

David's Son

Devotional Reading: Luke 4:14-21
Background Scripture: Luke 18:31-43

Luke 18:35-43

³⁵ As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷ They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

³⁸ He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

³⁹ 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!”

⁴⁰ Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ⁴¹ “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

⁴² Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” ⁴³ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.



Key Text

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!” —Luke 18:39

Introduction

A. Persistent Prayer

When my 17-year-old half-brother left home, he told our parents that he was done with them and with Christianity. He joined the navy, got a young woman pregnant, married her, and then divorced her after 15 months, signing over complete custody of their son in the process. After leaving the navy, he spent the remainder of his 20s involved with drug use and two more broken marriages. By age 32, he was unemployed, mired in debt, and living with a woman to whom he was not married.

My brother and I didn't speak for 15 years after he left home. We were very close, and his departure crushed me. I had idolized him growing up. He was handsome, athletic, and charismatic—all things I wanted to be. But over time, my appreciation turned to anger and resentment. I felt that if he didn't want to be in my life, I didn't want anything to do with him. My parents didn't speak about him, and neither did I. Only once did we hear about how poorly he was doing, and I thought he deserved that suffering he had brought on himself.

My mother, however, never stopped praying for him. Every night before bed and every morning upon waking, she would pray to God and ask him to reconcile my brother to him and restore our family.

After 15 long years, my brother called my mom. His friend had invited him to church, and he had begun to go regularly. He had committed his life to Christ. As a result of his changed life, he asked for forgiveness for the ways he had treated our family. The next day, my mom flew to Florida to meet him and bring him back with her. As they embraced each other for the first time in 15 years, she wept and thanked God for answering her persistent prayer.

B. Lesson Context

Today's Scripture text takes place on Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, a journey that began in Luke 9:51. At the point in Luke's Gospel of today's lesson, the end of the journey is drawing

A King

Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize how the blind man's persistence illustrates Jesus' statement in Luke 18:1.
2. Analyze the connection the blind man makes between Jesus and the "Son of David."
3. Write a prayer to become a person of persistence.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Persistent Prayer
- B. Lesson Context

I. Realization (Luke 18:35-38)

- A. Time and Place (v. 35)
- B. Individuals and Crowds (vv. 36-38)
Look-alikes

II. Reactions (Luke 18:39-41)

- A. Rebuke and Insistence (v. 39)
- B. Approach and Queries (vv. 40-41)
Why the Asking?

III. Remedy (Luke 18:42-43)

- A. The Effect of Faith (v. 42)
- B. The Results of the Miracle (v. 43)

Conclusion

- A. Don't Stop Asking
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

near. Today's text, Luke 18:35-43, describes the fourth and final miracle in what we might call "Luke's journey section" (compare the other three in Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19).

Just before today's text begins, Jesus had warned his disciples (again) that he, the Son of Man, was going to die and rise again on the third day (Luke 18:31-34; compare direct references and allusions to Jesus' death in Luke 5:35; 9:22, 44-45; 12:49-50; 13:32-33; 17:25). As we read the numerous events and teachings between Luke 9:51 and 18:35, we get the impression that Jesus was in no hurry.

Also in no hurry—but by necessity rather than choice—were the physically infirm of the era, especially those who were blind. Blindness was a familiar condition in the ancient world, with the Bible itself using some form of the word *blind* dozens of times. From our current scientific vantage point, there was no reliable cure for blindness in Jesus' day and little understanding of its varied causes.

But the ancient mind was not cautious about thinking of one cause of blindness in particular: many believed it to be a curse from God for some type of sinful behavior. The sins of the parents were thought to affect their children, causing them to be born blind (compare John 9:1-2). But regardless of the cause, blindness was economically and socially debilitating. Blind men could not serve as priests (Leviticus 21:16-18) and had little opportunity for employment. They were reduced to begging or depending on family support to survive.

Parallels to today's text of Luke 18:35-43 are Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52. An interesting fact regarding these parallels is that although Mark's Gospel as a whole is the shortest of the three, Mark's version of the event is the *longest* of the three!

I. Realization

(Luke 18:35-38)

A. Time and Place (v. 35)

35a. As Jesus approached Jericho,

Located near the Jordan River, about 17 miles

east of Jerusalem, the city of *Jericho* is infamous for having been destroyed by God some 14 centuries prior to the encounter described in Luke 18 (Joshua 6). Archeology reveals that there were actually two locations for Jericho in the first century: (1) the ancient location as described in the Old Testament and (2) the complex rebuilt by Herod, approximately one mile from the more ancient location. The modern city of Jericho includes both sites.

35b. a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark reveals more of the identity of this certain *blind man*: Mark 10:46 tells us that he is "Bartimaeus (which means 'son of Timaeus')." The fact that Luke doesn't give the name is a bit surprising, given his tendency to give more actual names relative to how frequently the other three Gospels do so. The non-inclusion of the man's name here may be due to the fact that Luke was not an eyewitness (Luke 1:1-4). But ultimately, this is speculation.

For a person living in the first century AD, any degree of visual impairment was untreatable. Corrective lenses, as we have them today, would not be available for centuries to come. The most serious visual impairment is, of course, blindness. People who were so afflicted had few, if any, viable treatment options and were unable to work in many occupations (see the Lesson Context for more background regarding blindness and its limitations). *Begging* alongside heavily traveled roads or next to city gates was frequent. The Law of Moses pronounced a curse on those who took advantage of the blind (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18).

B. Individuals and Crowds (vv. 36-38)

36. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

The exact makeup and number of *the crowd* is not given. In Luke 12:1, we see the description of a "crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another." This crowd—undoubtedly with drop-outs and add-ins along the way—was tagging along with Jesus

on his final journey to Jerusalem (see Lesson Context).

It was not unusual for people to travel long distances in large groups. Bandits would frequently wait along roads to ambush solitary travelers. While the Roman road system and garrisons had made travel safer, banditry was still exceedingly common. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan actually begins with this common scenario; its setting is the same road between Jericho and Jerusalem on which Jesus and his companions traveled (Luke 10:30).

A crowd of people naturally generates a great deal of noise, especially when enthusiastic about something. This occurrence is what catches the attention of the man who was blind.

37. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

The designation of *Jesus* being *of Nazareth* or as a “Nazarene” occurs about two dozen times in the New Testament—all in the four Gospels and Acts. Although Jesus was not born in Nazareth, he grew up there (Luke 2:39; 4:16, 23-24; compare Matthew 2:23). As a variant of the name *Joshua*, the name *Jesus* might have been common at that time. But there was no other person who had worked miraculously among the people—no other person who could be recognized by such a designation, as evidenced by the next verse.

38. He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The designation of *Jesus* as the *Son of David* reveals something that the blind man can “see” in contrast to the spiritually blind religious leaders (Matthew 22:41-46). Since the Messiah was to come from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:17-22), he was also referred to as the “Son of David” (Luke 20:41-44). Jesus was a descendant of David because he was Joseph’s adopted son, as Luke established earlier in his Gospel (Luke 3:23-38). By calling Jesus the “Son of David,” the blind man showed that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

But even such recognition did not guarantee a complete understanding of the Messiah’s role (Luke 24:19-27; Acts 1:6). It is no coincidence that

Luke relates Jesus’ prediction of his own death and resurrection to his 12 disciples just before this encounter with a blind man (Luke 18:31-34). The disciples, too, had acknowledged Jesus as they traveled with and learned from Jesus for three years. Still, when Jesus warned them that he would soon die and rise again according to the Scriptures, they did not understand him. On the other hand, the blind man did not know Jesus; in fact, he could not even see Jesus. Yet he possessed the spiritual sight to recognize that Jesus truly was the promised Messiah of Israel. (We should note that the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean the same thing: “the anointed one”; see John 1:41; 4:25.)

What Do You Think?

When have you cried out to Jesus for mercy?

Digging Deeper

How did you experience his mercy?

Look-alikes

One day, when I was young, I discovered my mother and paternal grandmother looking at old photographs. With a confused look, my mom held up one picture and asked, “When did we have this picture of Laura taken?”

“That’s not Laura,” my grandmother answered. “That’s me when I was little!” We all gathered around to see the photo. It looked so much like me that we could understand my mom’s confusion. As I have grown, I have begun to look more and more like my father, who looks a lot like his mother. When people meet my dad, they comment about how much alike we look. Similarly, my youngest daughter looks a lot like my husband. I recently looked at a photo of them together and felt shocked to realize they have the same eyes, smile, and nose.

We probably assume that a person needs visual acuity for such recognitions to be made. But in today’s lesson, it was a man lacking eyesight who recognized Jesus as David’s son! The text doesn’t say how he was able to do so. But the Bible has much to say about those who have eyes but fail

to see (Matthew 13:14; Mark 4:12; 8:18; Acts 28:26). How can you ensure you have no “spiritual blind spots” in this regard? And how can you ensure that people recognize Jesus in your life?

—L. M. W.

II. Reactions

(Luke 18:39-41)

A. Rebuke and Insistence (v. 39)

39. 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!”

The crowd attempted to quiet the blind man. Luke does not explain their reasons, but it may have to do with the way that important people were treated in the ancient world. Most people believed that those individuals who were important and famous stood above common people’s concerns. The group may have thought they were paying Jesus due honor and respect by keeping someone they considered unimportant from bothering him.

The blind man, however, showed no concern for such a social norm. Instead, he *shouted all the more* as he called again for Jesus’ *mercy*. Like the widow who pestered the judge in search of justice (Luke 18:1-8), the blind man ignored barriers in his way and persisted in asking Jesus for help.

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to cry out to God?

Digging Deeper

What benefit is there in crying out anyway, even if your petition is not answered as you hoped?

B. Approach and Queries (vv. 40-41)

40. Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him,

Based on ancient ideas of honor and the value of persons, the blind man had very little worth (see fuller explanation in Lesson Context). Thus, it is likely that the crowd didn’t expect this reac-

tion by Jesus. But Jesus was an expert at subverting expectations.

41. “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

At the outset, we should realize that Jesus doesn’t ask this question to correct an information deficit—to learn something that he doesn’t know. He already knows what the man needs. One legitimate reason for the question is that Jesus wanted everyone present to hear the specifics of the man’s request. The recovery of sight would have been a very impressive miracle, and Jesus could have wanted his audience to recognize the full impact of what was taking place.

A second possible reason for Jesus’ question is that Jesus may have wanted the blind man to demonstrate faith. By stating the great problem that he had, the blind man risked embarrassment for even asking for something so bold.

What Do You Think?

Do you boldly bring your requests to the Lord? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

How do you practice boldness in prayer while also asking that the Lord’s will be done (Matthew 6:10)?

Why the Asking?

“Mommy!” the toddler cried. “What?” his mom asked. “Mommy!” he repeated. “What?” she said, a bit louder this time. This pattern continued until the child’s mother came close to her son, lowered herself to look him straight in his eyes, and asked, “What do you want?”

The little boy smiled broadly, spread his arms, and wrapped them around his mother. She returned his embrace, cuddling him close until he pulled away and turned his attention to his toy truck.

I watched this with a smile, remembering my own children and the sheer number of times they called out “Mommy!” over the years. A mother’s instinct is to ask what their child wants. Mom wants to meet the needs of her child and wants him to feel loved and connected. Sometimes, she knows



Son of David, have mercy on us!

Visual for Lesson 5. Ask volunteers to share their answers to the question associated with verse 38. Read the visual together as a prayer.

all he wants is a hug. Sometimes, she already knows his needs, but she lets him ask nonetheless.

Jesus knew the man was blind and knew what he wanted, but Jesus asked him anyway. In so doing, Jesus empowered the man to make a bold request. How can passages such as Ephesians 6:1; Philippians 4:6; and Hebrews 4:16 empower you to be as bold? How does the caution of James 4:3 direct your boldness properly? —L. M. W.

III. Remedy

(Luke 18:42-43)

A. The Effect of Faith (v. 42)

42a. Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight;

Christians have been reading this story for nearly 2,000 years, and the radical nature of this healing is less clear to us than it would have been to the original readers. There were many people in the first century who claimed to have the power to heal. Frequently, they depended on calling for the help of higher spiritual forces. Many in the ancient world believed that healing various ailments required connecting with spiritual beings. These beings held special positions in the cosmic hierarchy. To get help from these beings, one would have to know their names and perform elaborate rituals to lure them. In other words, many saw healing as a kind of magic that only beings higher up the celestial hierarchy could accomplish.

In contrast, Jesus did not summon such beings for help. He didn’t ask for a heavenly creature to heal the blind man. He didn’t perform any special rituals or even touch the person. Instead, Jesus simply commanded that the man *receive . . . sight*. Unlike ancient exorcists, Jesus had the power to heal others. He merely spoke, and the blind man was healed. In so doing, Jesus demonstrated power over human bodies that only the Creator of those bodies could possess.

42b. “your faith has healed you.”

It may be tempting to understand the man’s *faith* as saving faith—the admission of one’s guilt for sins and request for Jesus to be forgiven. But there is no mention of sin in this passage; Jesus does not claim that the man’s sins have been forgiven (contrast Mark 2:1-12).

Instead, *faith* in this context likely refers to two related aspects of the blind man’s actions. First, he rightly identified Jesus as the expected Son of David. Second and most important, he persisted in his request when everyone around him pressured him to be silent. The man rejected the pressure of the crowd and focused only on who Jesus is and what Jesus can do. He continued to ask for healing even when everyone around him wanted him to stop. The man’s persistence showed his faith in Jesus and his trust in the Messiah’s love, compassion, and power.

What Do You Think?

What difficulties arise if we assume faithful people are always healed of their maladies?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples offer counterbalances to this assumption?

B. The Results of the Miracle (v. 43)

43a. Immediately he received his sight

The power of Jesus is further shown by the speed with which the healing occurs. Jesus simply spoke the word, and *immediately*, the blind man received his sight. Unlike supposed healers among the Greeks and Romans, Jesus’ commands

have instantaneous results. The particular Greek word being translated “immediately” is a favorite of Luke’s; 16 of the word’s 18 occurrences in the New Testament occur in his Gospel and book of Acts.

43b. and followed Jesus, praising God.

This result is interesting to contrast with a healing outcome in Luke 8:38-39. In that earlier passage, a healed man wanted to accompany Jesus but was refused. We see no such refusal in the passage at hand, however. The difference is attributable to the shifting context of Jesus’ ministry. The episode in Luke 8 occurred outside the traditional boundaries of Israelite territory, and the timing wasn’t right for Gentile outreach (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; Acts 1:8). The context in our lesson passage is different: Jesus is on his final trip to Jerusalem. There were likely no drawbacks for one more person to join the crowd.

43c. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

The shock wave of the healing sent ripples across *all the people*. And we can’t help but wonder if those who *praised God* were the same ones who had tried to silence the blind man just a few minutes earlier.

This ending also sets up a surprise for the reader. One would expect that someone as powerful as Jesus would have continual victories wherever he goes. That impression is supported in the next chapter, as Jesus brings Zacchaeus the tax collector to repentance (Luke 19:1-10) and as Jesus enters Jerusalem with a crowd of people who call him “king” (19:38). Yet Jesus had warned his disciples more than once that he would have to die and rise again (18:31-33; see also Lesson Context). The reader is thus primed to experience the shock of Jesus’ death and the joy of his resurrection that follows.

What Do You Think?
What reason do you have for praising God today?

Digging Deeper
What benefit is there to inviting your community to praise with you?

Conclusion

A. Don’t Stop Asking

Today’s text illustrates the point on persistence that Jesus made at the beginning of Luke 18. The blind man knew that Jesus was his only hope to receive healing. The man did not heed the crowd’s admonishment to be silent—quite the opposite! He did not give up. Like the persistent widow of Luke 18:1-8, he kept asking the Lord for help. The formula “faith + persistence” was (and is) powerful indeed.

Jesus’ encouragement for faithful persistence remains as sure as it was when he spoke 2,000 years ago. My mother never stopped praying for my brother, despite having no support in that regard from either me or my father. She put her faith in a gracious God, trusting him to bring her wayward son back to him and to our family. God responded to my mother’s persistence in prayer and healed our relationships. Even so, prayer is only one way by which we can demonstrate persistent faith. There are others. Can you name some?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us faithful persistence in all things related to your Son—the promised Son of David. Strengthen our faith to serve you and the kingdom over which Jesus reigns. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Persistent faith is vital.

How to Say It

Bartimaeus	<i>Bar-tih-me-us.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
Jericho	<i>Jair-ih-co.</i>
Jerusalem	<i>Juh-roo-suh-lem.</i>
Leviticus	<i>Leh-vit-ih-kus.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Nazarene	<i>Naz-uh-reen.</i>
Nazareth	<i>Naz-uh-reth.</i>
Timaeus	<i>Ty-me-us.</i>
Zacchaeus	<i>Zack-key-us.</i>