

Lessons from the Blind Men

Matthew 20:29-34

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TRANSCRIPT:

So, Matthew Chapter 20, starting from verse 29, the Bible reads, "Now as they went out to Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!' Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet. But they cried out all the more, saying, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!' So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Lord, that our eyes may be opened.' So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him."

Let's bow for prayer.

Father, we thank You for this morning. We thank You, Father, that we are able to gather here today to hear Your Word. I just pray that You would open our eyes of faith that we will grow stronger in our walk with You, Lord God. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the passage we just read, I want to consider a few notable truths that we can extract from the text pertaining to our need for Christ. Very clearly, we can see what Jesus is able to do, performing a miracle to restore sight to the blind. At the beginning, the text tells us that Jesus was passing through Jericho. Now, it is likely that He was heading to Jerusalem for the Passover, as the next chapter indicates with the triumphal entry. But the road from Jericho to Jerusalem was roughly 30 kilometers. And it was quite a tough road to trek for two reasons.

The first being, Jericho is 250 meters below sea level, which means that it's the lowest city on earth to this day. On the other hand, Jerusalem is 250 meters above sea level, which means that there is a significant increase in elevation from one place to the other. That makes the journey very difficult, especially when you factor in the arduous terrain that you've got to trek across. And the second reason is that the road itself was notorious for

robberies, and the locals referred to the road to Jerusalem as the Way of Blood.

Now, if you read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke Chapter 10, you would see that Jesus tells us that the road that the man was traveling on before he was set upon by robbers and left for dead was the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, also known as the Way of Blood. And so, we see that the road itself is not for the fainthearted. You're more likely to encounter trouble by a heartless band of thieves in the harsh terrain if you're not careful.

But if you are familiar with the city of Jericho at all, it was the first city defeated by Joshua and the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land after the death of Moses. And the city was destroyed, but over time, the city had managed to reestablish itself, and by the time of Jesus, had become an affluent city hosting a number of money makers. And one of these people you might be familiar with is Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Jericho housed a lot of these fortune makers, and because of this, beggars would often flock in and around the city. And they would often line the streets leading from Jerusalem to Jericho. They would hustle and beg outside the city walls. And many times, the beggars, the sick and the lame, the blind, they would often congregate together outside the city along the road. And this they did because they were considered social outcasts of society.

Now, the Bible tells us that two blind men were sitting by the road. They could certainly hear the bustling commotion around Jesus and His entourage of disciples and followers and admirers. And a large crowd was forming as Jesus left the city, and you can imagine the physical restriction of a crowd forming around you. And the noisy and loud atmosphere as people are wanting to ask you questions, begging you for money, wanting to see another miracle, wanting you to dine at their house, and a lot. But in the midst of a paparazzi-like crowd, there are two blind men yelling at the top of their lungs, begging for divine help.

So firstly, I want to begin by talking about the two blind men we see here. The interesting thing about these men is that they recognize who Jesus is. Despite the visual loss and infirmity, they surprisingly recognize Jesus. They never saw a miracle of Jesus, but they heard about Him. They heard about a man with great authority. They heard about a man with power over the natural and supernatural. And no doubt, the stories about Jesus had spread like wildfire over the countryside, in villages, in cities great and small. By these men opening their ears and their hearts, their faith in Jesus increased. When they heard Jesus was passing by, straight away they cried out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David," twice. They did not let the opportunity pass them by because who knows if they'd ever encounter

Jesus again. And so, they cried out with passion and angst for Jesus to hear their request.

The first thing I want you to note is that these blind men recognize Jesus as the Son of David. The phrase "Son of David" is a royal title, which indicates He's from royal origin. If you read Matthew 1, you see that Jesus is titled as the Son of David in the very first verse, and it shows His genealogy of how He's derived from the Davidic line by which the Messiah should come from. And so, the Messiah shouldn't be just any man; He needs to be from a royal line. And that's what Matthew tries to portray to us. And so, it shows that Jesus was a descendant of David and before him, Abraham. And His significance shows us that He's of royal blood. The gravity of this title, Son of David, calls to mind the covenantal promises God made with both Abraham and David.

And we see a very large number of prophetic passages from the Old Testament used by Matthew to show how Jesus fulfills the promises made to the Israelites. And Matthew uses great detail to document how Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One. And so, the title Son of David pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. It pointed to Jesus as the ruler of God's long-expected kingdom. And Matthew goes on to establish this in his gospel by referring to Jesus as the Son of David nine times, more than any other writer. And so, the weight of this title carries so much significance because every Israelite would know that the reference Son of David meant that it referred to Jesus as the Messiah.

And so, these men were quite vocal about their view or their faith of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus as Lord, Jesus as a merciful and compassionate healer. But there's more to the narrative than two blind men. In the Bible, apart from blindness being a physical impairment, the idea of blindness is used as an analogy to describe moral flaws. In other cases, blindness is used as a running metaphor in Scripture to describe the spiritually lost. It's used as a literary device to illustrate and explain the lostness of souls, the lostness of mankind, the lostness of many.

For example, the prophet Isaiah frequently compares Israel's apostasy and moral decline to that of blindness. In Luke 4, Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah that really encapsulates His mission, which did reference restoring sight to the blind, among other things. But there's a greater picture here, which foreshadows Christ overturning the moral decay of the human soul. That's the picture of blindness and restoring sight.

Now, I would dare say that the crowd that followed Jesus that day was mindless, insensitive, and naive. They were somewhat blind themselves. And I'll show you. Look at verse 31. It says, "Then the multitude warned

them that they should be quiet." Now, from this verse and the overall context, I'm able to see a few things. Number one, the crowd does not see the mission of Jesus. And number two, the crowd does not see Jesus as the Messiah. Now, I will impact these two points so you'll know what I mean.

But firstly, the crowd does not see the mission of Jesus, nor do they fully understand His purpose. Now, Jesus publicly taught that He was here to minister and not to be ministered unto. If you look at the last verse before our text, in verse 28, Jesus shares insight into His ministry by saying, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." And He says this to His disciples, who themselves did not fully understand the mission of Jesus. They expected glory and pomp. In fact, the mother of two of the disciples asked Jesus to seat her sons to His left and right in the kingdom. Now, this rubbed the other disciples the wrong way. Even Peter, at one stage, refused to accept Jesus' suffering and impending death at Jerusalem. And what does Jesus say to him? "Get behind me, Satan." He rebukes him. And this happened straight after Peter confessed Jesus Christ to be the Messiah in Matthew Chapter 16. He confessed Him to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. And yet, he does not accept Jesus' suffering and impending death at Jerusalem.

So, you see that even the disciples did not fully understand the mission of Jesus. The crowd here in this text did not think that Jesus was interested in the outcasts, the beggars, the poor, and needy. The crowd was so quick to rebuke the blind man for trying to interfere with Jesus, and yet it was the crowd itself that was interfering. They were obstructing the ministry of Jesus because they thought they knew better. They thought they knew Jesus better. They thought Jesus had no time for the lame, for the blind. But Jesus tells us exactly what His purpose on earth was, His mission in Luke Chapter 4, which Steve read for us. Says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." What we find here is the ministry that Jesus embraced. A ministry of reconciliation and restoration, a renewal to see the world as God intended. Yet the crowd lacked the vision to see this completely.

And so, the crowd ought to have encouraged the blind men to Jesus, but they did not. They should have urged their healing, but they did not. In fact, the crowd did not share the faith of the four men in Mark Chapter 2, where the men lowered the paralytic through the roof so that Jesus could heal him. In Mark Chapter 2, do you know why the paralytic was lowered through the roof? It's because the crowd was in the way. In fairness, they were being preached to, but still, they were in the way. The crowd here in

our main text are in the way. Not only are they in the way, but they spitefully tell the blind men to be quiet. They are obstructing the healing of two blind men because they are ignorant of the mission of Jesus, who is here to bring sight to the blind, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives. But this all stems from a failure to understand who Jesus is.

You see, a failure to understand the mission of Jesus will always be rooted in a failure to understand who Jesus is, His person. Now, it says in verse 31 that the multitude warned them. The verb "warned" that's used here signifies strong disapproval. You know, when your kids play up, and you stare at them with laser eyes to communicate that your patience is thinning? That's the kind of picture here. Or when a person does something quite irritable, that you gesture to them that your tolerance is fading. That's the picture here. The crowd strongly disapproved the actions of the blind men who were calling out to Jesus because this multitude does not understand the mission of Jesus. They are what we would call bandwagon fans, who have a skewed notion of Jesus as Messiah.

The second thing I mentioned was the crowd does not see Jesus as the Messiah. The crowd does not acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. Only two blind individuals do. Isn't that ironic? In fact, when the two blind men cried out with passion and fervor, "Oh Lord, Son of David," the multitude basically told them to shut up, to be quiet. "Nobody wants to hear what you have to say. Nobody cares about your problems." The crowd that day was ignorant and dismissive. They were essentially blind. They could not see the importance of the phrase that "Son of David" carried and the glory associated with this title, for it was a messianic title.

I dare say that many people in the crowd that day were possibly skeptics. They were people trying to suss out who this Jesus was. They perhaps were people familiar to those found in John 6, where Jesus spoke hard sayings, and then it says that many disciples walked with Him no more. I'm convinced that there were others claiming to be the Messiah during the time of Jesus, which brought much confusion. We know for sure that many came after Jesus, saying that they were the Messiah and led many astray. And Jesus told us that many will come in His name and profess to be the Messiah and work miracles, but they indeed are frauds. They are liars, antichrists.

The weak and fragile conception of Jesus that is evident here is not simply ignorance on the part of the crowd, but it is ignorance on the part of the religious leaders of Israel for failing to lead and teach the Israelites the truths of God. At times during His ministry, Jesus went head to head with the Pharisees. He went head to head with the Sadducees and the scribes. These were the religious leaders of their time. But Jesus strongly rebukes

them for leading the people astray. He rebukes them for diminishing and subverting the true teachings of God. He calls them hypocrites. He calls them fools. He calls them blind. This indignation of Jesus comes from a righteous place. His judgment is always true. The reason He was displeased with these leaders was because they were responsible for educating and upholding the religious teachings of the Old Testament, yet they could not properly interpret it to capture the true essence of the Jewish Messiah. As a result, they did not see Jesus as God. They did not see Jesus as Messiah, but instead, they saw Him as a threat because Jesus amassed a large following and openly spoke against the ill motives and actions of these leaders because of their hypocrisy.

If the religious leaders approved of something, then the people approved of it. If the religious leaders disapproved of something, the people, as well, they disapproved. And so, the religious elite was the neck that turned the head of a nation. They determine which way the head nods. If a nation is weak, it's because its leaders are weak. If a church is weak, it's because its pastor is weak. If a family unit is weak, it's because the parents are weak or absent. The leak will always be found if you look hard enough.

In Matthew 23, Jesus speaks to the multitudes and denounces the religious elite as being foolish and blind. He proclaims the seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees. But if you look in verses 16, 17, 19, 24, 26, they all refer to the leaders of being fools and blind. Jesus calls them the blind guides in verse 16 and 24, meaning that they were leading people away from the truth. They were leading people away from Him. And so, the unbelief of a nation is powered by the weakness and ignorance of its leaders. Jesus said this in Matthew 15:14 with regard to the Pharisees. He says, "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

In Matthew 20, our text, we see the irony that those who claim to see are those who are blind. The crowd thought they knew Jesus. The leaders thought they knew better. But the blind men knew all along that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, the Lord of all. And what we come to know from this passage and many others alike is that blindness is a universal problem. It does not specifically affect one social class or one ethnic group or one location. This blindness affects everyone, everywhere, ubiquitously. The blindness I am talking about is spiritual. And we are able to profoundly understand this spiritual blindness through the physical blindness of the two men here in this passage. They are one of the best examples of what it means to see with the eyes of faith instead of the eyes in our head. They are the best examples of walking by faith and not by sight.

Now, with the problem of blindness comes a ready need. But our needs

can never be met unless God is willing. And so, in this text, the willingness of God is apparent. As the men shouted for Jesus, it was Jesus who stopped and called the men to Himself. In verse 32, it says, "So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'" That question, "What do you want Me to do for you?" has to be the most fulfilling and selfless questions ever asked. The splendor and craziness of this question is magnified when you consider that this question was asked in person. That the God of all the universe would stand still in space and time outside the city of Jericho to ask two blind beggars, "What do you want Me to do for you?" When I see this question, all I can think about is how inviting and thoughtful it is. And so, you see, there is divine interest here to help the needy.

In this text, Jesus displays a concern, a willingness to alleviate the suffering of others because with God's willingness comes God's ableness. He is able to meet every need as He sees fit. And when we talk about God's willingness, we must factor in what God's will is. In this specific situation, God's will was to heal these men, to deliver them from blindness. In John Chapter 9, there's a man born blind, but Jesus heals him. And the disciples question Jesus about his blindness because they assume that his blindness was a result of the sin on his parents' part. But Jesus corrects this misconception by saying that the personal sin of both him and his parents had nothing to do with it. But rather, Jesus alludes to the man's blindness as an occasion for God to act, as an occasion for God to work. The passage reads in John Chapter 9, verse 3, "And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' And Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'"

The men in both Matthew 20 and John Chapter 9 were vessels to display God's power. Just like the Apostle Paul was the chosen vessel to display God's power, so too these men were chosen vessels to display God's power. The difference was Paul entered a life of suffering, while these men were healed from their suffering. You say, "What do you mean Paul entered a life of suffering?" Well, if you read Acts Chapter 9, verse 15 to 16, Jesus has a conversation with Ananias about Paul. And He says to him, this is a verse I'm reading, "Go, for he, that's Paul, is the chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." This dispels the idea of some churches which erroneously believe that you need more faith to be healed or that the reason you're not being healed is because you lack faith. That's dangerous teaching in dangerous territory. God may not heal you because your infirmities may serve a greater purpose in your life, as we will now see.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians Chapter 11. And we'll look at, I dare say, a testimony of Paul. In 2 Corinthians Chapter 11, from verse 23, shares a little insight into the sufferings of Paul as an apostle who really is the peak Christian who gave us half the New Testament. And it says, "He was in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. That's a hundred and ninety-five lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Three times I died in a day. I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the church, all churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity."

In the next chapter, from verses seven to ten, Paul beseeches the Lord three times to take away a certain kind of suffering. But the Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness." And Paul responds by saying, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Now, the point I'm trying to make here is that sometimes God will not heal you of your own physical ailments, your physical impairments. And it's simply because God wants to achieve something greater through your suffering. Your suffering can bring glory to God if you have the right perspective. Whether you've been delivered from suffering like the blind man or put into a ministry or suffering like Paul, you can bring glory to God in whatever situation you're placed in. You can see God work in and through you to bring about His greater glorification, not yours. With God, there is always a purpose behind suffering, whether we understand it or not. Sometimes our desire to ease our suffering will be answered by God with a no. That's not a time to get bitter, but it's a time to seek the grace of God that the power of Christ may rest upon you, that you may be a testament of God's grace.

It's about having the same joy and determination that Jesus displayed before His death, who considered the fruit of His suffering more than the suffering itself. Not only His perfect obedience, but His suffering and death brought about eternal salvation to all who call upon His name.

Now, it is God who takes the initiative to act. He is the one who moves

first to intercede. What moves Him to act is His love for us. The Bible teaches that He first loved us. One of the ways this is displayed is when He heals the blind man. Look at verse 34 with me. Verse 34 says, "So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes." The compassion of Christ is unique to human history in a sense that it is purely divine, literally. What does compassion mean? Well, compassion means, and I quote, "to have sympathy, pity, concern for the suffering of others." The word compassion comes from the Latin word "compati," which means "to suffer with." However, if you look at the Greek rendering of the word compassion in the New Testament, it's "splagnizomai," which carries the idea of your inward parts being stirred, or more literally, there's a twist in your gut, there's a deep yearning inwardly.

And so, the compassion of Jesus, in a very real sense, incorporated a deep yearning within the soul, a stirring in His gut because of His deep understanding of suffering. How do we know Jesus had a deep understanding of suffering, besides the fact that He's God? Well, He suffered here on earth in the most unjust and heinous way possible with His crucifixion. Paul tells us in his letter to Timothy that when he endured intense persecution, everyone forsook him. All forsook him, but one, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. He says, 'May it not be charged against him.' But then he says, 'But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me.'"

You see, God has an intimate knowledge of suffering, and He knows how to bring support and assistance, and perhaps healing, in times of hardship. He did it with Paul. He did it with others. It stems from His compassion. That is His ability to feel suffering and suffer with those who are in the fire of adversity. He's been there before and knows exactly what you're going through. What is interesting to see is that nearly every time the Gospels mention the word compassion, there is always a miracle that precedes it or follows it. And so, the miracles of Jesus were not exercised for showmanship or vainglory. They were exercised because Jesus was moved with compassion, a divine and intimate motive. Because there was a twist in His gut. Because there was a deep yearning within His soul. Because there was a deep-seated concern for those suffering.

Sometimes, God's compassion is brought about or brought on those who display a healthy fear and reverence. Psalm 86:15 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." Now, the blind men were such that they conveyed a healthy fear and reverence towards Jesus. Well, how did they do this? Well, verse 31 and verse 32 tells us, number one, they call Jesus Lord, which expresses their humility and faith or repentance. They acknowledge Jesus with His right-

ful title as both Lord and Messiah, the Son of David. And number two, they cry out for mercy, which expresses their fear of judgment, their fear of suffering. They sought reprieve from the only one who could provide it, and that was Jesus Christ. These men feared the Lord because of who He was. In a figurative sense, they could see Jesus for who He was: the Son of David, the Savior, the Lord.

In the hour of their need, they made the request known, despite the opposition of the crowd. The two blind men stood against the majority, and as a result, they benefited from the compassion Jesus displayed. What we should understand is God's compassion is intimately tied to His mercy. Lamentations 3:22 says, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." Why? "Because His compassions fail not." If His compassion fails not, it's because His compassion is always effective. It is effective in the sense that it shows God's love and concern. It shows His kind character. It shows His slowness to anger. His patience, and it shows that His mercy endures forever. Recipients of His compassion can testify that God is merciful, that God is love, and that His love is felt and it brings comfort and joy and strength.

The compassion Jesus showed the blind men ought to be the compassion that we display to one another. Regardless of race, regardless of status, education, personality, Jesus had a special place for the poor and needy. He had a special place for the outcasts, for the children, for those unwanted, for those that feared God, and for those who exercised unwavering faith. Let us be like Jesus and see others with a generous, single eye, and not with double vision or double standards.

So let's apply some of the things we've talked about today. Firstly, recognition. We need to recognize a few things. Number one, we need to recognize the world is filled with spiritually lost or spiritually blind people. Our text speaks into our own current situation where the world itself turns against the light of Christ in sin, in ignorance, and active rebellion. We saw the disposition of the crowd in trying to obstruct the ministry of Jesus. We also saw the religious elite as Christ-deniers and false shepherds leading the Israelites away from Jesus. God has called us to be light. Just like the moon reflects the light from the sun, so also we reflect the light from the Son of God. We are the extension of God's compassion to a needy and desperate world. Our lens by which we see and judge the world ought to be informed by the Word of God, by biblical truth.

If we fail to constantly recognize the state of the world and its need for the gospel, then we risk falling into apathy and becoming lazy with our gospel witness. In other words, we ourselves must not turn a blind eye to those in need and to those who are suffering. They need the gospel of Jesus. You are here today because someone invited you. You are here today because

you recognize your need for Christ. Let us not lose sight of our need and dependence on Christ, and let us never lose our sense of the gospel and its power to transform a great sinner into a godly saint.

Secondly, we need to acquire a vision of faith that is unwavering, especially when there are setbacks. The blind men are great examples of endurance. They persisted with their cry for the Messiah, but they did not waver in their call in Christ. In fact, they got louder when they were told to shut up. Even when the majority crowd tried to silence them, the men were determined to be heard, and they were determined to see again. Their single-mindedness and longing for Christ ultimately led to them being healed. And we will do well to follow in like manner and persist in prayer and faith, and develop the determination to see Christ in the same way.

I echo what I said earlier, that we need to acquire a biblical vision of faith, or at the very least recalibrate our vision of faith, so that it firmly aligns with what the Bible says. In the new year, we are thinking about becoming a church or constituting as a church, and with this move comes a lot of hard work, as well as opposition of a spiritual kind. We are moving in a direction that requires a lot of guidance from the Holy Spirit, requires counsel from the Word of God, and counsel from mature believers. Our purpose is to be a light to a blind world out there, to be a light in Harrington Park and beyond. If we are to pursue this, we must be unified with single vision and purpose. That means recognizing the blind spots that we have going forward and rectifying them so that we may be a thriving church in 2024 and beyond. We do not want to be like the crowd who are dismissive and ignorant. Neither do we want to be like some of the religious leaders who are foolish hypocrites, but we want to be genuine and authentic with our faith. We want to be authentic in our pursuit for Christ, unified as one people.

And thirdly, we should expect to see God work. When the blind men heard Jesus was passing through, they seized the opportunity. They sought Christ because they were expectant. They had this expectation that Jesus could heal them from blindness, and they were right. Likewise, our expectation should anticipate Christ working in and amongst us. Our desire must be so that our whole being must gravitate towards biblical truth and to where the Spirit of God is leading. For this to happen, we must let go of our pride and our thinking that we can do it all on our own, for we cannot. Our expectation must be grounded in biblical truth and in the will of God. The great missionary William Carey said these words. He said, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." Our attempts can only be considered great if it is in line with what God expects. We know what He expects, for the Word of God tells us through His commands and through His desires. God's Word is our blueprint for God's blessing. God's

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Word is our blueprint for God's blessing. Let us be a church eager to see the hand of God at work and pray He would use us as instruments in where He has placed us.

Let's bow for prayer.