



The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet but they shouted all the louder, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us! Jesus stopped and called them.

What do you want me to do for you? he asked. Lord, they answered, we want our sight. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

[6:29] This incident is also recorded by Mark and Luke in Mark 10 and Luke 18.

Here Matthew uses it to bracket this section of his gospel. In chapter 19 verse 13 we meet the little children, people thought weak and unimportant. Then we meet a man who is important in the world's eyes, a rich young man, followed by the question, who then can be saved?

We have the workers in the vineyard who think that spiritual reward is payment for effort but instead Jesus tells his disciples about his death. Then we meet the mother of James and John but she hasn't got the point either.

The only people in that group who have come near to understanding are the little children. So Matthew closes the loop. Here are some more people who are blind, weak and helpless.

As with the children, the crowd tries to turn them away but they are the ones who really see. The whole incident is about seeing. Just put out the seeing words as Jesus paints his picture.

[7:38] The first impression, a crowd scene. At the centre is a travelling teacher with his followers. Who is he? Then look, verse 30. There is a Greek word, *eduro*, behold, missing from the NIV.

Our attention is drawn to a detail. There is a disturbance. What is happening? It seems to be some blind men shouting. But it is what they are shouting that really matters.

Son of David, can this be the expected king, the anointed one, the Christ? Although blind, these men seem to have seen something the crowd has missed.

They know who this teacher is. So Matthew's picture homes in on the action and the pace slows as Jesus stops. Verse 32.

What do you want? Says Jesus. Isn't it obvious? They are blind. But Jesus makes them spell it out. We want to see. Jesus has compassion on them and they are healed.

[8:41] But there is a subtlety here that we miss in our English translations. The Greek word for eyes used in verses 33 and 34 is *ophthalmos*. Here the literal meaning is obviously physical eyes, but the word was commonly used metaphorically.

To quote Strong, it refers to the eyes of the mind, the faculty of knowing. When translating Jesus' original words into Greek for his gospel, Matthew surely does this deliberately to make his point. Not only are their physical eyes opened, but also the eyes of their minds. The way Matthew tells it, the miracle itself is almost an anticlimax. It merely brings their physical sight into line with their spiritual sight.

It's an acting out of the real miracle, which was what the blind men had already perceived. Who is it that really sees clearly? It is the men born blind. And who is it that gives true sight?

It is Jesus. Blind people rely on listening. These men must have listened carefully to the words of Jesus, however they had heard them. And unlike the crowd, they understood.

[9:50] So first let us look at what it is they have seen. And then we will consider what they and we need to do about it. What is it then that these men have seen?

They see the Lord, the son of David. This is a messianic term, but a rather special one. David had been anointed as king. His task was to lead his people to freedom from oppression.

The Jews were, of course, looking for another leader, an anointed king, Messiah in Hebrew, Christ in Greek, who would lead his people to freedom from the Romans. But surely this can't be him.

Where is the army? Where are David's mighty men, as the authorised version calls them? We read about them, for instance, in 2 Samuel 16. On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men.

The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance to their city gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Markah were by themselves in the open country.

[10:56] Joab saw that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him, so he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans. He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai, his brother, and deployed them against the Ammonites.

This is a proper army, organised and trained for battle. Joab certainly saw something. He saw the enemy, and he understood how to win David's war. But this Jesus, this Jesus has no army, no crack troops.

Jesus' followers were just a ragtag bunch, fishermen, a tax collector who would have been a Roman collaborator. Jesus had attracted a crowd, but they did not seem to have much idea of what was going on.

If anything, they were rather confused. This could not possibly be the son of David. Where were the rousing words calling the people to war in defence of the kingdom? We British know what a good war speech sounds like.

We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight on the hills. We shall never surrender.

[12:08] Eighty years after Churchill spoke these words, and with the Battle of Britain long ago won, they still send a tingle down our spines, don't they? But Jesus made no such call to war.

Instead, Jesus said really confusing stuff like, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Or, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. What kind of battle speech is that? Yet as these blind men had understood, Jesus was calling the kingdom to war.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Matthew 4, verse 17 is the rallying cry. And indeed, in chapter 10, Matthew tells of the apostles sent out as recruiting sergeants for the kingdom.

They had the same message. Sign up or perish. Time to choose your side. This war would have the nature of a civil war, which is always the worst kind. We read, brother will betray brother to death and a father his child.

[13:17] Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. And yet, when the apostles went out, they took no weapons. They didn't really take anything.

Jesus told them not to. Jesus told them, I am sending you out like a sheep among wolves.

Therefore, be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. A weird kind of war, certainly.

Sheep do not generally make good warriors. But for this war, blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. The apostle Paul would later comment, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world, or more literally, the weapons of the flesh.

On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. That's 2 Corinthians 10, verse 4. And so the battle is joined and the enemy is engaged.

And these two blind men were up for it. Now, if only they could see where they were going. But Jesus provides for that problem as well. So what do we make of this?

[14:25] What did the blind men do? And what should we do? Carpe Deum. Seize the day. As soon as they realized who was going past, they grabbed the opportunity.

Because this was their moment. Likely the only one they would get. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and probably would not pass that way again. It was now or never.

The time had come for a life-challenging encounter with Jesus. They were not going to let a little thing like a hostile crowd get in the way. They made sure they were heard.

So what about you? Have you had a life-changing encounter with Jesus? If not, but you have recognized who Jesus is and want such an encounter, if you have heard the call to war, then seize the day.

Jesus may not come this way again. Don't be put off. Now may be your moment. But having received their sight, what did the men do next?

[15:33] They followed Jesus. The Greek word means to become an attendant or a disciple. And the tense is aorist, referring to an event that happened in the past, but has a continuing significance.

They didn't just follow for a moment, but they continued to follow. They joined the war band. They became a party member. Mark, in his gospel, was writing years later that he was able to give us the name of one of them, Bartimaeus.

The crowd was mostly just drifting along until they lost interest. Many of them would soon turn against Jesus. But these two men had had a life-changing encounter with Jesus, and it changed their life.

They were in for the long haul. It would not all be the elation of receiving their sight. Jesus was going to Jerusalem. He was going to the cross. There would be times when it seemed the darkness was coming back.

But these men who had been given their sight and would follow Jesus wherever he was going, wherever the action was, Jesus makes the same call to us today. If your eyes have been opened, then follow.

[16:48] To one who was unsure, Jesus would say, No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.

Total war requires total commitment. Onward through the mud and smoke to victory. In the famous words of Reginald Haber, The Son of God goes forth to war, a kingly crown to gain.

His blood-red banner streams afar, who follows in his train. Let us sing again.

We'll sing Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto the Ancient of Days. That's number 170 in our Praise Hymn Book. desde desde desde desde desde desde!

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[18:25] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.