

Recover Your Sight
Luke 18:31-43
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Read Luke 18:31-43

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4b)

Introduction

Fanny Crosby was a 19th century woman who wrote many wonderful hymns of the faith, you may have sung "All The Way My Savior Leads Me," "Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior," "Jesus Keep Me Near The Cross," "Blessed Assurance," and "To God be the Glory." Like some other musicians and songwriters (Wonder, Charles), Fanny was blind. Though she had many people pity her and lament her blindness, she didn't feel cursed or punished with being unable to see. Instead she said, "It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me... If at my birth, I had been able to make one petition to my creator, it would have been that I should be made blind... because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior."¹

Talk about someone who knew the truth of the Apostle Paul's teaching that God's power is made perfect in our weakness, and who believed deeply in the glory of heaven knowing that we would receive perfect resurrected bodies there. Would that we all took such spiritually mature and wise views of the difficulties and afflictions in life. Today's Scripture passage deals with a man who was not so keen to continue living without sight. He cried out to the Lord for healing mercy, but rather than it being an expression of weak faith, he was commended for his strong faith and spiritual insight. And just like Fanny Crosby's desire to have Jesus be the first person she'd see when her sight is restored, this man's first sight was of his Savior. Before we read his story, we'll read some words from Jesus where he pointed things out to His disciples who were blind in their own way.

I. The Seeing are Blind (vv. 31-34)

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

How many of you have ever made a long-term plan, whether it was for your own life or for a company you worked for? Perhaps it was a 2-year or a 5-year plan, maybe longer like a 20-year retirement plan? Perhaps you listed goals you wanted to achieve, steps you would take to get there, and included measurable deadlines and benchmarks along the way. Sometimes those plans are amazingly helpful, bringing focus and reminders of what you should be prioritizing along the way. But we know that every plan on paper has to be reworked as soon as you start executing it and life happens. But an imperfect plan is better than no plan at all, because, as they say, if you fail to plan, you're essentially planning to fail. Here in these verses Jesus revealed, as He had several times already in Luke's Gospel, that He knew exactly where He was headed and what would happen along

¹ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville: Holman, 2018), pp. 273-74.

the way. It was His Father's plan for His life. These aren't exactly a wish list of desirable steps, more of a blow-by-blow description of what He would have to endure. Think about the fact that Jesus lived His entire life with a sense of dread hanging over Him; He knew from the beginning that He was destined to have His life ended in Jerusalem, even knowing the intimate details. Listen to the verbs in the order that Jesus gives them and how they intensify: delivered (to the Gentiles) -> mocked -> shamefully treated -> spit upon -> flogged -> killed. No part of this would be easy to endure, and that time was almost at hand. But they were all a means to an outcome that His heavenly Father had planned from before time began.

I believe that Jesus knew everything that was to happen to Him because He was divine/fully God, and He retained His ability to know all things when He took on His human nature. But even if He did not have a divine sense of omniscience, He could have known what was going to happen to Him just from what He had read in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- Psalm 41:9 told Him that a close friend who ate His bread would betray Him.
- Psalm 35:11 said that false witnesses would accuse Him.
- Isaiah 50:6 described how He would be spit upon and struck on the back and cheek.
- Isaiah 53:12 said that He would be killed with other criminals.
- Psalm 69:21 gave the detail that He would be offered vinegar/sour wine to drink.
- Psalm 22:16 said that His hands and feet would be pierced.
- Psalm 22:18 said that people would cast lots for His clothing.
- Psalm 34:20 says that His bones would not be broken.²

Every single one of these, and in fact, over 300 Old Testament prophecies written hundreds of years before Jesus' life, came true.

Now, a skeptical person could say that Jesus knew all of the OT prophecies and set about to make them happen. Some of that could be understandable, such as the triumphal entry where Jesus sat on a donkey and rode in to the shouts of His followers; He could have arranged that. And He could have set things up in a way that forced His arrest and a trial. But there were so many things that were not possible for Him to arrange, that He had no control over: the soldiers casting lots, offering Him vinegar, not breaking His bones; not to mention that the Romans would have chosen either flogging or crucifixion, not both; in His case, Pilate did both. Jesus had no control over the events prophesied around His birth: being born in Bethlehem, being born into the tribe of Judah as a direct descendant of David, His family moving to Egypt when He was a baby, etc. And, of course, the most impossible thing to make happen yourself would be raising yourself from the dead. And Jesus never foretold the details of His death on the cross without also foretelling the fact that He would be raised. Yes, there was shame and agony ahead, but there would also be exaltation and glory! What the violence and evil schemes of men could accomplish, the power of God could overcome, bringing victory out of defeat.

Notice that verse 34 says that His twelve disciples understood none of these things. Nothing. It was hidden from them so they did not grasp what He spoke rather plainly, they were blind to it. Remembering this lack of understanding on the part of the disciples will help us understand why they are so alarmed when Jesus is arrested, why they are so confused and sorrowful when He is put to death, and why they are so surprised when He rises from the dead. He had told them it was all happening, but it never got through. Only later would they put all the pieces together with the Spirit's help.

² A broader list of OT prophecies and their NT fulfillments found at: <https://www.learnreligions.com/prophecies-of-jesus-fulfilled-700159>

We go from a group of followers who were blinded to the truth spoken to them to the story of an actual blind man. We see the reverse of our first point:

II. The Blind Can See (vv. 35-43)

³⁵ As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." ³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ 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!" ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, 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 and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Mark's gospel tells us that this blind man's name was Bartimaeus, it even tells us his father's name was Timaeus, possibly because the early church knew these men. A blind man sitting on the side of the road doesn't always seem like the most likely person to be theologically astute. But Bartimaeus, who at first had no idea what was going on, had to ask what everyone was getting so excited about, connected the dots rather quickly. When he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he called out "*Jesus, Son of David.*" How did he know Jesus' identity and His lineage? It's not like everyone in Israel was a Son of David in the same way that they were all sons of Abraham or sons of Adam. Every natural born Jew was descended from Abraham, every person alive was descended from Adam, but only people in the tribe of Judah, who were blood descendants of King David could be called his sons. But perhaps this was a shorthand for calling someone the Messiah, because of the Scriptures' teaching that a son of David would sit on his throne forever. Either Bartimaeus had been overhearing others or talking to people who had educated him on who Jesus was, or he had been given divine insight into Jesus' identity.

He certainly had heard that Jesus could grant mercy and healing, and that is what he would stop at nothing to get. In verse 38 and 39 we read in English twice that he cried out. But in Greek the first cry of this blind man is *eboēsen*, which is the word to use for calling out or shouting. Verse 39 uses a different Greek word for crying out, *ekrazen*, which is, according to William Barclay, the "instinctive shout of ungovernable emotion, a scream, an almost animal cry... utter desperation."³ That got Jesus' attention, so He stopped and asked, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Which might tempt some people to roll their eyes and say, "Isn't that obvious?" But Jesus wanted the man to articulate exactly what he wanted, to demonstrate his need and his faith that Jesus could heal him. And sure enough, Bartimaeus plainly spoke his desire to be able to see, and immediately was reward with sight. And Luke says that he immediately followed Jesus and glorified God.

In this story, Jesus applauded Bartimaeus for recognizing His Lordship and acting on that faith, something that the religious leaders in the area failed at time and time again. We've had men in the last few chapters of Luke who were so blinded to their spiritual condition because they were morally good people – the rich young ruler and the Pharisee who prayed next to the tax collector. They thought they were all set before God because they had reached a certain level of morality, but they needed to see that they were lost and fallen no matter how many good things they did. Bartimaeus, though completely blind, saw his need for mercy and knew that Jesus was the One who could give it to him.

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 232.

Blindness and sight is a big theme in the New Testament that helps us understand salvation. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says. "... *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.*" What an image: the glory of Christ is shining but unbelievers can't see it because their minds are blind. How do we overcome this blindness? Two verses later, verse 6: "*For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" Think about that verse: when did God say "Let light shine out of darkness"? Genesis 1, the creation of the world. So Paul is saying that God, who worked a miracle creating all things out of nothing at the beginning of the world, will work the same kind of miracle inside His people: placing the light of Jesus in our hearts. That is the way that the spiritual blindness in our lives gets removed: we are delivered from the darkness of our sin and given spiritual eyes to discern and embrace the gospel through the Holy Spirit's work. Ephesians 1:17-18 - "*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, **having the eyes of your hearts enlightened**, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...*"

A kid that was part of my youth group many years ago is in the Navy and is married. I just found out that he had a horrific motorcycle accident this past week. Everybody is praying for his recovery. I don't know if he'll live, much less be able to walk and recover his full mental capacities. His name is Ben, you can pray for him. I wish we could just say, "if we all have enough faith then God will definitely heal Ben." But God never promised to heal us on this earth. Jesus may not restore us physically; we may stay blind, crippled, deaf, paralyzed, whatever we suffer from. But the promise of heaven is that we will receive resurrection bodies that will not cause us any pain in heaven; God will deliver us from every last consequence of this fallen world. So, while Jesus healed many people during His ministry on earth and people are still physically healed today, our salvation is the greater spiritual healing and the promise that, if we are not healed in this life, that we will live eternity healthy and whole.

Conclusion

Phil, Behn, and Phil, I want to address a few words of application to you from this text. Everybody else can listen, it's for them too, but these are especially meant for you on the day of your ordination and installation to the office of Ruling Elder:

1) The most important thing for you is that you understand and embrace the points of the Gospel in those early verses: that Jesus suffered and was crucified for you, to save you from your sins, and then He rose so that you will be raised after death. You have gone from spiritual darkness and blindness to the light of Christ opening up your eyes to His salvation. There are a whole lot of ways that you had to meet the qualifications of a Ruling Elder: that you manage your family well, that you have a good reputation with outsiders, that you are not greedy or a drunkard, etc. But none of those matter if you are not a new creation in Christ, saved and redeemed by Jesus' death on the cross on your behalf. And your entire life and worldview flow out of your redemption. Jesus' dying for you is not just icing on the cake of your successful lives; it's the very foundation that you build your life upon, and the well from which you minister to others. For our elders, we don't need just really good churchgoers, men who know how to run an organization well. We need people who have been absolutely transformed by His grace, who hunger and thirst for His righteousness and work in our lives.

2) Every other human being is worthy of God's love and grace, no matter what they look like in the world's eyes. Bartimaeus was worthless in everyone else's eyes, but the Savior stopped and changed his life. The great pastor, writer and theologian, Francis Schaeffer, was walking in the

streets of France with a group of friends. They passed a woman who was obviously a prostitute and Schaeffer stopped her and asked, "How much?" His friends were horrified but the woman gave him his price. He replied, "No, how much?" She gave her price again. "I do not mean that," he replied, "I mean, how much are you worth?" He explained that she was made in the image of God and that Christ had died for sinners so they might have fellowship with God. She was worth the price of the blood of the Savior.⁴ And everyone you meet has eternal worth in God's eyes; everyone who walks through the doors of this church and everyone living in our communities is worthy of our love and time. As Ruling Elders you cannot forget that.

3) Do not be like the crowd around Bartimaeus who tried to get him quiet and keep him from Jesus. Of all things we should be doing as leaders of the church, we should not be trying to get people to be quiet and respectable; don't just keep people busy. We should be looking for people to bring their imperfect, needy lives to the throne of grace. You never know what Jesus will do in and for them. Being in church will not automatically transform anyone, reading the Bible will not guarantee their salvation. Only meeting Jesus face-to-face will. Ministering to people is hard, it's inconvenient, it can be discouraging. But know that God uses imperfect people like you and me to come alongside other imperfect people to work the miracle of His salvation in their lives – bringing them from darkness to light, from death to life - transforming them and shaping them into His new creations. That is the work of ministry, never forget it. Amen.

Benediction - Colossians 1:11-14 – "May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

⁴ George Robertson's article "A Message for Nobodies" from Covenant Magazine, Winter 2004-2005.