

A King And Two Blind Men

Matthew 20:29-34

Introduction

In this chapter we have seen The Parable of the Vineyard (vv.1-16); the Prayer for Glory (vv. 17-28) and now The Miracles of Healing (vv.29-34).

Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. On this road leading out of Jericho and headed towards Jerusalem Jesus will hear the cries of two blind men. On that road are Christ's disciples and "a great multitude" following Jesus. Remember Jesus is on a mission. He has weeks to live. But with weeks to live Jesus is still able to exercise compassion and perform a great miracle. The miracle is a type and a picture of our own salvation!

The cries of the blind men are met with condemnation by the crowds (v.31) but compassion by Jesus (v.34)! The crowd tries to stop them but the blind men continued to cry out to Jesus who alone can open blind eyes! Jesus will show them mercy and compassion! The blind men were not healed simply by prayers or desperation—but their prayers and desperation provided Jesus with the opportunity to exercise His compassion and touch them and heal them. Evidence is given that Jesus did not simply open their eyes but also their hearts and lives as the formerly blind men follow Jesus (v.34).

The Lord is full of mercy and compassion. We might think that God is distracted, preoccupied or simply too busy to pause and personally pay attention to us! Jesus is never too busy that he cannot heal the sick or open blind eyes! John MacArthur rightly suggests that Jesus was never in so much agony Himself to be insensitive to the agony of others (p.248).

The Cry Of The Blind Men (vv.29-30)

Matthew 20:29 (NKJV) 29 Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him.

Jericho is an ancient city. It is located some 15 miles from Jerusalem—as the crow flies—but you cannot get from Jericho to Jerusalem as the crow flies—the road winds and elevates slowly and continually to that the 15 miles feel more like 45 miles. I have been to the City several times over the years—but the city is often left off tours because it is controlled by the Palestinian Authority. In antiquity it was called the City of Roses—and in the time of Jesus there were really two Jericho's—Old and New—much like the modern cities of New Orleans or Santa Fe or Albuquerque—there was an old section and new sections. According to Josephus Herod built a fort and winter palace near Jericho. A certain native plant near Jericho was said to have healing properties.

Jericho became a kind of mecca for the blind. It was in Jericho that Rahab the Harlot saved the two Jewish spies and tied a scarlet thread from her window and over Jericho's great wall.

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30 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!"

Mark and Luke give accounts of Jesus healing the blind men.

Mark's gospel reports Jesus was going "to Jericho" and Luke says "he was approaching Jericho" (Luke 18:35).

The apparent contradiction can be explained by what I said earlier; there were two Jericho's — old and new. Matthew is referring to the Old Jericho whose ruins can still be seen to this day. The two other writers were making reference to the then—contemporary or modern settlement. It may be that Jesus had gone through the City and was approaching the outside perimeter of the City where the blind men were near the gate.

Once again Jesus has a large entourage (great multitude v.29) of followers and pilgrims.

In Mark's gospel we learn the identity of one of these men (10:46) "Then they came to Jericho. And as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus sat by the road begging".

There were lots of reasons for blindness in the ancient world. Accident, birth defects, battle wounds, many were blind because of the transmission of sexual diseases in the birth canal. Other children suffered from trachoma, a virulent form of conjunctivitis. It may have taken weeks or months for such diseases to cause total blindness.

Blindness in the Bible is often a metaphor for people who are lost—trapped in darkness!

Helen Keller who lost both hearing and sight was asked; "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" Her answer is interesting; "Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing!" She was speaking of spiritual blindness!

Jesus lived in a world where the vast majority of people were spiritually blind! We live in that same world. Think of all the people blind—to their sin—blind to sin's solution—blind—to the truth! No wonder—so many people "grope in the darkness" though Paul argues in Acts 17:27—that God appointed people to live in different places at different times—so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him, though He is not far from each one of us".

Paul concedes that there were times of ignorance but now God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

These blind men were sitting by the road. There was no health care system or welfare system. These men were at the complete mercy of the generosity of others.

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These blind men could not see—but they could be heard. They cried out to Jesus. Do you know how many blind people were healed in Old Testament times? That would be zero. These men heard that Jesus had healed many people—including the blind (see 9:29-31).

The blind men cry out—and call Him Lord and Son of David. These are messianic titles.

The blind men have no physical sight—but have spiritual insight.

How interesting. So many people with the gift of physical sight—lack spiritual insight.

But these blind men could see—Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

The Condemnation Of The Crowd (v.31)

31 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!"

The blind men's cry cause some measure of frustration and embarrassment to the crowd. The multitudes warn them that they should be quiet. The crowd's condemnation does not silence the blind men but cause them cry out even more.

People in the world can be callous and unkind—even cruel.

In many ways the multitude were better off than the blind. They had sight—they had better clothes and better jobs. To the crowd these blind men were an annoyance, a hindrance perhaps even a handicap. "But as F.F. Bruce has expressed it, the two blind men 'refused to be bludgeoned into silence by the indifferent crowd,' and they cried out all the more saying again, "Lord have mercy on us, Son of David."

Christian sometimes people in the world will ask politely—"Please shut up."

At other times they will use threat—manipulation and even intimidation.

Shout louder.

When you cry out to Jesus there may be those who tell you to just shut up! The indifferent crowd will tell you that God doesn't care—Jesus doesn't care about you—he has his own mission his own destiny. But—that is in fact the point—the journey that Jesus was on—to go to Jerusalem to die for sin.

Other religions suggest your blindness is karma—or election—or just plain bad luck.

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There is a growing multitude that believes that Jesus either doesn't care won't help—or that Christianity is a religion for fools.

Even in this passage—they will point to apparent contradictions. Don't get me wrong. All honest readers of the Bible have questions that require careful research and reasonable answers. But there is a growing body of skeptics who attack the Bible—who deny—the point of the very passage.

Three quick things!

- 1. The blind men cry out.**
- 2. The blind men acknowledge the true identity of Jesus.**
- 3. The blind men persist in their cries—in spite of opposition and resistance.**

The Compassion Of The King (vv.32-34)

32So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

The passage is powerful. What is the response of Jesus to these cries and pleas? "Jesus stood still—and called them". I love that. Jesus stops. Jesus stands still Jesus calls them. Kent Hughes writes; "The Son stood still". Over the roar of the crowds Jesus heard their desperate cries for help and responds!

Prayer prompts attention—and inquiry.

In the roar of voices and noise of the popular culture—Jesus hears their cries.

Jesus hears your pleas and cries! He loves you. He has compassion for you.

Jesus is not willing for you to continue in darkness and the spiritual void. Jesus pauses in His journey to the Cross of Calvary—pauses on the way to humiliation and death—to heal blind beggars! Jesus controls the Universe. Mark's gospel at this point records "Call him".

In our text Matthew says Jesus "called them" and in Mark's text (10:49) "So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise. He is calling you." Verse 50—"And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus."

This is amazing. In the ancient world—you can imagine the blind had few possessions. Bartimaeus throws off his garment—this is an extreme gesture for a blind man.

Jesus asks the question—"What do you want Me to do for you?"

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Our health and wealth friends—might be tempted to use this Scripture as a ticket for unlimited health or wealth. “Make me rich Jesus. Make me popular. Make me beautiful. Make me famous. Make me powerful.”

I don't think that is what is happening in the text. I think Jesus is asking the men to articulate their faith. Can they boil their request to a singular request.

The blind men know exactly what they want.

33They said to Him, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened.”

A woman named Rose Crawford had been blind for 50 years. “I just can't believe it!” she gasped as the doctor lifted the bandages from her eyes after her recovery from delicate surgery in an Ontario hospital. She wept for joy when for the first time in her life a dazzling and beautiful world of form and color greeted eyes that now were able to see. The amazing thing about the story, however is that 20 years of her blindness had been unnecessary. She didn't know that surgical techniques had been developed, and that an operation could have restored her vision at age 30. The doctor said, “She just figured there was nothing that could be done about her condition. Much of her life could have been different.”

As I read the news account of her case, some questions came to mind. Why did she continue to assume that her situation was hopeless? Had no one told her about the wonderful advances in eye surgery?

Then I thought about the millions of unreached people in the world—unaware of the gospel—unaware that Jesus is God's Messiah.

How many people will remain in moral darkness—spiritual darkness—oblivious to hope?

34So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

The blind men barely got the words out of their mouth and Jesus filled with compassion touches their eyes.

No surgery, no bandages, no snake oil, no prayer clothes, no request for seed faith money.

And they see Jesus. They see the faces of the people who warned them to stay silent. They see Jericho—the city of roses dates, figs and palms dancing in the wind. They see blue skies and white clouds—and they see—like never before.

Clarence Edward Macartney writes;

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“And for you and me, too, that will be the greatest of all sights. When we awake from the dream men call life, when we put off the image of the earth and break the bonds of time and mortality, when the scales of time and sense have fallen from our eyes and the garment of corruption has put on incorruption and we awaken in the everlasting morning, that will be the sight that will stir us and hold us.”

The men stood, their eyes gaping saucers wide and filled with sights never seen before. Mark tells us that Jesus said, “your faith has made you whole.” Jesus is telling him—Bartimeaus and friend—you were right about your blindness and you were right about me. You were right to be persistent. You were right to call out. You were right to ignore the critics and criticisms and calls to remain trapped in the darkness.

And note—they followed Him! Does that mean they followed Him simply up the road? Did they follow Him to Jerusalem? Will they become eyewitnesses of the events that will follow in Matthew’s gospel?

Conclusion

Jesus heals the blind men on the road to Calvary. He pauses for a moment and continues His journey to Calvary.

Jesus hears the cries of those who are desperate and dark.

Jesus calls the blind and then asks the blind what is it that you want?

Jesus feels compassion.

Jesus touches the blind and then heals the blind.