

I Once Was Blind But Now I See

Luke 18:35-43

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Sight is a great blessing from the Lord for which we do not praise God enough. We can see the beauty of the snow that has fallen. We can see the wonders of the sky which hold countless stars. Through the aid of a microscope, we can see creatures that are full of life that we cannot see with the naked eye. We can see these dear little ones that will be baptized with water this Lord's Day. But many in the world cannot see these beauties and wonders of the Lord because they are blind. But what is far more serious, dear ones, is that many throughout the world are spiritually blind and cannot see by faith the Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. In fact, every one of us is by nature blind to Christ, blind to the kingdom of God, and blind to everlasting life due to that natural blindness that became ours through the sin of Adam. By nature, Jesus says, we all hate the light. By nature, we all love our blindness to Christ because we all by nature love our darkness and sin (**John 1:19-20**). This is not the condition of some, but the desperate condition of us all by nature.

Therefore, we all need sight in a spiritual sense and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if we are to have everlasting life. Jesus is the light who gives us sight, a sight which is greater than any mere sight with these eyes; for many who have no physical sight have received sight to behold the Savior who has graciously bestowed forgiveness of sin, true righteousness, and everlasting life (John 6:40). Let us turn to our text and consider one who was blind, but who was graciously given sight by Jesus, the light of the world.

The main points from our text today in Luke 18:35-43 are these: (1) The

Desperation of Bartimaeus Described (Luke 18:35); (2) The Faith of Bartimaeus Will Not be Silenced (Luke 18:36-40); and (3) The Faith of Bartimaeus is Rewarded (Luke 18:41-43).

I. The Desperation of Bartimaeus Described (Luke 18:35).

A. As the Lord Jesus continues His journey that will eventually lead Him to the cross in order to present His life a ransom for His elect, He enters the town of Jericho. You will remember that when Joshua and the 12 tribes of Israel first crossed the Jordan River to possess the land promised to them by God (Joshua 2), the first city they took was Jericho. There the Lord had called a prostitute to faith in the Lord by the name of Rahab (who had rescued the Hebrew spies sent by Joshua to acquire information about Jericho). The Lord preserved and protected Rahab (and her family) due to her faith in the Lord when He caused the walls of Jericho to crumble before His mighty power. Now approximately 1500 years later in the same city, the infinite power of the Lord is demonstrated to another unlikely candidate: a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46).

B. Let us consider what the text says about this blind man.

1. It is not very often that we see the specific names of those who were healed by the Lord expressly mentioned. This likely indicates how well known this blind man was, perhaps before as well as after he was healed. This miraculous healing was performed upon one who was known by all to have been blind.

2. We learn that Bartimaeus had a particular affliction, namely blindness. How he came to be blind or for how long he had been blind we are not told. However, the mention of his name, Bartimaeus, would likely indicate that he had been blind long enough that the people of Jericho knew him to be the blind beggar that sat at the roadside.

a. Blindness is a great affliction to bear regardless of the age in which a person lives, but blindness in the ancient world was a far greater affliction to bear than it is today. Today the blind can be taught to read by means of the Braille method. Whatever the blind learned in ancient times was learned by listening, not by reading. Those who cannot see today may resort to various programs wherein they may be taught and trained to work and live a productive life. Blindness in ancient times brought not only visual darkness, but darkness and hopelessness in providing food, clothing, and shelter for oneself (unless one was already wealthy or was shown mercy by some compassionate family).

b. Have you ever closed your eyes for a short period of time and walked around in darkness? It may be fun to some degree (like a game) to close your eyes for a few minutes and to wander around in darkness, but it would no longer be fun, if you were forced to wander in darkness for hours, days upon end, months, and even years. It's hard to imagine not being able to watch your children grow, not being able to see the light of the sun or moon, or not being able to enjoy the visual beauty of God's creation. To be forced to have everything described for you rather than seeing and enjoying it with your own eyes would indeed be a great affliction to bear. Do you regularly give thanks to God that He has granted to you the ability to physically see? It is not a gift we deserve any more than the ability to spiritually see.

3. Finally, we note that the blindness of Bartimaeus had consigned him to begging in order to provide for himself. Either he did not have a family to care for him, or he did not come from a wealthy family that could provide for him. Begging for alms was not unlawful in and of itself. Bartimaeus was compelled to depend upon the charity of others. He lived from day to day not knowing from where his next meal would come or whether he would even have a meal to eat. The desperate condition of this poor blind man is described for us in Luke 18:35. And there was nothing that he could do to remove himself from

this situation. Unless God took pity upon him and miraculously gave him his sight, this would be his lot till the day that he died.

II. The Faith of Bartimaeus Will Not be Silenced (Luke 18:36-40).

A. There are four snapshots of the faith of Bartimaeus that we should note in the next few verses.

1. **The first snapshot of the faith of Bartimaeus** is demonstrated when Jesus passes along the road and the crowd in Jericho that surrounds Jesus makes such a noise and commotion that the curiosity of Bartimaeus is stirred (Luke 18:36-37). Upon learning who it is that is walking by him, Bartimaeus begins to cry out and plead with Christ, “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:38). How Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus we do not know, but he had sufficient knowledge of Christ to know His name (Jesus), to know that He claimed to be the Messiah (the son of David), and to know that He was able to heal him of his blindness (have mercy on me).

a. Although blind, Bartimaeus did not exercise a blind faith. His faith was in Jesus Christ, the Almighty Son of God. Here was a man who by God’s amazing grace had received a faithful testimony, and that was enough (contrary to those who must see before they believe, John 20:29).

b. Note also, dear ones, that the faith of Bartimaeus was revealed not only by his confession of who Christ was and by casting himself upon the mercy of Christ, but also by the manner in which he appealed to the Lord: “and he cried, saying” (Luke 18:38). The word used here for “cried” means to raise the voice or to shout. He was not about to quietly call out to Christ (not in his desperate situation). His faith in Christ was expressed by even his willingness to look foolish to others. He didn’t care, because he was looking in faith to Christ not to anyone else.

(1) We can tell much about our faith in times of prayer by the way we make our appeals unto the Lord. Do we express those holy and earnest petitions within our heart to the Lord with a casual, “no big deal” kind of attitude, or do we do so crying out to the Lord and pleading with Him that He would have mercy upon us and grant us our requests for His glory?

(2) Dear ones, we need never expect the Lord to hear our prayers if they are not uttered with a sense of urgency, even desperation. Sincerity of faith is evidenced by our crying out to the Lord urgently (even if it is within the secret recesses of our heart).

c. The earnest and loud plea of Bartimaeus also reveals a faith that acknowledges he did not deserve anything from the Lord, but merely threw himself upon the tender mercies of Christ (“have mercy on me”). He does not plead “give me what I deserve”, but rather “have mercy on me.” You see, **mercy is not giving is what we do deserve** (which is condemnation and hell or our sin), and **grace is giving us what we do not deserve** (forgiveness of sin, the righteousness of Christ, and eternal life).

d. What was it that God had used in the life of Bartimaeus to bring him to this place of humility before Christ, rather than boastful pride? It was his desperate need of Christ, which need was evidenced by his blindness and his suffering.

(1) Dear ones, we have the blessing of reading here about Bartimaeus and how the Lord used his blindness to bring him to a point of desperation in understanding that he was unable to heal himself and must turn to Christ to be healed physically and spiritually, but we find it so very difficult to believe the Lord is likewise bringing us to that point of desperation of help in ourselves (or in others) through our physical suffering, or through the loss of possessions or relationships, or through the loss of dreams.

(2) This is written for your encouragement in

faith. Have you only come to resent the Lord, or to doubt the Lord's goodness or fairness through your suffering, or have you come to believe through your suffering that He is yet the almighty, good, and ever faithful Savior to you? That is what Christ is accomplishing through all your sufferings, dear Christian.

2. **A second snapshot of the faith of Bartimaeus** occurs in Luke 18:39. Many sought to silence him, but he made his appeal even louder to the Lord. Faith in Jesus Christ (a sincere faith) will not be silenced by man. When attempts to silence faith in Christ are made, true faith is not quenched like water upon a fire, but rather is fueled like gas upon a fire. Afflictions will not silence faith in Christ; poverty will not silence faith in Christ; nor will people who seek to shame us be able to silence faith in Jesus Christ.

a. Dear ones, do you desire Christ in such a way that you do not blame inconveniences or people for keeping you from Christ (and communion with Christ)? Or do you find yourselves making sad excuses for why you could not come to Christ, or commune with Christ?

b. Dear ones, faith in Jesus is evidenced by a hungering and thirsting for Christ at the expense of all who would discourage you from pursuing Christ, His truth, and His righteousness (Matthew 10:37).

3. **A third snapshot of the faith of Bartimaeus** is demonstrated in Luke 18:40. It would appear that Christ Himself did not immediately answer the loud and earnest cries of Bartimaeus. Calvin suggests that Bartimaeus began crying out to the Lord when Christ first entered Jericho (Luke 18:35) and continued to do so until Christ was exiting Jericho at which time he was healed (Mark 10:46). Did the Lord not hear him? Of course He did, being the eternal Son of God. Why then did He not immediately heal Bartimaeus when he first began to plead with Him?

a. First, to stretch the faith of Bartimaeus in waiting patiently upon Christ. It is times of desperation in our lives that take us

out of our comfort zones which the Lord uses to stretch us and to grow us in faith.

b. Second, to draw attention to the desperate need of this poor blind man so that his healing would bring greater glory to God before the multitude (John 9:1-3).

c. Third, for our encouragement that we not faint in times of need, desperation, and urgency when we come to the realization that there is no hope in man, but only hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. **A fourth and final snapshot of the faith of Bartimaeus** is witnessed in the parallel account in Mark 10:50. He cast away his outer garment because he did not want anything to hinder him from coming to Christ. His garment was something good, it kept him warm. However, even that which was good he did not allow to prevent him from coming to the Lord. Food, clothing, jobs, hobbies, music, computers, books, family, friends may all be good things which the Lord gives us to enjoy when used lawfully, but if they become a deterrent to our coming to Christ in faith, in obeying Christ in faith, in loving Christ in faith, in serving Christ in faith, then we must willingly set them aside. For nothing, dear ones, nothing in this life is so important that it ought to keep us from trusting, loving, and obeying Christ and His commandments. What is getting in your way of coming to Christ in faith or in your enjoying and communing with Christ in faith? Are you willing to cast it aside so that it does not hinder you in coming to Christ? If not, I submit that whatever that is, it has become an idol to you.

III. The Faith of Bartimaeus is Rewarded (Luke 18:41-43).

A. The Lord in His great compassion asks exactly the question Bartimaeus was dying to hear: “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” In trust and confidence that Christ was both able to heal him, Bartimaeus prays that he might have his sight (“Lord, that I may receive my sight”).

Dear ones, we can never pray with true faith and receive comfort in our prayers if we are not confidently persuaded that He is able and that He will always give us what is good for us (Matthew 7:11). If we doubt either of those truths (His ability and His goodness), our prayers will fall to the ground, it will be like spitting into the wind.

B. Because Bartimaeus in faith looks to Christ and His power, to Christ and His merit, to Christ and His faithfulness, to Christ and His righteousness, to Christ and His sufficiency, rather than to his own power, merit, faithfulness, righteousness, or sufficiency, he is heard by the Lord. When the Lord declares, “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee”, it is not to be understood that it was the virtue of his faith that healed him. It was Christ that healed Him—the object of his faith was Christ. It was by embracing the power and mercy of Christ by means of faith that secured his salvation and healing. Thus, dear ones, faith is like the eye. Just as the eye in looking at an object does not look at itself, so faith does not look at itself, but is like an eye looking outside of itself to Christ for all that is needed.

C. Finally, dear ones, this man’s genuine faith is evidenced by his glorifying and praising God (Luke 18:43). One of the greatest evidences of saving faith is a thankful heart. When we consider the spiritual blindness of which the Lord has mercifully healed us, we have reason to praise the Lord each and every day. Pride and all of its manifestations (selfishness, self-righteousness, self-pity, self-preoccupation, and self-praise) all vanish when the eye of faith is fixed upon our glorious Savior, Jesus Christ.

In closing, I would like to make two applications in preparation for the baptisms this Lord’s Day.

The Disciples of Christ sought to prevent small children (even infants)

from being brought to Christ, Jesus said, “Forbid them not: for such (or “such ones” is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16). Let us not as parents do so by our words or deeds. Our children are “holy” not “unclean” (1 Corinthians 7:14) i.e. in the Visible Church; not outside the Visible Church—the Visible Church is called a “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). The promise of the Spirit and salvation is made unto “you, and to your children” according to Peter (Acts 2:39). And baptism was administered to not only those who believed (like Lydia), but also to her whole household—household baptism (Acts 16:15). Therefore, our children as members of the Visible Church are entitled to the sign and seal of baptism.

Our children need Christ to heal them of their spiritual blindness (Psalm 51:5; John 3:3; John 6:40). They are (just like each of us) in darkness until they are granted sight and faith to trust alone in Christ alone for their salvation. Our baptism and the baptism of our children points to our natural blindness in our sin and our desperate need of light to behold by faith our Savior. Baptism is the outward sign and seal of that promise of salvation to us and to our children. Baptism is a visible gospel, just as the Word of God is a preached gospel. May no one within the sound of my voice turn away from the light of Christ’s good news preached from His Word or signified and sealed in baptism this Lord’s Day.

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