

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This message #30 By Faith and Not By Sight**

#### **Scripture Luke 18:35-43**

Last week we studied one of the miracles performed by Jesus in the rural areas of Judea. Today we will focus on the fourth and last of those miracles. The events in the passage for today occurred just before Jesus entered Jerusalem, perhaps just a day or two before the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city.

Let me explain the context. Luke informed us in the ninth chapter that Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” In the following chapters there are numerous references indicating how Jesus and His close companions “went through the towns and villages, teaching as He made his way to Jerusalem” (*Luke 13:22*).

In the verses just before today’s reading, Luke wrote that “Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem.’” And then He explained once again the purpose of the journey: “everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will rise again” (*Luke 18:31-33*). In spite of what He was going to endure, Jesus was resolute/determined that all the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled.

Jesus was in the final days of His itinerant ministry. Jerusalem was the next destination. With that as background information, let’s read about the last healing miracle mentioned in this Gospel of Luke.

#### **Read Luke 18:35-43**

Jericho was about 17 miles from Jerusalem, a short distance from the Jordan River, and on a main route to Jerusalem. It was almost time for the annual Passover Festival to begin, and the roadway into and through the city of Jericho was crowded with the many pilgrims who were making their way toward Jerusalem.

A location next to a roadway filled with people was the perfect spot for a blind beggar. Blindness was a fairly common problem in Israel, and blind people were usually ignored and often shunned. There was a cultural and religious stigma against blindness. Many people thought blindness was a consequence of sin committed either by the individual or his/her parents. The disciples asked Jesus about this on one occasion when they encountered a blind man. Their question was “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (*John 9:2*) Jesus responded to the question by saying that sin had nothing to do with the blindness. However, most of the people of Israel did not understand it that way.

The Gospel of Mark informs us that the beggar in this episode was named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus could not see what was happening, but he could hear the commotion and excitement in one segment of the crowd. When he asked what was happening he was told that “Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.” The crowd identified Jesus with His human earthly origins – He was from the village of Nazareth.

Bartimaeus, however, addressed Jesus with one of His Messianic titles, “Son of David.” We don’t know how Bartimaeus came to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. He must have had some knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies, and he must have heard reports that Jesus had the ability to restore eyesight. He must have fit these facts together and concluded that Jesus was the promised “son of David.”

Most Jews were familiar with the words God spoke to David, “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son” (*II Samuel 7:12-14*). Perhaps Bartimaeus was also familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind” (*Isaiah 61:1-2*).

Let me offer my opinion about the knowledge of Bartimaeus. It is my opinion that he was able to link the reports about Jesus that he had heard to the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that he knew. It is also my opinion that his physical disability worked in His favor, enabling Bartimaeus to have insight into obvious facts that people with good eyes could not or would not recognize.

One of the factors which hindered many people from accepting Jesus as the Messiah was the ordinariness of His appearance and life. He was of lowly birth. He had lived most of his life in Galilee, the “backwoods” area of Israel. He had worked as a carpenter for many years. He had disappointed many people because He made no effort to gather together military and political zealots in order to overthrow existing political structures and establish an earthly kingdom. Humanly speaking, He had neither the background nor the characteristics of the Messiah/King of the Jews. From what people observed, Jesus was an ordinary, albeit, popular man. Yes, He had performed some incredible miracles, but this only increased the perplexity of many people because He was, by outward appearances, so ordinary. The Pharisees refused to recognize Him as God in flesh. In fact, they accused Jesus of blasphemy for associating Himself, a human, with God the Father.

Bartimaeous avoided the hangups of most of his fellow Jews. Because of his blindness, he had to rely on other insights than what would otherwise come through eyes. His way of filtering information was different than most of the other Jews. His understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah was not confused by the things he could not see.

There is a Biblical principle which we need to inject into this study. This principle was written by the Apostle Paul. He stated that the followers of Jesus “live (or walk) by faith, not by sight” (*II Corinthians 5:7*). [“Walk” (in Greek “*peripateo*”) is the literal meaning.] Bartimaeous was an example of the people who live by this principle. He was a model for believers today. Like Bartimaeous, we must not let the things which can be seen hinder our perception of the truth which is revealed in the Scriptures.

Jesus did not fit the expectations of most of the Israelites who saw Him, and so many people concluded that He could not be the Messiah. It is likewise easy for many people today to look around the world and conclude that God is not in control or is not personal or isn’t even there. Some people think that the suffering and injustice in the world is evidence that God does not exist, or, at least, that a good God does not exist. Miracles are often explained away in scientific terms or as coincidences. Most people question the virgin birth of Jesus and do not accept the fact that He was God in flesh. People have these opinions because they are oriented to living by sight and not by faith. Most people around us have confidence only in things which can be seen, measured, handled.

The Apostle Paul wrote that the followers of Jesus must “walk by faith,” that is, be focused on the spiritual, not physical, realm. The question we must ask ourselves is “to what extent am I living by faith?” How can we live, in a practical sense, day by day, with faith as our guide? Non-believers question how faith in non-material realities can be an adequate and reasonable basis for life here on earth. Are we, as believers, foolish for thinking that faith can sustain us through life here on earth? Are we foolish for placing our hope and confidence about the future in something which cannot be seen or measured or handled?

To walk by faith means to make faith part of all daily activities, step by step throughout our lives. As believers we have no choice but to go through this life in a material world, but the reality we must focus on constantly is the spiritual realm. We are members of God’s kingdom, and as members of the kingdom of God, we are called to live in this world, and yet be separate from this world.

The phrase, “by faith,” represents a conviction about God — about Who He is and what He is doing. The only basis of our spiritual reality is information that God has revealed about Himself. God has revealed this information in His Word, the Scriptures, and He makes it understandable to us by His Holy Spirit. Individuals who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit have the ability to perceive reality in heavenly ways. As believers we have “the mind of the Messiah” (*I Corinthians 2:16*).

There is a verse in the letter to the Hebrews which stands out as an eternal principle: “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (*Hebrews 11:6*). This verse informs us that we must believe in God and His Word if we are to begin to understand spiritual reality and truth, and we must have faith before we are to come to Him, and we must live by faith if we are to tap into the rewards that God is able to give to us.

Faith also represents a conviction about what is yet to be seen as compared to what can now be seen. Hebrews 11:1 states that “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” For the followers of Jesus, faith based on the truth of the Word of God is what keeps us going, what gives us hope and joy when our circumstances are depressing and difficult.

In his letter to the Roman believers, Paul, in explaining the need for faith in the Word of God, wrote, “faith comes from hearing the message,” the “good news,” which is the “word of the Messiah” (*Romans 10:16-17*).

Bartimaeous knew and believed both the revealed word of God in the Old Testament Scriptures and the truth about the person Jesus, and when he learned that Jesus was passing by, He began to call out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many of the people on the roadway told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more. This was the great opportunity in his life, and he was not going to give in to the wishes and influences of the worldly minded people around him. He was desperately eager to get the attention of the Messiah. He lacked the ability to run up to Jesus and ask for help. All he could do was loudly cry out for mercy in the hopes that Jesus would notice him.

Jesus noticed, stopped, and asked that the man be brought to Him. When He asked "What do you want me to do for you?" the man requested his physical sight. What is remarkable is that Bartimaeous had no doubts about Jesus' ability to give him what he wanted. On the basis of his faith, he didn't hesitate to make his bold request. His words were evidence of his faith and confidence. Bartimaeous truly believed that the man Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the descendent of David, the Son of God, the One who could restore sight to the blind.

Jesus acknowledged the man's faith as He granted the man's wish. He said, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." His faith was "being sure of what he hoped for and certain about what he could not see."

In saying "your faith has healed you," Jesus used a special Greek verb. The word translated "healed" (*sozo*) can also mean "saved." Hence, there was a double meaning in Jesus' statement. Bartimaeous received both eyesight and salvation. His faith in the person of Jesus was the key to the restoration of his sight as well as the salvation of his soul.

Jesus' statement to Bartimaeous was virtually the same as what He said to the leprous man who returned to give thanks to Jesus — the man we talked about previously. Jesus had said to him, "Rise and go, your faith has healed/saved you" (*Luke 17:19*), the same words. I think that Luke presented these episodes for a purpose. He wanted his readers to understand the benefits of faith. He also wanted to contrast the attitudes of individuals who recognized and believed the truth about Jesus against the religious leaders who could not recognize the spiritual reality of Jesus.

After gaining his physical sight, Bartimaeous then followed Jesus, praising God. Notice, God is thanked for His work through Jesus. Bartimaeous was a testimony to the power of God, as manifested through Messiah Jesus, to instantly change lives. If there were scoffers among the crowd before that time, we can assume that there were none after what they saw. The last sentence informs us that “all the people ... praised God.”

Friends, we are like either the Pharisees or the blind beggar; either like those who have their physical faculties but can't or won't understand the truth of God's Word, or like the blind beggar who has spiritual understanding and doesn't hesitate to ask God for mercy. It is far better to be like the beggar.

The Apostle Paul described the condition of people who are oriented to the physical, material world. He said that “Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (*II Corinthians 4:4*). By nature, all of us are spiritually blind sinners, and the only way we can receive healing and salvation is to believe what God has said about Himself in the Scriptures, and to ask Him for mercy. Just as Jesus can give sight to those who are physically blind, He can also grant spiritual healing to those who live in the darkness of sin.

Let us walk by faith, not by sight. It is the only way to please God.