

Kingdom sight

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[0 : 00] As Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And he cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And those who were in front rebuked him. Telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, What do you want me to do for you?

He said, Lord, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, Recover your sight. Your faith has made you well.

[1 : 02] And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Rejection of the message of Jesus is deeply unsettling. Personally, whilst I was preparing this, I could think of several. Matt and Andy, my two closest friends growing up.

Lawrence, my closest friend at university. Laura and others. All of whom at one time professed Christ and now no longer do.

I think of the many I've tried to tell about Jesus. Too many to remember. Only to have been met with point blank rejection. And I think of the many who won't even let me get that far.

But ask that I never speak to them about Jesus. And I wonder if, like me, when that happens, you turn the blame inwards.

[2 : 10] Am I not engaging enough? Am I not well researched enough? Is my gospel proclamation not clear enough? Have I not memorized two ways to live effectively and winsomely enough?

Is my testimony just not that sensational? Ultimately, is the reason people reject Jesus because of me? Or maybe, perhaps more worryingly, when that rejection happens, we might even think, is there a reason that I'm missing?

Maybe there's a big flaw in the gospel. Maybe there's something I don't know. Maybe I'm just particularly gullible and naïve.

Rejection is unsettling. Deeply so. And it's worth pausing, therefore, to ask, should it be? Should rejection of the gospel be unsettling?

Because really that's a question of, is rejection of the gospel outside of Jesus' control or within it? Is rejection of the gospel outside of Jesus' control or within it?

[3 : 28] We're in a section all about the kingdom of God, and we've been told it is both here and not here. Andy, if you remember, had that helpful exam question, is the kingdom of God here?

Yes, no, other. And it's essentially other. In case you're wondering, it's answer C. There you go, there's the answer. It's going to come in a great blaze of light that's going to tear across the sky that no one will miss at the end of time.

But it's also here as tax collectors and sinners confess the name of Jesus and enter in. It is not here and here.

But we closed last week with a disturbing story. And it was disturbing. A man who kept the law, at least half of it, and had been materially immensely blessed by God.

And he failed to enter. More than that, Jesus had gone on to say, it is impossible for a rich man to enter, as possible as a camel entering through the eye of a needle.

[4 : 34] And so if the rich man, the law-keeping man, the man that everyone would be excited to have on their team, if he can't get into the kingdom, who can?

Is Jesus' kingdom going to be a kingdom of one? Jesus. And everybody else on the outside. How do people enter into this kingdom?

And why does it seem that so many people can't? Well, our first point is on your handout.

The problem is far greater than we thought. We are all blind. The problem is far greater than we thought. We are all blind. We're going to take a step back to verses 31 to 34.

These operate as a sort of hinge in our section. They summarize, helpfully, why the rich man couldn't enter. And they lead well onto today's passage, 31 to 34.

[5 : 33] Have a look down with me. Chapter 18. And taking the twelve, this is Jesus speaking, he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him. And on the third day he will rise.

Here we see Christ explained for the third time his death and resurrection.

And he's explaining it just to the twelve disciples. And it's worth just pausing to remember who they are. They had been with Jesus for three years by this point. Literally in the seminary of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If anyone should understand what Jesus is trying to tell them, it's the disciples you would think. You couldn't get a better teacher. You might think, oh, it's great listening to the teaching of Grace Church Dulwich.

[6 : 35] Well, imagine if Jesus was here preaching. You know, theologically, in a sense, he is. But as in, you get what I'm saying. Imagine that he was up here preaching. You would think, surely they would be able to get it. Three years sitting under Jesus.

And Jesus is also clear in our verses that his teaching is not in a vacuum. Have a look down with me at 31 again. See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

In other words, what Jesus is trying to make clear is he means that what is about to happen, his death and resurrection, it's plain in the Old Testament. He might have had Psalm 22 in mind, or Micah 5, or 2 Samuel 7, or Isaiah 35, 53, all of it.

In other words, what he's saying is that you should have been able to grasp from the Old Testament alone that this is what Jesus is going to go and do. His teaching is not happening in a vacuum.

So if anyone should understand the teaching of Jesus, if anyone should be qualified to enter the kingdom based on their understanding, it would be the disciples.

[7 : 44] They'd had him for three years. They knew the Old Testament. It's not happening in a vacuum. Jesus had repeated it three times. And yet, verse 34, but they understood none of these things.

This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. Verse 34, it's an emphatic sandwich. Three times the point is made that they cannot understand, and the reason for not understanding is given in the middle.

Do we notice this? Verse 34, have a look down with me. They understood none of these things.

This saying, teaching, was hidden from them. They did not grasp what was said.

Point one and point three, they did not understand. Point two, the reason, it was hidden from them.

And so finally, we see perhaps why some of us might be thinking, gosh, the disciples are dense.

If I had been there, I would have understood. If I'd sat under Jesus for three years, I would have grasped it. But finally, we see why they are not understanding. No matter what is said to them, or how it is said, or even who says it, they cannot understand because it is hidden from them.

[9 : 07] We in Britain have a reputation for being terrible at learning languages, and there are so many variations on the same skit that I'm sure we've all seen, where a British person goes abroad, tries to make themselves understood to someone who doesn't speak English, and they get more and more frustrated.

They raise their voice louder and louder. We know this, don't we? Louder and louder. Where is the pub? And slower and slower, thinking that if I just say it louder and slower, they're definitely going to be able to understand.

But that obviously, and this is why I suppose it's funny, it obviously won't change the fact that whoever is listening cannot understand. If they don't know the word for the pub, it doesn't matter how many times we say it.

And the same is true of the disciples. It doesn't matter how many times Jesus explains, or how many times they read the Old Testament, or all of the time they've spent in the last three years sitting at the feet of Jesus, the truth has been hidden from them.

This will, I think, help us empathise with the disciples somewhat. I wonder when you're doing kind of gospel read-throughs, you often are left, you know, and certainly when I've done Sunday Club and Jam, the question of how are they so stupid gets fairly asked.

[10:30] And we can empathise, can't we, at the shocking ignorance. It's because there is something far bigger, far more significant, than simple intellectual understanding going on.

They are spiritually blind. They cannot see. And the key thing to understand, that Luke is going to make absolutely clear for us in this passage, is that the reason for them not understanding, is not dependent on them.

We'll say that again. Luke wants to make absolutely clear, that the reason for them not understanding, is not dependent on them.

But because someone outside of them, has hidden it from them. Aaron James was a US veteran, who has just recently received, apparently, the first of a full eye transplant.

He was wounded in battle. And there was great hope, that if this transplant would work, he'd be able to recover his sight. But sadly, he has not been able to.

[11:42] He cannot see. And it looks like that he won't ever see. And it doesn't matter how much he may try. Sadly, he cannot. And just like Aaron James, the disciples, try as they might, ask Jesus as much as they can, they can't understand.

It also explains why the rich ruler, couldn't get into the kingdom. Do you remember back from last week? Have a look down with me at verse 18. Again, this explains why the rich ruler, couldn't get in. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Do we see that it's the wrong question? It's the wrong question. It isn't about what the rich ruler does. The problem is far bigger than that.

It's that he needs double eye surgery that would actually be a miracle, that would actually work. He's blind. And unless God reveals it to him, he will stay blind.

So in our section, all about the kingdom, Luke wants us to understand really clearly that entry is impossible. We're blind, and we cannot see.

[12:57] Even the disciples, even the disciples with Jesus as their teacher, cannot see. Now, if we pause for a second, it's obvious that for us in this room, this is going to have two reactions.

The first is that it will be deeply reassuring and simultaneously, probably, deeply painful. Luke is showing us that the reason for rejection is not with the rejecter.

It is not because, therefore, our friends or family haven't heard the gospel clearly enough, or that we as Christians haven't researched the historicity of the New Testament enough.

It's not down to our lack of intellect or evangelistic zeal or conciseness in expression. No, it is simply down to the fact that the truth is hidden.

And anecdotally, I've had many conversations with growth group leaders and with others where the constant refrain has been that people have felt crippled, thinking, I can't evangelize because I don't know X or I'm not like Y or whatever the reason may be.

[14:12] Well, Luke wants to show us that people coming to faith has got nothing to do with our competencies and capacities. It's not down to us.

It's down to something else. So in one sense, I hope that would be very liberating. We're free to share without worrying that somehow we might not quite say the right thing or present it quite in the right way.

No, we're free to share. But of course, it is also painful because it means that people will continue to be blind unless God does something about it.

And of course, that throws up the enormous question of why. Why might God blind some and unblind others? Point one, the problem is far greater than we thought.

We're blind. Point two, therefore, this is on your handout as well, cry to Jesus for mercy. Only he unblinds.

[15:26] We come to our next scene and Luke has deliberately put this here as a metaphor for what we've just seen with the disciples and we really need to know this. We really need to know this.

If the rich man and the disciples look like currently they do not enter the kingdom and yet tax collectors and sinners and children can, the obvious question is how? How is it that the case that the disciples do not understand and yet that tax collector two weeks ago that Edar helped us think about? He does. How? What's the difference? Well, the answer is simple but profound. Jesus has shown them mercy and unblinded them. Jesus has shown them mercy and unblinded them.

If we come to our story, our blind man is an outsider. Let's have a look down and we'll read the story together. Verse 35. As Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging and hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

[16:30] They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is coming by and he cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Our blind man is an outsider.

That much is obvious from where he's sitting and the fact that he's begging. He hears the crowd going past, the noise, the ruckus, the hubbub, so much so that it causes him to call out and you can imagine how disorientating that must have been.

A friend of mine recommended last night that I watch Bird Box. I don't know if you've heard of Bird Box. I only managed about half an hour of it, I'll confess to you. Basically, the premise is there's a monster, I don't actually know because I haven't finished it, but the premise is that there is something out there that if you see it, you die.

And it's pretty, so then the only way that you can survive is you wear a blindfold. I'll be honest with you, I find TV like that utterly terrifying. I had many nightmares and I only watched half an hour of it. But it was brilliant at portraying how terrifying it is to not have your sight and for lots of things to be happening around you that is utterly disorientating.

And so we can imagine our man sitting at the side of the road, not being able to see and the noise and the bustle. No one's stopping to help him and explain. He has to inquire. And he inquires and hears that it's Jesus of Nazareth and immediately he cries out.

[17:48] And we have no idea what the blind man could have known about Jesus. He knows he's from Nazareth. He knows he might be a king. That's all we're told. But you can imagine that glimmer of hope, can't you?

Oh, he's the man. Is that the man I've heard of? Who raises the dead. Who heals the sick. Who says that there is forgiveness of sins. Perhaps he could do that for me.

And you can imagine the glimmer of hope. The desperation. And so he calls out and the scorn of the crowd. It is horrible to hear, isn't it? This desperate man.

Verse 39. And those who were in front rebuked him. Telling him to be silent. And that is just indicative of what we've seen in this section, isn't it?

Jesus doesn't want people like you, blind man. Jesus doesn't want people like you, tax collector and sinner. No, Jesus wants the kind of people like the rich man.

[18:48] Jesus can benefit nothing from you. Don't waste the teacher's time. Don't bother the teacher. He doesn't have time for people like you. It is despicable.

And it is just like the Pharisee, isn't it, that we saw two weeks ago. Thank you, Lord, that I am not like them. But our man won't be deterred. He cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And verse 40. To everyone's shock, Jesus stopped. And commanded him to be brought to him. Lin and I, for Chinese New Year with Noah, went to Leicester Square to see the dragon dancing. Terrible idea with a one-year-old, by the way. What a terrible idea. Apparently, one-year-olds don't like very loud drums. Who knew?

But what we were doing, as we were meandering through, the one thing that you could never do in this great, heaving crowd of people is suddenly just stop. Oh, it's the year. You all just get slammed into the back. So can you imagine this huge crowd and this one blind man cries out and Jesus stops and the whole crowd stops and Jesus commands, bring him, the one that you have told to be quiet, the outsider, the blind man, the beggar, bring him to me.

[20:10] So the crowd stops and this man comes forward and everyone looks at this man who has nothing, no money, no eyesight, no family, no support, nothing he can offer Jesus whatsoever.

The only thing he can bring is his need. and Jesus stops and asks him again, verse 41, what do you want me to do for you?

He said, Lord, let me recover my sight and Jesus said to him, recover your sight, your faith has made you well.

Can you imagine the relief, the shock of perhaps a lifetime in the dark, a lifetime of being disorientated, of being cut off, of being an outsider and suddenly in the dark light bursts in for the first time perhaps in his life and the world begins to take shape and the noises that he's so used to hearing he's able to finally see what makes them.

But of course the only thing and the first thing that he will be concentrating on and that he sees is Jesus. That would be a wonderful thing to be the first thing that you ever see.

[21 : 44] And what is the blind man's response? Verse 43, and immediately he recovered his sight and followed him glorifying God and all the people when they saw it gave praise to God.

That is such stark contrast, isn't it, to the rich man last week. Have a look down with me where what is what Jesus say, verse 22, when Jesus heard this he said to the rich man one thing you still lack, sell all that you have, distribute it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

But when the rich man heard these things he became very sad that he was extremely rich.

Compare that to our blind man, verse 43, and immediately he recovered his sight and followed him. The rich man could not. The blind man begged Jesus for mercy. He could see and he followed. And so the obvious question and Luke is making this very obvious for us, one man does not follow, one man does.

What is the difference between these two? Well the major difference is that the blind man recognises his need and the rich man does not.

[23 : 05] The blind man recognises his need, the rich man does not. The rich man says, what must I do? The blind man says, have mercy. And Jesus is able and will unblind.

As we think about concluding, in this section of the kingdom, Luke wants us to have no doubt whatsoever about how and why people enter.

The kingdom is here already as people enter in like children, tax collectors and blind beggars. But there is a twist in our passage.

A twist. This kingdom doesn't come by us entering it, but by Jesus bringing people in. This kingdom does not come by us entering it, but by Jesus bringing people in, by Jesus unblinding.

If we want to see the kingdom, Jesus has to take the initiative like the blind man, we are completely dependent on Jesus.

[24 : 16] Now, of course, we know that Luke is writing to give certainty to Theophilus from chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, and we could well imagine why Theophilus might need certainty, particularly in the face of this level of rejection.

If the outcasts are getting in and the people you want are getting rejected, well, Theophilus might well be left thinking, gosh, does this gospel even work if the only people it attracts are sinners and beggars and children.

Well, Luke wants to give Theophilus and us certainty that rejection is not because there's a defect in the gospel, not because the gospel is outside of Jesus' control.

No, the reverse is true. Rejection and acceptance are entirely dependent on Christ and Christ alone. if people reject, that is because Jesus is in control.

So for us, as we finish, the application is much the same as from our first point. We started by thinking this morning, is the rejection of the gospel unsettling?

[25 : 24] And of course, if by that question we mean, is the rejection of the gospel painful, the answer is obviously yes. but if we think that the gospel is unsettling because it somehow might prove that the gospel isn't persuasive or it's flawed or we're naive and gullible, then this passage here in Luke is helping us correct that view because Luke wants us to see that human beings are not neutral observers of the gospel.

We're not as much as we might like to think we are. we don't analyse the gospel from a detached viewpoint. We don't come to the evidence with an open mind.

Rather, we are like the disciples. We're completely blind. And unless Jesus takes the initiative to move towards us and unblind us, we will stay blind.

again, therefore, reassurance and pain are probably the two reactions. Reassurance, again, because if we want to see a miracle, well, I wonder if it's worth just pausing for a couple of seconds and realising that there's close to a hundred in this room right now.

Close to a hundred people who were blind, but because of the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, now see. In other words, if Jesus can unblind me and you, then he can unblind anyone, which means no one is beyond the hope of salvation.

[27 : 06] If we can see, they can see. And it also means that it does not depend on our skill or evangelistic zeal. We proclaim and like the blind man, ask Jesus for mercy.

for those of us looking in on the Christian faith, I would imagine this probably is relatively offensive, because it's saying that we are all blind unless Jesus opens our eyes.

But it means also, therefore, that if we are willing to explore the Christian faith, it is not going to come from exploring another book, or talking through another moral issue, or digging deeper into the historical evidence.

No, ultimately it's going to come from one place only, which is taking the posture of the blind man and saying, Jesus, please, have mercy on me.

Of course, we've said this also throws up the painful question, like, why won't Jesus unblind? The passage doesn't answer why. But for us, who have been unblinded, the blind man must be our posture.

[28 : 19] We, and our friends and family who do not believe in Jesus, are utterly dependent on Christ to be unblinded. And we can only see, we can only enter this kingdom if Jesus has mercy on us to see it.

So we must throw ourselves on his mercy and kindness. Why don't I close this in a final prayer? Father, we thank you that all of us who have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have been saved by your unblinding work.

We thank you that like the blind man, we now see because of the mercy of the Lord Jesus. Please enlarge our view of his power and sovereignty. please forgive us for when we have thought that people's salvation is down to us.

And please reassure us that when we throw ourselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will not leave or forsake us. Amen.