

Luke 18:35-43

**“Your Faith Has Saved You”  
The Enlightenment of a Blind Man**

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Today we continue our journey with Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. As you recall, Luke presents Jesus walking from Galilee to Jerusalem over ten chapters, from Luke 9:51 to 19:44. The Temple in Jerusalem is Jesus’ final destiny. There he will confront the religious and political powers. They will crucify him. Crucifixion is not the end, but the beginning for Jesus.

Walking *on the way* (*hē hodos*) with Jesus symbolizes discipleship. *On the way* Jesus teaches through parable and miracle about his suffering and death, seeing and understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation, repentance and belief.

The disciples misunderstand him, the Pharisees oppose him, but certain women, lepers, and beggars come to faith. The entire journey is about Jesus’ identity, discipleship, and healing the disciples’ blindness.

The passage we focus on this morning is about the importance of *faith for perceiving and thus receiving salvation*.

**A. The Blind Beggar**

<sup>35</sup> As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>36</sup> When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. <sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

<sup>35</sup> Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ ἐγγίσειν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἰεριχὼ τυφλὸς τις ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐπαιτῶν. <sup>36</sup> ἀκούσας δὲ ὄχλου διαπορευομένου ἐπυνθάνετο τί εἶη τοῦτο. <sup>37</sup> ἀπήγγειλαν δὲ αὐτῷ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος παρέρχεται.

As Jesus and his followers approach the city of Jericho, they have walked about three days from Galilee *on their way* to Jerusalem.

At this point in the story, the narrator introduces a "certain blind man" (τυφλός τις), but he doesn't tell us his name. Mark identifies him as "Bartimaeus" (Mk 10:46). Bartimaeus means "Son of Honor."

The irony is raw. A son of honor is living daily with shame. Being blind he is unable to work. Perhaps his family or friends help him, but he was expected to go out and sit by the roadside and beg, hoping someone would have mercy and give him a coin or two.

The blind beggar is sitting "beside the road" (παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν) and he hears "a crowd going by" (ἀκούσας δὲ ὄχλου διαπορευομένου).

"In the Middle East, village people show honor to an important guest by walking some distance out of town to greet the guest and escort him or her into the village. At times, the popularity of a guest can be measured by how far the crowd walks to welcome the visitor."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the crowd may have followed Jesus from Galilee, but the majority of the crowd was undoubtedly from Jericho coming out to greet Jesus, a famous rabbi, and welcome him to their city.

The blind beggar asks, "What's happening?" and someone answers, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

## B. The Blind Beggar & the Crowd

<sup>38</sup> Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>39</sup> Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

<sup>38</sup> καὶ ἐβόησεν λέγων· Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με. <sup>39</sup> καὶ οἱ προάγοντες ἐπετίμων αὐτῷ ἵνα σιγήσῃ, αὐτὸς δὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔκραζεν· υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με.

### 1. What does the beggar shout?

The blind beggar shouts out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The title, Son of David, refers to a future king of Israel, who is expected to rescue Israel and bring back the golden age of King David. This future king is better known as "the Messiah."

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008) 172

The blind beggar identifies Jesus as the Messiah but, more than that, he asks Jesus to have mercy on him. Ordinarily, when beggars shout out to passersby, "Have mercy on me!" they are listening for a coin to land in their cup.

However, "when Jesus comes by, these words, *Have mercy on me!* take on a new meaning. They are not a request for alms but for healing and restoration of honor."<sup>2</sup>

## **2. What is the crowd's reaction?**

What is the crowd's reaction? They want to silence him. Why would they want to silence him?

When dignitaries come to Wichita, does the major and city council take them to see homeless people on Broadway? No, of course, not! They would be embarrassed. It would be shameful. No city wants to be known for having poor people and beggars. It was the same with Jericho.

## **3. How does the blind beggar react?**

How does the blind beggar react? He shouts out even more. He repeatedly calls out for Jesus even though the crowd tries to silence him. But the blind beggar is *too persistent* to be hushed by the crowd--that's faith!

That is the type of faith the Luke's Gospel emphasizes--persistent faith, unwilling to yield; persistent faith, unwilling to yield even in a culture that would like to silence that type of faith. Luke's Gospel tells us *persistent faith* catches Jesus' attention.

Notice what Jesus said in Luke 11:5-10:

<sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Geddert, *Mark*, BCBC (Scottsdale: 2001) 253, commenting on the Bartimaeus story in Mark 10:46-52.

least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. (NRSV)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (NRSV)

### C. The Blind Beggar & Jesus

<sup>40</sup> Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, <sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you."

<sup>40</sup> σταθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν ἀχθῆναι πρὸς αὐτόν. ἐγγίσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτόν· <sup>41</sup> τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· κύριε, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω. <sup>42</sup> καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἀνάβλεψον· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.

#### 1. Jesus stops

In sharp contrast to the people who are trying to silence the blind beggar, Jesus stops. The Greek says, "He stood still" (σταθεὶς). When you exercise faith, it is as if Jesus—and by implication, God—stands still to watch you. *Your faith intrigues God.*

So Jesus stops and "commands him to be brought to him." "The very people who are insulting the beggar are ordered to escort him to Jesus for an 'audience' (a nice touch)."<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. The Jesus' Question

The blind beggar comes to Jesus only to face a question. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Now, the man is a blind beggar! Isn't it obvious what he needs? Is Jesus being insensitive or what?

<sup>3</sup> On persistent faith in Luke, see Lk. 18:1-8.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes* (2008) 173.

I think Jesus was asking, "What do you really want?" Do you want money from someone you think is the Messiah? Do you want to be healed and accept the responsibility of a healed person?

In traditional Middle Eastern society, beggars had a recognizable role to play. Every pious person was expected to give to the poor. Giving to the poor was giving to God. Beggars, therefore, gave people the opportunity to fulfill their duty to God.

The traditional beggar doesn't say, "Hey, Mister, can you spare a few coins so I can buy some bread?" "Instead, the traditional beggar sits in a public place and challenges the passerby with 'Give to God!' He is really saying .... 'I'm offering you a golden opportunity to fulfill one of your obligations to God'."<sup>5</sup>

That's how beggars in a traditional culture survive. But what if the blind man was healed?

- He has no education.
- He can't read or write.
- He has no training.
- No employment record.
- No marketable skills.

If he is healed, how will he support himself?

- Isn't it in the blind beggar's interest to remain blind?
- Is the blind man ready to accept the challenges that will come if he is healed?
- That is the question that Jesus puts to the man.

Are you ready to be healed? Are you ready to receive God's grace? Are you ready to embrace a new life that come with divine grace? What holds you back?

### **3. The Beggar's Request**

To the blind man's credit, he wants to be healed and to embrace the responsibilities that come with healing. Notice that the blind man does two things.

First, he addresses Jesus as "Lord." By calling Jesus "Lord," he recognizes that he (the blind man) is not the Lord. Many people want to be the master or lord of their own lives. They function as a god unto themselves. But this

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<sup>5</sup> Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes* (2008) 173.

is not the case with the blind man. The blind man already “sees” that Jesus is his Lord. To recognize that one is not the LORD is, in the words of the Serenity Prayer, “to accept the things I cannot change.” This is to give them into the hands of God. That takes real trust (faith) in God.

Second, he no longer asks for some nebulous form of “mercy” (coins or whatever), but rather asks specifically “to see” or “see again” (ἀναβλέψω). The word for “see” is *anablepsō*. It has multiple levels of meaning that Greek readers would have caught, but English readers miss. *Ana* means “again” or “upward” and *blepō* means “to see”. So he is asking “to seeing again” (to restore his sight), “to be able to look up” (to restore his honor), or “to look heavenward” (to receive revelation or enlightenment).

**4. “Your faith has saved you”**

Jesus grants the request. Jesus says, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

The man is “saved”. The Greek word is *sōdzō* (σώζω). *Sōdzō* means many things, including to heal, to rescue, to liberate, to keep from harm, and to make whole.

On a literal reading, the story is about a physical healing. But what if we read the story symbolically? What then is the story about? Surely, it is about the Blind Man “seeing” what others did not. It is about enlightened. Indeed, the story is more about spiritual, than physical, sight. Even before the Blind Man gains physical sight, he “sees” or grasps the true identity of Jesus as Lord. He “sees” his life from that perspective henceforth.

What is “faith” according to this story?

- Persistently seeking Jesus’ help despite the crowd that wants to stop me
- Courageously recognizing that Jesus is “Lord,” not me
- Fearlessly accepting the responsibilities that come with my healing

**D. The Results**

<p><sup>43</sup> Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.</p>	<p><sup>43</sup> καὶ παραχρῆμα ἀνέβλεψεν καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ δοξάζων τὸν θεόν. καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἰδὼν ἔδωκεν αἶνον τῷ θεῷ.</p>
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In this story, Jesus sides with the oppressed (the blind man) over against the oppressor (people in the crowd).

The man is healed. He can see. He sees well enough to follow Jesus. He accepts the responsibilities of someone who knows he is not God. He gives thanks God.

Finally, God has also given special grace to the oppressor. All the people "see" and "praise" God.

## **E. Reflections**

### **1. Faith and Salvation**

- a. Faith allows a person "to see" and "to receive" salvation
- b. This kind of faith:
  - Persistently seeks Jesus
  - Courageously recognizes Jesus as Lord
  - Fearlessly accepts the responsibilities that come with healing

### **2. Jesus Christ**

- a. Jesus is compassionate and merciful, and so is God
- b. Jesus is the Messiah but, more than that, he is "Lord"

### **3. The Great Reversal:**

- Throughout Luke's story of Jesus, there is a great reversal. The lowly are exalted, and the exalted are cast down. The Song of Mary says (Lk 1:52-53):

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

- The Great Reversal is demonstrated when we compare the Healing of the Blind Man (18:35-43) with the story of the Rich Ruler (18:18-30).

Just before the episode of the Blind Man comes the story of the Rich Ruler. The Rich Ruler wanted to know how he could be

saved. Jesus told him, "Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven." But the man went away sad.

Notice the contrasts between the story of the Rich Ruler and the Blind Man.

<b>Rich Ruler (Lk 18:18-30)</b>	<b>Blind Man (Lk 18:35-43)</b>
Wealthy	Poor
Had great honor and status	Lived in dishonor and shame
Lacked faith	Enthusiastic faith
Did not receive salvation	Received healing/salvation
Went away sad	Rejoiced and praised God
Did not follow Jesus	Followed Jesus
Went away blind	Was able to truly see

- That's the Great Reversal.
  - On the one hand, people like the Rich Ruler, who trust in themselves (in their possessions, power, and prestige) and not God, lose salvation and become (spiritually) blind.
  - On the other hand, people like the Blind Man, who trust God and put their existence in the hands God, experience salvation and become enlightened.