

The Cure for Spiritual Blindness

Luke 18:31-43

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for November 5, 2023

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Physical sight doesn't guarantee spiritual insight. Physical blindness doesn't limit spiritual vision. Jesus demonstrated perhaps the ultimate Messianic power when he restored sight to a believing blind man. But many people in the crowd had perfectly good vision, but couldn't see their Savior standing right in front of them. Stephen Davey teaches on Bartimaeus' miraculous healing.

I want you all to meet my new research assistant, ChatGPT, which has been very helpful. It works for free, all hours of the day and night; ChatGPT, by the way, did *not* write my sermon.

Times have certainly changed. Forty years ago, when I was studying for the ministry, you really wanted, beyond the normal pastor's library, a set of The Encyclopedia Britannica—all 32 volumes.

In my early years of pastoring, I would spend hours leafing through those pages looking for facts and information and even illustrations. There were no personal computers back then. The internet had not been invented yet by Al Gore, from what I remember.

Marsha and I had just gotten married; she was working full time putting me through seminary. Money was extremely tight, yet someone knocked on our apartment door while I was home studying. It was an Encyclopedia Britannica salesman. I don't know how he got my address. I should have shut the door. But we're talking about books, and within minutes he unfolded the glossy, full-color brochure of the entire set. The brochure covered our little living room floor.

He told me that it could be mine, for only 39 cents a day.

I wasn't good at math, and that sounded like a great deal. We paid 12 dollars a month for the next 40 years—at least that's how long it seemed!

It's amazing how fast the world of information has changed in the last few decades, and I am grateful for most of it.

Well, according to data that I was able to pull up from my new assistant, the World Health Organization reported that as of last year, there are 19 million children in the world who are visually impaired or completely blind. Imagine, 19 million children cannot see well, or at all, today.

There are 7.3 million visually impaired or completely blind people, of all ages, in the United States today.

Perhaps you are suffering from vision problems—some genetic disorder, macular degeneration, the effects of diabetes or other issues, and you know what it's like to struggle with failing eyesight.

I still vividly remember my mother-in-law, legally blind but determined as ever, I would see her sitting in her chair reading her Bible by holding it up close to her good eye. I was always challenged and even convicted by her determination to read God's Word.

The human eye happens to be one of the marvels of God's creation. Your eyes and your nervous system and your brain all must be working in tandem to produce shapes and colors and depth and movement.

God designed your set of eyes to have 274 million light-sensitive rods and cones that convert light into chemical impulses. And those impulses, or messages, travel through your optic nerve to your brain at the rate of 1 billion messages per second.

One of the essential problems for evolution is how so many intricate components—hundreds of millions of them—could have independently evolved to work together; because, as one author writes: "If one single component doesn't function, sight is not possible. The eye either functions as a whole, *or not at all.*"

Mario Seiglie, "The Miracle of the Human Eye", *Good News Magazine* (September 27, 1988)

He goes on to write: "It would have taken hundreds of thousands of chance mutations occurring at the same time, so that the lens and the retina, which cannot work without each other, would have to have evolved at the same time."

Ibid

Small wonder that with what little he knew of the human eye, Charles Darwin would write to a friend in 1860, "To this day, the eye makes me shudder."

Ibid

Now that we know the complexity of sight, Dr. H.S. Lipson, a member of the British Institute of Physics, wrote a few years ago, “We must admit that the only acceptable alternative is creation. I know that this is anathema to physicists, as it is to me, but we must not reject a theory that we do not like if the evidence supports it.”

A quote by Seiglie (Physics Bulletin, Volume 30, p. 140)

Well, there’s no need to shudder or be confused, the Bible says it clearly in **Proverbs 20 and verse 12:**

The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both.

Proverbs 20:12

This is the same verb used repeatedly in Genesis 1 where the Lord *made*, the Lord *fashioned*, the Lord *created* everything.

So, follow this: when we read in the Bible of the miracle of someone being given sight, we really can’t imagine the staggering number of elements involved in that one miracle.

Literally millions of working parts are instantly repaired, or formed, or enabled: the optic nerve, the chemical communication system, the brain reception; all of it, suddenly, at His command, is working perfectly in tandem in order to give sight.

No wonder the Rabbis of Jesus’ Day and generations before were simply stating that only God could heal someone blind.

According to the prophets, that was the role of the coming Messiah and by the way, “there is not one illustration in the Old Testament of someone being cured of blindness.”

Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale, 1997), p. 427

It’s as if God held back that one miracle that would authenticate the identity of His Son as Messiah.

In fact, when Jesus preached His first sermon, he unrolled the scroll of Isaiah to that signature passage in **Isaiah 61** and read the messianic prophecy:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to ... proclaim liberty to the captives, and **recovering of sight to the blind.***

Isaiah 61:1, Isaiah 42:7

We’re about to watch the Lord Jesus do just that; **as you’re turning to Luke 18, let me tell you ahead of time that we’re** about to watch the disciples refuse to believe what they didn’t want to see, but a blind man will believe, even though he *can’t* see.

We're in Luke 18, where we left off last time, here at verse 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."

Luke 18:31

Jesus often referred to Himself in the third person pronoun, and the **Son of Man** is a Messianic title taken from the prophecy of Daniel.

And what did the Old Testament prophets predict that Jesus says He will fulfill? **Jesus says here in verse 32:**

"For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Luke 18:32-34

The disciples are completely missing the vision of what Jesus is seeing ahead of time.

Helen Keller, a woman born blind, made this statement in her later years, and it introduces the issue we're watching here in this scene. Helen wrote: "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."

That's the disciples at this moment. In fact, Luke says three different ways that they didn't get it! **Notice verse 34 again:**

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

Luke 18:34

Now to be fair, there are two dimensions at work here:

First, there is a spiritual dimension to their lack of insight.

We're told here that this prophecy from Christ was **hidden to them**. The original language informs us that a sense of blindness was imposed upon them, so they didn't fully understand what He meant.

And we can understand why. Had they fully understood what Jesus was saying, they would have either armed themselves with swords and galvanized this crowd of people into an army and rushed into Jerusalem to seize the throne or they would have become so

discouraged that they would have quit on the spot and effectively said, “Well then, we’re done. Why go on to Jerusalem?” Besides, they never caught His promise to rise again.

So, there is a spiritual dimension to their lack of insight.

But secondly, there is an emotional dimension to their lack of insight.

They’re not seeing this because they don’t want to see it. They’re not hearing Jesus say this because they don’t want to hear what Jesus is saying.

We all have a way of seeing only what we want to see and listening only to what we want to hear.

Adapted from William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 231

At this moment, the crowd is warming up their “Hosannas” for the Lord’s triumphal entry in just a few days; they will chant, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The King is here!

“What do you mean you’re going to be flogged and mocked and spit upon and killed? You’re about to be crowned King! The kingdom is just around the corner; Jesus, can’t you see it?”

That’s the only vision they had swirling in their hearts and minds.

But the vision Jesus has is that in a matter of days, He will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah who wrote of the Messiah:

I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

Isaiah 50:5-6

This is what Jesus saw coming. So, in a very real sense, the disciples had sight, but no spiritual vision. We’re about to be introduced to a man who didn’t have sight but had spiritual vision.

Now verse 35:

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

Luke 18:35

Now I’d rather get right to it, but I need to stop for a moment because the liberals and the skeptics love this verse and typically tell first semester college students that the Bible is obviously wrong because **Luke** says here that Jesus was **drawing near** to Jericho. But

Matthew writes that Jesus was *leaving* Jericho, and **Matthew** says there were *two blind men*. But **Mark's gospel and Luke's gospel** only talk about *one* blind man. So the gospels are evidently filled with error.

Well, the answer is a little bit of biblical history.

The old city of Jericho had been destroyed back in Joshua chapter 6 when the walls came tumbling down and the Israelites captured this pagan city. It was never rebuilt.

But just a mile south of the old city of Jericho was the new city of Jericho that had been built by Herod the Great.

Barton, p. 424

The new city was the retreat for royals; they built enormous palaces, with swimming pools, gardens, bathhouses, and a theater for outdoor dramas.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Living Insights in Mark](#) (Zondervan, 2016), p. 228

New Jericho was a favorite vacation spot for wealthy people; Jewish people would travel through Jericho on their way to Jerusalem during festival seasons.

This was a great place for beggars to survive.

All that to say, Jesus is evidently leaving the old city of Jericho heading toward the new city of Jericho when this takes place. Matthew, Mark and Luke are all correct.

And by the way, neither Mark nor Luke say there was only one blind man. But they focus only on one of them, more than likely because he will become known in the early church; Mark even gives us his name: Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46).

So, we'll focus our attention on him as well.

Bartimaeus is sitting here on the outskirts of Jericho; Jewish people are flooding through with money in their pockets for shopping and their favorite restaurants.

Even though this was the best season for begging as thousands of Jews made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, keep in mind how hopeless he is: there's no treatment, no medicine, no surgery option. He would have been viewed as someone under the judgment of God for his incurable condition. The culture believed that evidently, he'd done something wrong somewhere and God is paying him back for his sin.

Groups of people that have been traveling to Jerusalem together have passed by Bartimaeus already.

But now, he hears a crowd coming his way; the word Luke uses for **“crowd”** could be translated a multitude of people. They were probably having to step around Bartimaeus to keep from stepping on him.

He wonders what in the world is going on in **verse 36**:

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!”

Luke 18:36-38

Notice he doesn’t cry out, “Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me!” but “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

He’s statement is one of faith: “I know You’re not just Jesus from Nazareth—that’s geography—you’re ‘the Son of David’—that’s deity!”

And get this: “Bartimaeus is the only person recorded in Luke’s Gospel who uses this definitive assertion that Jesus was none other than the Messiah.”

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 2](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 214

The rabbis were already using “Son of David” as a Messianic title, taken from **Isaiah chapter 11**; they even taught that the Messiah would come as the second David. Devout Jews were already praying every day that God would send the Messiah from the lineage of David.

Ibid, p. 215

We don’t know when it happened or where it occurred to Bartimaeus, but somewhere along the line, he had heard the stories; he had connected the dots. This blind beggar happened to be a believer.

And the reason he’s crying out here is that he believes what the rabbis have been teaching, that only God can cure blindness.

And even though he’s got a lot to learn, he believes Jesus can give him sight because he evidently believes that Jesus is the anointed Son of David, the divine Messiah.

So even though he can’t see, he *does* see. Even though everything around him is dark, he has recognized the light.

Notice the crowd here in verse 39. Isn’t this like the world:

And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

Luke 18:39a

Be quiet! He doesn't have time for you. You don't matter—beggar. If Jesus *is* the Messiah, He won't have time for the likes of *you*.

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 110

Luke writes here again in verse 39:

[They] rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Luke 18:39

Have you ever watched a movie where a guy is stranded on a deserted island or adrift in the ocean and a plane is spotted flying high overhead. The man begins yelling and waving his arms; you're wondering, will they see him? Will he be rescued? You're holding your breath! Will somebody see him and stop and rescue him?

The very next phrase delivers those incredible words: ***And Jesus stopped.***

He stopped!

He heard, He knew, He cared; in a few days Jesus will hang on a cross, but He cared for this beggar.

Verse 40:

And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he (Jesus) asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Luke 18:40-41a

Now Jesus knew what Bartimaeus wanted; Jesus isn't confused. But Jesus wants to make sure this crowd of people doesn't miss the Messianic miracle.

There can be no mistake here: "Bartimaeus, what do you want? You want some money? Some clean clothes? Some food?"

Verse 41:

"What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight."

Luke 18:41

Lord! Don't miss that: we've gone from Jesus of Nazareth to the Son of David, to "Lord."
"Lord, let me recover my sight."

This word for **recover** could refer to someone losing their sight sometime during their lifetime, or someone who was blind from birth and they want to receive their sight, that's how Jesus used this same word in **Matthew 11:5: "the blind will receive their sight."**

Bartimaeus is saying, "Lord, I want to be able to see!"

Verse 42:

And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well."

Luke 18:42

Sozo—you could translate it: **Your faith has saved you.**

"You were blind, but the eyes of your heart saw who I was: The Son of David, the Messiah, the Lord, and you believed by faith in Me!"

The next verse says:

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

Luke 18:43

Underscore that word in your mind: **Immediately he recovered his sight**. Just like that! Wham! No emergency surgery, no period of rehabilitation, no exercises for muscle memory, no therapy for eye coordination, none of that.

Immediately, 274 million rods and cones began to convert light into chemical impulses.

Immediately, those impulses began traveling to his brain at the rate of 1 billion messages per second.

Immediately, blind Bartimaeus sees Jesus.

Immediately, Bartimaeus becomes new believer Bartimaeus—Brother Bartimaeus!

But many of the people in that multitude are happy with Jesus now, but will cry for His crucifixion in a few days; they remain spiritually blind.

What's the cure for spiritual blindness?

Let me boil it down to a three-step cure:

First, like Bartimaeus, you need to understand that without Christ you are spiritually blind.

You say, “How hard can that be?”

I’ve talked to many people who have no idea they can’t see spiritually. They think they have perfect insight on eternity, God, religion and even truth, but they go from one fad to another; one speculation to another.

How about you? Do you know you are blind to your sin and only Jesus Christ can open your spiritual eyes to see?

First, you need to understand that you are spiritually blind.

Secondly, you need to believe there is only one saving cure.

You must believe that Christ alone is able to save you, to open your eyes to see the truth of His gospel and the glory of His deity.

I’ve talked to a lot of people over the years who have 2 or 3 options out there, they’ve got that cure and that idea and that practice and that ritual. Listen, you’re not going to be saved by Jesus until Jesus becomes your only option.

You need to understand that you are spiritually blind.

You need to believe there is only one saving cure.

Thirdly, you need to make one sincere request.

Do what Bartimaeus did here; cry out in repentance and faith and say, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.**” He had nothing to offer Jesus. He’s a blind beggar.

And when you come to Jesus like that—placing your faith in Christ alone—He will save you, He will *immediately* save you.

He will open your spiritual eyes that the apostle Paul says **were blinded so that they could not see the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).**

So, what can you see today?

You might be physically blind, but you can see the truth about Christ.

You might have 20/20 vision and be blind today to the spiritual truth about Jesus Christ.

Earlier I mentioned Helen Keller, who was born mute, deaf and blind. But with great insight she said she would *rather be blind than have sight without vision*. That has profound spiritual implications as well.

I've shared with you before how her Christian teacher, Anne Sullivan, would teach Helen how to connect and communicate by the age of 7.

Helen would grow up to become a brilliant individual, a renowned speaker, awarded several honorary doctorates; later in life she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

She would be featured on the cover of Time Magazine when she was awarded in 1937 Time Magazine's Woman of the Year, back then when people knew what a woman was, evidently. Before the world became predictably confused after centuries of denying our Creator God—the creator of our eyes.

Well, at the age of 8, she came to understand her spiritual need, thanks to her teacher inviting a pastor to visit and explain the gospel account of Jesus Christ, to which Helen responded in faith.

She would later say, "I always knew there was a God but now I know His name."

She had more vision in her blindness than our world has today.

Sounds like Bartimaeus, who had more insight in his blindness than many people in this crowd.

Bible scholars piece together historical accounts that reveal Bartimaeus followed Jesus from Jericho into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; he was among those who huddled in tears when Jesus was crucified; he was there with the believers who rejoiced at the Lord's resurrection.

Adapted from Hughes, p. 218

A month later, he was there on the day of Pentecost when the church was created and the church in Jerusalem grew some 3,000 new believers. He would become known in the early church as a faithful follower of Christ.

But even here sitting on this dusty road, Bartimaeus was way ahead of the crowd; he knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the King, the Lord.

Who is Jesus to you, today? Have you asked Him to cure you of spiritual blindness as you choose by faith to follow Him as *your* Messiah, *your* King, as *your* Lord?

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