
As we begin this morning, I want to draw your minds back to a few weeks ago when many of us lost power when the tornado came through. That wasn't a fun time being without power...in the dark. I know I spent quite a bit of time in the dark that Monday night...uselessly turning on the light switches. It's amazing how spoiled we are to lights at night to be able to see. And, this points me to today's message...a message about the plight of the blind...those living in darkness.

I remember one time when I was at a conference years ago... to prove a point, the speaker at the conference broke us into groups and had us do things blindfolded...



That was a weird thing. One in the group was left unblindfolded so he/she could help the blind. It was a conference on teamwork. Have you ever had to do something blindfolded? It's amazingly hard! I mean, even trying to walk blindfolded through your own home (that you know so well) can be ridiculously difficult?

Today, we're going to witness the plight of two blind men as they encounter Jesus. They are hopelessly and helplessly blind, which has led to a lifestyle of begging. It's a pitiful scene that's unfolding on the outskirts of the town of Jericho.

Matthew 20:29-34

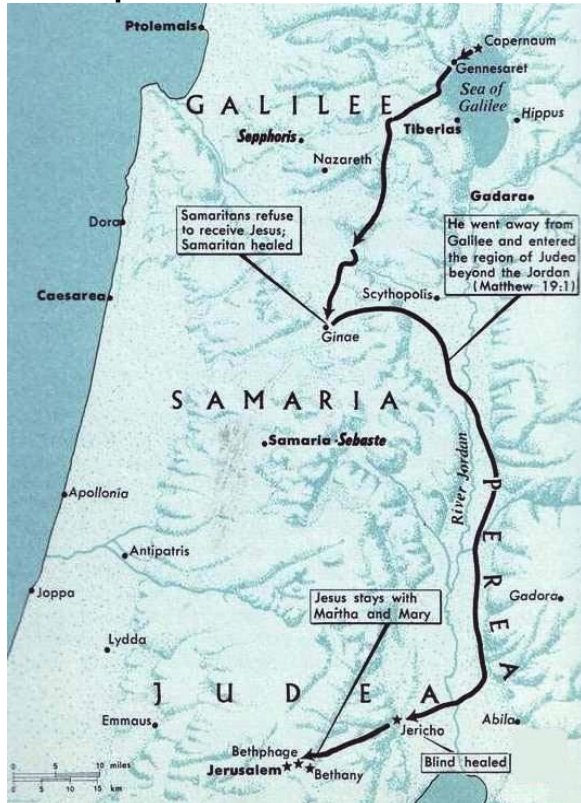
²⁹ And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³³ They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." ³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Jesus asked the men, "What do you want me to do for you?" Now, I don't mean to be crass...but, if you and I are looking at this scene as flies on the wall...we would probably say, "Duh! They're blind Jesus! They want their sight! Isn't that obvious?" The answer would be, "Of course it's obvious..." After all, at this very moment...in heaven...Jesus knows everything we need in our lives, right? He's omniscient! He knows everything! And the same was true at that moment... So, why would He say something like that?

Hey folks...have you heard this before: "You have not because you ask not." That's James 4:2 and it's a principle of Scripture that we must never forget. Of course Jesus knew what

they wanted and needed, and He knows what we need, BUT He wants us to come to Him and ask...He wants to have a relationship with us where we trust Him enough to meet our needs when we ask.

Now, I want you to think with me about where we are in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is a little over a week from His death on the cross. He's made His way to Jericho. You'll remember our map...

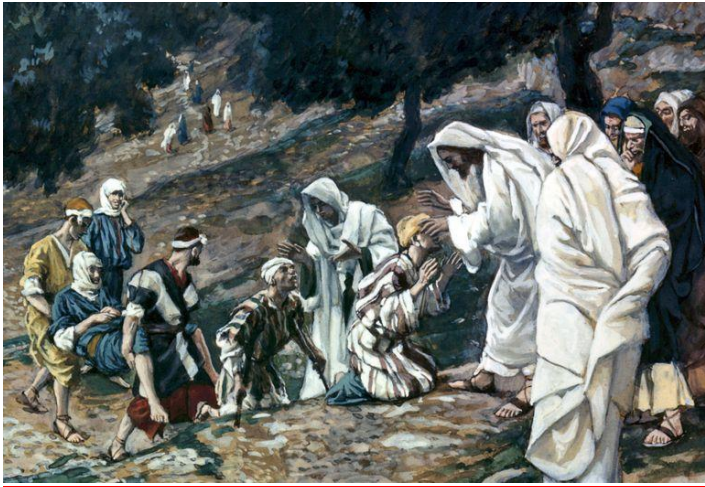


At the bottom of the map you'll see Jericho and where it says, "The blind healed." Jesus is headed to Jerusalem for His death on the cross and He's made His last journey from the north in Galilee to Jerusalem. Along the way, what's He been doing? He's been teaching, preaching and what? **Back in Matthew 19:2** we learned that massive crowds followed him...see it...

Mathew 19:2

² And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

Truly healing has been part of Jesus' ministry for the last three years. How many times have His apostles seen this happen...



Honestly, for His Apostles, this has become old hat to them. They've been watching Him heal for three years. They've seen Him heal blind people many times. But, this occasion is going to be a teachable moment. This will be a teachable moment about all they've seen over the last few weeks on their journey south to Jerusalem.

You remember...it's Passover season. There are over 2,000,000 million Jews headed to Jerusalem for Passover. The crowds are unbelievable...you can't stir them with a stick. Matthew tells us they are coming out of Jericho. They're only 12 miles from Jerusalem.

Now, I want you to understand something... This isn't the original Jericho, because it's in ruins (Joshua 5-6). It was destroyed when the nation of Israel marched around it for 7 days and then on the 7th day, they marched around it 7 times and then shouted and the walls came tumbling down. Yet, there was a lady and her family who were saved...Rahab (a prostitute)... In fact...she is in the family line of Jesus found in Matthew 1. She became the mother of Boaz and she was the great, great grandmother of King David. (You tell me God can't change a life on a dime... Just ask Rahab! You can change!!!)

Well, Jericho is an amazing city! To this day...it's so beautiful. I saw it in 2007. But, the Jericho I saw is the third Jericho. Even the one that Jesus came through...the one we're talking about this morning was eventually destroyed. The Jericho I saw in 2007 and will see again next year is about 1 and ½ miles south of the original. See the picture on the screens...



It is about 1,000 feet below sea level. To go to Jerusalem you will journey almost 3,300 feet straight up (like going to Boone). It's a tough journey.

And it's hot in Jericho... It's considered the Palm Springs of Palestine, because it gets really hot there and compared to Jerusalem, where it is odd...but, it can snow in Jerusalem. There's a contrast between the two cities. Jericho is nicknamed the "City of Palms" and King Herod had a winter home there. It's such a beautiful area!

Now, I also saw something else while I was in Jericho... Take a look...



Do you know what that is? That's a sycamore tree. Now, Matthew doesn't record the event with the little bitty tax collector who climbed up in one of these, while Jesus was there. Only Luke records this account in Luke 19...

Luke 19:1-3

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

What a juxtaposition of opposites!! A rich tax collector versus two blind beggars! A man who could buy anything he wanted versus two men who had to beg for everything they needed. A man who climbed into a tree to see Jesus versus two men who couldn't see their hand in front of their face. What a contrast...and yet they were the same... They wanted to SEE JESUS!!! Oh! Don't miss the providential irony in this.

Three men wanting to see...and they all MUST see Jesus in order to be saved... You see, it doesn't matter your station in life...rich or poor...well educated or no education...if you drive a Rolls Royce or a Ford Fiesta...we all MUST SEE Jesus in order to be saved...we must get to Him...He is our salvation...He is our life preserver in our sea of sin!

And so here are these two, pitiful, blind beggars trying to get Jesus' attention!

Matthew 20:30

³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Think with me about this common scene in the first century...



Luke's account of this scene tells us in Luke 18, tells us they were begging. You see, there were people begging along the main thoroughfares everywhere you turned in Jesus' day. There was no Social Security. No Medicaid or Medicare. If you were blind and had no family to care for you...you had to beg! And these two men heard that Jesus was passing by.

Now, Mark records this event in his Gospel account as well. **Would you turn with me to Mark's gospel please.** Turn to Mark 10 and find verse 46. Let me remind you that Mark's account is from the Apostle Peter's perspective. John Mark was a missionary, who traveled with the Apostle Paul. Mark never traveled with Jesus. He and Luke were not Apostles. They were missionaries. Peter tells us (via the hand of Mark) one of the men's names...

Mark 10:46

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

This makes it a bit more personal doesn't it? His name is Bartimaeus. This is a man...a human being...a person in great need...along with his friend...and they know they need help... They are crying out for mercy! **Go back to Matthew 20**... I want you to catch that second word in verse 30.

Matthew 20:30a

³⁰ And behold,

See that word? "BEHOLD." What does that mean? It's an exclamation! It means: "Wow! This is crazy! This is amazing!" What's amazing? That two blind men are begging? No! Again, that's a common scene. No and it's also NOT AMAZING that they were blind...there were many, many blind people in the first century (medical care and procedures were pretty much non-existent). So, what was amazing? Was it because they were crying out? No! That was common too! The louder you screamed...the more apt you were to get some money. So, what was the big deal...the BEHOLD? Look at the end of the verse...

Matthew 20:30

³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

They called Jesus "Lord" and the "Son of David." That's the big deal! Why? Because these guys were ascribing to Jesus: "Messiahship." They were in essence saying: "This is the Son of God!" That's what was amazing! They had never seen a single miracle...they had only heard about Jesus and yet, they believed. Just like us... We are the blind beggars who have never seen...but, yet, believe. They called him: "LORD...Kurios...King of all...Sovereign, Master..." They called Him: "Son of David"...that's the Jewish term for the Messiah...HAVE MERCY ON US!"

How did the CROWD react to this hollering?

Matthew 20:31

³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

In essence...the crowd told them to "shut up!" This was becoming embarrassing! You've been there. You're at a ballgame and a fan just goes crazy trying to get the referees attention and they're a family member ☺ and you just want them to sit down...it's embarrassing... That's how this scene was playing out. BE QUIET!!! STOP IT!

But, the men "CRIED OUT" even more! This only intensified the situation! In fact, the word, "CRIED" in the Greek is the word: KRAZO and it means to "cry out like a raven" or to "scream like a lunatic...as if you were demon possessed." It means to shriek like an insane person!!!!

Listen, these guys are screaming at the top of their lungs! Help us Jesus!!! And I can just see the people in the crowd trying to push them down and get them to shut up... Yet, they won't give up! Why? **They're desperate** and Jesus is passing by!! They're going to miss Him! Now's the time!!! This is it!!!

"Lord, Son of David...have mercy on us!"

It's like this folks...You're drowning at sea...you've been blinded by the crash...and the helicopter is about to pass you by...

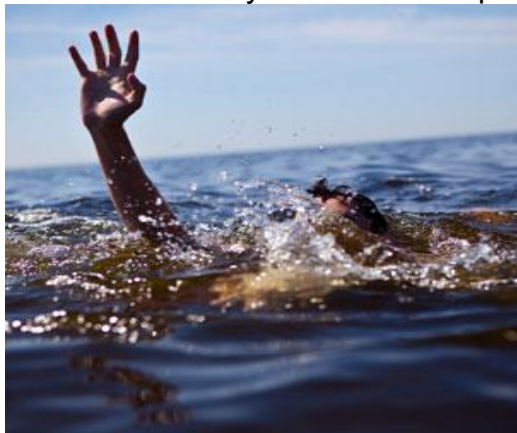


You are screaming for all you're worth!!! Help me!! Save me!! Don't pass me by!!! Can you feel and understand their desperation?

Hey folks, listen to me...that's how you've got to come to Jesus... You're desperate...you have no where else to turn. That's how you receive Biblical salvation...

Listen, I believe we're missing it today. We try to tell people that getting saved is about going to heaven...and it is...but, it's about missing Hell! Being saved is more than just adding Jesus to our lives like adding an extra pillow for our head in the bed... No...the point is...when you see yourself...as desperate you don't have anything...you don't have any pillows...you're drowning and you need to be **SAVED!!!**

Listen, in order for Biblical salvation to take place, a person must come to the end of themselves. They must see that there is no hope and no way to save themselves outside of Jesus. Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." To call on the Lord means to cry out in total desperation... See the picture again... **SAVE ME!**



That's what these men were doing and it got Jesus' attention...

Matthew 20:32

³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Again, I don't want to sound disrespectful, but that on the surface...seems like the dumbest question in the history of man: "What do you want me to do for you?" Come on Jesus! They're blind...what do you think they want you to do? Isn't it obvious?

So, why does Jesus ask? Because in order to be helped, to be delivered...you must ask! You have to call on Him. You must admit your desperation and you have to do it publicly. That's the point... Jesus always required people to say publicly what they wanted...that's why we must **CONFESS** with our mouths the Lord Jesus.

You see, believing in Jesus is not enough...even the devil and his demons believe and shudder. No! You must confess Jesus publicly with your mouth...

Romans 10:9-10

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Listen church family, if you don't confess with your mouth PUBLICLY that you believe in Jesus, then, Biblically speaking, you aren't saved. It's that simple. **That's why Jesus said, "What do you want me to do?"**

Can you just see Bartimaeus... Maybe he looked like this...



Eyes glazed over...likely hoarse from shrieking and screaming...

Matthew 20:33

³³ They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened."

A simple request... "I want to see!" And did you notice that Bartimaeus and his friend called Him "Lord" again. Sovereign and Master of all! So, what does Jesus do?

Matthew 20:34

³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Can you see that scene... ..imagine Jesus touching their eyes...



This is the God of the universe in the person of Jesus Christ touching their eyes and the Bible says, "IMMEDIATELY" at that moment they saw...



Wow! Can you imagine!! Hey...don't miss the fact that all three Gospel writers record this fact...that they **"recovered" their sight**. What does that mean?

It means at some point in their lives, they could see and they went blind somehow. You know...it's one thing to get your sight having never been able to see before (say, you were blind since birth), but to have your sight and then lose it and get it back again... Wow! That had to have been such a tremendously powerful and **euphoric feeling!**

And so, Jesus was still teaching only days away from his death... What's He been teaching?

Well, that the "first shall be last and the last first." He offered these men healing and salvation at the end of His ministry and His apostles were seeing this. Would they receive and accept these two men? Jesus had also been teaching about being willing to suffer... He was teaching about He would suffer at the hands of the Romans and the Jews as He is going to be flogged and crucified... Yet, here He shows pity and compassion to these two men who have been suffering so much. Jesus was willing to slow down and be a servant (a Deacon...diakonos to these men). He touched them (GOT HIS HANDS DIRTY) and they were healed and they followed Jesus.

But, there's something else that we can't miss and we see this from Peter's perspective from Mark 10:52.

Mark 10:52

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well." The Greek word for "faith" is this word:

Faith: (Greek: Pistis): a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God

You see that phrase: "made you well," is more than physical healing...because of the Greek word that is used for the two English words "made well"... It's this one word:

Made Well: (Greek: Sōzō): to save, to preserve one who is in danger of destruction, to rescue

What does this mean? Well, Jesus could have use the word, "**Ee-AH-oh-mai,**" which means to cure or make well physically, but the word was "**Sozo,**" which means salvation. Don't forget...



You see, Jesus healed all kinds of people in His ministry...thousands upon thousands were brought to Him, but Bartimaeus and his friend were

SOZO, saved and I'll tell you how we can see the evidence of this... The end of verse 52 in Mark 10...

Mark 10:52

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Jesus said, "Go your own way..." and they could have chosen to go back into Jericho, but they followed Jesus. They didn't go home... They didn't go tell family... They didn't go pack some clothes for the journey... "They followed Him on the way." That tells me they were the real deal. They said, "We're going with you!"

It reminds me of what Peter said when Jesus asked the apostles if they wanted to go another way... Peter said

John 6:68-69

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

And that's exactly what these two blind men realized. Where else are we going to go? You are the Son of God. You are Lord! You are the Son of David! We're following you! And that's what the word "FOLLOWED" means...

The word is: **AH-kah-LOU-They-OH**, and it means to become part of the group...to join the team...to become a disciple. These blind guys said... "I'm done with this! I'm following Jesus!"

As so, as we close...I'll ask: What do you believe about Jesus? Can you see Him? Of course you can't...you and I are like the blind men...we can't see Him...so will we believe what we've heard. Or will you continue to walk in darkness...allowing the god of this age, Satan to continue to blind you?