

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus and Us.*"ⁱ

We are working our way verse-by-verse through Luke's Gospel, and we find ourselves at **Luke 18:35**.

Spiritual blindness is an inability to understand spiritual truths.

James Buchanan described it this way: "As it is difficult to convey an idea of color to the blind, so it is difficult to describe to [the spiritually blind] the [spiritual truths understood by those] whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit...[Think] of a man who sees, but has no sense of beauty...such is the case of a natural man...on whose ear the sound of the Gospel falls without awakening music in his soul."ⁱⁱ

In this morning's account we will meet a man who serves as a picture of all who are spiritually blind, but then given spiritual sight.

Look with me at Luke 18:35...

Luke 18:35 As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

In the parallel account in Mark 10:46 we learn the blind beggar's name is Bartimaeus, so that's how I will refer to him throughout the account.

I have invited you before to do more than simply read the verses when you are in narratives. You will get much more out of your Bible reading when you picture what the verses describe.

If you are a parent, when you read the Bible with your children, I would encourage you to describe the accounts for them, or ask them to describe the accounts to you.

And in this account we can appreciate it much more if we picture what we are reading. As we move through the verses I will do my best to help us understand what this looked like, because I believe it would have been very dramatic to witness.

In Jesus's day, blindness was a common affliction that had no cure. Because blind people could not work, they had to make their living as beggars. Bartimaeus spent his days sitting by the side of the road begging for money from people who passed by.

If I am honest with you, it is hard to imagine a more miserable existence. Perhaps only the life of a leper could rival Bartimaeus's depressing life. If he was fortunate enough to receive money, he would make his way into Jericho and struggle to buy food. This was on a good day. On a bad day, he would spend the night hungry.

When I think about Bartimaeus's life, one of the words that comes to mind is boring. I cannot think of many things more boring than spending my days sitting on the side of the road begging. One of the only things that could make the boredom worse would be blindness, because then you can't even see anything of any interest while the hours pass by.

But on this day Bartimaeus noticed the excitement...

Luke 18:36 And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

Bartimaeus had no idea what was happening. He asked those around him, hoping they would be kind enough to answer. Because as we will see in a moment, the crowd was very inconsiderate.

I can only guess what he might have expected, but one thing I can tell you is this...

He would not have expected the answer he received...

Luke 18:37 They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

This would have been an exciting moment for anyone, and we know that because so many people had gathered for the occasion. But for Bartimaeus, a man whose life was characterized by boredom and monotony, this very likely would have been the most exciting moment of his life.

Now just so you can picture this scene better, let me briefly show you what happened right after this when Jesus entered Jericho. Look at Luke 19:1...

Luke 19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

Huge crowds were following Jesus and people, like Zacchaeus, wanted nothing more than to be able to see him. As Jesus approached Jericho numerous others gathered on the sides of the road.

Now even though we are on the edge of our seats, we must pause this account for a moment, because I want to make sure we view it correctly. Mark your spot in Luke and turn innocent to the right to John 6.

Look with me at John 6:1...

John 6:1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw THE SIGNS that he was doing on the sick.

Notice the miracles Jesus performed were called “signs.”

In the following verses Jesus feeds the 5,000. Look how it’s described in John 6:14...

John 6:14 When the people saw THE SIGN that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

Again, notice the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 was called a sign.

Jesus didn’t perform miracles for the sake of performing miracles. He performed miracles because they served as signs. And I would go so far as to say that if you read about Jesus’s miracles and don’t understand that they serve as signs, then you will misunderstand them, or at least misunderstand the sign.

So, let’s spend a moment understanding why Jesus’s miracles would be called signs...

Not to sound overly simple, but signs provide information to help us get to the right place:

- You’re driving down the road and signs help you reach the right destination.
- You’re walking through the airport and signs help you find the correct gate.
- You’re in the grocery store and signs help you find the right aisle. Unless you’re like me and regardless of how many signs they put up in the store you still must call your wife to ask where to find things.

Similarly, Jesus’s miracles are called signs because they help people get to the right place. And the right place is understanding a spiritual truth.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Jesus's physical miracles were signs illustrating spiritual truths.

Every one of Jesus's physical miracles was intended to serve as a sign that illustrated a spiritual truth.

Or here's another way to say it...

Most of what Jesus did physically pictures what he wants to do for us spiritually.

Because I have mentioned this before, I will go through it quickly...

When Jesus healed deafness, it pictures how he wants to heal spiritual deafness so we can understand spiritual truths.

When Jesus calmed the storm it pictures the peace he wants to give us when he calms the storms that rage in our hearts...

Philippians 4:7 the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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When Jesus healed the paralytic, it pictures how he wants to heal our spiritual lameness so we can – as **Romans 6:4** says – **walk in newness of life.**

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I thought Carl Templin did a great job last week with his communion devotion...

He made the point that when Jesus cleansed physical leprosy it pictures how he wants to cleanse our spiritual leprosy, or sin.

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I feel like if the charismatic movement could just understand this one truth it would dramatically change the way they live.

Instead of believing what Jesus wants to do for us is primarily physical, they would understand his miracles serve as signs of what he wants to do for us spiritually.

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And in this chapter there's a perfect picture of people misunderstanding the sign because they looked at it physically instead of spiritually. Look at John 6:26...

John 6:26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, NOT BECAUSE YOU SAW SIGNS, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

This sounds strange. Jesus told them they didn't see the sign. Why would he say that? Of course they saw the sign. That's why they were following him. They wanted more food.

Jesus meant that they saw the sign physically, but not spiritually.

The NLT reads...

John 6:26 (NLT) "You want to be with me because I fed you, not because you UNDERSTOOD the miraculous signs."

They didn't understand the sign, or in other words, they didn't understand what the miracle, or sign, was pointing to.

What was it pointing to?

It was pointing to Jesus wanting to feed them spiritually.

So he spelled it out for them...

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

In other words, “I am the food you should be hungering for...not another miracle that doesn’t last.”

But they never understood the sign, which is why they ended up abandoning Jesus...

John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Now turn back to Luke 18 and let me be clear about why I took this detour to John 6...

We are reading about one of Jesus’s miracles that serves as a sign, and I want to make sure we are not like the people in John 6 who misunderstood because they only looked at it physically. We would be as spiritually blind as Bartimaeus was physically blind if we do that. And I don’t want that for us!

So, let’s make sure we understand this account spiritually.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Like Bartimaeus unbelievers (Part One) are blind.

Unbelievers are as spiritually blind as Bartimaeus was physically blind.

Listen to these verses that describe unbelievers who see physically but are blind spiritually...

Jeremiah 5:21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who HAVE EYES, BUT SEE NOT.

Ezekiel 12:2 Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who HAVE EYES TO SEE, BUT SEE NOT.

Follow me for a moment while I discuss parables...

Parables are like miracles in that they illustrate spiritual truths:

- Physical miracles illustrate spiritual truths
- Parables are physical stories that illustrate spiritual truths

When Jesus started teaching in parables it was a change in his ministry, because he had previously been speaking so plainly. Listen to this...

Matthew 13:10 The disciples [asked Jesus], “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

The disciples noticed the change because they knew parables were not as easy to understand as Jesus’s previous teaching.

Listen to Jesus’s response describing unbelievers as they listen to parables...

Matthew 13:13 I speak to them in parables, because SEEING THEY DO NOT SEE...nor do they understand.

He meant that they could see physically, but they were spiritually blind. And this is every unbeliever in their unregenerate condition.

Lesson Two: Like Bartimaeus unbelievers (Part Two) are poor.

The Bible regularly uses financial terms to discuss the gospel: debt, ransom, redeem, and impute.

And when the Bible discusses our spiritual condition it says we are poor.

What does it mean to be spiritually poor?

It means not having anything of value with which to purchase or earn our salvation.

Unbelievers are as spiritually poor as Bartimaeus was physically poor.

This is why we must pray...

Matthew 6:12 forgive us our debts.

We pray this because we are too spiritually poor to pay our debts.

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In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the man who represents all unbelievers has more debt than he could pay off given multiple lifetimes.

Matthew 18:26 The servant fell on his knees, imploring [the master], ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 Out of pity...the master...released him and forgave him the debt.

The master released him because he knew he was too poor to pay the debt.

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Have you ever heard that quote that Christianity is little more than one beggar showing another beggar where to find food?

I really like that quote because it captures our spiritual poverty.

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Now in Bartimaeus’s desperate condition, look how he responds when Jesus passes by...

Luke 18:38 And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

I bet blind Bartimaeus cried out! We will see that he was going to make sure Jesus heard him!

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It is significant that he called Jesus the Son of David because this means he had faith Jesus was the Messiah.

So, here’s how we want to understand Bartimaeus:

- He was blind physically, but he could see spiritually.
- Spiritually speaking he could see better than many others who could only see physically.

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Now before we read the next verse, I want you to think about something...

Think about the lengths the paralytic’s friends went to get him to Jesus. They carried him up to a roof, took the roof apart, and then lowered him down in front of Jesus. It was incredible.

So when this crowd recognizes that there is a poor, wretched, blind beggar among them calling out to Jesus for help, how would you expect them to respond?

They are going to bring him to the front! They are going to grab him by the hand, make a hole in the crowd, and walk him out. Then Jesus wouldn't be able to miss him.

Maybe some of the people would even help him get Jesus's attention by yelling, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on this poor blind beggar here!"

Look at Luke 18:39 to see what this wonderful crowd did...

Luke 18:39a And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

Pause here for a moment.

Unfortunately, blind Bartimaeus found himself in the rudest crowd in history.

The phrase "those who were in front" means he was behind people.

They were so bothered by Bartimaeus it says they "rebuked him" That is strong language. They did not politely ask him to keep it down. They turned around and told him to be quiet.

They didn't want a loud, obnoxious blind beggar yelling and screaming behind them. They came out to see Jesus, and they didn't want this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity ruined.

But did Bartimaeus listen to them?

Luke 18:39b But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

We know Bartimaeus is blind, he's a beggar, but if I had to come up with one other word to describe him, it would be persistent. He persisted in crying out to Jesus despite the many obstacles he faced:

- He couldn't see Jesus.
- There were people standing between Jesus and him.
- These people were rebuking him and telling them to be quiet.
- Also, notice something else: I don't mean this as a criticism of Jesus, but Jesus did not immediately respond. This delay required even more persistence.

But Bartimaeus was not going to be silenced. In fact, we can tell by the way it's written that the more they told him to be quiet, the louder he became. He is screaming and begging for Jesus to help him.

There are two reasons Bartimaeus was so persistent, and it could be either of these or both...

One reason is he heard about Jesus's miracles, and he had faith Jesus could heal him.

The second reason Bartimaeus might have been so persistent is he knew the Old Testament Scriptures. We already know that he referred to Jesus as the Son of David, which shows some familiarity with the Old Testament.

And there were numerous prophecies about the Messiah healing blindness...

Isaiah 35:5 [When the Messiah comes] then THE EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL BE OPENED, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Isaiah 42:7 [the Messiah will OPEN] THE EYES THAT ARE BLIND.

Perhaps Bartimaeus knew these prophecies.

But there's one more prophecy that I want you to see. Please turn a few chapters to the left to Luke 4.

The context is Jesus just began his public ministry and he returned to his hometown of Nazareth. Look at Luke 4:16...

Luke 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

We are told Jesus was given Isaiah, but we are not told that he was given a certain passage. He chose the following passage because it described his ministry as the Messiah...

Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news TO THE POOR. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and RECOVERING OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

Gospel means good news, which is why the words “good news” are translated as gospel in some Bibles.

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Using just this verse, do you see how perfectly it applies to Bartimaeus?

Jesus said he was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor and recover sight to the blind. That's got Bartimaeus's name all over it!

So regardless of how the crowd was treating him, he kept crying out to Jesus for mercy. And this brings us to the last part of lesson two...

Lesson Two: Like Bartimaeus unbelievers (Part Three) must cry out for mercy.

Twice it says Bartimaeus cried out for mercy...

Luke 18:38 And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, HAVE MERCY ON ME!” 39 And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, HAVE MERCY ON ME!”

When you are spiritually blind and spiritually poor and Jesus walks by you cry out for mercy!

If you sit here today as a believer, this is what you did. Maybe you didn't use these exact words, but you recognized you are a sinner and God's wrath was against you, so you cried out for mercy.

If you sit here today as an unbeliever, God's wrath is still against you, and you need to follow Bartimaeus's example and cry out for mercy.

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Hold this thought for a moment and look at the beautiful situation that occurred that the crowd definitely did not expect, or they would not have been rebuking Bartimaeus...

Luke 18:40a And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him.

Jesus stopped, which meant the crowd stopped. I'm sure people wondered what was going on.

Listen to what it says in the parallel account...

Mark 10:49a Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

Jesus singled out Bartimaeus in front of everyone and requested that he be brought to him. I can only imagine what Bartimaeus was thinking. I doubt that there was a better moment in his life.

One commentator added that this rebuked those who were trying to silence him.

Luke 18:40b And when he came near, he asked him, 41 “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” 42 And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”

Your faith has made you well is literally “your faith has saved you,” which is how it’s translated in some Bibles, such as the KJV.

Jesus healed Bartimaeus physically, but more importantly he healed him spiritually. He was given spiritual sight at the same moment that his physical sight was restored.

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In all three accounts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?”

I have no doubt that Jesus knew what Bartimaeus wanted, but he made him ask anyway:

- If Bartimaeus was going to receive mercy from Jesus, and hear the words, “Your faith has made you well,” he had to ask for it.
- Similarly, God wants us asking. If we are going to receive mercy and know that our faith has made us well, we are going to have to ask for it.

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I don’t know if this means anything, but I noticed that in Luke 18:41 Bartimaeus moved from calling Jesus “Son of David” to calling him “Lord.”

And this is what it says...

Romans 10:9 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

We must confess...or ask.

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Consider this...

God knows who will be saved...

Ephesians 1:4 [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

God knew from before the world was created who will be saved. He is not waiting to see who will respond. But he is waiting for us TO respond.

God could just save everyone who will be saved. But he is waiting for us to cry out to him for mercy...like Bartimaeus.

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Jesus told Bartimaeus that his faith had made him well, or saved him. He has moved from believer to unbeliever.

Luke 18:43 contains one of the simplest, but also one of the most fantastic descriptions of this happening.

There is so much in this verse we are going to consider at it piece by piece. Look at the beginning of Luke 18:43...

Luke 18:43a And immediately he recovered his sight

And this brings us to three...

Lesson Three: Like Bartimaeus, believers (Part One) move from darkness to light.

It says, “immediately he recovered his sight.” Total blindness to perfect vision. It would have been incredible.

Bartimaeus knew complete darkness and then complete light. This is exactly what happened to us as believers, not physically, but spiritually.

There are so many verses associating salvation with moving from darkness to light that I can’t list all of them. Here are just three...

Isaiah 42:6 “I am the Lord...I will...7 open the eyes that are blind, to bring out...from the prison THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS.

Of course it doesn’t mean a physical prison or physical darkness.

Acts 26:18 [God will] open their eyes, so that they may turn FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT and from the power of Satan to God.

Consider this familiar way Jesus described himself...

John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The way that Jesus brought Bartimaeus out of his physical darkness into physical light when he healed his blindness wonderfully pictures the way Jesus brings us out of our spiritual darkness into spiritual light when he healed our spiritual blindness.

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Look at the next part of the verse...

Luke 18:43b and followed him,

Lesson Three: Like Bartimaeus believers (Part Two) become Jesus’s followers.

After Jesus healed Bartimaeus, Bartimaeus became Jesus’s follower.

The same is true for us. In fact, I would say this is the first thing that should happen after we are converted. We follow Jesus.

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The next part of the verse...

Luke 18:43c glorifying God.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice the dramatic change that took place with Bartimaeus:

- He went from begging to following Jesus.

- He went from crying out to praising.

Lesson Three: Like Bartimaeus, believers (Part Three) glorify God.

Bartimaeus became Jesus's follower and began glorifying God, and the same should happen to us following conversion.

God saves us so that he has worshipers.

Consider how well blind Bartimaeus was fulfilling this verse...

1 Peter 2:9 Proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We are to proclaim the excellencies of, which is to say glorify, the one who brought us out of darkness into marvelous light. Bartimaeus was doing this and we should do.

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The last part of the verse...

Luke 18:43d And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

This is what Jesus wanted to see happen. He healed Bartimaeus not just so that Bartimaeus would glorify God, but so others would glorify God as well.

The same is true for our conversions...

Lesson Three: Like Bartimaeus, believers (Part Four) lead others to glorify God.

God didn't just save us so that we glorify him. He saves us so that others glorify him...

Matthew 5:16 Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and GIVE GLORY TO YOUR FATHER who is in heaven.

When we are saved we should be sharing the gospel with others, not just so they can be saved, but so that they too can give glory to God.

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I want to conclude by sharing a lesson with you that I decided to take out of my sermon. That sounds strange, doesn't it? Why would I share a lesson I decided to take out of my sermon? If it wasn't worth being in my sermon why mention it now?

I want to share with you WHY I decided to remove the lesson.

As you can tell, I have been establishing the ways Bartimaeus is a picture of us. He was very persistent with Jesus, and I had a lesson that we must be persistent as well.

But I took the lesson out because I didn't think it was true. Bartimaeus had to be persistent because of the crowd, not because of Jesus.

I'm not saying that there is no place for persistence in our relationships with the Lord. The beginning of the chapter contains the parable of the persistent widow.

But this is persistence in prayer versus salvation.

And salvation doesn't require persistence. We see what salvation requires in Jesus's statement to Bartimaeus after his conversion...

Jesus told him, "Your faith has made you well," or "Your faith has saved you." This is how we are saved: by grace through faith.

David Davidson said, "*We labor naturally under a blindness and poverty, far more distressing than the loss of eyesight. But Jesus is EVEN NOW passing by and will not disdain the cry for mercy. Let us, therefore, breaking through every entanglement, spread out our wants before him. And having received an answer to our petition, let us unite on magnifying His name, and following His footsteps, till we come to see His glory in the light of heaven.*"

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If you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and it would be a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

- John MacArthur – Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- Wiersbe – Luke
- Hendrickson – Luke
- Stein

ⁱⁱ James Buchanan, *Office and Work*, 1842.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bartimaeus, who followed Jesus and glorified him, stands in stark contrast to the rich young ruler who walked away.