

I. Introduction

A. I want to thank Shelia for sharing her story – giving us a bit more perspective on what it’s like to be blind. And I want to note that sometimes we do not understand because we cannot see. And sometimes we see but do not understand.

B. Two weeks ago I flew to Denver for a conference. I arrived on April 20th, a bit early for the event, so I went to a coffee shop in the hotel and sat down at a window seat to read. But after a few minutes I set the book down because I was really taken by the people walking down the sidewalk in front of me. It was a very counter-cultural collection of people.

C. I knew Denver was a bit edgy, but not this edgy. It looked like a Grateful Dead Concert. And I was thinking, “Wow, this place has changed. It’s more like Berkeley than Boulder. It’s more Berkeley than Berkeley.”

D. After about an hour, a bit after 4, I decided to go for a run before things started so I raced up to my room, changed and headed out around 4:15. And I was immediately struck by the fact that everyone I went by was smoking pot.

1. Denver is one of two states where recreational marijuana use is legal. I knew that. But I didn’t think that everyone would be smoking pot. And as I jogged I am thinking, “Wow, my sense of how a culture changes is way off. They legalized pot a couple years ago and now 90 percent of the people are smoking pot in the middle of the day.

E. And then a couple hours later I learned that I had arrived in Denver on April 20th – 4-20 – which is National Weed Day. 420 is police code for smoking pot. “We have a 420 in progress,” means, “we have a report that someone is smoking marijuana right now.”

F. In light of that, April 20th became the day for everyone to openly defy the laws and smoke pot. In particular, at 4:20 on 4-20 – right at the time I was out for a run – people all over the country (even in places where it is still illegal) are to light up.

G. The hotel I was staying at was two blocks from the capital. Everyone was flying in to meet there. So what I was seeing was not Denver being edgy. It was stumbled quite different than that.

H. Sometimes we do not see and consequently do not understand. Sometimes we see but do not understand what we are seeing.

II. Context matters. And that certainly applies to our passage today.

A. Luke has been building a case for Jesus as the Savior. He tells us that right at the start.

1. The entire Bible is about Jesus. The Old Testament is a long introduction pointing ahead to Jesus and the Gospels. The rest of the New Testament points back to the Gospels and Jesus.

2. The Gospels themselves are all about Jesus and his death and resurrection – which changes everything. And which we will turn to in just a few moments as we come to Holy Communion.

B. At this moment in our study we are in Luke 18. Jesus is approaching Jerusalem and the last week of his life. We are in an extended section of teachings by Jesus because Luke records a number of the parables here. But we have a little break from that for a reminder that Jesus is God.

III. Luke 18:35: **As Jesus approached Jericho**

A. Jesus had been in Galilee (in the North) for a couple years. Small towns. Simple people. For the last handful of chapters He has been traveling south towards Jerusalem, timing his arrival to correspond to the Passover because the Passover – the annual Jewish National holiday during which they celebrated their deliverance from slavery to the Egyptians a thousand years earlier by sacrificing a lamb (a young, perfect, male lamb) and splashing its blood over the door to their home) – was all about Jesus. It was always about him. He will make that point at the Last Supper.

B. Anyway, He is walking to Jerusalem. They have arrived at Jericho, which means that they are getting close. They are just 15 miles away – a day or two out. By this point the traffic would be picking up. Lots of people are heading to Jerusalem. And as a result, those who survive by begging are out in force.

IV. **As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.**

A. This was a good place for a beggar to sit - lots of people on a religious pilgrimage feeling the need to be generous. It's a bit like Christmas time, and a blind person begging was the person ringing the bell next to the Salvation Army Red Kettle.

B. This blind man is likely destitute, poorly dressed, scraggly hair and an unkempt beard.

C. I was talking with a friend who was also at the conference and he was talking about a new campus the church he leads had just opened up. It is in an urban store front building in a low income part of town.

D. And he had a morning off and went down to this site and was hanging out in the back and he noticed a half dozen homeless men who were sitting on the other side of a temporary wall, listening.

E. And he went over and said, “Guys, come on in and join everyone and sit here with everyone else.” And one guy said, “No. You don’t understand, half of us are crazy and would freak out if we had to go into a crowded room. And all of us smell bad. We prefer to sit out here. But this church is great. They give us all the coffee we want and they talk to us. You can tell they are glad we are here.”

F. The blind man likely looked like the homeless people. First century Palestine was a hard place to live for everyone. He is likely quite poor and almost certainly disheveled.

V. V36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

A. Hard to know what exactly is going on at this moment. This doesn’t necessarily sound like a request for money. Maybe it is. But as we read it appears to be more than that.

VI. V 36 - 39 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

A. Please note, he refers to Jesus as the Son of David twice. This would suggest that although he is physically blind, he is not spiritually blind. Calling Jesus the Son of David is a way of calling Jesus Savior.

B. One of the ways the story told in the Bible is framed is through a series of covenants - agreements or contracts that God makes with various people or groups of people. (The Bible is not a collection of advice – morality lessons and inspirational stories. All of that is in there, but it is the story of God’s love and it gives the context for what is playing out in life. And we need to understand the context to understand what is going on around us. And it all leads up to God restoring us and rescuing us.)

C. And one of the ways you can see this develop is by looking at the deals he makes with various people: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. In 2 Samuel 7 we have the Davidic Covenant. Let me read it for you. This is God speaking through Nathan the prophet:

1. Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leader over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

1. “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

D. Some of this references Solomon. Some foreshadows Jesus.

E. There are other places in Luke where we have references to David:

1. In Luke 2:4-6 we see that Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus b/c He was from the lineage of David.

2. In Luke 3:23 we see Jesus linked back to David in a genealogy.

3. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. One of the ways the Jews referred to the Messiah was to talk about the Son of David.

F. So when the blind man calls Jesus “Son of David” he is making a statement about Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Savior. It’s doubtful he gets all that implies, but he is stating a big truth.

G. So, this man is physically blind but spiritually alive. He can see what matters.

VII. V42 Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

A. Earlier in our study of Luke - in the *Greater Than* series – we noted that after Jesus was baptized and spent forty days in the wilderness, during his early days as a Rabbi that He did a lot of things that showed that He was *greater than* all the other teachers.

1. He healed the sick; he cast out demons; he turned water into wine; he calmed a storm
2. In short, He demonstrated power over sickness and death and evil and nature.

B. And at that time I said, please understand the miracles Jesus does are principally big arrows pointing at Him saying, “Pay attention to this guy.” The miracles were not statements about what we can expect today. They are not promises about life in this broken world as much as they are neon signs flashing above Jesus saying, “He is different.”

C. God can heal. I believe that. I’ve seen that. I’ve seen that in my own life. Two years ago I was in neuro-ICU downtown, unaware that those who understood my condition didn’t expect that I’d make the recovery that I have. They did not expect me to be able to stand and drive and work. As a rule, the more people knew the less hopeful they were.

D. I attribute my recovery to great medical care and the prayers of God’s people. I am thankful for both. And I am aware that neurologists and therapists describe my recovery as miraculous. In fact, when I go back down to visit the people at RIC, they cry and I cry and they say, “I don’t see this kind of recovery in my other patients.” The last time I went down the woman who worked with me most often – my principle physical therapist – didn’t recognize me for the first few minutes of the conversation. And I could tell when she finally clued in because she sort of jerked and said, “Mike? Mike? I didn’t recognize you with clothes on.” And I said, “If I am down here with friends from the church it would be very helpful for me is you didn’t say it exactly that way.” And she said, “But it looks like you have a job and no one could tell that you had a stroke.”

E. Now my recovery is not perfect. I still have issues. A couple months ago Sheri and I were flying back from HBI – our mission partners there – and I fell over in the aisle. There was no turbulence. I just went down. Thankfully I dumped the coffee I was holding on myself, but I fell in someone’s lap and slapped the seat of the guy in front of me. And he jumped up looking very confused. And of course it looks like I’m drunk. Who falls over in a plane? When we landed in London we end up sitting across from each other and Sheri said, “What’s all over your shirt?” Don’t ask. I fell over. Big scene. She was like, “That was you? I was sleeping and I heard this commotion and saw a flight attendant running down the aisle. That was you?”

F. God could heal me more completely. He could heal all of us. But that is not the norm in this broken world. We are left with lots of questions and heartache right now. It is impossible to explain why He does X and not Y. Why he doesn't do more. But what we can say is:

1. He understands. He showed up in this broken world and suffered. He is not a stranger to our pain.
2. He promises a day when all things will be made new. His Kingdom will come. There will be a day free from cancer and Alzheimer's and strokes and aging and death. He foreshadowed that when he walked among us. We get a glimpse of what is coming when we see how he healed people. It's almost as if He couldn't help it. Wherever he went people got better. One of the things you realize when you start out as a pastor is that you can't look to Jesus for examples of what to say at a funeral because every time he shows up people come back to life.
3. And the other thing we can say is that the miracles we see in the Bible are there to focus not on the miracle but on the miracle maker – not on the fix but on the fixer.

G. The purpose of the miracles around Jesus is to point to Jesus. The big news is that Jesus is God and the Savior of the world.

1. He fulfilled the Davidic Covenant.
2. He showed his love by showing up in a broken world and dying in our place.

VIII. I was quite taken this week by the metaphor of sight.

A. In verse 42 this man asked Jesus to see, which is some thing I ask God for quite a bit. I want to see things clearly, rightly – by which I mean, I want to understand things and view things as He does.

B. In my morning prayer time I often include The Lord's Prayer and really lean into those first petitions

1. Hallow your name – glorify yourself
2. Thy Kingdom Come
3. Thy Will be Done

C. That is what I want. And so I want to see what that looks like for me. What can I do to be part of that.

D. We want insight. And I toyed with going there in this sermon. It would not be a huge leap to move from someone asking about sight to talking about spiritual sight.

E. But here's the deal – that is not what the text is focused on. The first goal of Bible Study is to understand what the text means. What did the original writer – in this case Luke – intend for his readers to understand.

1. There are other aspects of Bible Study – we want to learn so we can apply; we want to meet with from God. Ultimately the goal of Bible Study is to become more like Jesus to the glory of God.

F. But the first thing we are after is to understand the text. And in this postmodern age I feel the need to stress that the Bible means something. The question is not, “What does it mean to me? How do I feel about it?,” although that is what passes for Bible Study in lots of circles today.

G. That is not what we are after. My appeal to you on an ongoing basis is: read the book every day.

1. Start your day with ten minutes of Bible reading and ten minutes of prayer. Be shaped by that discipline and by what you hear.

2. This assumes that we take what it says at face value.

H. I am struck right now by the need to see the world and other people more as God does – by the need for proper vision. But that isn't what this passage is talking about.

I. What we are being reminded of here is that Jesus is the Savior of the World. He is the fulfillment of the promises made by God throughout the Old Testament.

J. He is not simply a great teacher, a moral reformer, a wonderful example. He is all of those things. But He is God. He is the Savior of the world.

K. And He was sent by his Father to reconcile His creation – including you. Jesus was born to die in our place to pay our debt and to secure for us eternal life.

L. And that is why we come to this table.