

Luke Chapter 18: vv. 35-43 and 19: vv. 1-10

The healing of the Blind Man and the conversion of Zacchaeus

[English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Today as we continue our study in Luke's Gospel, we are coming to the end of the Lord's ministry here on earth. A few days later, the Lord Jesus would be crucified at the hill of Calvary. In the previous talks on chapter 18 there have been many different people who have come to see Jesus and parables taught of different characters. There was:

- The persistent widow vv. 1-8
- The pharisee and the tax collector vv. 9-14
- Little children vv. 15-17
- The rich young ruler vv. 18-30
- We then have the blind beggar vv. 35-43 in today's talk along with Zacchaeus in ch 19 vv. 1-10.

Some of them receive blessing and others went away sad. There are contrasts between rich people and poor people, religious people and those of simple faith. In today's talk we will look at the outcome of a poor blind man and a rich tax collector and how they found the answer.

Jesus allowed the most desirable potential disciple (the rich young ruler) to go away without being saved yet one like Zacchaeus gets the blessing. Previously in chapter 18, there was the thought of the coming kingdom, but in our two incidents today we are focussed on the grace of God seeking to save sinners which is a picture of the present day, the day of grace, whereby men and women, boys and girls can come to the Saviour.

The teaching of the kingdom comes back into view in the next incident in chapter 19. Today we will look at the healing of the blind man where we see the mercy of the Lord in view and then we will look at the story of Zacchaeus which shows the grace of the Lord Jesus. In the story of Zacchaeus we see the reason for the first coming of the Lord Jesus which was to make a way of salvation possible by His death and resurrection. His primary objective was to seek and to save that which was lost.

The Healing of Bartimaeus

So let's now read the first section of today's passage in Luke chapter 18 vv. 35-43. "As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he came near, He asked him, "What do you want me to do for

you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

This story is told in two other Gospels (Matthew and Mark) with Mark giving us the most detail and revealing the name of the blind man as Bartimaeus. On close inspection of these incidents, there would appear to be some discrepancies in the stories. It would seem that Luke places the healing of the blind man as Jesus approached Jericho and both Matthew and Mark as He left Jericho. It has been found by archaeologists that there were two Jericho's at this time, an old original city and a new Roman Jericho, side by side. Luke writing for the Gentiles would have the Roman Jericho in mind while the others would be referring to the old city. Matthew's Gospel talks of two blind men who were healed while the others only mention one. Matthew also tells us that Jesus touched the eyes of the blind men which brings before us the coming of the Messiah of Israel.

I would like to put 5 headings over our talk about blind Bartimaeus:

1. **His condition**
2. **His need**
3. **His solution**
4. **His conversion**
5. **His devotion**

1. **His condition.**

Verse 35 tells us that he was a blind man who sat at the roadside begging. Blindness and diseases of the eye were a very common illness in the times of the Bible. This was usually caused by flies that landed on the eyes of children when they were sleeping, bringing disease which could lead to blindness. He would have been an outcast of society and would have spent most of his time begging for alms for food in the hope of getting enough to survive. There was no help from those in the crowd round about him; he was doomed for a life of misery. We see from the following verses of Scripture that God's view of the unbeliever is very much as the same condition as Bartimaeus.

2 Corinthians 4:4: “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Revelation 3:17: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realising that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Every day was the same for Bartimaeus with no sign of hope or help from those around about him.

Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

You might say that I'm not like Bartimaeus but until we come to realise that we are all in the same condition as sinners, blind and without hope, then we will not see that we have a need in our lives.

2. **His need.**

Physically Bartimaeus wanted to have his sight restored but he knew that no ordinary man could do this. There was no medical help and no social hand outs to help make his life more comfortable. He would have heard from those around him that there was a man called Jesus who was a miracle worker who could meet his need and restore his sight. For the last 3 years, the Lord

had been performing miracles - healing the sick and making the blind to see but Bartimaeus had no way of getting to Jesus by himself. Romans 5:12 says,

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

And also in Isaiah 64:6 we read,

“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”

Like Bartimaeus we have a need, so let's look for a solution.

3. His solution.

A tremendous opportunity arose that day for Bartimaeus. We read in v.36 and v.37 of a large multitude of people creating a stir nearby. Bartimaeus asked what was going on and was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. This may well be his only opportunity to meet with Jesus so he seized it with both hands and began to shout out “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me.” Like Bartimaeus, we may only have one opportunity to come to the Saviour as the Scripture tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” The crowd tried to quieten Bartimaeus but he was persistent, shouting louder and louder! On hearing his cry, the Lord Jesus stood still and asked for him to be brought near.

The words “cried out” in verse 38 are translated as to use one's voice at a high volume, to shout. The words “rebuked” and “cried out” are both in the imperfect tense indicating a continued action. The more he cried out, the more the crowd tried to stop him. If we call on the Lord to save us He will always hear: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” Isaiah 55:6. Our solution for salvation is right here, right now. There are many voices trying to keep us from the Lord as Satan will try his hardest to distract us by various means: family, work, pleasure, filling our heads with false hope. We need to have the same desire as Bartimaeus to come to the One who can save us.

4. His conversion.

Bartimaeus's cry was “Son of David have mercy on me” vv. 38-39. He knew more than the rest of the crowd that Jesus was the Messiah. The phrase, “Son of David,” means that someone who is the promised descendant of David will sit upon the throne of Israel (see Jeremiah ch.33). His cry is for more than money, it's one of faith that the Lord will be able to heal him. It is strange that the Lord asked him in v.41 “What do you want me to do for you?” It would seem obvious what was needed but Jesus wanted to hear the faith that was in him. Romans 10:9 tells us “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.” Having been brought to Jesus, he asked of the Lord that he might receive his sight. We see the tender mercy of Jesus restoring his sight but also because of Bartimaeus' faith, He could say, “Thy faith has saved thee” v.42. In his poor, helpless condition, there was nothing he could have done to restore his sight. We too need to come to the Saviour as the only way of salvation. John 14 v. 6 tells us,

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.””

As Christians, when we speak to others about Jesus it is sometimes good to ask them the question, “What do you want Jesus to do for you?” Are they really wanting to be saved or do they

just want a social connection to Jesus to make them look good? Jesus heard Bartimaeus' response and said, "Your faith has made you well."

5. His devotion.

Bartimaeus, once having received his sight, could very easily have gone his own way but we read in v.43 that he followed Jesus and not only followed, he also glorified God. When we come to the Saviour, His desire is for us to follow in His footsteps and be a witness for Him in this world. The word 'followed' means to follow someone as a disciple, but we see that Bartimaeus followed not just anyone, he followed Jesus. His change of life was seen by others, which in turn led them to praise God also. Those who are close to us should see something in our lives which reflects the love of God in our hearts. This is the thought of reconciliation, to have our lives changed and a complete turnaround in our walk of life.

The well known hymn, "Amazing Grace", was written almost two and a half centuries ago in 1772 by an Englishman called John Newton. He had a troubled childhood and spent years fighting against authority. He became a sailor in his teens and later in life was a slave ship master. He was converted at sea during a storm but it was a few years before he fully devoted his life to God's service. The lyrics of the hymn tell of his life and conversion and devotion to God, just like we've seen in Bartimaeus.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

John Newton - 1772

The Call of Zacchaeus

Let's now read from chapter 19 vv. 1-10:

"He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And

Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

When we come to chapter 19, we are drawing to the close of the end of the Lord's ministry here on earth, prior to His going to Jerusalem to be crucified. In the well known story of Zacchaeus, which is a favourite of most children, Luke gives us a few details as to what kind of person Zacchaeus was. In comparison to blind Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus was totally different. He was head of the tax collectors in his region, working on behalf of the Romans, which made him very unpopular among his own people, safe to say that they would have hated him. Jesus acknowledges the hatred people had for tax collectors: "If they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" Matthew 18 v.17. Tax collectors were known to line their own pockets, making him a very rich man. He was small in stature and was probably despised by most because of this.

In Leviticus 21, we read of conditions which prevented people being accepted as priests, one of which was being small in stature, so it is possible that he had been an outcast most of his life. He was certainly not liked among his people; therefore his job would have given him the power over them. Whilst he had such riches, there was obviously still a void in his life and when he heard that Jesus was nearby, his desire was to see Him. Unable to do this because of the crowd, he climbed a sycamore tree to get a good view. Can you imagine the shock of Zacchaeus when Jesus stopped under the very tree he had climbed and called him by his name! There was a hymn sung in church the night I was saved which struck a chord with me and it goes like this.

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling-
Calling for you and for me;
Patiently Jesus is waiting and watching-
Watching for you and for me.

"Come home! come home!
You who are weary come home!"
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling, "Oh sinner, come home!"

Oh, for the wonderful love He has promised-
Promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon-
Pardon for you and for me!

W L Thompson 1847 -1909

Maybe someone today has that same desire to get to know Jesus by listening in to this talk.

Jesus called to Zacchaeus to make haste and come down and he was obedient to that call. When the Saviour calls, there are only two responses; there is no middle ground. You can ignore Him and carry on as you are or, like Zacchaeus, you can respond to the call and receive Him as your Saviour. Even though Zacchaeus was a rich man, it still made him miserable and dissatisfied with life. But responding to the call of Jesus, we are told he now had joy in his life. There's a chorus we sing with the children:

“If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come in to your heart.
Your sins He’ll take away, your night He’ll turn to day,
Your heart He’ll make over anew and then come in to stay.
If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come into your heart.”

Joseph D Carlson 1915

Zacchaeus could testify to that and this could be what you also could enjoy if you are obedient to the call.

In verse 7, we get the reaction of the crowd. Zacchaeus was the last person in Jericho they thought should have the privilege of entertaining Jesus in his house. But this incident shows us the grace of the Lord Jesus by choosing to save such a person as Zacchaeus. No matter what kind of person we are, the Lord Jesus tells us also that His grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In verse 8, we see that in true repentance Zacchaeus now gives back to the poor and returns whatever he must have stolen from others but it must be noted that salvation did not come from this act as there is nothing that we can do to inherit eternal life. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us,

“knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

The Lord’s answer to the people was that Zacchaeus was the son of Abraham. This is something that all Jews could claim to be as their heritage, but it was in relation to the faith of Abraham in that he left all and obeyed God through faith. In the same way Zacchaeus, through faith, accepting Jesus as Saviour was the means of his salvation.

At the end of this narrative Luke reminds us that the primary purpose of the Lord’s incarnation as Son of Man was to provide a way of salvation for the sinner, both Jew and Gentile. It was not to set up the kingdom on earth at this particular time as the Jews had hoped. His death and resurrection makes it possible for all who trust Him and confess their sin to receive eternal life.

As we close this talk let’s think about the mercy shown to blind Bartimaeus and to the grace shown to Zacchaeus. There is hope for all in this world if we are obedient to the call and come to the One who can save.

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