lying hearts and cheating hearts and hateful hearts and selfish hearts. There is a blackness within. Ephesians 2:3 summarizes this by saying, "we are by nature children of wrath." Our very natural being, what we are from the time we are a one-celled human being in the womb of our mother is the very nature that is anti-God and contrary to God's truth. It's a very nature that is a nature of a rebel and a self-indulgent creature. It's the very nature that causes a holy and just God to desire to put out wrath against us. We are by nature the children of wrath.

When God originally made man in the Garden of Eden, he made that man would love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Now, you hear that commandment that we should love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and we all think, "Wow, that's hard to do. How can we do that with all of our mind and all of our heart?" Well, look, that's normal. That's the normal, natural expectation that the Creator God has of all that he created. No wonder the Bible says we are sinners, we fall short of God's expectation of us. Instead of loving God with all of our mind, heart, soul and strength, we love ourselves and we love our sins and we give into the indulgences that we find coming out of our hearts and we try to squeeze God into our new theology because we want a theology that coddles our lust and we want a Christ that embraces our fallen lust. I'm sorry, you can't have one. There is no Christ who is anything like your fallen lust and who will cradle and embrace your fallen lust. We were intended when God made us to reflect God's beauty and God's goodness and God's moral, ethical uprightness but instead we reflect Satan's ugliness and Satan's wickedness. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is a darkness within us. It's in our bodies. It's in our hearts. That's why we need a Savior.

Bartimaeus had a darkness within him and I believe the text would bear out that Bartimaeus knew that there was a sin darkness, not just a physical malady that put him in darkness. Both were going on, I believe, in Bartimaeus's understanding. But also Bartimaeus had a darkness that came on him from without. It came from others. In verse 35 it says he was sitting by the side of the road. He's a blind beggar and his lot in life is on the side of the road. He wasn't in the mainstream. He wasn't traveling down life's boulevard. The side of the road. These pitiful people of this day that had a disease like this found themselves literally living on the side of the road. That may have been his only abode was the ditch on the roadside. Blind Bartimaeus lived off the insignificant or insufficient rather scraps of the world. He was clearly a public nuisance. He was despised and neglected by most everyone. You see, the religion of this day taught that it was sin that caused sickness so if you had a public, obvious disease like Bartimaeus had, then you were scorned and rejected and considered a vile, filthy sinner because your sin caused the sickness. So he had this stigma and this shame connected to him. Bartimaeus didn't ask for this. He didn't sin more grievously than the other sinners of his culture. This was put

on him by others. It was a darkness that came from outside of him and put him in this place.

So Bartimaeus and others like himself lived separated off and rejected by the masses. I thought this week how so very, very many people in the world today, so many of you sitting here under my voice today, you feel separated. You feel relegated off the mainstream. You feel like your life is one that, "I'm not really in the middle of things. I'm regulated to the sidelines. I have to live a separated life." You feel a deep stigma and a pain. You walk daily and many may not know it but in your heart of hearts you walk daily with a rejection and with a loneliness of heart. Isn't it true that many people can be surrounded by others yet they still feel alone? I don't know and sometimes your own spouse doesn't know and quite certainly many of your friends and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ do not know what many of you carry in your hearts: hurt, a pain, betrayal, confusion, anxieties, discouragements. And so many of these are brought on by others. Bartimaeus felt that pain. That's where he was. It was his daily lot in life but in the middle of his despair and in the middle of his darkness, the Bible text tells us that Jesus cared. Jesus cared. Wow. I want to tell you something, friend: Christ is the God of infinite capacity and this God of infinite capacity can care intimately for you in your dilemma and in your despair and in your heartache.

So Bartimaeus had this blindness that was from within him. It was in his own eyes and we do see a spiritual parallel there. We all have the darkness of sin within us. But also he felt a burden and a darkness that came on him from without. It was the people of the culture that put him on the roadside, that threw him away, that saw him as a nuisance and so many of you, so many of you have felt that very thing from others. A spouse has rejected you. A friend, a parent. It's been a 1,001 things but it's not something you really did or did anything to deserve. It came on you. It's a darkness from without and there is darkness from within.

Notice thirdly about Bartimaeus in his darkness: notice his longing. We see his great, great longing in verses 36 and 37. He is sitting by the roadside, verse 36, he hears there is a crowd going by. He can't see but he can hear and he began to inquire, "What's going on? What's all this commotion? What's all this talk about?" In verse 37, "They told him that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by." Without hesitation, Bartimaeus, verse 38, "he called out, saying, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'" I mean, it's as if Bartimaeus sat on the side of the road every day hoping for somebody that could help him and the moment he heard there was a possibility, he leaped toward it. This shows the longing of his heart. He hears there's a crowd. He begins to inquire, "What's this crowd all about?" They said, "It's this Jesus from Nazareth. He is coming through." And Bartimaeus had heard about him and instantly he's crying out for help. You know, we live in a world that's longing for hope and longing for help but the world seems to always look in the wrong places to find it.

The Gospel of the day that you and I live is a Gospel of Oprah. The Gospel of Dr. Phil. The Gospel of the so-called secular progressives which is really digressive. The liberals who throw away the traditions of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Who throw away the

concept that there is a God who is separate from us and holds objective truth for us. They throw all that away. The Gospel of this new liberal, modern culture is the worship of yourself. "You're good. The answer is in you. The truth is within your own heart." So we're told in effect to look inside our hearts, find out the real us that's really there. You might even find out that you're a man and you've really been a woman all along if you look deep inside of there they'll tell us. Then we're told to look inside and whatever you think you find in there, you're to embrace it. You're to express it and you're to celebrate it. By the way, everyone else around you better embrace it and better celebrate it too. That's the Gospel of this modern age and any notion that's cast abroad that, "No, we must look for truth outside of ourselves," any notion that truth is objection not subjection, that God is separate from us and he is Almighty and he is all wise and he has ordained truth that we look to for our guidance and for our values and for our convictions, any notion of that is condemned and now in our culture is being quickly, systematically silenced.

I honor the office of President but the great moral decline of our country is significantly due to the great leadership the President has and when he throws out there the gauntlet that we are rejecting our moorings, we are cutting loose from the Judeo-Christian traditions that made this country what it is and now every man can do what's right in his own eyes morally and we'll all celebrate and embrace this, teaching little boys and girls to follow every wicked lust that may fall across their depraved hearts and that's a good thing, I'm telling you that is damaging and damning to any people. But if you were to stand up and in the slightest way oppose that, you are systematically silenced.

So man looks inside to see how he should live. He looks in his own heart and the results are in. It's all coming out now and we see vile, ugly darkness spewing through our land. Man is looking for answers. He doesn't look to the God of Scripture, he looks to himself and he finds himself running in circles, chasing ever-changing shades of darkness. Some men look in their hearts and say, "Oh, if I just had this possession or that possession or this much money or that much money, then I would find it. Oh, if I could just have this position of power and this power and control here or there, oh, that would be it. Oh, if I could just be married to this person instead of that person or if I could just have this person in my life or that person in my life, oh, that would be the answer I'm looking for. If I could just get to this place or to that place." He looks in his heart and says, "Oh, if I could just fulfill this lustful pleasure and that lustful pleasure. If I could just be free to be me and indulge and drink deeply of the desires I find within me, that would be my salvation." Everybody is looking for an answer but looking in the wrong direction.

Bartimaeus needed some answers. He had a longing, a longing for answers and I'm convinced Bartimaeus, though blind physically, had eyes to see what many, many people missed. Psalm 51:1 tells us, the Psalmist cries out, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion," you could paraphrase or amplify, "The greatness of Your mercies blot out my transgressions." The Bible tells us we're all born with a sin nature. The Psalmist said, "For in sin my mother conceived me." The Bible tells us when we get to the age of understanding that there is a God and we understand the conscience that he has put in our hearts. Listen to me, friend: every person that lives in outward clear wickedness is sinning against the revelation of

God that God put in their very conscience. They know! They know. Their conscience condemns them until they sear it until the point where God turns the conscience off. Listen, that's why these people need such powerful affirmation from the culture because they get none from God. God tells them right the opposite so they keep heaping up, heaping up, heaping up encouragements for their lust. Because God doesn't encourage them, they need others to get them through and support them on their journey of perversion.

We're born sinners. The Bible says we practice sin, "All we like sheep have gone astray and each one has turned to his own way." He looks in himself and says, "What's best for me? I don't have to look at the objective truths of this God that gave us the Scripture, I within my own heart can find the truth for me. So we leave that aside. Our culture doesn't need that. This is a new America. We're betting this thing on new and wiser things," they would tell us. We're born in sin. We practice sin. We spread sin. Each of us has influenced others to sin and each of us always influence others and we influence others to dishonor God to a horrifyingly greater extent than we ever dare to admit.

Now, I think there's something here when you think about, "Why do men fail to cry to Jesus and diligently seek him? Why do they fail to do that? Why do they not see their need for Christ? Why do they not see the sinfulness of their souls?" Bartimaeus could see in himself what others could not see in themselves, he saw his desperate need for a Savior. Bishop J. C. Ryle said, "Let a man see his own guilt as it is and he will not rest until he has found security and peace in Jesus Christ." Oh, we need mercy. We need mercy.

Bartimaeus needed mercy from Christ and we need mercy and I want to tell you something: God's got plenty of it. God has a bountiful supply of mercy. Mercy might be simply defined as: God doesn't give you what you truly deserve. Ephesians 2:4 just tells us that God is rich in mercy. He's rich in it. He doesn't have just a partial amount that he's saving. No, he's got an abundance of it. It's as if heaven's got a giant dump truck load ready to tilt out and dump on anyone who will say, "O God, I need mercy!" He's ready to pour it on you. He's rich in mercy. Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy." Jesus promised in John 6:37 that if you'll come to him, he will in no wise cast you out." Adulterer, if you'll come to him, he'll in no wise cast you out. Fornicator, if you'll come to Jesus, he will in no wise cast you out. Swindler and cheater and robber, if you'll come to Jesus, he will in no wise cast you out. Homosexual and perverse, if you'll come to Jesus, he will in no wise cast you out. Liar, thief, whatever it is, he has mercy for you and he has mercy for me. He's rich. He's rich in mercy.

Bartimaeus had a longing and he knew he could go to Christ and find what he needed. His darkness. He had a darkness from within. He had a darkness from without. He had a longing in his heart for help. Notice, secondly, let's look at his deliverance. Let's notice his deliverance. First of all, his deliverance was diligently sought. Diligently sought. Look at it there, if you will, in verse 40, "And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him." So here Bartimaeus is and

he's not going to be deterred. He's going to be after Christ. He's going to look for Christ. He's not going to back up. He's not going to steer away and I think there's a lesson here for us: why do the lost not find Christ? The lost don't find Christ primarily because they're not looking for Christ. They do not find Christ because they do not love God and long for their treasure to be in Christ. They'd rather God just come and help them in their pursuit instead of them saying, "I love you, God, and I want to be after your pursuits." They would gladly have hell insurance from Jesus but they do not want to be delivered from sin and self and the world. What they actually want is Jesus and the world.

I believe blind Bartimaeus with all of his heart just said, "I'm casting everything on you and whatever you say, whatever you do, I'm with you. I'm not adding you on to me, I'm dying to me and coming to you." This blind Bartimaeus used to cry for money and now he cries for mercy. He's not shouting for the rights of the blind but he shouts for mercy. That's what he's looking for. That's what he wants.

Desperately sought the deliverance. Secondly, not only desperately sought but it was successful because of mercy. His seeking and longing were successful because God holds the mercy. In verse 40, simple three words, "and Jesus stopped." Wow. And Jesus stopped. I mean, they're going along. There is this rabid, if you will, throng of people crashing, pressing in around Jesus. Who knows how much noise and racket and commotion there was as the word spread through the countryside, "Jesus is coming through," and people are emptying their houses and villages and running across the fields and the roads and packing around and Jesus hears this cry and he stops. You know, the Bible text never says Jesus stopped to admire Herod's palace. The Bible text never tells us that Jesus stopped to wonder over the Roman legions. The Bible text never says Jesus stopped to admire Rome's great cities and they were great. The Bible text never says Jesus went out of his way to inquire of the theologians in Jerusalem. But the cry for mercy stopped deity in his tracks. Wow. I mean, God stopped. Stopped.

You know, there is really two things that really get God's attention. Two things that really get God's attention. 1. There is multiplying wickedness. If a people begins to multiply, become calloused and brazen in wickedness, it gets God's attention quickly. Now, people always struggle with sin. Every culture, every country struggles with sin but if there's a humility, if there's a shame, if there's a repentance it's one thing but when a country becomes brazen and hardened and open and celebratory about wickedness, multiplying wickedness gets the attention of God. Genesis 19:13 as the angels were there in Sodom dealing with Lot, they basically said, "God's about to get rid of this whole place because the outcry of Sodom's wickedness was great before the LORD." Did you hear that? God hears the crying of the wicked but it stirs him to wrath. It gets his attention.

Secondly, the cry of sinners for mercy gets God's attention. Where the cry of the wicked before God stirs his wrath, the cry of a desperate sinner for mercy stirs God's mercy toward them. Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Did you hear that? I don't care where you've been, actually I do care but as far as God's mercy being available to you, I don't care how far down the road, how deep in the gutter, how filthy the slime, how vile the

environment, if you will say, "O God, I'm a sinner! I need Christ!" God stops and turns to you in mercy and says, "I'll take you. I'll take you. I'll take you. I'll take you. I'll take you and I'll forgive you. I'll even do better than that, I'll clothe you with the righteousness of my Son, Jesus Christ. As a free gift, if you'll just turn to me." Wow. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Notice the parallels here that we see. First of all in verse 40, it was an individual call. I mean, with all this going on and all these probable thousands of people, Jesus stops and says, "Call him to me." Now, there is a universal call. God's call of salvation goes out to all men everywhere but we also know the Bible teaches there is an individual call where God personally steers his heart focus and the wooing of the Spirit's power toward you and he calls you to himself.

It's an individual call. It's an intercessory call. He tells the disciples, "Go get him." God didn't have to do it that way. He could have written the Gospel in the stars. He could have written on the sides of the mountains, I supposed, but God has ordained that Christians help others come to know God. He does it through people.

It's an individual call. It's an intercessory call. It's a faith conversion. It's a faith conversion and Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has made you well." Scholars point out to us that the phrase "made you well" is the same idea as "salvation has saved you." Has saved you, which leads me and many other commentator writers to the conclusion that the text is wanting to point out his blind eyes were healed but his dark, sinful heart was healed also.

He came to saving faith in Jesus Christ and he made a public confession. His life was different and everybody saw it. Verse 43, "Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God." I mean, possibly blind Bartimaeus sat by the roadside and all he had to his name was the cloak he was wearing and Jesus changes his life and he throws the cloak down and leaves his place in this world to find a new place with Jesus Christ. A public profession of, "I'm now a follower of Jesus Christ."

I was counseling with a lady in my office. This has got to have been 25+ years ago and she told me that she grew up in a non-Christian home and when she was 14 looking for love, security, acceptance at school, she joined a high school sorority. She said, "The girls in the sorority were not good girls. Instead of being out on a fund raising project, we lied to our parents and we went to a party and at 14 years of age, I had relations with a 30 year old man at a party and I became pregnant." She had basically been raped. She said, "I went home and when the time came and I discovered I was pregnant, my parents said, 'Well, this is shameful and embarrassing, you've got to have an abortion,' so," she said, "I had an abortion and it was the most horrible unbelievable experience. Word got out and my parents were embarrassed so we moved to a different town. At the age of 16, I entered a long term dating relationship with a man who was several years older than me and I became pregnant again. My parents again said, 'You'll have to have an abortion.'" She said, "So I had an abortion and then after that episode, I came back home and my

mom and dad got real, real strict with me, understandably so and I just rebelled against that." Listen moms and dads: rules do not change the heart. You've got to have some rules. You've got to have some but they don't change the heart.

She said, "I rebelled against that. Got into a marriage, another man quite a bit older than me. I became pregnant and he said he didn't want to have any part of raising kids so he left me and I had my third abortion. Then I came to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." She explained to me how she knew her own sin needed forgiveness but it was obviously there was a darkness that had been put on her by others too and she said, "It was only through God's work in my life, through receiving Christ that I've been able to make it and I'm now using my life to help other girls who are going through what I've been through."

I thought, "That's mercy." I don't know what road you've been on. I don't know what your journey's been like but I do know this: God's mercy is sufficient for you. He will forgive you. He will cleanse you. Do you understand there are no second class citizens in God's church? We're all redeemed sinners. As Paul writes to the Corinthians who were in the midst of filthy, vile, sexual perversion in their city and all of them had gotten saved out of that, he lists those filthy perverse sins and then he says, "And such were some of you. Such were and God changed you."

Lady, student, senior adult, run to Jesus. He has mercy enough for you. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me," listen, "I will in no wise cast them out." Is that not good? Your mom and dad may have cast you out, your friends may have cast you out, there may be other folks who have cast you out but I'm telling you, if you'll turn to Jesus confessing your sins, he will in no wise cast you out. That's the kind of Savior he is. That's the kind of mercy he gives. Mercy for your darkness. Amen and praise the Lord.

Let's stand in prayer this morning.