

Luke 18:35-43 The Great Question

Jesus performed many miracles. There are some three dozen recorded in the gospel accounts of His life, and from inference, we can assume that He performed many many more. Early in His teaching ministry, He spoke in the synagogues, and regularly people brought others before Him to be healed, have demons driven out, or some other good work done for them. Jesus performed miracles so frequently that His opponents did not even bother to deny them. Rather, they tried to attribute His work to Satan.

Jesus performed miracles that demonstrated His sovereign power over disease. ¹⁰“And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ ¹³And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God” (Luke 13:10-13).

Jesus also demonstrated His power of the supernatural world. ³³“In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴‘let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are - the Holy One of God!’ ³⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘be quiet and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people, he came out of him without doing him any harm” (Luke 4:33-35).

He demonstrated His power over nature. ²³“But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. ²⁴They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm” (Luke 8:23-24).

He demonstrated His power over death. ¹²“Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, ‘do not weep.’ ¹⁴And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, ‘young man, I say to you, arise!’ ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother” (Luke 7:12-15).

Yet despite this manifest power, power so great that even His enemies did not deny it, Jesus was a suffering servant. He was a dying Messiah. He was on His way to Jerusalem for the crucifixion. Before those crucial events unfolded, however, Jesus made a stop in Jericho. This would be the scene of the last of Jesus’ miracles. Scripture records no further conversions after Jesus leaves Jericho, until the Roman centurion and a convicted criminal come to faith at the cross. This was one last bright moment before the storm. And being the profound teacher that He was, this last moment hinged upon a question.

The Blind Beggar

Jericho was on the way from the Jordan River to Jerusalem. After His ministry in Galilee, Jesus had been in Perea, having crossed over the Jordan River to avoid Samaria. He and His disciples arrived in Jericho, probably to rest and prepare for their half-day uphill journey into Jerusalem.

Jericho was about fifteen miles from the city gates of Jerusalem. Because it was near the Jordan River, its well-watered surroundings provided nourishment for many crops, particularly date palms. So much so that the city was called by that appellation, “the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people” (Judges 1:16). At this time, Passover, Jericho was crowded, and beggars took full advantage of the opportunity.

There were, actually, two cities of Jericho at this time. The ruins of the old Jericho, destroyed during the Israelite invasion of Canaan, and newer Roman Jericho. Roman Jericho was built south of the Old Testament city. This has led to some concern since Matthew “as they were leaving Jericho” (Matthew 20:29) and Mark “as He was leaving Jericho” (Mark 10:46) both claim that the miracle took place as Jesus left the city of Jericho. However, Luke writes that these events occurred “as Jesus was approaching Jericho” (v. 35). There is no issue here, though, as Matthew and Mark could easily be referring to the Old Testament city and Luke was referring to the city in Roman times. So the narrative took place as Jesus departed from the ruins of the Old Testament Jericho and made His way into the modern Roman Jericho. While Jesus was on His way there, Luke wrote, there was “a blind man was sitting by the road begging” (v. 35).

Matthew mentions two blind “two blind men sitting by the road” (Matthew 20:30), but Mark “a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road” (Mark 10:46) and Luke mention only one. Again, this is not an issue since neither Mark nor Luke claim that there was *only* one blind man. Mark even gives him a name that Luke omits. Some scholars suggest that this was because by the time of Mark’s narrative, Bartimaeus had become a well-known member of the early church, and could give veracity to the testimony of the gospel account.

From John’s account, we know that Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead in nearby Bethany, so no doubt the crowds were large as Jesus made His way. Such a large group entering the city would have drawn people from their houses to see what was happening. Men and women came in from the fields. Rumors spread. People talked.

Along the side of the road sat the blind man. He was sitting and begging from passers by he could not even see. Blindness was a scourge of the ancient world. It was so common in ancient Israel that it was used as a metaphor for spiritual deadness,

“⁶I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness,
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the nations,
⁷To open blind eyes,

To bring out prisoners from the dungeon
And those who dwell in darkness from the prison” (Isaiah 42:6-7).

Begging, as well, was common. Like blindness, poverty was seen as a punishment from God for sins. So this wretched man was doubly-cursed. He was not only blind, he was destitute. Apparently there was no one to provide for his daily needs, so he resorted to sitting along the side of the road, hoping for alms.

Breaking up the monotony of his day he heard “a crowd going by” (v. 36). Perhaps this was his chance. Surely one of the many people passing by would give him something. “He began to inquire what this was” (v.36). The response came “that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by” (v. 37). It was not unusual for people in the ancient world to be known by their city. This practice continued until the modern age, in fact. We are all familiar with Leonardo Da Vinci or Thomas á Kempis.

It seems that the blind man must have heard of Jesus, for he “called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (v. 38). The word Luke uses, *boaō*, means literally to scream. This man screamed at Jesus as if his life depended on it, because in a very real sense, it did. Notice, also, that he calls Jesus the “Son of David.” This reference spoke of the Davidic covenant.

“¹²When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, “ (2 Samuel 7:12-14).

This was the great prophecy that one day God would provide a king who would reign over an everlasting kingdom. It could not refer to David’s biological son, Solomon, for he died and the kingdom broke apart after his death. Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy. Related to David by blood through His mother and by legal descent through His father, Jesus was the Son of David Who would fulfill the prophecy.

It had been foretold. “³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32-33) were the words spoken by the angel Gabriel when he announced the upcoming birth of the Messiah to Mary.

Though there is no Old Testament reference to this title, by the time of Christ “Son of David” had become synonymous to ‘Messiah.’ “¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they became indignant ¹⁶and said to Him, ‘do You hear what these children are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘yes; have you never read, “out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?”’” (Matthew 21:15-16). The blind man, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, knew Jesus to be the Messiah.

Knowing this he cried out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 38). He needed mercy. He understood there was nothing he could do to win Jesus’ favor. There was nothing he could offer the Son

of David. He simply cried out for mercy. The reader is reminded of another cry for mercy in a desperate hour,

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1).

One might think the crowd would be anxious to see a miracle. Perhaps doubters in the crowd would relish a chance to put this Jesus to the test. Instead, sadly, the blind man was not helped by the crowd. Quite the contrary, “those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet” (v. 39). One must wonder why did the people want him to be silent? Perhaps they were in a hurry and did not want Jesus to stop. Maybe they saw the man’s behavior as undignified. It could be that the people feared the Pharisees in the crowd, and did not want to draw more attention to themselves than they already had. Finally, it may be that Jesus had been teaching as He walked along, and they did not want Him interrupted.

But the blind man would not be denied. Instead of being shamed into silence and withdrawing, ‘he kept crying out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (v. 39). Let us not overlook the benefits of persistent prayer. The man called out, often, and passionately. Like the woman who troubled the judge until she wore him down, so, too, this blind man would not stop until Jesus had heard him.

The Compassionate Savior

Behold the compassion of Jesus. When He could be thinking only of Himself and the cross He was to face, He helped another. He performed a miracle that again demonstrated His power as God Incarnate, but also His unfailing compassion. Matthew’s account draws this out, “moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him” (Matthew 20:34).

Ignoring the crowds, “Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him” (v. 40). He had to shout over the noise. He needed to make Himself heard over those who were telling the blind man to be still. But Jesus was as insistent as the blind man. He demanded that the man be allowed to approach. Mark’s account elaborates on the detail. ⁴⁹“Jesus stopped and said, ‘call him here.’ So they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.’ ⁵⁰Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus” (Mark 10:49-50). Imagine that. The blind man jumped up, and quickly moved toward the voices of those who were near Jesus. He left behind his outer garment, probably the only one he had. He gave it up as lost. It did not matter. He had the chance to meet Jesus.

Let us appreciate the efforts of the blind man. Handicapped as he was, he did what he could. So must we in the pursuit of our faith. We must make use of whatever we have at our disposal. The blind man did not sit at home waiting for help to come to him. He went out, found his way to a busy road, and begged. So we, too, must take advantage of the resources we have for our edification. We cannot sit at home not reading our Bibles, avoiding other believers, and staying quiet in prayer, and expect to grow in our faith.

“When he came near, He questioned him” (v. 40). Jesus knew what the man needed, his plight was obvious, but nevertheless, Jesus asked him “what do you want Me to do for you?” (v. 41). “What do you want?” What a question! There were many possible answers. Did the man want alms? Perhaps a handout, some bread or fruit to get through the day. Did the man want healing? Surely he was blind and

could use the restoration of the power of sight. Did he want forgiveness? Did he even recognize his need in this area?

The blind man didn't hesitate. Immediately he replied, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!" (v. 41). He called Jesus 'Lord' again signifying his understanding that Jesus had the power of God. That he wanted to regain his sight indicated that he had not been born blind, but had lost his sight in either an accident or from an illness.

Jesus responded without hesitation, "receive your sight" (v.42) He said simply. There were no theatrics. There was no burst of song from angels in heaven. But, as ever, this was a miracle. Jesus healed the man as only God Incarnate could heal. We must remember that when Jesus healed, He did not do it by half measures. Jesus healed instantly, "immediately he regained his sight" (v. 43). The blind did not have partial vision, or a hazy and clouded sight. He could see clearly as ever. Jesus healed totally. There would be no relapse.

But this healing was more than physical. Jesus continued, "your faith has made you well" (v. 42). The word used was not the word for physical healing, *iaomai* but rather for spiritual healing, *sōzō*. This word was used with the idea of salvation. In the case of the paralytic lowered by his faithful friends through the roof to the feet of Jesus, He said, "seeing their faith, He said, 'friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (Luke 5:20). To the woman who surreptitiously touched His garment as He walked by he said "daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:49). And to the grateful leper who returned to fall at His feet and thank Jesus, He said "stand up and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19).

The specific context in this situation bears out this understanding. Surely the blind man was not healed physically because he had faith. Jesus needs no such cooperation on our part. But to be saved, however, faith is required. When Jesus says his faith had made him well, Jesus was speaking of his salvation.

The response of the man was wholehearted. He "began following Him, glorifying God" (v. 43). His response was to follow and glorify God. The man followed Jesus to Jerusalem. He probably saw His triumphal entry. Perhaps he was present at the cleansing of the temple. Maybe he hung on the fringes of the crowd during Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Maybe he was even among those in the upper room waiting and praying. Again, this may be why Mark gives us his name in his account.

But there was more than simply the praise of one healed man. Luke recorded that "when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God" (v. 43). Of course, as we have learned, not all of these people believed. Some were simply amazed. Yet they could not deny that a great miracle had occurred. Many must have known the man their entire lives. Some had perhaps helped the blind man from time to time; others, undoubtedly, had taken advantage of his handicap. But none of them could doubt now that the Son of David had arrived on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Takeaways

“What do you want?” This is a great question. We know that Jesus healed, but He also saved. What do you want Jesus to do for you? Is Jesus someone to call upon to make your life better? Is He someone to call upon when needed, but to ignore when all is well? It is important to assess what we want from Jesus? Do we want a Savior or a Lord? When we get what we want, do we also follow and glorify God?