

BEHOLD JESUS! (Luke 18.35-43)

Blindness is a grievous disability, a deprivation of one of our most precious senses. I have often thought this would be the last one I would be willing to forfeit. Losing the sense of touch, smell, taste, or hearing would each be bad in its own way, but oh, may I never lose my sight! We might reasonably argue that sight is the most important for our safety, learning, perception of others, and enjoyment of pleasure.

When the king of Babylon captured King Zedekiah, his sons were killed right before his eyes, and then his eyes were put out, so that the last thing he ever saw, the images which must have lingered in his mind for the rest of his days, were heart-wrenching (2 Kgs 25.7).

On the other hand, what a blessed and rare thing it is, even today, for a blind person to begin seeing. Consider how wonderful and unforgettable those very first images must be.

A lady named Ginger Flower had an eye condition from birth which left her legally blind for most of her 40 years. Last year she completed artificial cornea implant surgery and began a life of new sight—beginning with the faces of nurses in her recovery room. She excitedly pointed out objects for the first time—the yellow cap on a nurse seated across the hall, the wall clock reading 2 p.m., a woman at the nurse's station: "She's got blonde hair!" Before Ginger finished scanning her curtained room and the hallway beyond, she had everyone in the recovery room crying (source: *Kansas City Star*, MO; 10/22/05; "Corneal Blindness, Cornea Implant Moves to Second Stage with Success").

Our text today tells of a blind man miraculously receiving his sight. Many sermons focus on the blind man: his need, his desperation, his determination to be blessed, his faith, his healing, and his response. Many others take this literal history and show how it illustrates the way God saves sinners. Certainly both these things have some legitimacy, but I doubt either is the best way to preach it. Luke does not even mention his name, only calling him "a certain blind man." Doesn't this suggest that our focus in reading the story ought to be Jesus? The blind man is only useful to us because he is an occasion for a further revelation of the person and work of Christ. God made this man blind in the first place and sent him to that time and place to display the glories of Christ the Lord (Exod 4.11; cf. John 9.1-7). This scriptural account draws us to see things, ironically, from the blind man's perspective, to identify with him and to imbibe his noble spirit, and he was absolutely transfixed upon Jesus. Some time earlier he had heard about Jesus and hope was born. One day he heard Jesus was passing by and his hope was excited to a fever pitch. Then he heard the voice of Jesus

and made the earnest request. Finally, the light flooded his seeing eyes for the first time and he beheld the Savior's own face!

This passage is intended by God to open the eyes of people who are spiritually blind, that they might behold Jesus as He really is and to believe in Him for the very first time. Even Christians who have been seeing Jesus with eyes of faith for a long time find nothing more pleasant than to gaze upon Him in His glory. This is a foretaste of beholding the beatific vision, the eternal joy of saints in heaven. Therefore I propose that the main point of this text is that

The greatest sight of all is to see Jesus.

I would take you through this passage verse by verse, focusing on Jesus all the while. May God open our eyes, that we may all behold wondrous things out of His law.

Jesus had just painted a verbal picture for His disciples about the terrible things facing Him, but this portrayal was hidden from them (18.32-34). With the hindsight of historic fulfillment we can appreciate much better the horrors of His passion. Luke's narrative picture of Jesus healing the blind man is much more pleasant. Let us dwell on it for edification and encouragement, and especially to intensify our faith in and devotion to Jesus.

HIS COMING (18.35)

At this point in His life, Jesus approached Jericho on His resolute journey to Jerusalem (9.51), serving the needy all along the way (Matt 20.28; Acts 10.38). This was probably the new Jericho, about 1.5 miles from the old city Joshua conquered, and about 18 miles from Jerusalem. This is the first mention of a specific place in Luke's account of the Jerusalem journey, subtly implying it was almost over. This was the fourth and final miracle (healing crippled woman, 13.10-17; man with dropsy, 14.1-6; ten lepers, 17.11-19).

We all know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judah, and grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, considerably north. The crowds called Him, "Jesus of Nazareth" (18.37). It was highly unlikely that anyone born in Bethlehem would be raised in Nazareth, and that he would prove to be a true prophet, but all this was according to prophetic Scripture (Luke 2.4, 39, 51; Matt 21.11; John 1.45-46; Matt 2.5-6, 23).

More wonderful than all this is that the Son of God came into the world from His home in heaven, where He had dwelt from all eternity, sharing in the glory of God the Father (John 3.13; 6.38; 17.5). Heaven is a real place, far beyond this world, where God is upon His throne (Psa

11.4), and in His court there are myriad mighty angels ready to fly on their next divine mission from the slightest indication of His will (Matt 6.10). From heaven the Son of God sent forth the original command to create all things (Col 1.16-17). From heaven He provides for and rules over His creatures (Psa 115.3). From heaven He weighs the hearts of men (Psa 33.13), saving His elect (Psa 57.3) and punishing His enemies (Psa 18.13-14). He is so exalted that even to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth requires condescension (Psa 113.5-6).

What a contrast then between perfect heaven and this fallen world! As Jesus drew near to Jericho, “a certain blind man sat by the way begging.” Pitiful sight, all the result of Adam’s original rebellion against God! Eyes originally meant to see (Gen 1.26, 31) had now become useless, and man originally meant to work and have abundance (Gen 2.15-16) is found begging, vulnerable to the same kind of neglect Lazarus suffered (16.19-21).

This makes Jesus absolutely unique among men. Only He literally came into the world from another place when He was conceived. His advent was a true incarnation (union of the human and the divine nature in One Person; John 1.1-3, 14). How great then is His love for sinners, to do such a thing! We are spiritually blind until we have seen Him as God in the flesh, come down from glorious heaven to this miserable world. Behold His coming!

HIS FAME (18.36)

This blind man heard “the multitude pass by,” an unusual thing, and so “he asked what it meant.” Why all this hubbub? What has drawn people together, away from their work, homes, schools, and the market, to this place at this time? It may be that many ignored his request at first because the original grammatical form indicates he “kept asking” what it meant. “What’s going on? Please tell me.”

The multitude came together to see Jesus, formerly almost completely unknown, but once He burst onto the scene in His public ministry, word about Him spread like wildfire. He taught with authority, not like the Pharisees. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Luke notes the spreading fame of Jesus as the itinerant miracle-working preacher (4.14, 37; 5.15).

The multitude on that particular day is nothing compared to the multitudes flocking to Jesus ever since. John Lennon was insane when he said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ and that rock and roll might outlive Christianity. More people have identified with Jesus than any human being who has ever lived, and many who are not even nominal Christians know of Him. His unparalleled fame in itself suggests His superiority to all others.

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He never went to college. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself. He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. [Twenty] centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race, and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on earth as has that One Solitary Life.¹

HIS AVAILABILITY (18.37)

The crowds told the blind man Jesus was there. In approaching Jericho, He came near where the blind man was to help him. He was “passing by,” available and accessible to him. Ordinarily great kings are found in guarded palaces, and the common people rarely see them, but not so with Jesus. He was out among the people, where they could hear Him, touch Him, and bring their petitions to Him.

Since then Jesus left this world, ascending to heaven after His resurrection, but His availability is much greater now than it was in Luke’s story. He dwells with His people now in a spiritual way (John 14.18, 21; Matt 18.20; 28.20). Further, Jesus makes Himself available to gospel hearers. He is not beyond your reach because He is not a reward for your good works but a free gift of God’s grace to any who will believe on Him (Rom 10.5-11).

There is a contrast between the Law and the Gospel. While the language of the Law is, “Do and live,” that righteousness which it demands, and which man is unable to perform, is, according to the Gospel, gratuitously communicated through faith. This righteousness is in Christ, and He is not at a distance, so that we must scale the heavens, or descend below the earth,—in one word, attempt what is impracticable, to come to Him, and derive from

¹ Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), American Episcopal Minister.

Him this benefit. He and this righteousness are brought near unto us, as was long before predicted. . . . We must not attempt in any way to merit Christ, or to bring anything like an equivalent in our hand.²

Right now, Jesus is passing by, offering Himself to you. I hope you have enough spiritual insight to see Him this way.

HIS OFFICE (18.38)

By faith the blind beggar seized his opportunity to be saved as soon as Jesus was available to him, and you ought to do the same. The beggar cries for mercy to the “Son of David.” We cannot say for sure whether he realized this was tantamount to identifying Jesus as the OT Messiah, but at the very least the beggar has confidence that Jesus was powerful enough to heal him and restore his sight miraculously.

We must also see Jesus as being in the unique office of Messiah-Savior, a sinner’s only hope. By divine decree, only Jesus Christ has the role and power to give sight to the spiritually blind, to release the devil’s captives, to give new life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. The Father has given His Son power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17.2). Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14.6). Only Jesus has the office of Mediator between God and man. Only He lived a sinless life and died an atoning death and lived again three days later after a glorious resurrection. We must see only Christ as “the Son of David” if we would be saved.

HIS DESIRABILITY (18.39)

Providence put a potential hindrance in the blind beggar’s way to Jesus—the crowd’s rebuke. When they heard him calling out to Jesus, they “rebuked him, that he should hold his peace” (alt., “were sternly telling him to be quiet,” “scolded him”), but he only “cried so much the more.” The grammar indicates a continuing action. The beggar was totally unfazed by this peer pressure. He desperately wanted Jesus’ favorable attention, regardless of whether others approved or not. This is especially impressive because as a blind beggar he was particularly dependent on passers-by and defenseless against them, but none of that mattered to him. The blind man saw Jesus as highly desirable, the ultimate priority, worth risking life and limb.

Have you seen Jesus that way? Fear of man may be one of the most effective tool of Satan to keep people from becoming Christians. Certain Jews believed in Jesus, “but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him,

lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” The threat of excommunication at first would seem a plausible excuse for being closet disciples of Jesus, but John cuts to the quick of their sin: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12.42-43). This keeps happening all the time with many who fancy themselves “private Christians” or “almost Christians.” They would confess Christ openly and be baptized and added to the church, except certain people would criticize them. Their friends might ridicule, their spouse become angry, and their boss fire them since they could not work Sunday’s any more. Let me remind you that the first class of sinners mentioned in Rev 21.8 consigned to the lake of fire is the fearful or cowardly.

The problem with such people is that they have never seen how desirable Jesus really is, not only because of His own inherent excellence but also because of what He can do for them. The blind man’s loud and incessant cry continued, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” He keenly felt his misery and believed Jesus could relieve him. This was a desperate cry for compassion and healing, probably with a great sense of personal unworthiness and a guilty conscience, akin to David’s prayers in the Psalter (6.2; 9.13; 51.1-3). If sinners were more conscious of their danger and misery, they would see Jesus as more desirable, and social disapproval would not discourage them in seeking the Lord.

HIS SUMMONS (18.40)

Even in the crowd, Jesus’ ear is attuned to the poor man’s cry (Psa 34.6). Jesus “stood” (i.e., stopped, no longer moving with the crowd), “and commanded [or, ordered] him to be brought [or, led] unto him.” Jesus was determined to bless this man, and dropped everything to do it.

Once Jesus summoned him, he was brought straightway. Jesus passes by multitudes, and then singles out His chosen ones and causes them to approach Him (Psa 65.4). There is an invitation extended to the many (the outward, general call in gospel preaching), and also a summons that compels the specific people Christ intends to save (the inward, effectual call of the Holy Spirit). “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22.14; cf. Luke 14.16-24, esp. v. 23).

Countless Christians today, not to mention ordinary sinners, are blind to the sovereign grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They hallucinate spiritually and think they see a pathetic, weeping, weak, helpless, and disappointed Savior, pleading, begging, usually to no avail, unwilling or unable to exert power over the stubborn, to quicken the dead, and to grant faith in an unbelieving heart. Oh, this is their blindness! Behold the mighty Healer who summons the miserable to come for deliverance! Have you seen Jesus this way?

² Haldane, in loc.

HIS INQUIRY (18.41)

To put it in the vernacular, Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” Surely this was not a request for information. It was perfectly obvious what this man was about to ask, especially to the Lord who knows all things, including what is in men’s hearts. The man responded, “Lord, that I may receive my sight”—no surprise there.

Why then did Jesus make inquiry this way? Was it not to increase the glory He would receive in granting the impossible petition? This request required a bona fide miracle. By asking publicly like this and then receiving publicly, all would be able to discern that Jesus was the Author of the blessing, worthy of highest praise.

Biblical religion teaches us that God is the Savior, we are the needy sinners, and He rescues us for the sake of His name above all things. We are not doing Christ any favors to pray to Him and serve Him; we are not helping Him out. He is redeeming us from our sins and miseries through the entire experience of a believing heart. Psa 50.15 is the fixed pattern: “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

You must call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved with a trustful dependence upon Him to do it for you because that is how He will get the glory for your deliverance after it happens. You don’t have to pray to soften His heart toward you or to tell Him what He does not already know. True prayer is in itself a humble act of worship, because it acknowledges our helplessness and God’s power to save.

Christ continues making this inquiry, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And I ask you, Do you want faith to believe and be saved? Do you crave strength to overcome temptation? Do you long for assurance of reconciliation with God? Christ can give you all this and more. If you are too proud to ask, you should never expect to receive. Christ welcomes your pleas, and will grant them as far as it tends to God’s glory and your good. Have you seen Him this way?

HIS COMPASSION (18.42)

Using the very same words of the request, Jesus compassionately grants exactly what this poor man asked. “Receive thy sight.” It was Christ’s to give or withhold this blessing at His pleasure, but He is full of love and pity toward the suffering, and when needy sinners humbly petition Him for mercy, He is bound to grant it.

Christ is of such a generous and giving character, that He is more inclined to bestow His favors than we are to receive them. He is not hard or stingy in the slightest. Much of His preaching was designed to overcome our

unbelief on this point (Matt 11.28-30; John 6.37; Rev 22.17).

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare: / Jesus loves to answer prayer; / He Himself has bid thee pray, / Therefore will not say thee nay. // Thou art coming to a King, / Large petitions with thee bring; / For His grace and power are such, / None can ever ask too much.³

The blind beggar trusted in this compassion, and that is why he came asking. Jesus told him, “Thy faith hath saved thee,” not for a moment to suggest any inherent power in faith itself, but that the forwardness to ask the right One came through Christ-honoring faith! Faith is the empty, open, outstretched hand receiving Christ and all He is offering. Do you have that kind of faith? Are your eyes wide open to the compassionate heart of Jesus Christ, and do you see Him in that light? Do you regularly go to Him in prayer for the greatest blessings?

HIS AUTHORITY (18.43)

Christ’s authority appears first of all in the fulfillment of His divine fiat: “And immediately [the blind man] received his sight.” “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen 18.14). We know Jesus Christ is God, because only God can call into existence the things that do not exist (Rom 4.17), as Jesus did.

His authority also appears from the response of the people to this miracle. This newly-seeing man knew immediately that the One who could open his eyes was his rightful Lord and Master, the One who deserved to be believed implicitly and obeyed without question. That is why he “followed” Him (a technical term of discipleship). His eyes were open in more than one sense!

Many professing Christians today say they see Jesus as Savior but they evidently prove blind to His Lordship, because they are unwilling to follow Him unreservedly. Alas! they have been misled by popular false teachers who think they are defending salvation by grace, when they really are only perverting grace. Their damnation is just (Jude 4)! Do you really perceive your Savior’s authority over you, and your profound obligation to believe and obey Him in all things? Do you clearly see Him as King of kings and Lord of lords?

Finally, Luke notes that both the healed man and the crowd glorified God, giving Him praise, when they saw this miracle. That is the divine purpose and the evidence of anyone’s spiritual vision. The greatest sight of all is to see Jesus, and as we behold Him, we are enabled to fulfill the ultimate end for which we were made and redeemed: “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever” (WSC #1). Amen.

³ John Newton, Trinity Hymnal, #531.