

The God Who Opens Luke 18:31–43 (ESV)

INTRO/CONTEXT: We come today to the final miraculous wonder in the ministry of Christ recorded in Luke's Gospel before the resurrection. The first being turning the water into wine at the Wedding at Cana, and this healing of a blind man being the final. There will be one more account of a miraculous work when he curses a fig tree, but it is unique in that it is the only miracle that produces a destructive result rather than a restorative effect.

Just prior to the miracle, we read for a third time in Luke's Gospel a foretelling of what was soon to take place in Jerusalem.

TEXT: Luke 18:31–43 (ESV)

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. ³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³ And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."

It could not have been more plain - in fact, you would expect that on the first Easter Sunday, the disciples would be gathered around the tomb counting down. But that was not the case. Why? Look at verse 34 -

³⁴ But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Theologians are divided on whether this is active ignorance or passive ignorance. In other words, did God prevent them from understanding, or did the concept of a crucified Messiah not fit into their worldview? We cannot be certain, but it seems to me that this particular aspect of the Gospel was hidden from them until the proper time.

Luke's Gospel will conclude with a couple of disciples encountering the risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus, where we read that as Jesus blessed the food - **Luke 24:31 (ESV)** ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him...

ILLUSTRATION: I'm sure you heard about the little boy who was selling newborn puppies by the roadside. The sign said, "\$20 for Methodist Puppies." The next week, the sign said, "\$20 for Baptist Puppies." The local Methodist minister had to ask, "Son, last week you said they were Methodist puppies; this week you say they are Baptist puppies. What changed?" To which the boy replied, "Their eyes were opened."

Well, at this point, the disciple's eyes were not fully opened... but take that in contrast to what comes next.

³⁵ As he drew near to Jericho, a **blind man** was sitting by the roadside begging.

Jericho is one of the oldest functioning cities in Israel. It was the first city that the Jews conquered as they took possession of the land. As you may remember, the walls fell outward, and archaeological evidence validates the teaching of the text to this day.

In **Mark 10:46**, the blind man's name is **Bartimaeus**, meaning the son of Timaeus. When you read of an individual's name in biblical texts, it is assumed that this was a person who would be known by the Christian community. It is likely that the man whom Jesus heals went on to become a leader in the Christian church. Some have suggested that this man would have been in the upper room when the day of Pentecost came.

He was **blind**, which is difficult at any time, but particularly at this time. It was assumed that a blind person was cursed by God. Remember when the disciples encountered a man blind from birth and asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?"

We are also told that he was **begging**, which indicates that he had most likely been abandoned by his family. No one to help him, no one to look after him, he made his way to the gate of the city where travelers must pass by, and begged.

Part of the Jewish faith was that you must perform one **mitzvah** - or good deed each day. So often, these beggars would hold their cup and say, "Give to God," and the passer-by would drop in a coin.

ONE THING ABOUT LOSING THE CAPACITY TO SEE - is that we are told the other senses are heightened. A blind person can focus on the other senses. They hear what those with sight may not; their sense of touch is elevated to be able to read braille.

That seems to be the case for Bartimaeus. For you see, his theology had actually advanced beyond that of many of the disciples, simply from that which he had heard about Christ.

He was a bit of an Autodidact - a self-learner. We see his method of learning in verse 36 -

³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

So, he recognized that something unique was happening - the number of people passing through the gate was amplified. Never had he heard so many new people coming into the city of Jericho. So he inquired what this meant. He asked a question. One wonders how many times he had done this before. I am convinced it was his regular practice, and I will show you why.

³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

Jesus of Nazareth was the secular name for Jesus. There were many Yesuahs in first-century Israel, but this is the one that came from Nazareth. Nothing more than that.

But Bartimaeus doesn't cry out, "Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me." look at what he says -

³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The verses that follow reveal that much more than his eyes were opened... first we see an...

1. Opened Mind

The questions shouted by Bartimaeus reveal that he had come to several distinct theological conclusions about this Jesus of Nazareth, simply from the chatter around Jericho and his time listening to the teachings from the Synagogue.

a. He Believed Jesus to be the Son of David

³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, **Son of David**, have mercy on me!"

According to MacArthur - Son of David is a messianic title (cf. Matt. 12:23; 21:9; 22:42), which indicates more than merely declaring Jesus was a descendant of David. The title describes Him as the heir to the messianic throne and the one who has the right to fulfill the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12–14). In that covenant, God promised that David would have a greater son, who would reign over an everlasting kingdom.¹

Gabriel affirmed that the child Mary was carrying would be that Son of David - **Luke 1:32 (ESV)** ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

How did Bartimaeus come to this conclusion? He listened, and he inquired! He heard the sermons preached by the Rabbi; he heard the rumors about Jesus of Nazareth spoken in the marketplace - he had come to the conclusion that this Jesus is the promised Messiah - the Son of David, the King of all Kings.

b. He Believed Jesus to be Merciful

³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, **have mercy on me!**"

Now, what might Bartimaeus have heard that would have convinced him that Jesus was a merciful King?

Perhaps he had heard tell of that great sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorted his followers to **Luke 6:36 (ESV)** ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

¹ John MacArthur, Luke 18–24, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 60–61.

- Perhaps he heard about the mercy shown to the servant of the Centurian.
- Or the widow whose son had died.
- Or that sinful woman, caught in the very act, thrown at the feet of Jesus - she received mercy.
- Maybe it was the healing of Jairuses daughter.
- Or the feeding of the 5,000

Whatever it was - Bartimaeus had heard enough about Jesus to convince him that if Jesus was merciful to all of those people, maybe, just maybe, he would show mercy to him as well.

He believed Jesus to be the Son of David; he believed Jesus to be merciful...

c. He Believed Jesus to be Sovereign

41. “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, **“Lord, let me recover my sight.”**

He addressed Jesus as kurie (Lord), likely affirming that He has the sovereign authority to dispense this healing. What did Bartimaeus overhear that convinced him that Jesus of Nazareth had such authority?

- Maybe he heard that no man ever spoke as He, as one with authority.
- Could it be when he heard that even the storms and the sea obeyed His voice?
- Perhaps it was that poor man tormented by a legion of demons in the country of the Geresenes. Jesus commanded them as would command a stray dog, to leave.
- Maybe it was the time they let an invalid through a hole in the roof and Jesus spoke with the authority not only to heal, but to forgive sins.

Whatever it was, he had heard enough to be convinced that if Jesus wanted him to regain his vision, it would happen.

He believed Jesus to be the Son of David; he believed Jesus to be merciful, sovereign,

d. He Believed Jesus to be Omnipotent

41. “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, **“Lord, let me recover my sight.”**

It was believed that blindness was one ailment that could not be healed. You have to admit it is a difficult one to fake. Lower back pain, perhaps... but blindness?

But Bartimaeus had heard rumors that Jesus had healed the blindness of others and He believed those rumors. So when he heard Jesus was passing by, he had the audacity to cry out to him - Son of David have mercy on me as well...

NOW - this is a good opportunity to explain how life change happens.

You see, it is God that saves a soul, it is God that changes the life, but the work we do in places like this gives God the tools to work with to cause faith to arise in the heart.

- **PARENTS**—Those Bible stories you read to your kids each night may seem, at times, to be making little difference. Little Johnny wakes up as rebellious as he went to bed. But dear Mother, understand that one day Jesus might pass by Him - when he does, little Johnny will know who He is.
- **TEACHERS** - Do you ever wonder if anything you have taught is actually being caught? This generation has the remarkable ability to see totally disinterested while tracking along perfectly with what you are saying. They may not look you in the eye as you teach, but they, like blind Bartimaeus, are hearing nonetheless.

Paul said it well in **1 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

That great Theologian Nick Saben said it best, “Don’t look at the scoreboard, trust the process”

Paul exhorted Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)**

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

The Mind of Bartimaeus had been opened...secondly, we see an...

2. Opened Mouth

³⁸ **And he cried out,** “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Luke 6:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ ... out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

If the Lord Jesus Christ fills your heart, he will inevitably come out of your mouth.

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago, I had a young man approach me after a student camp and he said, “Pastor, I gave my heart to Jesus today and I believe he saved me, but please don’t tell anyone - my dad is a deacon and he would be embarrassed if he knew I have never actually be born again. I said, “young man, first of all I think you underestimate your dad, but secondly - I won’t have to tell anyone, if you sincerely came to Christ, you will confess it before others.”

Have you ever had a time, where your mind was opened to the claims of the Gospel? You understood that Jesus was the Son of God, the long promised Messiah of Israel, that He was merciful to sinners, and he had the power and authority to save?

Did you cry out to him for mercy? Perhaps you didn’t know what to say - but the words are that important - it is the cry of the heart. If you know who He is in your heart and you cry out to Him by faith - he hears and he saves!

Romans 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

His MIND had been opened...his MOUTH had been opened...

3. Opened Eyes

⁴¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” ⁴² And Jesus said to him, “**Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.**” ⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight...

Would you be prepared to answer the question Jesus asked? If Jesus passed by you and said, “what do you want me to do for you?” How would you answer? What would your motive be?

Bartimaeus wanted to see, that he might follow Christ. He had lived his life at the mercy of strangers begging at the same old gate day after day... if only he could see, he would arise and follow.

What about you? What would have to happen for you to follow Jesus?

- What if you had something that most of humanity has never possessed - a complete copy of the written word of God and the ability to read? If you had that, would you follow? Oh, but I suppose we all have multiple copies of the Bible in print and digital. My bible app will even read it to me. That is no excuse.
- What if you had a bible preaching church to attend and godly men and women to pour into your life and disciple you? Well you have that as well - I know of no church more willing to invest in your spiritual progress.
- What is lacking? Do you know? If not, figure that out and cry out to God for it!

His MIND had been opened...his MOUTH had been opened... his EYES were opened

4. Opened Witness

⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight **and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.**

This was far more than a medical miracle in Bartimaeus's life; his life was completely changed. He followed Jesus, and he would follow Him into Jerusalem; with those new eyes, he likely saw Jesus suffering and dying on the cross. He would see Him raised from the dead.

He glorified God for what had happened, and when the people saw his praise, they joined in as well.

You see when a person is genuinely saved, you don't have to convince them to speak up for the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon said, *"You are either a witness for Christ or an impostor."*

Which are you? Has your life been radically changed? Has your soul been gloriously saved? Must we guess at the cause?

Must we beg you to testify? Must we reason you into believer's baptism? Or are you the first to speak?

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Many may not know that the great Dutch Painter, Vincent Van Gogh, was the son of a godly Pastor, and Van Gogh himself wanted to preach the Gospel. For a while, he lived in London, and his favorite preacher was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Each Lord's day, Van Gogh sat among the crowds, with as many as 10 - 20 thousand people listening to Spurgeon preach the Gospel. In the evenings, Van Gogh would go down to the east end of London and work as a street preacher.



He wanted to study the scriptures more deeply and he went to the university at Antwerp. Sadly, he fell into a school that was very liberal in its views of scripture and day by day, they raised questions over the authority, sufficiency, inerrancy of the biblical text - and ultimately Van Gogh lost his confidence in God and turned to immorality.

You'd expect a great artist to paint something that reflected this change in position and he did. He calls it, "An open bible with a candlestick and a book".

- The bible had belonged to his Father a Dutch Reformed Pastor in the Netherlands...it is opened to Isa. 53.
- The candlestick is no longer burning...
- The book is an erotic pornographic novel that had been banned called, "The Girl Elisa" by Emile Zola.

What a picture of this generation. Dear friend, is the candle burning for you?

*O soul are you weary and troubled
 No light in the darkness you see
 There's light for a look at the Savior
 And life more abundant and free
 Turn your eyes upon Jesus
 Look full in his wonderful face
 And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
 In the light of his glory and grace*