

The one who had nothing to give?

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, verse 31, reading through to 19, verse 10, and you'll find that on page 1057.

That's page 1057. Luke, chapter 18, verse 31. And taking the twelve, 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 spat upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.

But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. As he 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.

[1 : 19] 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. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.

[2 : 27] He was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry, come down, for I must stay at your house today.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Lizzie, thank you very much indeed. I think you'll find it a help to keep that passage open. Let's turn back to it, page 1057, Luke chapter 18 and the start of chapter 19.

Shall we pray again before we look at these verses together? For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

[3 : 38] Heavenly Father, we pray this morning that you would help us to understand how it is that we are lost and how it is that Jesus can save us. Amen.

Well, it was just another day on the Jericho Road. The blind man had arrived early, hoping to catch the wealthy commuters on their way into the city.

And as he'd done every day for years, he laid out his mat and sat at his usual spot on the pavement, hoping he'd get enough money to eat that day. He heard the familiar voices, and as usual, most of them just passed on by.

Footsteps came and went. Every now and then, there was the clinking of small coins landing in his bowl, but it was nothing out of the ordinary. Just another day. And yet before the day was out, this blind beggar's life would be changed forever.

The man who began the day unable to see would end it with his sight restored. Never again would he need to beg on the Jericho Road. At first, it just seems like any other day, but then suddenly, the man could hear a commotion in the distance.

[4 : 56] More footsteps than normal. Excited chattering. A murmur as people stopped to see what the fuss was about. And within a few minutes, the street was packed. The shopkeepers had closed their tills, the residents left their homes, and everyone waited eagerly.

The blind man could hear the clamor of the paparazzi and autograph hunters jostling for position. Someone important was obviously on his way into town. The blind man couldn't see, but he didn't want to miss out on the excitement.

He had to know what was going on. After all, a large crowd might mean good business for him. So he asked those nearby who was approaching, and they told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Jesus of Nazareth. The blind man had heard the stories about Jesus. He'd heard of how others who were blind and deaf and lame had met this man and had their lives turned upside down.

And he'd remembered how the Old Testament scriptures, which had been read to him as a little boy, foretold that when the Messiah, God's promised king, came, the sign would be that he'd healed the blind, the sick, and the lame.

[6 : 09] And now Jesus was heading in his direction. This was the man he'd been longing to meet, secretly hoping that if he begged each day on the main highway into Jerusalem, eventually Jesus would pass through.

He dreamed of this moment, and he wasn't just going to let it pass. So he drew breath and shouted, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

The crowd were annoyed. They too had been waiting to see this man of whom they'd heard so much, and they didn't want the occasion ruined by a beggar. So they snapped at him to be quiet. But the blind man wouldn't listen.

He had to meet Jesus. And so he drew breath again, and at the top of his voice exclaimed, son of David, have mercy on me. And it worked.

Jesus stopped and called out to him. By now that the crowd's irritation had turned to intrigue, you could hear a pin drop. What would Jesus do?

[7 : 11] Well, he summoned the man and asked him a question, to which the answer must have seemed so obvious. What do you want me to do for you? Lord, I want to see, the man begged.

There were no fireworks, no magic words, no religious ritual. Jesus simply spoke three words, recover your sight. And immediately, the man could see.

His faith had made him well, or literally saved him. He left his mat and beggar's bowl behind forever, and started following Jesus along the road.

Well, it's a lovely story, one we find in children's Bibles, or perhaps learnt at Sunday school. But what's it got to do with us? Is it anything more than a nice story?

Well, so often the key to understanding the Bible is to understand the context in which a passage comes. Right at the beginning of his Gospel, Luke tells us that he's writing an orderly account.

[8 : 16] In other words, he's arranged his material very carefully. And here in Luke 18, the way Luke has composed his material is very important. Those of us who were at one of our midweek events this week saw that in the preceding part of the chapter.

Just look down with me at your Bibles again for a moment, if you would. Back in verse 18 of chapter 18, we read that a ruler asked Jesus, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

We'll come back to that later. But the upshot of the incident was that that upright, wealthy ruler who approached Jesus failed to reach the high moral standards Jesus sets for entry into the kingdom of heaven.

And the twelve disciples and those who witnessed the event ask Jesus in verse 26, just have a look, they ask him, then who can be saved? If an outwardly good, successful man wasn't good enough, who could be?

It is, I think, the most important question we could ever ask. Who can be saved? Saved from the just judgment the Bible says we all deserve for failing to live with God in charge of our lives.

[9 : 29] Who can be accepted into the kingdom of heaven? And in today's passage, Luke gives us the answer. Because in the verses we read, Jesus meets two more people.

Two people we might assume would be far more unlikely candidates for being accepted by Jesus than that rich ruler. The first is this blind beggar, a man with no social standing whatsoever.

The second is another rich man, but one who, unlike the rich ruler, was far from morally upright. Because this second man, Zacchaeus, had gained his wealth as a tax collector by cheating his own people.

Two unlikely and very different people. But notice what they share. They're both saved by Jesus. Verse 42. Jesus says to the blind man, literally, recover your sight.

Your faith has saved you. We'll look on to the end of our passage, chapter 19 and verse 9, where Jesus says to Zacchaeus, today salvation has come to this house since he also is the son of Abraham.

[10:44] So Luke answers the question, who can be saved? By giving us portraits of two people being saved. And this morning we're going to think together why it was that these two unlikely men received salvation from Jesus and how we ourselves can do so too.

We're going to notice just two things from our passage about who it is that receives Jesus' salvation. Here's the first. Those who rely on Jesus for mercy.

Those who rely on Jesus for mercy. Now it's important that we understand the function that these two men serve in our passage. Because they're supposed to be representative pictures of each one of us.

Let me explain. In verse 33, Jesus explains to his disciples for a third time that he's going to die on a cross. Just have a look at verse 33. Talking about himself, Jesus says to them that after flogging him, they will kill him.

And then Luke tells us in verse 34, but the disciples understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them and they did not grasp what was said.

[11:58] Now verse 34 is really important because Luke says three times that the disciples failed to understand what Jesus was saying about the cross. They understood none of these things.

This saying was hidden from them. They did not grasp what was said. Three times we're told the disciples didn't get it. The meaning of the cross was hidden from them.

Or as we might say, they just couldn't see it. They couldn't see why Jesus needed to die. Now remember, Luke's writing an orderly account.

He orders his material very deliberately. And straight after this discussion with the disciples, he tells us about two other people who can't see. People from whom Jesus is also hidden.

Of course, it's obvious the blind man can't see Jesus. We're told of his blindness in verse 35 and in verse 41, he says literally, let me see. But Luke wants us to realize that Zacchaeus has exactly the same problem also.

[12:58] He too needs to see. chapter 19, verse 1. Have a look. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus.

He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small of stature.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. Jesus is on the Jericho road. He meets two men who on the face of it couldn't be more different.

And yet they both share the same basic problem. Neither of them could see Jesus. Now do you see what's going on here? These two men, the blind man and Zacchaeus, are pictures of those disciples in verse 34 who also couldn't see, from whom the truth was hidden, who were unable to grasp why they needed Jesus to die.

The blind man's physical blindness is a picture of the disciples' spiritual blindness, their inability to see spiritual reality, and their need for Jesus to open their eyes.

[14:17] And of course, these two men are not only pictures of the disciples, but pictures of all of us, of you and me. Because if the poorest beggar and the wealthiest man have the same basic problem, then isn't Luke teaching us that all of us in between must be included in that category too?

As with the disciples and the blind man and Zacchaeus, we're all blind and need to see. You can remember the words of the famous hymn, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. And I wonder if John Newton, the hymn writer, didn't have this section of the Bible in his mind as he wrote those words.

Zacchaeus, the lost man who Jesus finds and this blind man who sees. Like Luke, John Newton uses physical blindness as a metaphor for the spiritual blindness which afflicts us all.

So this incident we're looking at this morning is far more than just a nice story for children at Sunday school. And what happened that day is good news for far more people than just one blind man who regained his sight.

[15:34] It's good news for each one of us because all of us are spiritually blind by nature. And like these two men we need to have our eyes opened to understand why Jesus had to die.

As we saw at the beginning none of us reach God's standards. None of us deserve to enter his heavenly kingdom. We're all facing God's just and terrible judgment.

So like the blind man we need mercy. And wonderfully Jesus' encounter with this blind man shows us that if we rely on him we can receive mercy.

Remember how that rich ruler back in verse 18 asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. And he went away sad without it seems the salvation for which he longed. But in verse 41 Jesus asks what do you want me to do for you?

As we saw in the week the rich ruler thought he had to do something for Jesus to earn his way into heaven. But none of us are good enough for God.

[16:43] None of us consistently live with God in charge as we ought. Doesn't matter if we're penniless nobodies like the blind man or wealthy civil servants like Zacchaeus. We all need saving.

We need Jesus to do something for us. And that explains Jesus' itinerary here. As the first verse of chapter 19 tells us he was only passing through Jericho.

It wasn't his final destination because his real destination was Jerusalem. We see that back in verse 31. And the reason Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem was precisely in order to do for us that which we could never do ourselves.

To make us fit for eternal life. To atone for our sin. To bring us forgiveness. Because when Jesus died on a cross in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago he willingly took upon himself the punishment we deserve.

He suffered the fate that was rightfully ours so he could offer us mercy. I don't know if you watch the rugby at Twickenham yesterday but if so you would have heard Swing Low Sweet Chariot the anthem of English rugby reverberate around the stadium.

[18:00] Now one of the verses of the original song goes like this The brightest day that I can say coming for to carry me home when Jesus washed my sins away coming for to carry me home.

See at the cross Jesus washed our sins away. He made it possible for this blind man and Zacchaeus and you and me to receive mercy if we rely on him.

If we cry out in the words of verse 38 Jesus son of David have mercy on me. That's why we need to have our eyes opened to be able to see why Jesus had to go to the cross because it's only through his death on the cross that any of us can be accepted by God.

And the wonderful thing about Luke 18 and 19 is that they show us that anyone can be saved. The crowd thought that the blind man was too unimportant for Jesus to bother with. They thought Zacchaeus was too wicked and yet Jesus sought out both of them.

In fact they were exactly the kind of lost people for whom he came. I don't know maybe some of us feel too unimportant for Jesus. Why would he be interested in someone like me?

[19:18] Others of us perhaps feel too wicked. We think we've blown it with God because of how we've lived our lives. So do you see what wonderful news this is? If the blind man and Zacchaeus can be forgiven there can be hope for us all.

Isn't it wonderful that Jesus is interested even in those no one else has the time of day for? That he has compassion on helpless people like the blind man and hated people like Zacchaeus.

So who can be saved? Well first of all those who rely on Jesus for mercy. But secondly those who are saved are those who receive Jesus as king.

Those who receive Jesus as king and that's the other thing I want us to notice this morning. Now this part of Luke's gospel is full of contrasts and one of the contrasts in our passage is between the crowd and the blind man.

Just have a look at how each described Jesus. Verse 36 just turn back verse 36 hearing a crowd go by the blind man inquired what this meant.

[20:27] They told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Now clearly this crowd must have respected Jesus or were at least intrigued by him.

After all they turned out to see him. But ultimately they thought he was just an ordinary guy. Jesus of Nazareth they call him. When they saw Jesus all they could see was another human being Jesus

of Nazareth.

Not so with the blind man though. Look at the next sentence. The crowd told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by and the blind man cried out Jesus son of David have mercy on me.

He may have been blind but this man sees what the crowd could not see. He sees who Jesus really is. Not Jesus of Nazareth but Jesus son of David.

David was the greatest of the kings of Israel and he was promised a dynasty that would last forever. God foretold that one of his descendants would one day reign over all people for all time and establish a kingdom of perfect peace and justice.

[21 : 38] And son of David had become a title for that promised king or Christ or Messiah. So when this man calls Jesus son of David he's recognizing that Jesus is that great king, the rightful ruler over the whole world.

And notice that he acknowledges Jesus not just as king over the world but as king over his own life. We see that in verse 41 where he calls Jesus Lord.

Zacchaeus does the same actually, just look on with me to chapter 19 and verse 8 where he says, Behold Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. Both men not only recognize Jesus as the king but also receive Jesus as their king.

Well what about us? If I may get personal for a moment. What do we see when we look at Jesus? Many people today of course see Jesus just like the crowd did as Jesus of Nazareth, an important historical figure they respect, perhaps whom they're even intrigued by, but nothing more than that. Just an ordinary human being who makes very little difference to our lives. Is that how we see Jesus? Or do we see him as this blind man did, as the king of kings, the one who actually has the right to rule over your life and mine, to be our lord?

[23 : 11] Remember the sign that God's king, the messiah, had come would be that he'd open the eyes of the blind. And here we see Jesus doing that. Have we recognized who he is, I wonder, and received him as our king?

Of course, if Jesus is our king, it'll mean more than simply intellectually understanding who he is. We can't be saved by Jesus and yet stay the same. He must change our lives radically as he does for these two men in our passage.

Notice how in verse 43 we're told that after the blind man recovered his sight, he followed Jesus. Or notice in verse 8 of chapter 19 how Zacchaeus made restitution for what he'd done wrong.

His life was turned upside down. From being a greedy tax collector, he became a generous giver. And if we're to receive Jesus as king, we too will need to change.

Like the blind man, we'll need to follow Jesus, seeking to live as he wants us to, willing to make sacrifices for him, putting him first in our lives. Like Zacchaeus, there may be very practical things we perhaps need to do to make amends for past failures.

[24 : 28] And yet there's no better way to live than following Jesus. After all, the blind man could now see and were told of how he glorifies God in his joy.

Zacchaeus in verse 6 received Jesus joyfully. Following Jesus is wonderful. He changes our lives in the most fantastic way.

I've never met anyone who's regretted following Jesus. And yet Luke is clear that there is also a cost. And for these two men, as for us today, that particularly meant going against the flow.

Remember that the blind man and Zacchaeus are supposed to be viewed as a pair. And the interesting thing is how they both faced the same obstacle when it came to meeting Jesus. And that obstacle was the crowd.

So in verse 39, the crowd tried to stop the blind man from calling out to Jesus. Just have a look, verse 39. We're told that those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

[25 : 35] But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. And given what a careful writer Luke is, I think he wants us to notice that Zacchaeus faced the same obstacle. Look on to verse 3 of chapter 19 this time.

Verse 3, we're told that Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not. You see, so often it's the crowd that stops people seeing who Jesus is or calling out to him for mercy.

Far from being some kind of emotional crutch or something, it takes courage to be a Christian. So often it means going against the crowd, against the flow. The blind man had to ignore the sneers of the crowd.

Zacchaeus had to do the rather undignified thing of running and then climbing up a tree in order to meet Jesus. And I think many people today hold back from following Jesus because of the crowd. Pressure from our friends, our family, our colleagues, the media can keep us from calling out to Jesus. People may think we've gone mad and sneer at us if we follow him. Society increasingly tells Christians to stay silent, to only hold our views in private, to keep our thinking out of the public square.

[26 : 53] But it's only those who receive Jesus as king, who follow him publicly, who will be saved by him. I wonder whose voice we will listen to.

A crowd or Jesus, the king of the universe, who commands us to come to him, just as he did Zacchaeus in verse 5. So who can be saved?

Well, only those who rely on Jesus for mercy and those who receive Jesus as king. We can't earn our way into heaven. We can't do anything to save ourselves.

Jesus tells the blind man it was his faith that saved him. And if we have that same faith, if we put our trust in Jesus' death for us on the cross and acknowledge him as our personal Lord, then we too will be saved.

God so can I ask you as we close, if you've ever called out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

[27 : 58] It's all that really matters in life. The final verse of our passage says that the son of man, Jesus, came to seek and to save the lost.

Jesus came to save the lost. When the passengers on the Titanic boarded the ship, their tickets were divided into four categories, according to class.

But when their voyage was over, their names appeared under only two categories in a list in the offices of the ship's owners in Bristol. One category was entitled known to be lost, and the other known to be saved.

We're lost, facing an eternity cut off from God. But Jesus came to save the lost. In the final analysis, there are only two categories of people in the world.

Have we been saved by Jesus, or are we still lost? I don't know where each of us stands when it comes to Jesus, but I'd be surprised if there weren't some here who, as it were, are sitting by the roadside at the moment, like that blind man was in verse 35, looking on, curious what all the fuss is about when it comes to Jesus.

[29 : 16] And if that is you, can I urge you to do what this blind man did, to get up from the roadside, ask Jesus for mercy, and start following him. I'm going to close this morning by praying a very simple prayer which you can pray if you want to be saved by Jesus.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to read through the prayer once so we all know what it says, and then I'll read it a second time more slowly so that anyone who wants to start following Jesus this morning can silently echo it in their own heart.

So here's how the prayer will go. dear God, I'm sorry that I haven't lived with you as my Lord and King. I know that I'm blind and lost. Thank you though that Jesus died on the cross to save me.

Please have mercy on me and help me to follow Jesus as my King for the rest of my life. So that's the prayer. Why don't we take just a few moments of silence to think about how we personally want to respond to what we've considered this morning and then in a few moments I'll pray that prayer and those who want to do so can join in silently in their own hearts.

A few moments of silence. Jesus said what do you want me to do for you and the blind man replied Lord I want to see.

[30 : 37] Let's pray. Dear God I'm sorry that I haven't lived with you as my Lord and King. I know that I'm blind and lost.

Thank you though that Jesus died on the cross to save me. Please have mercy on me and help me to follow Jesus as my King for the rest of my life.

Amen.