

Blind Ambition
Luke 18:35-43

Our passage today is about someone who was blind, totally blind. We find it in Luke 18:35-43 and I invite you to turn there as we discuss the man who had blind ambition.

His problem
His possibility
His petition
His prevention
His persistence
His pardon
His path
His praise

Stevie Wonder, the singer, and Jack Nicklaus, the golfer, were sitting by the pool talking. The conversation eventually turned to golf and Nicklaus was surprised to find out that Stevie Wonder, who is blind, had been playing golf for years.

The golf pro couldn't believe it. He wanted some details so asked Stevie Wonder how he did it. The singer explained that his caddy set him up on the tee off area and then stood out in the middle of the fairway and called out to him. The singer listened for the sound of his caddy's voice down the fairway and swung in that direction. They would go to where the ball landed and the caddy moved on down the fairway and did it all again until he reached the green.

Nicklaus was impressed but wondered how he putted. The singer replied that the caddy set him up on the green and then leaned down behind the hole with his head on the ground and his mouth just over the cup, then called to Stevie.

The golf pro was so amazed that he wondered if they could play a round of golf sometime. The singer agreed but said that because people didn't take him very seriously he only played for money and he never played for anything less than \$10,000

a hole. Nicklaus thought that was a steep price, but asked when they could play. Stevie Wonder said anytime, just name the night.

I. HIS PROBLEM – v. 35

We read that Jesus was approaching Jericho. Matthew 20:29 indicates that Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho. So which is it? Was He coming or going? Many critics of the Bible will point to these two passage and argue for the fallibility of Scripture because of this seeming discrepancy.

Let's consider a brief geography lesson. First, let me mention that Jesus had been traveling to Jerusalem and He had been on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Jericho is on the western side of the Jordan about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is not about a week before His triumphal entry.

Second, let's be reminded that during the days of Joshua and the conquest of the land by Israel, Jericho was the first city to be destroyed. As children you may remember singing that little ballad in Sunday school "Joshua 'fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua 'fit the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down." Jericho was totally destroyed. Joshua put a curse on the city if anyone should try to raise it up again. "Joshua 6:26 "At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: 'Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates.'"

This curse was fulfilled in I Kings 16:34 during the days of King Ahab. "In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua Son of Nun."

At some point that city was abandoned and a new one built by Herod the Great only not in the same location but a short distance from the original site. So for one passage to say Jesus was leaving Jericho and another to say He was entering Jericho is by no means a discrepancy based on the close proximity of the two sites.

Luke indicates He was approaching Jericho. Because of its location it was a logical meeting point for pilgrims traveling to and from Jerusalem, especially during festivals. Please keep in mind that the Passover is now just two weeks away. As Jesus and His companions were traveling into Jericho Luke records that there was a blind man sitting by the roadside begging. Blindness was a significant problem in Jesus' day for which there was no cure. The only thing they could do was beg. They were at the low end of the social scale. They didn't have brail or Seeing Eye dogs or schools to help them navigate the world of the seeing. .

In 2012 the National Federation for the Blind indicated that there were approximately 8 million blind people in America. Through technology and training blind people can hold many jobs and function quite well in a seeing world. But not so in Jesus' day.

Blindness held certain cultural and spiritual stigmas. People believed that somehow blindness was the result of some sin the person or his parents had committed. The disciples thought that when on one occasion they asked Jesus about a blind man. "Who sinned that he should be born blind, this man or his parents?" Jesus said that neither the man nor his parents had sinned. He was born that way so that God would receive glory.

That should be a reminder to us every day as we look into the mirror that God made us the way we are for His glory.

This guy, identified by Mark as Bartimaeus, was

blind and he was begging. His problem was his blindness and so had to resort to begging for a meager existence at best. We find him outside Jericho begging. It was a great spot to beg because of the many travelers coming and going from Jerusalem, and remember that the Passover was in a couple weeks so this is a prime spot for begging.

Blindness is a problem for many people today. Oh, they can see just fine. They see to put on their shoes in the morning, they can read the morning paper and watch their favorite sports team. They have physical vision and it may even be 20/20. But they are afflicted with another kind of blindness. Paul writes about it.

II Corinthians 4:4

There is a spiritual blindness that has afflicted many in our world so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. They choose to ignore the remedy that can help them see spiritually, to have the spiritual blindness lifted. They cannot see because they choose not to see, blinded by Satan.

Someone has rightly said "there is none so blind as he who will not see."

Bartimaeus was blind and didn't want to remain blind forever. He longed to see, but he could do nothing about his condition or his circumstances. He was just sitting there waiting for something to happen. His condition was utterly hopeless, that is until he heard some exciting news. Maybe that's us, unable to do anything just sitting around waiting for something to happen. The problem is blindness.

II. HIS POSSIBILITY – v. 36-37

My Dad's house is a couple miles outside of Fairview on M-72. Years and years ago, you could sit there and the rare vehicle passed by in a day. Now there seems to be a steady stream of traffic even in that remote location. Occasionally there will be a motorcycle gang that will drive by, maybe 20,

30 or even 40 bikes. You can hear them coming so you get up to see what the commotion is all about as they roar by.

Sitting outside the city of Jericho a blind man is begging from people passing by. He hears them approach. He may have heard the familiar shuffling of feet along the dusty road after a long day of travel.

He may have heard the mother reminding her children to stick close as they passed through the busy city.

He may have heard the bleating of sheep being led to become the Passover sacrifice.

He may have heard men in conversation discussing higher taxes or the hopes of a good crop.

He was attuned to the sounds of the street so that he might beg for help as they passed by.

But a different sound now pierced the air. It began as a low din; a muffled noise of what sounded like a very large crowd that amplified the closer it came.

A large crowd always arouses curiosity, especially from someone who needs to have everything explained due to lack of sight. He was curious and wanted to know what was happening. Why was there such a commotion? The explanation was a simple one. Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

The mind of Baritaeus must have been spinning wondering about the possibilities of what Jesus' presence might mean for his problem, his blindness.

III. HIS PETITION – v. 38

Right away I want you to notice a difference between verse 37 and verse 38. Do you see it? The crowd referred to Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth. They only saw Him in respect to where He was from. I would be Howie of Watertown, my Dad would be Howard of Flint and David of Flint. You were known by where you lived. The crowd didn't see Jesus beyond His hometown identity.

The blind beggar on the other hand saw Jesus in an entirely different light. He didn't see Jesus for what He was, He saw Jesus for who He is – the Son of David. That is significant. It isn't merely just a reference to Jesus being born as a descendant of David. It is a Messianic title. When he heard who was in the crowd coming his way he knew immediately that Jesus was the Messiah. It is an acknowledgment of His kingship. He was the rightful heir to the throne, the one promised to King David who would come and reign forever (II Samuel 7:12-14). It was the promise given to Mary at the announcement by Gabriel that she would bear the Christ child, the One who would "be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:32-33)

This was an affirmation by Bartimaeus of Jesus being the Messiah. Though he could not see he knew the Old Testament promises that pointed to the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Redeemer Messiah coming to save His people. He would strengthen feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; open the eyes of the blind, and the ears that are deaf. (Isaiah 35:3-5)

Jesus was more than just a man from Nazareth, He was the Son of God, the Messiah. It was to Him that this blind man called out that he might receive mercy. He wanted Jesus to show compassion on him, to have pity for him in his destitute state. Such a cry acknowledged his inability to help himself that he had no merit of his own to offer in exchange for whatever Christ might do for him, but it was a cry of hope. It is that cry of the penitent heart, the heart desperate for change, calling out to the only one who can help in time of need, the only one who is our hope. It is the cry from someone who recognizes that Jesus is the only one who can help. It is the cry of the psalmist "This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him and delivered him from all his fears." (Psalm 37:6)

Jesus should not be the last resort in our desperate state but the first reason we call on His name to have mercy on us.

He could do nothing about his condition but he knew Jesus could. He had probably heard that Jesus had healed others who were blind; maybe He would do the same for him, too. He was blind and could not see Jesus physically, but he could see Him through the eyes of faith, faith that believed Jesus was the Messiah.

His petition was to ask for Jesus to show mercy on him in his dismal state. Is there some need today that you have for which you need to call out and petition for the mercy of Christ?

IV. HIS PREVENTION – v. 39a

How much determination and drive do you have if there is something you really want? What does it take to stop you?

We saw a few weeks ago that the disciples were preventing parents from bringing their children to see Jesus. How many had been turned away and headed home before Jesus intervened?

We saw a woman wanting justice from an unjust judge. She continued to pursue action until he gave her what she sought.

We read here that those who were leading this multitude were telling the blind man to stop. He was making a scene. Some scholars believe those leading the way were the town officials who wanted to make a good impression about their fair town and felt the blind man's actions were embarrassing.

When Atlanta hosted the Olympics, officials went through the city and relocated the homeless people living under overpasses so that the city would have a nice clean feel to it.

They may have felt his presence and boisterous actions were not the impression they wanted to give

Jesus and demanded he keep quiet. But it was impossible to keep him quiet. The more they insisted, the more he persisted.

Matthew 7:7-8 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

This is in the present active indicative voice indicating that we are to continually come to the Lord asking, seeking, knocking. Now, this isn't a magic lamp that we rub to get our wishes granted kind of prayer. Our prayers should be according to the will of God. “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of the heart” means that the more I delight in the Lord, the more my desires and His desires for me line up together.

19th century scholar and pastor Alexander McLaren wrote “Make God's will your will, that He may make your will His will.”

The petition of the blind man was that Christ might show him mercy, but the crowd was hindering him. But his persistence is seen in verses 39b-40.

V. HIS PERSISTENCE – v. 39b-40

He shouted all the louder. He prayed all the harder. He persisted until the Lord heard him.

How fervently, how earnestly, how persistently do we petition the Lord?

Maybe there are voices in your head telling you it isn't any use going to the Lord. He either doesn't hear or doesn't want to be bothered. Or maybe those voices tell you He doesn't care or it's trivial or He is too busy to bother with the likes of you. Maybe you have shared with someone something that you are praying about and that person told you it was useless to pray about whatever it is. Does that stop you or do you persist all the harder? “He shouted all the more.”

Too often we pass by those with needs. We may give them a glance, but we have no compassion for them. We remain unmoved to do anything except to tell them that they can't be there, to move on or point them in some direction down the road where they can get some help and get them off our street.

Jesus stopped having heard the cry. His heart was always filled with compassion toward those in need. Remember, Mark 10:45 says Jesus came to serve not to be served. Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion on him. Compassion was a crowning character trait of Jesus in His earthly ministry. The Gospels record 13 occasions in which it expressly states that Jesus had compassion. If it were not for His compassion, we would still be lost in our sin, destined to be forever separated from God. "It is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Jesus stopped and asked Bartimaeus what he wanted. It's not that Jesus didn't know or couldn't tell what the man needed. It was obvious. Here was a man begging, blind, bereft of daily goods. He knew the man was blind. Jesus knows what we have need of before we ask, but He still wants us to ask and He wants us to be specific. So ask.

Let me remind you here that God responds to the petition of faith. Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Take a pen and underline that phrase "diligently seek Him." That's the persistence of the blind man. That's the kind of persistence we should have in seeking God, not that we diligently seek Him to answer our petitions, but that we diligently seek Him to know Him.

He knew Jesus was the Messiah.
He knew Jesus could answer His petition.
"Lord, I want to see."
I don't want to just hear people talk, I want to see them.
I don't want to just hear the rustle of leaves, I want to see them.
I don't want to just hear the birds chirp, I want to see them.
I don't want to just feel the warmth of the sun, I want to see it.
I want to see.

Maybe that is your prayer today. Oh, you can see all right with your eyes the things he couldn't but wanted to, but maybe your prayer is to see spiritually, to have the vision of your heart opened so you can see spiritual truth for the first time.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You
I want to see You

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You
I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up
Shinin' in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love
As we sing holy, holy, holy
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He was persistent. He knew what he wanted, and he knew that it could only come from Jesus. The Lord heard and answered. We see his pardon.

VI. HIS PARDON – v. 42-43a

Maybe you have been on Youtube or Facebook and viewed a video clip of infants, toddlers, people who for the very first time are able to hear because of

some medical treatment. Their reactions are priceless. Imagine having lived life in total blindness to all of a sudden be able to see. When Jesus spoke it was instantaneous and complete healing.

At six months old Fanny Crosby developed a cold. A doctor prescribed hot bandages soaked with strong medicine to be placed on her eyes as a remedy. The result was that her eyes were damaged and she lost her sight. Yet growing up she never became bitter because of it. At the age of 8 she wrote this poem:

Oh what a happy soul am I
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.

I complain about a cold that lasts a week.

In her lifetime she compiled over 8,000 hymns and poems. We will close with our service with an invitation song of hers *Pass Me Not, Oh Gentle Savior*.

Perhaps her most oft sung and our favorite hymn is *To God Be the Glory*.

It was because of her blindness that she had such wonderful insight. An interviewer once commented that she felt pity that God had not given her sight when He had showered her with so many other wonderful gifts. Fanny replied “Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?”

The interviewer asked why she would have made such a request to which Fanny Crosby replied, “Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”

Reflecting on that conversation, she wrote the following lyrics:

When my lifework is ended and I cross the swelling
tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see,
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other
side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

When the eyes of Bartimaeus were opened they gazed into the eyes of Jesus. Now let’s be clear about one thing. It was not his faith that healed him. It was His faith in the power of the Messiah. Our English translation implies that he only received his sight, but the Greek word used here is one that refers to being saved. Let me add that faith is not necessary to be healed. Jesus healed many who didn’t have faith, but faith is necessary for salvation.
“For by grace are you saved by faith...”

What Jesus gave to Bartimaeus, He can give to all who call out to Him. He gave pardon.
He has enough for all.
He has enough for each.
He has enough for evermore.

Notice his path.

VII. HIS PATH – v. 43b

“Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus.”

Some scholars suggest that he followed Jesus all the way to Calvary. Others suggest that because Mark names him, he was well known in the early days of the church in Jerusalem. Whatever the case, he followed Jesus. It is a word that is used 77 times in the New Testament referring to following Jesus as a disciple. It’s more than just meaning he was heading in the same direction, the prefix in the Greek suggests union or likeness. He joined Jesus as a follower, a disciple.

Because of the dramatic transformation Jesus has made in our life through salvation, are we following Him?

How far are we willing to go with Him? Are we willing to go all the way to the cross?

Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus!
Anywhere, everywhere, I would follow on!
Follow! follow! I would follow Jesus!
Everywhere He leads me I would follow on.

There is one final thought in this passage because of what Jesus did. We see his praise.

VIII. HIS PRAISE – v. 43c

When we have been wonderfully and totally transformed there is but one thing to do and that is to offer praise, praise that stems from a grateful heart. We are to lift His name up, honor and extol Him, worship Him alone, magnify His glorious name.

Fanny Crosby has written another wonderful hymn.
Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
Sing, O Earth, His wonderful love proclaim!
Hail Him! Hail Him! Highest archangels in glory;
Strength and honor give to His holy Name!
Like a shepherd, Jesus will guard His children,
In His arms He carries them all day long.
Refrain:
Praise Him! Praise Him! Tell of His excellent greatness;
Praise Him! Praise Him! Ever in joyful song!

What praise do we shower on Christ for His gift of salvation?

A moment in time is all we may have as Jesus passes by. How will we respond? Bartimaeus may have said that the time was not right. Should he wait for a more convenient time when Jesus would pass by again? The crowd was too large. There's too much opposition. What Bartimaeus didn't

know was that this visit to Jericho would be the last one Jesus would make.

Think for a moment about others in Scripture who had just a moment in time as Jesus passed by. Pilate. Felix. Agrippa. The rich ruler. The Samaritan woman. Saul (Paul). Some let that opportunity slip by forever to be lost, others called out to Him and were saved, the blind eyes of their heart opened to see the salvation of Christ. Have you yet to call out to Him? This may be the only time Jesus passes by. The Lord hears the cry of those who call out for His mercy. His ear is tuned to the cries of those who seek to be saved.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said "We walk by faith, not by sight." (II Corinthians 5:7)

A blind man was sitting by the side of a road begging. He saw his need and saw his opportunity.

There are a couple of questions I would ask in closing:

Jesus is passing by, how do we see Him?

How far are we willing to follow Him?

How much praise have we given for what He has done in our life?