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## WHEN JESUS PASSES BY

Luke 18:35-43

By

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Luke Lesson 86

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Luke 18:35-43

God often uses the most simple and unlikely people to teach us the most profound spiritual lessons. Years ago, when I lived in Seal Beach, California, there was a young man whom everyone called "Seal Beach James." James was mentally impaired, but he knew Christ as his Savior. He couldn't drive, but he would often ride his bike to the beach and talk to people about Christ. He had a basket on his bike that he would fill with gospel tracts. He had no fear. He would walk up to the tanned, muscular beach bums playing volleyball and ask, "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?" Surprisingly, they would often stop and listen.

James' mother did not know Christ. If you were at a gathering with James, he would call his mother and if you walked by he would say to her, "Here is Steve Cole and he is going to tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ." He'd hand you the phone and you were on! Sad to say, his mother, who had normal intelligence, never learned from her mentally impaired son. She died without trusting in the Savior.

In our text, a blind beggar teaches us some important lessons about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark tells us that his name was Bartimaeus. Matthew tells us that actually there were two blind beggars healed that day, but Mark and Luke only mention one. They do not say that there was *only* one. They merely focus on the man who was the more vocal and memorable of the two.

There is another harmonistic problem. Matthew and Mark both report that the incident took place as Jesus was going *out* of Jericho, but Luke states that it happened as Jesus was *approaching* Jericho. There have been numerous solutions proposed, but before I mention some of them, let me point out that the variance indicates that Luke was not relying on either Matthew or Mark as his source, or the accounts would line up. Also, we are dealing with eyewitness accounts of what happened. Matthew was there personally; Mark got his story from Peter, who was there; and Luke carefully researched his account from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4).

Sometimes, eyewitness accounts of the same event can vary greatly and yet all be true. We may lack sufficient information to piece it all together, but it would be arrogant for us, from our limited perspective, to pronounce that one of the authors was in error.

Here, then, are several proposed solutions. Some say that Jesus was leaving old Jericho and about to enter the rebuilt Jericho when this incident occurred. This view is possible, but the problem is that old Jericho was not inhabited in Jesus' day, and thus it would be unusual to speak of Jesus leaving the ruins as if He were leaving the city itself.

Others propose that a two-part event was condensed into one account. Bartimaeus cried out as Jesus entered the city, tagged along with the crowd, and eventually was heard by Jesus and healed along with the other beggar as Jesus left the city. Another variation is that Jesus entered and passed through the city when He encountered Zaccheus (19:1). When Zaccheus responded, Jesus turned to go back into the city, at which point He met Bartimaeus. Thus, depending on how you view it, Jesus had left the city or was entering it. Luke merely separates the accounts for his purposes.

However you resolve it, both this story (which is Luke's last miracle) and the next (about Zaccheus) are examples of how the nation should have responded to her Messiah. Bartimaeus and Zaccheus line up with the publican in Jesus' parable (18:9-17), who cried out to God for mercy. They stand in contrast to the Pharisee in the parable and the rich young ruler (18:18-27), who both tried to approach God based on their own merit. The Pharisee and the rich young ruler were likely candidates for salvation who missed it because they trusted in themselves and refused to acknowledge their sin. Bartimaeus and Zaccheus were unlikely candidates for salvation who obtained it through faith in God's mercy, apart from anything in themselves. Thus Luke uses this unlikely blind beggar to teach us that...

When Jesus passes by, we should cry out to Him in faith and He will be merciful to us.

There are three main lessons:

1. There are opportune spiritual moments when Jesus passes by.

Every day was the same in Bartimaeus' darkened world. He would get up, grope around for a crust of bread, then take his staff and tap-tap his way from his shack out to his normal spot. When he heard people passing by, he would cry out, "Alms for the blind! Alms for the blind!" Somehow, he eked out enough to survive.

But today was different. A larger than usual crowd was making its way past Bartimaeus. When he asked what was happening, he was told, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Bartimaeus instantly thought, "Jesus of Nazareth? He's not just Jesus of Nazareth, a great prophet! He is the Son of David, the Messiah! I've heard about His marvelous teaching and how He has healed the sick and raised the dead. And, I've heard that He has opened the eyes of the blind!"

Bartimaeus instantly knew that this was his window of opportunity. Jesus was passing by. Soon He would be gone, never to pass that way again. Like a halfback who sees a brief opening in the line, Bartimaeus plunged through. He began to shout at the top of his voice, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those near him said, "Shut up, old man! We can't hear what Jesus is saying!" He shouted even louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The ones leading the way yelled, "Tell that beggar to be quiet! The Master has more important things to attend to." But Bartimaeus wouldn't be silenced. This was his only chance and he wasn't going to miss it.

Just as Bartimaeus had his opportune moment to cry out to Jesus, and then it would be gone, so it is with you. *Today* is the day of salvation; you may not have tomorrow! Today you are hearing the Word of God, about a Savior who invites you to come to Him for mercy. Jesus is passing by, and He may never pass so close to you again! He is the only one with the power to open eyes that have been blinded by sin. Call out to Him while He is near!

2. When Jesus passes by, we should cry out to Him with bold, persistent faith.

Bartimaeus knew the business of begging; he wasn't shy! He cried out for all he was worth, and when people told him to shut up, he yelled all the louder! He kept shouting until he heard that

Jesus was calling for him. His bold, persistent faith obtained what he was after. This blind beggar teaches us seven lessons in faith:

(1) Our faith should be in Jesus the Messiah.

The multitude said, "Jesus of *Nazareth* is passing by," but Bartimaeus didn't cry out, "Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me." He cried, "Jesus, *Son of David*, have mercy on me!" This beggar was blind, but he saw something significant about Jesus: He is the Son of David.

Public opinion about Jesus was sharply divided. Bartimaeus had heard some argue that Jesus was an imposter: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" they sneered. "Everyone knows that the Christ must be from the offspring of David, born in Bethlehem" (John 7:40-43). But others countered, "Surely, no one could do the miracles that this man does unless he were from God! The deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the eyes of the blind are opened."

When he heard this last item, Bartimaeus asked, "Did you say that Jesus opens the eyes of the blind?" "Yes," they reported, "just recently in Jerusalem He opened the eyes of a man born blind" (John 9). Bartimaeus' heart leaped with hope as he thought, "This Jesus then really is the Messiah, the Son of David! If only He would come to Jericho and could give me my sight."

There are two strands of support here that show us that Jesus is the promised Anointed One, the Messiah. First, He was descended from David, in fulfillment of God's promise to David to set one of his descendants on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Luke has traced this Davidic connection: In 1:27 we learn that Mary was a descendant of David. In 2:4, we learn that Joseph, also, was a descendant of David, and thus the couple went to Bethlehem, the city of David, to pay their taxes, and were there when Jesus was born. In 3:23-38 we see specifically that Jesus' lineage goes back through David. In 20:41-44, Jesus spars with the religious leaders, asking them how Messiah can be both David's son and his Lord as well.

The second strand that shows Jesus to be the promised Messiah is that He opens the eyes of the blind. Isaiah 35:5 prophesied that Messiah would do such, and Jesus had cited that reference

when he told the messengers of John the Baptist, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (7:22-23). In the Bible, only Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, and there are more of His recorded miracles in this category than any other. It shows Him to be the promised Messiah.

The point is, it is important that our faith rest in Jesus as revealed in Scripture, not in a Jesus of our own imagination. The cults have invented false Christs, who do not match up to the Jesus of the Bible. Others subjectively make up a Jesus of their own liking. But we must believe in Jesus as revealed in Scripture.

- (2) Our faith should appeal to God on the basis of mercy, not merit.

Bartimaeus didn't stand before Jesus after straightening up his appearance and say, "I've lived a pretty good life. I've always gone to synagogue. I've never hurt anyone. I've tried to do the best I can. Based on all that I've done, would You open my eyes?" No, Bartimaeus knew that he was a blind beggar with no claim for healing. He had nothing in himself to commend himself to Christ. Like the publican in Jesus' parable, he just cried out for mercy.

Luke wants us to see that we all are blind beggars before God. Satan has "blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). Before God we are "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). This is perhaps the major stumbling block that keeps people from coming to Christ: they want to commend themselves and their good deeds. God has to open our eyes to our true condition before Him. We have nothing in ourselves to merit His salvation. We are spiritually blind sinners, and the only way we can come to Him is to ask for mercy, not for merit.

- (3) Our faith should be personal, not generic.

Bartimaeus didn't cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us." According to Matthew, there were two of them. It might have been more polite to ask for healing for both. But each man had to come on his own. Bartimaeus could have thought, "I'm a Jew, a son of Abraham." He could have tried to get this blessing on the

group plan. But he didn't. Generic faith won't do. The only way anyone can come to Christ is to cry out, "Jesus, have mercy on *me*. I'm the sinner. I'm the spiritually blind one. Lord, please be gracious to *me!*"

(4) Our faith should persistently overcome all hindrances.

Whenever you trust in God, you will encounter hindrances. Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus in faith, and the crowd sternly told him to shut up (18:39). But the more they told him to be quiet, the louder he shouted. This was his one opportunity to be healed, and he wasn't about to sit there passively. He persisted until Jesus heard him. He was like the widow in Jesus' parable at the start of this chapter (18:1-8). She kept hounding the judge until he granted her request.

Probably those who told Bartimaeus to be quiet were embarrassed by his bold outcry. It wasn't polite. It didn't follow social protocol. It interrupted the things that Jesus was saying as the group walked along. But Bartimaeus didn't care what people thought about him. He cared about one thing: *he wanted to see!*

As you know, Marla and I are going to the Czech Republic over Y2K. I was asked to give ten messages on faith. As soon as the man who invited me mentioned the date, I thought, and even said out loud, "Over Y2K?" But as I came home and thought about it, prayed, and sought counsel on what to do, it seemed like the only negative factor was the potential problems associated with Y2K. I thought, "How can I tell them that I don't have the faith to come and speak about faith because I'm scared of what might happen at Y2K?" So I committed Marla and I to go.

The next morning, we woke up to a cold house. No lights. No heat. The power had gone off in the night. I thought, "Good joke, Lord. I go out on a limb in faith and You start shaking the tree!" Then, Marla talked to a college girl here at church who knew a man at NAU who had studied Y2K extensively. He is the tornado-chaser type. He wants to be in the worst possible place he can be on New Year's Eve. After researching every country, guess where he picked? Yep: *Czech!*

Meanwhile, I'm getting frequent emails warning of how Y2K will be bad in the U.S. and an absolute disaster in other countries.

Then my mother telephoned and told Daniel (I was gone) that she had heard that the U.S. State Department was ordering Americans to get out of Eastern Europe before January 1<sup>st</sup>. Shortly after that, another email arrived in which the author said that his former predictions of Y2K disaster (which had been bad) were “soft core.” The real truth is that it may not be “The End Of The World As We Know It,” but it will be “much closer than any of us care to get.”

My point is, whether you trust in Christ as your Savior or whether you step out in faith as a Christian, your faith will have to overcome hindrances. Learn from Bartimaeus to persist in faith in spite of the hindrances.

(5) Our faith should be specific in focus.

At first, Bartimaeus cried out, “Have mercy on me!” But then Jesus asked him pointedly, “What do you want Me to do for you?” That’s an interesting question to ask a blind man! But Jesus never asked a dumb question. His question was designed to get Bartimaeus to be specific in stating his need in front of the crowd. “Lord, I want to receive my sight.” This response also confessed that he believed that Jesus had the power to give him sight.

Jesus doesn’t always grant our requests, even when they are specific. Matthew and Mark both report that just prior to this incident, James and John had come to Jesus and asked Him to do whatever they would request. Jesus responded, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They answered, “Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left” (Mark 10:37). But Jesus didn’t grant that request. It wasn’t for His glory to grant it. But it is for His glory to grant salvation by His free grace to blind beggars who cry out, “Lord, I want to receive my sight!” Be specific: tell the Lord that you have sinned and that you want His forgiveness. He will say, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

(6) Our faith should be bold in its requests.

What a bold thing to ask, to receive sight! It reminds me of the story of Naaman, the Aramean army captain who was a leper. He had a servant girl from Israel who told him of the prophet Elisha who could heal his leprosy. So Naaman took a generous gift along with a letter from his king to the king of Israel that said,

"Please cure my servant of his leprosy." The king of Israel tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?" (2 Kings 5:7). What a bold request! No one but God could do such a thing!

Precisely! God is in the business of answering impossible requests that bring glory to His name. As we saw (Luke 18:27), salvation is impossible with men, but not with God. Like Bartimaeus, come to God as a blind, begging sinner and cry out, "Lord, I want to receive my sight." What men cannot do, God can and will do. He will say, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you."

One reason Bartimaeus' faith was so bold was that he felt so keenly his deep need. He lived each day in total darkness. Those who could see did not feel the desperation that Bartimaeus felt. He could walk out into the bright sunshine and it was pitch black for him. I once heard Bill Cosby tell how he was staying in the same hotel as the blind singer, Ray Charles. He decided to stop by Ray's room and say hello. He knocked on the door and Ray yelled, "Come in." Cosby walked in and heard Ray's electric razor going in the bathroom, but the lights were off and entire place was pitch black. Before thinking, Cosby blurted out, "Hey, Ray, why are you shaving in the dark?" Then it hit him and he thought, "Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!" Ray good-naturedly called back, "I do everything in the dark, brother."

It is when we realize our true spiritual condition that we will sense our desperate need for Jesus Christ. Deliverance by man is in vain. We need deliverance by God, and so we must cast ourselves totally on Him.

(7) Our faith should result in glory to God for His answer.

As soon as Bartimaeus gained his sight he said, "Thanks, I feel much better now." And he took off to enjoy life and have all the fun that he had been missing. Not exactly! Immediately he began following Jesus, glorifying God. And all the people who saw what had happened gave praise to God. The mark of true faith in Jesus Christ is that the person who got saved gives glory to God and begins a new life of following Jesus in which others are led to give praise to God.

Bartimaeus didn't go around telling everyone about his great faith. Yes, Jesus says that his faith saved him, but clearly He means that Bartimaeus' faith was the means through which salvation came to him. It was God's power through Jesus that gave him his sight. The power and will to heal rested completely with the Lord. Faith is just the hand that receives God's gift of eternal life, and even faith is a gift from God. No one can boast in his great faith. We can only glory in God who opened our eyes and showed us His great mercy.

We have seen that there are opportune spiritual moments when Jesus passes by. At such times, we should cry out to Him in faith. Finally,

3. When we cry out to Jesus in faith, He will be merciful to us.

As soon as Jesus heard Bartimaeus' cry, He stopped or stood still. He was walking with a crowd of people, heading to Jerusalem where He knew He would suffer and die. He could have thought, "I don't have time for this man! Besides, can't he see that I'm teaching this multitude?" But Jesus stopped. He will always stop for any needy sinner who cries out to Him for mercy. He didn't tell Bartimaeus to go clean up first. He didn't prescribe a plan of penance for him to work off his sins. Instantly, by His great mercy, He granted Bartimaeus' request.

Jesus' words, "Your faith has saved you," have a double meaning. On one level, he was "saved" physically, so that he could now see. But on a deeper level, his faith had saved him spiritually. *That* is the greater miracle. Instantly God forgave his sins and imparted new life to him, making him a child of God. As Jesus said, "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). God promises that "whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

### Conclusion

David Brainerd, the 18<sup>th</sup> century missionary to the American Indians, was once witnessing to a chief who was close to trusting in Christ. But he held back. Brainerd got up, took a stick, drew a circle in the dirt around the chief, and said, "Decide before you

cross that line.” Why was Brainerd so urgent? Because he recognized that Jesus was passing by that chief at that moment. He might never be so close again.

I pray that you will see Jesus passing by here today and that this poor, blind beggar will teach you to cry out in faith, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” If you do, He will!

### Discussion Questions

1. How can we help lost people feel their spiritual blindness?
2. How can a person know if his faith is genuine?
3. How can we know if an opportunity is from God or not? See Acts 16:6-10; 2 Cor. 2:12-13.
4. What are some ways that Christians may be hindering outsiders from coming to Jesus?

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