

## Matthew 20:29-34 – The Blind Men Who See!

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“I see, I see”, said the blind man. That was a little play on words my brothers and I used to say growing up. We liked puns like that because they make you re-think what you know, or the way you ‘see’ things. Oops I did it again. I’m just a punny person! When we say, ‘I see’, we often mean, ‘I understand.’ Like the three blind mice in Shrek singing, ‘I can see clearly now the rain has gone.’ So, in that sense, a blind man can ‘see’.

In today’s story we see two blind men, who see more clearly than anyone else. But before we get to that, I want to ask, ‘What kind of person do you think sees clearly?’ Someone who is intelligent, who has finished their schooling, maybe gone on to study at university? Do they see the world better than others?

Maybe someone who has studied 4 years at theological college and had many years of ministry experience? Maybe someone who lives a clean life; doesn’t smoke or drink? Can they see morally, what’s right and wrong, better than others? Do you see clearly? And if you do, how? How did you come to see clearly?

As we come to this passage, let’s pray that God, who sees everything clearly, would give us real sight. As we come to this passage, we’ll hopefully see three things. 1. We don’t see by listening to the crowd. 2. We see only by admitting our need, and 3. Jesus has compassion and opens our eyes.

### 1. We don’t see by listening to the crowd

The first thing we notice is that when Jesus left Jericho, a large crowd followed him. What do you think about Jesus when you read that? I’m tempted to think, ‘Yes! Jesus is successful, everyone is following him.’ They’ve realised he is the Messiah, the King, and Saviour of the world! Surely, they see Jesus clearly. They’re the ‘in-crowd.’

And then we see two blind men, sitting by the roadside. They’re sitting on the ground, unclean by Jewish standards, most probably begging. See being blind in the ancient world was horrible. They didn’t have Vision Australia or guide dogs to help them read or get around. They couldn’t work, so they had to beg for money.

And there were also spiritual implications for blind people. In John’s gospel, when Jesus saw a blind man, ‘His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”’ (John 9:2) They thought people who had serious disabilities were being punished for their sin. In fact, under the old covenant, no priest who was blind or lame or had any physical defect was allowed to approach God in the temple (Leviticus 21:16-23). While this was just for the priests, it led to the idea that anyone who had a bodily defect was ritually unclean. Look at how the crowds respond to these two blind men:

**Matthew 20:31** *The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”*

The crowd thought these men were not worthy of approaching Jesus. What does that tell you about how they see Jesus? They expected him to be a conquering King. A military Saviour who came to defeat the Romans and save the faithful Israelites. And who were the faithful? Well, the crowd who were with him.

See there were many crowds in Jerusalem, not just because Jesus was popular, but because it was the time of Passover. They had come from all over Israel, and even other countries to Jerusalem to join in the feast. They were on a religious pilgrimage, and so thought they deserved to be with Jesus. Jesus had finally come to save them. The good people. The people who had nothing to be ashamed of.

Friends, don't we often think of Jesus like that? We can approach him if we have nothing to be ashamed of. If we have it all together. But if we have been sinful, or unproductive, or if we struggle with depression, then we don't deserve to come near to God. How do we feel when we're in the crowd of God's people?

When we catch up with other believers, and people ask, 'How are you going this week?' Do you hide how you're really going? Do you feel pressure to be silent about your real needs? Do you tell people you've been great and handling everything well? I know I'm tempted to say all the things I've been doing for God.' I don't tell them about how I've been ungodly and angry at the kids, and selfish.

But thankfully these blind men don't listen to the crowd. They don't see Jesus as the conquering Messiah who comes only for the faithful. They call out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' In 2 Samuel 7, God promised King David that one of his descendants would always be on the throne. One of his sons would sit on God's throne forever. This sounds like a successful military leader.

But as God's people kept disobeying him the kingdom of Israel went downhill, and eventually were defeated by their enemies. During the time of the exile, Israel was greatly humbled. But God promised that he would come to save them. He would send a suffering servant to heal them:

*Isaiah 35:5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.*

This Messiah would not be a conquering king, but a servant who healed people, forgave them and treated them better than their sins deserve. The blind men saw Jesus as this kind of Messiah, and so cried out to him for mercy. They believed Jesus would help them. In doing this, they saw Jesus better than anyone else!

Friends, do you see Jesus clearly? Then don't let anyone stop you from coming to Jesus. Cry out to him for mercy. And don't stop anyone else coming to Jesus either. For no one is worthy of Jesus. We are all equally unworthy and in need of his mercy.

## **2. We see only by admitting our need**

See, the blind men could have given in to the social pressure and kept silent. But they knew they were desperately in need. Their physical poverty opened their eyes to their spiritual poverty. And this drove them to Jesus as the only one who could help them. So they shouted all the louder, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!'

They do not come to Jesus with their riches, or upright moral life. They come only with empty hands, begging for his mercy. Mercy means not being given the punishment we deserve. They are asking to be

healed, though they don't deserve it. They know they are sinners who don't deserve anything from God. So they rely only on Jesus' undeserved kindness. And unlike the crowd, Jesus cares for these blind men:

**Matthew 20:32-33** *Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.*  
<sup>33</sup> *"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."*

The NIV masks the boldness of their request here. They literally say, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened.' They saw their spiritual need better than so many others. In Ch. 19 we saw the rich young ruler who thought he was able to get into God's kingdom by doing good things. He was blind to his spiritual poverty.

Then last week we saw James and John, who thought they were great enough to sit on Jesus' left and right hands in his kingdom. They thought they were greater than the other disciples. They didn't see their spiritual powerlessness - that they couldn't do a single thing without Jesus. Here the crowds, like the disciples, wanted to bask in Jesus' glory but not practice his compassion.

But these men, by admitting their great need, saw Jesus clearly. They saw him as the servant King, who came to heal them and save them from their sins. They see that 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Which is what Jesus has just taught his disciples.

They saw what is true for everyone – that we are all spiritually blind and helpless. We are guilty before God and deserving of his righteous anger. And Jesus has given his life to pay our ransom, so we can be free of guilt and shame. On the cross, people mocked Jesus saying, 'He saved others, but he can't he save himself!' (Matthew 27:42). But they didn't realise that it was only by giving himself up that he could save the world.

If we are to see Jesus clearly, we need to admit our own poverty and need for Jesus to rescue us from our sins. As the great reformer, John Calvin wrote, 'Faith is like an empty, open hand stretched out toward God, with nothing to offer and everything to receive.' We have nothing to offer Jesus, but everything to gain from him. As we see our spiritual poverty, we will cry out for, and trust in, Jesus' mercy.

Friends, if you are listening today and realise that you need forgiveness from God, that you need spiritual healing, call out to Jesus. Admit your need for him, and trust him as your Lord and Saviour. For he came to serve you and give his life for you.

### **3. Jesus has compassion and opens our eyes**

Here we see the wonderful kindness of Jesus.

**Matthew 20:34** *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

The crowds didn't think they should even come near Jesus. They were unclean, unworthy. If you touched an unclean person you would become unclean too. But Jesus not only lets them approach him, but full of compassion, he touches their eyes and they immediately receive their sight.

Brothers and sisters, see the tender compassion of your Lord and Saviour. In the crowd of people, where blind men are forgotten, he sees you. He sees your need. Your brokenness, your helplessness. And he has

compassion and opens your eyes. There is no brokenness that is too great for him to heal. There is no shame that is too great for him to wipe away. Jesus is not ashamed of these blind men. He comes near to them and touches them and opens their eyes. Neither is he ashamed of you.

There is no need that is too great for him to fill. There is nothing you have ever done, and nothing you will ever do, that can stop you coming to Jesus. Jesus promises, 'All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:37). Jesus loves you and will never cast you aside. Cry out to him. Don't be ashamed. Who cares what anyone else thinks?! Cry out to Jesus for mercy. And he will have compassion on you, and save you.

## **Follow him!**

In the end, these two blind men don't just receive physical healing. Immediately they were healed and followed Jesus. And that's the amazing thing about being saved by Jesus. You come just as you are, but he doesn't leave you to live your old life. He brings whole of life transformation. He wants you to follow him.

So follow him. Ask him to change your life, to give you hope and purpose. Learn from him and tell others about his power to transform. Tell them what Jesus has done in your life. And invite them to pray to him and get to know him too.

See, Jesus doesn't just want to make Christians who know the truth intellectually. He wants to make disciples who follow him. And he tells his disciples at the end of this gospel, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them to obey *all* that I have commanded you.' That includes the command to make disciples. Disciples are those who make more disciples. And he promises to be with us always as we do that.

So follow him, and teach others to do the same. What kind of people will you tell about Jesus? Those who are worthy? Those who live good, upright lives? If you are anything like your Lord, you will tell the poor, blind and lame, the addicts and rejects of society that there is a Saviour who loves them and longs to have compassion on them. For Jesus is the only hope for humanity. Do you believe that?

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, Jesus writes to the church in Laodicea, and says to them,

**Revelation 21:17-18** *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.'*

They thought they were rich so didn't need anything. But it's only by seeing that they are poor and blind that they will come to Jesus for spiritual healing. It's only by seeing our world as spiritually poor and blind that we will tell them about Jesus. If we believe that COVID is a deadly virus, and the best protection is to get vaccinated, we will try to convince others to get the vaccine. If we believe we are completely blind and helpless, then we will tell others about the only one who can open our eyes. So follow Jesus and tell others what he has done for you. Let's pray.