

Luke 18:31-43

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[0:00] Luke 18, 31, 23. Who's your hero? Who's your hero? Mine is supposed to be Ryan Giggs, really.

! He is my older brother. But I wonder who do you want to be like, isn't it? As long as Ryan Giggs is playing professional sport, I think there's hope for me. There's hope for me. I hope he doesn't retire this summer.

But I wonder who you model yourself on. You can often tell with a preacher. Very often. Who do they model themselves on? Who do you want to be like? So you school children, you're at an age, aren't you, where lots of you go to parties.

So you have a princess party. Or maybe you have a superheroes party. And some will come as Spider-Man, some will come as Superman, or Spider-Man, or Banana-Man.

Because they want to be heroes. In the church that I worked in, as an assistant, there was a child who had a Bible Heroes birthday party. And so children came as their Bible Heroes. It was a wonderful sight. There was little John the Baptist, in his camel hairs outfit.

[1:01] There was Gideon with his jawbone. There was Elijah calling fire down from heaven. David with his sling. And one boy came as Daniel with his collection of thoughts off fairy lines. I wanted Claire and I to go to Samson.

I would go to Samson and she would come to the ice about it. But that probably wouldn't be appropriate. But nobody, nobody, nobody came as the blind bagger. Nobody came as the blind bagger.

It would be interesting, wouldn't it, if I asked you this morning, who was your Bible hero? I doubt would you say it was the blind bagger. He's not the kind of man we want to be, is he? But in Luke 18, as I studied it, Luke 18 tells us very much that all of us should want to be the blind bagger.

Now all the usual suspects are there in Luke 18, isn't it? All sorts of life is there.

We've seen that, haven't we? The rich and the poor, the children and the old, the crooked and the pillars of society.

[2:06] They're all there. And as we come to the end of Luke chapter 18, the end of the chapter, which is 35 to 43, is really the kind of example par excellence of what Jesus has been teaching.

It is a bog standard day in the life of Jesus in Luke 18. And it's the kind of thing we expect him to do, isn't it? We expect Jesus to heal a blind man. For those of us who know our Bibles, it's just the thing that Jesus does.

But maybe, as we've read this chapter again and again, as we've got to know this story of blind Bartimaeus, the beauty and the incredible drama of what happens is lost.

So let's just look at it again. A blind man is made to see. A man speaks. And by this man, another man saw. There's a blind beggar in healing.

He's not there as much anymore. But if I went up to him and spoke to him and he was made to see, I guarantee you that would make the healing desert, wouldn't it? Even on the surface, this blind man was made to see by another person speaking.

[3:15] It is mind-boggling. It is incredible. The blind being made to see. And yet, there's far, far more here. There's far, far more here than just this amazing miracle.

It is a passage which is full of paradox. It is full of two truths which seem to contradict each other. And yet, are true. Two truths which are opposed to common sense but nevertheless are true.

So let's look at them. First of all, in verses 35 to 7, we see a blind man who could see. That's the first paradox. A blind man who could see.

As he drew near, Jesus 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. It's an ordinary day at the gate.

There's nothing unusual about it at all. There's a blind man there. There's probably actually several blind men there. That was the custom of the day. People who were paralysed, they had no other way to make a living.

[4 : 17] Blind people would sit at the gate and travellers who came through Jerusalem or other cities, they would beg. Maybe the traveller would throw them a coin. It's an ordinary day at the gate.

But the blind man, he hears a commotion and he hears what he knows must be a crowd and he asks the normal question. He asks, what's going on? He asks, what's happening here? And they say to him, don't they?

They say to him, verse 37, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. The teacher from Nazareth, the rabbi from Nazareth is coming to town.

And immediately the blind man cries out, do you see it? Verse 38, Jesus, son of David. Jesus, son of David, he began to shout.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. But they didn't say that, did they? They didn't say, Jesus, son of David, is coming to town. They said, Jesus of Nazareth is coming to town.

[5 : 17] Do you notice the difference? The crowd identified Jesus geographically. But the blind man identifies Jesus theologically. He calls him Jesus, the son of David. And in fact, it's a statement of faith.

In fact, this blind man is the first person, apart from the angel, to use this title of Jesus. He recognizes who Jesus is. All of Israel was looking for the Messiah. All of Israel was looking for the son of David.

The Old Testament was full of prophecies and teaching about the coming king, the coming Messiah. They said, over and over again, he will be of the lineage of Israel's greatest king.

He would be of the lineage of David. So look, the most famous one of that, it's Isaiah chapter 11, and verse 11. Let me read it to you. You can go there if you want. Isaiah chapter 11, and verse 11. You'll know this verse. 11 verse 1. It says, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, David's father. And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

[6 : 23] Jesse was David's father. And here was the stump, the lineage of King David's life. That was cut off. That was cut off. The tree of Jesse is cut down, and they think it's all over.

But it's not. No more kings when Babylon would conquer. And there'll only be a stump in the fields of what it used to be.

But a shoot is going to come out of that stump. It's a beautiful little picture. And from that shoot, well, it will grow into the greatest tree of all, won't it? A branch that will bear fruit.

So you have a tree in a field that is cut down, and a stump. It looks like the tree is dead and buried. But from this old stump, this new root will come out.

You know Isaiah chapter 9. Isaiah chapter 9. We read it every Christmas time, don't we? Isaiah chapter 9. For unto us a child is born, and to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders.

[7 : 32] And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and of the increase of his government there shall be no end. Where? On David's throne. The crowds did not say Son of David, they said Jesus of Nazareth.

But this man shouts in faith, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy. How did he know he was the son of David? How did he know that?

Well because Jesus was doing exactly what the prophet had told him to do. Let me read to you from Isaiah again, Isaiah 35, and verses 4 and 5 as he spoke of the Messiah.

Say to those who have an anxious heart, Be strong, fear not, Isaiah says. Behold, your God will come with vengeance. With the recompense of God, he will come and save you. And then here it is, verse 5, Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf and stopped.

Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. He will make the blind see, he will make the deaf to hear, he will make the lame to run.

[8 : 43] That's the work of the Messiah. Do you remember John the Baptist earlier on in Luke's Gospel? And he begins to have second thoughts, doesn't he, about whether Jesus is the one. So he sends his messengers from prison, and he says, Are you the one, or should we look for another?

And Jesus sends back a message, doesn't he? He says, You go and tell John what you've seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor of good who is preached to them.

The dead are raised. John the Baptist would know Isaiah's prophecy. And John would smile. And John would say, The kingdom has come.

The son of David has arrived. So let's go back to that gate outside Jericho. Let's imagine you're that blind man. You've been in darkness probably a whole life.

And you've been hearing for two years about a man from Nazareth a rabbi. You've heard about his teaching. No one ever talked like this man. You've heard that his name is Jesus, which is a pretty common name.

[9 : 52] But you know that his behaviour is anything but common. You've heard that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, he's made the blind to see, he's made the lame to walk, he's raised the dead.

So what are you thinking? What are you thinking? You hear he's coming to town, you hear he's nearby, you think this is my chance. And you're thinking this is the son of David.

Is he the Messiah? Is this him? And you see, he was blind, wasn't he, this blind man? But he could see far more than the folks in the crowd. He could see better than the Pharisees, he could see better than the Sadducees, he could see that Jesus was Messiah.

And maybe, just maybe, he wouldn't have seen as much unless he was blind. Maybe it is his blindness that has given him his sight.

Keller, Helen Keller, that is, said, better to be blind and see than to be able to see and be blind.

[10 : 59] Better to be blind and see than to be able to see and be blind. And the Pharisees could see, couldn't they? They have seen Jesus, they have seen Jesus make the blind see and the deaf hear.

They had seen him raise to the dead, but they didn't see him as Messiah. But the blind man did. He was the Jesus, son of David.

you're the one. Lots of jumping around. Come with me to John chapter 9. It's the next book in the Bible along. John chapter 9, verse 39. It's on page 896 in the Church Bibles.

And he says this. Jesus says, For judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind.

Some of the Pharisees heard him say these things and said, Well, are we also blind? Jesus said to them, If you were blind you would have no guilt. But now that you've saved we see, their guilt remains.

[12 : 10] Jesus was saying, wasn't he, to them, You Pharisees do not see yourselves as sinners. You do not see yourself as being blind. You think you can see. You don't see yourself as being helpless. And Jesus was saying, If you understood yourself as helpless, as a sinner, I could save you.

If you understood yourself as being blind, I could make you see. But we don't like that, do we? We don't want to be the blind man. And Luke, in his account, in Luke 18, is drawing a great contrast.

He is drawing a contrast between the disciples and the blind man. So Scott Reddard, did you pick that up? That immediately before, he's spoken of the son of man who must suffer, who must be killed, who they will spit on, who they will murder.

But on the third day, he'll rise again. But look at Luke 18, verse 34. They understood none of these things.

This same was hidden from them. And they did not grasp what was being understood. They don't understand it, they don't get it, they are blind to who he is.

[13 : 21] And the very next story, the blind man sees. And the irony of the Christian gospel is this, we must become blind before we can see. We must understand that we are spiritually blind before we can see.

It is the great paradox. You want to see Jesus? He is all around for eyes to see. But we must pray, O Father, O God, open my eyes.

The testimony of every Christian was, is, I once was blind, but now I see. Secondly, let's see a second paradox.

A man without opportunity who seized opportunity. A man without opportunity who seized opportunity. Look at verse 39. And those who were in front of him rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. Now the life of a blind man in the first century was the life of a beggar. Unless a family had money, the blindness meant begging. [14:29] So this man, from childhood, had gone to the gate because it was the only way for him to eat. It was the only way for him to get anything, was to get to the gate, was to get to beg. There were no benefits.

I have never really begged for anything, really. I don't know about you. I suppose I beg a little bit for the building project, but I'm not very successful. But I've never really had to beg. I don't want charity. This was a hard life, wasn't it? It was a shameful life for the beggar. A humiliating life. Begging at the gate as people entered the city. He would be there for the rest of his life.

This man had no future, no life beyond begging. But suddenly there's an opportunity and what an opportunity it is. There were a lot of Presbyterians in the crowd that day, weren't there?

Verse 39. Can you see them? He begins to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David, have mercy on me.

[15:28] That's how loud he shouts. And the Presbyterians said, well, be quiet. Shh, shh, shh, shh. They said, you're making such a commotion, aren't you? But they weren't blind.

And they weren't beggars. I'm blind, and I want to see. So I'll choke as loud as I can. See, the blind man understands Isaiah 55, doesn't he?

Seek the Lord while he may be found and call on him while he is near. Call on him while he is near. Don't you love this man? I love his determination. Blind beggars do not think, I'm upsetting the decorum here.

Maybe he'll pass by again tomorrow when there'll be less of a crowd and maybe I can talk to him then. No, the blind beggar says, he is here, he is here, I can't believe it, I want to see.

So what if he'd not called out? In verse 31, taking the 12, he says to them, see we are going to Jerusalem. He's not going to come to Jericho again.

[16:37] He's approaching Jericho. The blind man had an opportunity through the visit of Jesus to Jericho which he would never have again. What is interesting is, the blind man didn't know that at the time.

So, context is king, isn't it? Luke 18, the context makes the point. So remember we said all of life is here, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the sophisticated and the down and out, the religious and the criminal.

Luke 18 has two cries in it, doesn't it? Do you see that? It has the cry of the widow at the start of the chapter and it has the cry of blind Bartimaeus at the end of the chapter.

And they function as two bookmarks. And the subject of the chapter is found in the question, verse 26.

It's the subject of the chapter. Who then can be saved? Who then can be saved? And what Luke demonstrates in Luke 18 is that God is willing to receive absolutely anybody.

[17:41] That God is no respecter of persons. He will save anybody. He will save the widow who couldn't get anyone to listen to her. He will save the tax collector who was sure no one would listen to him.

He will save the children who were kept away so weak that they can't even come on their own two legs that they've got to be carried. And he will save a blind beggar who no one wants to listen to. And then by contrast, you've got the rich young ruler.

Good education, cracking prospects and a gorgeous girlfriend. And he expects to be commended. But he's not accepted. And there's also the tax collectors there.

He's a good man. I'm not sure I'm as religious as he is. He gives. He's faithful. He's religious. He's reliable. He's self-disciplined. And yet he's not helpless.

And so both him and the rich young ruler, they stick out like sore thumbs because they're not accepted in Luke 18. And the end of the chapter is if to sum it all up, if you didn't get it before, let me make it as obvious as I possibly can that he is a blind beggar.

[18:51] He's a blind beggar who's got no importance. He is a nobody. He is the very definition of helplessness. And God has mercy on him. Now that's a familiar truth, isn't it?

God is merciful. He welcomes all. Don't we love that message? That is what people expect of God. That's his business, isn't it? But even that great truth can be misconstrued.

So you might have heard it said, haven't you, that God is always waiting for us to turn to us. To turn for us when we will turn to him. He is always waiting for us. He will turn to us whenever.

And there is an element of truth to that. But do not presume to come to God like that. Don't think that God is in your pocket.

And that you can turn to him whenever it seeks you and he will be merciful to you. When I was growing up as a child, he's watching Minder. Minder with Arthur Daly and George Cullen.

[19 : 56] It's good. Dennis Waterman. And my thought of London is whenever you stepped on the road and you shouted, taxi, a black cab would pull up. But then you move to London and immediately you want a taxi.

You can never find one, isn't it? But God is not like the taxi driver in Minder. That whenever you stand up on the road and you shout, God, well actually he'll just roll up to you whenever. He is not waiting just for you to flag him down.

That idea is grotesque. Hebrews 12, 17 to 18 tells the story of the covenant child Esau. And Esau was a man of impulse who wanted everything right now and he sold his birthright for a meal.

And then it says this, for you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected. He found no chance to repent even though he sought it with tears.

He desired a blessing but he found no chance to repent even though he sought it with tears.

Bartimaeus, at the end of this chapter is a great warning to you and to me.

[21 : 03] There's great truth here, isn't there? Glorious truth that God accepts anybody who is helpless but don't miss your opportunity. Seek the Lord while he may be found.

And so this blind man, Jesus may not have passed by again. Blind folks do not ignore opportunities for sea. Beggars do not ignore opportunities for riches.

So when he comes near, call on him. So let's think about for a moment, when does Jesus come near to you? When does Jesus come near to you?

Well the Bible's answer is this, that he comes near to you in the preaching of his word. In Ephesians 4, 21, if I could remove a word from the New Testament, it would be in this verse.

Because I think the translators really don't help us. In Ephesians 4, verse 21, and I want to remove the word about, let me read it to you. Assuming, he's talking about the preaching that the Ephesians heard.

[22 : 18] And he's saying he heard the gospel and this is what it says, verse 21, assuming that you have heard about him. But the word about is not literally there.

It's not there. It says this, literally, assuming that you heard him and were taught him. That is what it literally is.

But Jesus never went to Ephesus. Jesus never preached in Ephesus. So how did the church in Ephesus hear him?

Paul says this, because you heard the preaching of the word, you actually heard Jesus. It's phenomenally bold, isn't it?

And that is what preaching is. It is not the word of man, it is the word of God. So let me read to you, the Shorter Catechism really understands that.

[23 : 17] It says this, the Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual, effective means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith and salvation.

What it's saying to you is this, you hear the preaching of Jesus, you hear Jesus. And so you meet Jesus in the preaching of the word this morning. Over and over again, God said to Israel, this is the day of your visitation.

When will be the day that Jesus will visit you for the last time? When will God say, the day of my visitation is over?

We have a modern Jesus, don't we? Which he never says that sort of thing. But the real Jesus does. You cannot become a Christian when you like.

The opportunity is not always open. John Chapman, the Australian evangelist, tells this great story of talking with a man, and it's a young guy who's in church.

[24 : 33] And the young guy says, I don't want to become a Christian, but I'll become a Christian when I'm older. I'll become a Christian, I want to live my life up, and then I'll become a Christian at the end of my life.

And Chapman says, so you think you can become a Christian then? The man says, yeah. So why don't you become a Christian? The man says, I'll become a Christian when I want. And John says, well, why don't you become a Christian now?

Could you do it now? And the young man says, yeah, I could do it now, if I wanted to. I could do it now. So Chapman says, well, go on, give it a try, why don't do it now? Do it now.

The man gets a bit irish and he says, I don't want to. I don't want to. Chapman says, come on, do it. If you can make yourself a Christian now, do it now. And the man shouts, I don't want to.

And Chapman says, what makes you think you'll want to at the end of your life? The truth is, you cannot become a Christian whenever you want to. You can't.

[25 : 35] The opportunity is not always open. The truth is, isn't it, Luke 18, the blind man could have remained sightless, he could have remained blind for the rest of his life. But he said, that is the Messiah.

Now is the day of opportunity, today is the day of salvation. Jesus, son of David, have mercy. mercy. Thirdly, a beggar who is undeserving.

A beggar who is undeserving. Look at verse 38. Look at verse 38. They told him, Jesus and Nazareth is passing by.

And he cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. See, the people who think that they can see and are rich, do not cry out for mercy.

They think they don't need mercy. However, we must be careful to realise that being spiritually blind and spiritually destitute does not make us deserving.

[26 : 46] Do you see what the blind man cries out for? He cries out for mercy. mercy. He realises I'm not entitled to the Lord Jesus. I'm not entitled to healing just because I'm blind.

He did not cry out to Jesus, Jesus, I am blind. Didn't cry that out. He didn't say, Jesus, I am disabled. I deserve your attention.

He cried out, have mercy on me. I am not entitled and neither are you. And we don't gain the cross. We don't gain the cross simply by saying we're sinners.

There are plenty of people who know they're sinners, don't they, but they don't cry out for mercy.

And we have developed a society where entitlement is a big thing, isn't it?

I am poor, I am needy, society owes me something. And actually we carry that over to God we think God cares for us simply because we're poor and needy.

[27 : 52] You know what, a wealthy man does not need God any less than a poor man does. And a poor man does not need God any less than a wealthy man does. Everyone must plead for mercy.

A mother once approached Napoleon and she was asking for pardon for her son. Her son was guilty of treason. And Napoleon replied to her and he said your son has committed treason and he has committed to twice and justice demands death.

She said I do not ask for justice, I ask for mercy. And Napoleon said your son does not deserve mercy. And she said, sir, it would not be mercy if he deserved it.

And mercy is all I ask. And Napoleon showed mercy. I'll ask him. This is a magnificent him.

Just look at it in your sheet. It says this. Your mercy, my God, is the theme of my song, the joy of my heart, and the boast of my tongue.

[29 : 04] Your free grace alone from the first to the last has won my affections and bound my soul to that. your mercy in Jesus has freed me from hell. Its glories I'll sing and its wonders I'll tell.

This Jesus, my friend, when he hung on the tree, there opened the channel of mercy for me. Your mercy is more than a match for my heart, which wonders to feel its own hardness depart.

In awe at your goodness I fall to the ground and weep to the praise of the mercy I found. The door of your mercy stands open to all, the poor and the needy whoever shall call.

No sinner comes seeking mercy today is ever by Jesus sent empty away. Great father of mercy is your goodness I own and the covenant love of your crucified son.

All praise to the spirit whose whisper divine seals mercy and pardon and righteousness mine. I'm not finished so don't think we're about to sing it. This man, he may have been blind.

[30 : 03] He may have been needy but he did not cry out for entitlement. He would sing that last hymn with gusto. A blind man who could see, a man without opportunity who seized opportunity, a beggar who was undeserving and lastly a beggar who received more than he asked.

Look at verse 40. 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 recover your sight your faith has made you well and immediately he recovered sight and followed him glorifying God and all the people when they saw it gave praise to God. I don't know what you're like with beggars but normally beggars get much less than they ask for don't they?

So they ask don't they haven't got money for the bus fare home that's what beggars ask for a pound they get 50p this man asked for sight and he got sight he followed Jesus Mark in his account tells us a lot of details it tells us that this man's name was Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus Mark when you read his account says the crowd said to him after telling him to be quiet when Jesus called him they said cheer up old man really Jesus wants to see you he tells us that the man threw his cloak aside why does Mark tell us all those details was he there no Mark in his account he met Bartimaeus after the fact Bartimaeus became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and Mark knew him and you can imagine Bartimaeus telling this story over and over again he sat down with Mark

I went to the gate as usual that day and I got more than I asked for I got sight and I got Jesus true I asked for sight and he gave me life life you couldn't imagine so let's go to heaven as we close and let's find Bartimaeus and let's ask Bartimaeus the question what is the most important thing that happened that day and the most important thing that happened that day was not that he received his sight was that he received Jesus of Nazareth let me point out to you two things as I close the nobody cries for mercy verse 41 and Jesus stops and calls through the crowd doesn't he bring him here don't you love that don't you love that nobody cries for mercy the second person of the trinity the creator of the heavens and the earth stops and says bring him here and don't doubt that this morning don't doubt that this morning that if you will cry for mercy

[33 : 11] Jesus in heaven will stop say bring her here or bring him here verse 41 there's this extraordinary question what do you want me to do for you the blind man has been saying for years give me something give me a few pence give me enough for a cup of coffee give me enough for a mcdonald's Jesus asks you this morning what do you want me to do for you now this is important how are we to understand the miracle and Jesus wants us to spiritualise the miracle let me tell you why because in verses 32 to 34 he's been telling the disciples what's going to happen to him but in 34 they don't understand they are blind they are blind here is a man that sees and gloriously Jesus is able to open blind eyes this morning what do you want him to do for you what do you want him to do for you maybe that you're sitting here tonight this morning and you're saying I want Jesus to leave me alone and you know what tragically he may do that he may do that and so I want to plead with you while it is a day of opportunity that as

Jesus stops by your seat this morning that you say to him Lord let me receive my sight call on the Lord while he's near seek him while he may be found and call for mercy what do you want me to do for you Jesus asks let's sing let's sing Thank you.