



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.
1286-56
Luke 18:31-43
Mark Mitchell
March 12, 2006

Overcoming Spiritual Blindness

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Sometimes the blind see more than those with sight. Fanny Crosby was born in New York in 1820. When she was six weeks old the mistreatment of an eye infection rendered her completely blind. That same year, her father died. When Fanny was 15 she enrolled in the New York Institution for the Blind where she thrived in courses in English, music and poetry. In November of 1850 she attended a revival service at Thirteenth Street Methodist Church in Manhattan, and her childhood faith came to life in an experience of conversion. She was married eight years later and soon after began writing hymns. She was employed by William Bradbury, one of New York's preeminent music publishers, to provide his company with two hymns per week, for which she was paid \$2 a week. She wrote hymns like "Blessed Assurance" and "To God Be the Glory" and "Rescue the Perishing." By the time she died in 1915, she was the most prolific hymn writer in American history. Her life can be summed up by something she wrote when she was just nine years old:

*Oh, what a happy child I am,
although I cannot see.
I am resolved that in this world,
contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people
don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind--
I cannot and I won't.*

Fanny Crosby was blind, but she could see more than most people with 20/20 vision. In the Bible, more is said about spiritual blindness than physical blindness. Jesus called the Pharisees "**blind guides**" (Mt. 23:24). In his first recorded sermon he said he came to bring "**recovery of sight to the blind**" (Lk. 4:18). And on one occasion he said something rather mysterious. He said, "**For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind**" (Jn. 9:39). Blindness, of course, is a metaphor for the incapacity to see spiritual truth. Our hearts have eyes. Before we come to Christ, the eyes of our hearts are clouded over with cataracts blocking our vision. We can't see ourselves, others, and life itself in the clear light of truth. We can't understand our need for God, nor can we grasp his love. When we come to Christ, it's like we get a lens implant. We begin to see clearly. We understand

things like why the cross was needed for our forgiveness. His promises become more than just words, but life preservers.

In Luke 18, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He's traveling with not just his twelve disciples but a sizable group of people as well. As he nears Jerusalem he encounters both spiritual blindness and physical blindness. These encounters show us that sometimes those who can see are really blind, and sometimes those who are blind, can really see.

I. Sometimes those who can see are blind (vv. 31-34)

Let's start by reading v.31a, "**And He took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem...'**" This has been a theme in Luke's gospel. We first heard about Jesus going to Jerusalem when he was talking to Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. Luke said they "**were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem**" (9:31). And then in the same chapter he tells us, "**And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem**" (9:51). Then, in chapter 13 he says, "**He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem**" (13:22). In chapter 17, he says again, "**And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee**" (17:11). And then, after these words here in v.31, in the next chapter he says it twice. In v.11, "**...because He was near Jerusalem...they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.**" Then in v.28, "**And after He had said these things, He was going on ahead, ascending to Jerusalem.**" So Luke has kept us face to face with the persistent purpose of our Lord to go to Jerusalem. Why? Because it was in Jerusalem that his mission would be fulfilled. This is the purpose for which he came. And Jesus knew it. Talk about a "purpose driven life." He says in the rest of v.31, "**and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished**" (v.31b). Jesus knew the Scriptures. He studied the Scriptures. He read passages like Is. 53 and Ps. 22. So he knew what would happen to him.

Look at vv.32-33. "**For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.**" In the

gospel of Luke this is at least his 6th prediction of his suffering and resurrection. Notice how specific he is. The verbs are like the pounding in of a nail: handed over-mocked-mistreated-spit upon-scourged-kill. This is the first time he says that he would be handed over to the Gentiles. Who handed him over? Well, from a human perspective, it was the Jewish authorities (9:22). But from another perspective it was God himself. In Acts, Peter says Jesus was “**delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**” (Acts 2:23). One the things we need to see here is that Jesus was not a victim. He didn’t get caught in something out of his control. None of this took him by surprise. We mustn’t look at the cross and say, “Oh, poor Jesus. What a terrible tragedy. If he would have only known.” But he DID know! And he wasn’t a victim but a willing participant in God’s plan. He gave his life up; no one took it from him.

And yet, the amazing thing is, despite all the focus on Jerusalem and the numerous predictions of his sufferings, the twelve disciples are still blind to what is really going on. Look at v. 34. “**But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.**” Notice that three times Luke restates the same thing—they didn’t get it. What didn’t they get? I don’t think it’s that they didn’t get that he would die or even rise again, but they didn’t get why this had to happen and they didn’t get what this would accomplish. One of the problems was that, unlike Jesus, they really didn’t understand the Scripture. They had no concept of a suffering Messiah. They thought he would just swoop down and take over. Sometimes our blindness is due to the fact that we have unbiblical expectations. We don’t really read and study the Scriptures.

But notice something else. Luke also says that it was hidden from them. It’s like they didn’t have the spiritual capacity to see what this was all about. There is a clear implication here that there are just some things we can’t understand apart from God’s help. You can’t really understand the Scriptures apart from God’s help. You can’t really understand the meaning of the cross and resurrection apart from God’s help. It’s like how animals have a set of correspondences with the environment which far exceed ours. Bats detect insects by sonar; pigeons navigate by magnetic fields; bloodhounds perceive a world of smell unavailable to us. In the same way, the spiritual or “unseen” world requires an inbuilt set of correspondences activated only through a spiritual quickening. Paul says to the Corinthians, “**A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot**

understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor. 2:14). There is a different level of correspondence available only to a person spiritually alive. It’s only the Spirit of God who can open our eyes. That’s why later in Luke’s gospel, after the resurrection, he says, “**And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him**” (Luke 24:31). Your physical eyes can be open but NOT recognize him. You can see but you can be spiritually blind.

Now in contrast to the disciples, as Jesus comes into the town of Jericho, he’s approached by a man who is blind but can see.

II. Sometimes those who are blind can see (vv. 35-43).

Look at vv.35-37. “**As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.**” Jesus is traveling with a crowd of people, many of whom are disciples; others are just pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. The day had begun like any other for the blind man. He woke up, shook the straw from his shabby clothes, stretched, and began tapping his way along the familiar alleys leading to the main gate of the city. Perhaps he was able to beg a crust of bread along the way. Arriving at the gate, he took his spot amidst the other beggars. As he sat there, the city came to life as he began his cry for alms. And then his blind sensitive ears heard something different, out of the ordinary. He sensed a great crowd approaching. People around him rushed forward. He grabbed someone and asked, “What’s going on? Why all the commotion?” And they told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” It’s an interesting way to put it. Not Jesus the Messiah. Not Jesus the Teacher. Not Jesus the Healer. Just Jesus of Nazareth.

But the blind man knew more. He knew about Jesus. He’d heard about his teaching and his healing. So he began to cry out. “**And he called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’**” (v. 38). Notice how this man SAW something that the others didn’t see. Jesus wasn’t just a teacher and a healer. With amazing insight, he calls Jesus the “Son of David.” That’s another way of calling him the Messiah. We think, “Well of course he’s the Messiah,” but remember that at this point most people didn’t see that.

This guy must have really been making a racket because look what happens next. “**Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’**” (v. 39). Perhaps he was making his way forward, pushing his way through the crowd. Whatever he did, the crowd didn’t like it. “Shut up, beggar! You’re making a scene! Stay back!” But this guy is on a mission. This is his chance; a once in a lifetime opportunity! It’s like if you go to Warriors game, they do this thing at half-time where give away pizzas to the crowd. But they don’t just give them to anyone; they

give them to the group who yells the loudest. So they hold their hand to their ear towards one section and see how loud they cry, and then another. Hungry people are screaming and waving at the top of their lungs, because the loudest group gets the pizza. That's what this guy is doing, but the prize is more than just a pizza.

Whatever he did, it worked. Look at vv.40-41. **“And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ And he said, ‘Lord, I want to regain my sight!’”** What a great verse! Jesus stopped! The Son stood still. He has a mission to fulfill in Jerusalem, but he still stops for hungry, hurting souls. What a window into God's heart. Do you ever wonder how this works today, as Jesus listens from heaven? How can he be attentive to our cries for help when a million beggars cry to him at the same time? And yet he is—instantly! The heart's cry of one single person in need is so much sweeter to Jesus than the shallow hallelujahs of the crowd.

He says to us as he said to him, “What do you want me to do for you.” Up until that point, he had just asked for mercy. Jesus wants him to be more specific. It's hard to say why. Perhaps he wanted him to articulate his request to stretch his faith. Maybe he wanted this man to make his request public. Maybe the question would force the man to do some soul searching. Whatever the reason, it seems Jesus wants us to tell him what we want. When you pray, be specific.

Look what happens in vv.42-43. **“And Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.”** Imagine what this was like! Instant sight! This man, who probably had never seen the blue of the summer sky, or the bright colors of spring, can see! Maybe the first thing he saw was the face of Jesus. And he begins to follow Jesus right to Jerusalem. Remember what Jesus said to the rich, young ruler in the passage just prior to this? He said, “Sell everything, give it to the poor, and then come follow me.” But he didn't do it because he was attached to his stuff. But here, this poor, begging, blind man does what the rich man wouldn't do—he followed Jesus. His whole life changed.

In the book, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, neurologist Oliver Sacks tells about Virgil, a man who had been blind from early childhood. When he was 50, Virgil underwent surgery and was given the gift of sight. But as he and Dr. Sacks found out, having the physical capacity for sight is not the same as seeing. Virgil's first experiences with sight were confusing. He was able to make out colors and movements, but arranging them into a coherent picture was more difficult. Over time he learned to identify various objects, but his habits—his behaviors—were still those of a blind man. Dr. Sacks observed, “One must die as a blind person to be born again as a seeing person. It's the

interim, the limbo, that's so terrible.”

The amazing thing about this guy is that there doesn't seem to be any limbo. He just picks up and follows Jesus. His focused life immediately begins to impact others. The crowd who benignly called him, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and impatiently rebuked him, is now praising God.

Jesus told him, “Your faith has made you well (lit. saved you).” So even before this man received his physical sight, he had spiritual sight. Here is one who was blind but could see with the eyes of faith. I want us to look a bit closer at this man and see what we can learn from him about spiritual vision; about what is involved when God is at work in our own lives to overcome spiritual blindness.

First of all, faith “sees” our need for sight. The man knew he was blind. Out of that need he cried out for help. There is only one thing worse than being blind, and that's being blind to your blindness. In spiritual terms, that means being blind to your sin and your need for mercy.

Jesus had an encounter with the Pharisees in John 9 where it became evident that they were blind to their sin. Jesus said to them, **“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.”** The Pharisees responded, **“We are not blind...”** **Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains”** (Jn. 9:39-41). In other words, if you knew you were blind, you would cry out for help and your sin would be forgiven, but since you think you can see, your sin remains.

The sad thing is, you would think that the more alienated from God that we become, the more we would see how lost we are, but the opposite is true. The further away we get from God, the less capable we are of seeing it. We develop spiritual cataracts that keep us from seeing anything. It's a painful but gracious thing to be able to see ourselves as we really are, because it's only then that we'll cry out for mercy.

This is true, of course, for that initial experience of coming to Christ for salvation, but did you know it's also true for us as believers? In Rev. 3 Jesus is talking to the church at Laodicea and he says, **“Because you say, ‘I'm rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ‘I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see”** (Rev.3:17-18). So at times, even as believers, we become complacent and we think that we have it all together and Jesus says you don't know it but you're blind.

Second, faith “sees” Jesus as Messiah. Faith is only as good as its object. This blind man saw that Jesus was the promised Son of David. That’s the key to this story. No one else in the gospel of Luke calls Jesus the Son of David. And he’s willing to shout it. He didn’t care what people thought. He could get in trouble with the Romans for saying that because they knew this was the title of a king. But he didn’t care. He didn’t care what they or the religious leaders thought.

How about you? What do you really believe about Jesus? It’s not enough to believe he was a good teacher who lived an exemplary life. It’s not enough to believe he was a prophet. It’s not enough to believe he’s one of many paths to God. He’s God’s ONLY Son. He’s the world’s only Savior. That’s what this man saw. That’s what he put his faith in. What you believe about Jesus makes all the difference in the world.

Third, faith “sees” by persistently asking Jesus for mercy. This guy was persistent in his cries for help. Nothing could stop him. Jesus said that you have to become like a child, and this guy is like a helpless infant starved for milk: “Whah! Whah! Whah!” Remember what Jesus said back in Luke 16, **“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it”** (Luke 16:16). Well, here is exhibit A. Spiritual sight belongs to those who “go for it.” Nothing will stop them. Like Jacob who wrestled with the angel of the Lord, they won’t let go until he blesses them. Think of something in life that you’ve really wanted. You wanted it so badly that it’s all you thought about. You did everything to give yourself the best chance of obtaining it. Why should we be any less desperate to hear Jesus say, “Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you”?

Finally, faith “sees” by following Jesus and impacting others. This is often a neglected part of this story. This story isn’t just about him getting healed and going home. This is a discipleship story. It’s about a man who not only regained his sight, but who spent the rest of his life following and serving Jesus. True faith will always result in a life that follows him, even to Jerusalem, and contagiously infects others with the good news of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Fanny Crosby wrote a song about this story. Like the blind man, she was blind but she could see better than most of us. If we see our need, if we see Jesus for who he really is, if we persistently cry out to him, and if we follow him wherever he leads, this can become our song, too.

*Son of David! hear my cry
Savior, do not pass me by*

*Touch these eyelids veiled in night,
Turn their darkness into light.
Son of David, hear my cry!
Savior, do not pass me by.*

*Though the proud my voice would still,
They may chide me if they will,
Yet the more I’ll pray for grace,
Only here shall be my place.
Son of David, hear my cry!
Savior, do not pass me by.*

*Though despised by all but Thee,
Thou a blessing hast for me;
Faith and prayer can never fail,
Lord, with Thee I must prevail,
Son of David, hear my cry!
Savior, do not pass me by.*

*Glorious vision! heav’nly ray!
All my gloom has passed away;
Now my joyful eye doth see,
And my soul still clings to Thee,
Thine the glory evermore,
Mine to worship and adore.*

--Fanny Crosby