

Blindness

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[0 : 00] Spiritual blindness. There's none so blind as those who will not see.! There's none so blind as those who will not see.

! It's one thing to be ignorant. It's another to be willfully ignorant. To choose not to see and accept the truth.

This morning in our studies in the life of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, we're going to encounter a man who for all that he is physically blind can see.

And then by contrast, those who for all that they can see are blind. The question for us is this. For all that we may all be able to physically see with our eyes, are we so blind in our hearts that we cannot see and cannot accept the truth about Jesus?

Now, the Jericho Jesus is drawing near isn't the Jericho of the Old Testament, you know, the Jericho around which the Israelites marched seven times and the walls fell down. It was a small town about ten miles from Jerusalem, the same distance perhaps as East Kilbride is from us.

[1 : 19] So Jesus is very close to the city in which he will be betrayed to the Gentiles, tortured and then crucified. Jerusalem will be the place where the blindness of the religious Jews will reach its darkest, for there they will murder their Lord.

As Jesus passes near, he is met by a blind man who cries out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me. For all this man's blindness, he can see more clearly than any of the rulers of Israel, for he knows who Jesus is.

And he cries out to Jesus for mercy, whereas they are willfully ignorant and do not see their need of any kind of mercy from God.

Our passage this morning works at two levels. The blind can see, where we'll consider the story as it's recorded for us in these verses.

And second, the seeing are blind, where we'll consider the story as it's placed in the wider context of this gospel. And the question comes back to this for all of us.

[2 : 39] For all that we may be able to physically see, are we so spiritually blind that we cannot and do not want to see and accept the truth about Jesus?

First of all then, the blind can see. The blind can see. It was very common in the Israel of Jesus' day to see beggars by the roadside. It was far more common to see beggars than it was to see rich young rulers like we encountered a couple of weeks ago.

The vast majority of people were very poor and they lived a hand-to-mouth existence. This blind man had nothing and he depended entirely upon the charity of others.

But for all that he was blind, from listening into the conversations of passers-by, he probably knew more than anyone else about what was happening in the world of his day.

They say, after all, that those who lose one of their senses make up for that loss by training their other senses. So, for all that this blind man couldn't see with his eyes, he knew an awful lot.

[3 : 57] So, when this crowd following Jesus passes by, he asks them what's going on, to which they reply, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Because this man had trained his ears to compensate for the loss of his eyes, he had heard many stories about Jesus, what Jesus had said, what Jesus had done, and he'd thought about these things.

So, for example, earlier in this gospel, we read of Jesus, on many who were blind, he bestowed sight. Luke 7, 21.

On many who were blind, he bestowed sight. So, this blind man, sitting by the roadside outside Jericho, would have heard all these things and said to himself, if Jesus has already given blind people their sight, he can give me my sight also.

their sight. Now, this blind man was used to crying out and making a nuisance of himself.

Every day, he'd call out to passers-by, alms for the poor, alms for the poor, and sometimes he'd get a coin or two, but it was a hard life. Because the best people could do for him was to give him a penny.

[5 : 18] He'd sometimes get enough, to buy himself food for the day. Because that's all other people could do for him. That and nothing more.

On Friday evening, myself and Catherine and Jonathan and Ailey went for a walk into the city center. Of course, you see beggars by the side of the road and they're calling out, any spare change, any spare change.

And you think, that's about all I can do for you, is give you my spare change. It's all a human being can do for a beggar. Give them your change.

But this blind man realized that Jesus and Jesus alone could meet his deepest need. Not for spare change, but for sight.

So the blind man cries out, Son of David, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. This blind man, he knew enough about Jesus to call him, Son of David, which in the Israel of the day, was a title for the Messiah.

[6 : 21] In other words, this blind man knew that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the one God had sent to redeem Israel from its captivity. But the crowds hushed him up. He was a nuisance.

They told him to be silent. Why would Jesus be bothered by someone so worthless as a blind man? What can a blind man do for Jesus?

And perturbed by the crowds, the blind man keeps crying out, Son of David, have mercy on me.

The blind man didn't have the same inhibitions as others.

He wasn't too proud to cry out to Jesus, have mercy upon me. Well, Jesus stops in his tracks and commands the blind man to be brought to him, at which point he asks him, what do you want me to do for you?

The blind man responds, let me recover my sight. Now, that's not the kind of request the blind man could have made of anyone else in this world. Of every other person, he'd have asked for alms, for coins, for spare change, because that's all they were capable of giving him.

[7 : 34] But of Jesus, he asks, Lord, let me recover my sight. He knows that only Jesus can do that which others cannot. But look, immediately, Jesus says, recover your sight, your faith has made you well.

And of anyone else, we would have said that this is the speech of a madman, but not of Jesus.

Because immediately, the man recovers his sight. He could see, not just with his heart, but with his eyes.

The man who, for the last few years, had been day after day begging, now followed Jesus and glorified God.

And after the people saw what had happened, they too began to praise God, because this man had been miraculously healed. Now we see in this story the classic elements we have observed for the last number of weeks from Luke chapter 18.

The tax collector praying in the temple. Infants brought to Jesus. And by contrast, the rich young ruler. And what we'll see next week, Zacchaeus, the tax collector.

[8 : 52] A person comes to Jesus in great need, with nothing to offer Jesus except his poverty and his emptiness. They recognize that if they're to be accepted by God, it's not because they'll have earned it.

It will be entirely down to the unmerited, undeserved mercy of God. It will not be because of what they have done for God, but what God has done for them.

In the same way today, every one of us needs here to know that we're creatures of need. We are creatures of need. The rich young ruler didn't think he needed anything.

He had everything this world could give him, and he was a religious man. Foolish man. What he didn't realize was that he was entirely as needy as everyone else.

He may have had no earthly needs, but spiritually, he was blinder than that beggar. He didn't realize that he was a sinner and that God stood against him.

[9 : 59] He didn't realize that he had a sinful heart, and so he left Jesus sad. Do we realize that though we may not have the same disadvantages as this blind beggar, our biggest need is the same as his to be right with God?

We all stand as sinners before the infinite purity and holiness of God. are we too blind to see our need for God and for that which only he can do for us?

Have we been blinded in the West by our health and our wealth, our prosperity,! For all our advances, have we regressed into the blindness of spiritual darkness?

Our greatest need as human beings is to get right with God, for there's no forgiveness, there's no possibility of change, there is no hope, meaning, or purpose, and no eternal life without it.

But foolish people that we are, our greatest need has become our deepest darkness. The praying tax collector saw his need of forgiveness and he received it.

[11 : 27] The infants being brought to Jesus had nothing to offer him. Do we see our need today? The only way to be right with God is to cry out to him for mercy.

It is not to try and earn or win God's favor, but to receive it. Recognizing your need. Have you ever cried out to God for mercy?

For that is the only way that you shall ever receive it. Perhaps that's why it's so difficult for religious people to get right with God. They want to work their way up to God.

They want to work their way to salvation rather than receiving it as a gift of mercy from God. Notice also the nerve of this blind man.

The nerve. He didn't let his cries for help be silenced by those who tried to hush him up. They tried to hush him, but he refused to let others overwhelm his sense of personal need for the mercy of God.

[12 : 35] How loud today are the voices of other people in your life in your head? How persuasive are they? are they keeping you from seeking the mercy of God in Christ?

They tell us ignore God. This need you have in yourself it's just a passing thing. Just get on with this life. Go to the swim.

Go to the sauna. Go to a shopping spree. You're a good person. You don't need forgiveness. Do you have people like this in your life? People who though they love you try to silence your cries for mercy to God.

In the face of those who are trying to hush us up we must hold our nerve and keep crying out. The tax collector in the temple despite the hatred of others went to the temple to pray for mercy.

The infants despite the rebuke of the disciples kept on being brought to Jesus and you too must hold your nerve and keep on crying out to Christ for mercy.

[13 : 48] Many Protestant churches especially in the Anglican tradition have the Kiri Eleison as part of their liturgy. Kiri Eleison just means Lord have mercy.

Where were sung or spoken they say Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. To cry out to God for mercy is the prerequisite to receiving that for which we ask.

Lord have mercy is the kind of prayer which if I may use the words with reverence stops Jesus in his tracks and brings us to him. It was the prayer of the tax collector Lord have mercy on me a sinner which led to him being justified before God and Jesus son of David have mercy upon me which drew the Lord's attention to this blind man.

He sees us in our blindness he sees us in our need and he says to us recover your sight your faith has made you well. Faith not works will heal us save us make us right with God and not just any faith but faith in Jesus.

everyone says they have faith in something or someone but it's faith in Jesus alone which is necessary. It is not what we give to Jesus that saves us but what Jesus gives to us and with his words of healing he can change our lives forever and in an instant.

[15 : 29] You know one of the first signs that someone has come to know Jesus and is now a Christian is that in their own words they say a light has come on in my head.

That's the way it was for me and the way it was I'm sure for many of you. A light's come on in my head. Whereas I once didn't understand now I see in Jesus my Lord and Saviour who is willing and able to take away my sin and to give me eternal life.

I didn't understand that before but now I do a light has come on. As John Newton wrote in Amazing Grace I once was blind but now I see.

You'll see that once he had been healed this man who was blind was forever changed. Once his life was dominated by sitting in one place now we read he is following Jesus.

Once his voice had been used only to cry out for charity but now he is lifting up his voice to the praise and the glory of God his whole life is pointed in a new direction.

[16 : 43] Following Jesus didn't make him rich and it won't make you rich but he's got a new purpose and a new meaning and a new contentment in life.

He now lived for something far greater than himself the praise and the glory and the honor of Jesus his Messiah. His cries for mercy had been answered.

And as a result of this man's miraculous healing we read that all the people when they witnessed all the people when they saw it rather in verse 43 gave praise to God before that fateful day this blind man had been a beggar a pest leeching off the people of Jericho but now he became the reason people praised God.

This man's life had been going nowhere fast but now because of what Jesus had done his life and the lives of all those who witnessed that miracle were filled with praise.

Isn't that something every Christian longs for? that as a result of what Jesus has done for you others would praise God.

[18 : 03] I've now been your minister for a long time 22 years and as your minister over so long I have had so many occasions to praise God for the ways in which I've seen him at work in your lives.

Mine's is a deeply privileged position. What about those we know who are not yet Christians? We long for them to see the change Jesus has made in our lives and as a result to themselves turn to Christ.

Many years later perhaps some in the crowd that day would tell their grandchildren how the story of how Jesus had miraculously healed and given a blind man his sight and how on that day they decided not just to be another face in the crowd but to follow Jesus for themselves and become his disciple.

Jesus was passing by that day and a blind beggar cried out Jesus son of David have mercy on me. Are there any others here today who as Jesus is passing by his word are calling out Jesus son of David have mercy on me.

If there are you can be sure of this you will receive it you will receive it just as surely as the blind beggar did that day in Jericho.

[19 : 38] The blind can see. Secondly and briefly the seeing are blind seeing are blind. much of the gospel of Luke and increasingly so as we enter into its later stages is dominated by the hatred of the religious leaders of Israel for Jesus.

There are none so blind as those who will not see. The Pharisees and scribes had heard the same words from Jesus' mouth as everyone else had.

They had seen the same miraculous works of Jesus as everyone else had. But rather than believe in Jesus rather than join with the crowds in praising and glorifying God because of Jesus they willfully chose to reject him.

They refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah. Now for them their rejection was not based upon insufficient evidence or knowledge as if to say it was a pure intellectual rejection of the mind.

Their rejection was entirely willful. In other words, although Jesus had provided them with more than enough evidence of his being the Messiah, for their own selfish reasons, they refused to see the truth for what it was.

[20 : 59] Jesus didn't fit into the ideas of what a Messiah should be and should do. Jesus wasn't a warrior figure preparing the armies of Israel for revolt against the Romans.

He wasn't a religious legalist whose primary interest was in dotting the I's and crossing the T's of Jewish rabbinic religion.

Rather, Jesus pressed home the priority of a man's heart in religion. The hypocrisy of those whose religion was merely a matter of external conformity to man-made rules, behavior modification.

Jesus talked about love, mercy, and grace. He talked about loving one's enemies, not killing them. Above all, the religious leaders of Israel didn't want to admit that for all these centuries they'd been wrong.

They didn't want to lose their positions of authority and power and government over the people, so they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah because they did not want to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

[22 : 05] it was not an objection of the intellect, it was an objection of the will. Speak to the hand, the face ain't listening. After the resurrection of Jesus, even though the religious leaders of Israel

knew from first-hand accounts that Jesus had risen from the dead, they made up a story that Jesus' body had been stolen by his disciples because they could not allow themselves to believe in Jesus.

Very soon after this miraculous healing of the blind man on the road to Jericho, a healing of the religious leaders of Israel, no doubt had heard about and some would have been present that day, they arrested Jesus.

They delivered him over to the Romans who crucified him. They knew what they were doing. They were not acting in ignorance. They were blind to the glory of Christ because they did not want to see.

Although they were able to see perfectly with their physical eyes, they were as blind as bats with their spiritual eyes. They were blinded than this blind man was, and all because for their own selfish reasons they refused to allow themselves to see the truth about who Jesus was.

Tell me, who's the blinder? who's the blinder? The man who can't see but wants to, or the man who can see but doesn't want to? Who's the blinder?

[23 : 42] The man who can't see but wants to, or the man who can see but doesn't want to? When I listen to others preaching, I sometimes wonder how anyone can hear what that preacher is saying without being savingly converted on the spot.

Because that preacher will be so clearly spelling out the gospel, pointing unerringly to our need of Christ, and pressing home the urgency of faith. I used to think this all the time of Professor MacLeod.

He'll remove any reasonable objection to the gospel, and the Holy Spirit is powerfully speaking through him. And yet many who hear him will leave unchanged and unrepentant.

How can this be? Unless they are willingly blind to the message of the gospel. They're hearing the same message everyone else does.

I used to sit and listen to the Reverend David Patterson and wonder to myself, what is this man saying before I was a Christian? But afterwards, it was like David Patterson would suddenly become a really good preacher.

[25 : 02] I used to hear from his voice of the love of God which gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. I used to hear from his mouth of the sufferings of Jesus, the Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us on the cross, the Jesus who paid the penalty my sins deserved, and died to give me eternal life through faith in him.

I heard the same message before I was a Christian and then after I was a Christian. But before I was a Christian, I didn't believe. Why was that? Because I chose not to believe.

There are none so blind as those who will not see. Yet there are some who do hear and believe.

They might not be the religiously respectable, but like that blind beggar, they hear the good news of the gospel and they cry out to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.

They're not too proud to admit their need. Man, I would never sit in a doorway in Buchanan Street dressed in rags with a wee cup in front of me calling out any spare change.

I'm too proud. Are you too proud to admit your need of the mercy of God? It is they, the once blind, who receive healing and salvation from Christ.

[26 : 35] It is they who against all odds become his most faithful servants and spend their lives praising and glorifying him. It is they, not the religiously respectable, who are made right with God.

through the preaching of his word and by his Holy Spirit, Jesus is passing by here today. The blind man took the opportunity to cry out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

If he kept quiet that day, would he ever have again had the chance to meet Jesus? There's an urgency attached today to our response to the story of Jesus and the blind beggar.

He is passing by now, now. Will you take the opportunity now? God has given you to cry out to him for mercy.

For in so doing, you'll stop him in his tracks and he'll say to you, recover your sight, your faith has made you well. The question for us is this, for all that we may be able to physically see, are we so willfully blind that we cannot see and accept the truth about Jesus?

[27 : 58] Amen.