

Turn Your Eyes
Healing Blind Eyes
Luke 18:31-43
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This past Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent. Lent, along with Advent, is a highlight of the church year. It's a season focused on growing as disciples of Jesus, when we as followers of Jesus recommit ourselves to our Savior as we reflect on Jesus' suffering over the last days of his life and his ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross. Reflection, examination, and recommitment during Lent prepare us for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter. This Lenten season our staff invites each of us to turn our eyes to Jesus.

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 18:31. The heading above this passage in my Bible is "Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time."

³¹ Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

³⁴ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. (Luke 18:31-34)

Luke has been dropping hints throughout his gospel about Jesus' impending death since shortly after Jesus was born. When the elderly Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to Jesus, Joseph and Mary in the temple in Luke 2, Simeon prophesied to Mary, "a sword will pierce your own soul too." In Luke 9 after Peter identified Jesus as "God's Messiah," Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who He was, and then He plainly said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Jesus' words were clear and straight forward, yet his disciples were unable to understand what He was talking about.

Later in Luke 9 after the transfiguration on the mountain, when Jesus' countenance changed and his clothes shone like lightning and Moses and Elijah miraculously appeared talking with Jesus, He again told his disciples, "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." His disciples were still clueless about what was going to happen to their Lord. So, in the passage I read earlier, Jesus told his disciples a third time what his fate was going to be, but still, they couldn't understand. Then we read these words, starting at verse 35:

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. (Luke 18:35-43)

At first glance, Jesus' restoring sight to this blind man might not seem all that remarkable to us. After all, Jesus' had healed many diseases. He had restored damaged arms and legs. He had cast demonic spirits out of people. He had even raised the dead. But Jesus' opening of blind eyes was noteworthy on two levels. First, outside of the Holy Spirit restoring sight to Paul through Ananias, after he was struck down by a blinding light on the road to Damascus, we don't read of anyone but Jesus healing blindness. Jesus' disciples cured diseases and healed all kinds of ailments, but they never healed blindness. Isaiah chapters 35 and 61, Messianic prophecies quoted by Jesus, specifically mention the healing of blind eyes as a sign

that God's promised Messiah had come. The healing of blindness was unique, providing evidence that the Messiah had arrived. Secondly, Jesus' healing of physical blindness was often connected to spiritual blindness. Jesus' opening of blind eyes frequently paralleled people's hearts and minds being opened to see and understand spiritual truth.

Last week when we explored the Parable of the Lost Son, I pointed out that parables were a teaching tool Jesus used to convey truth at several levels. There was the obvious point that could be taken at face value, and then there was the deeper spiritual truth that lay beneath the story. In Matthew 13, the disciples asked Jesus why he often spoke in parables. Jesus answered by quoting the Prophet Isaiah's words from Isaiah 6:9–10:

'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

One of the neat things about walking through a book of the Bible like we are through Luke's gospel is being able to see connections we normally miss when we move back and forth between books and topics. I want to call your attention to two passages of Scriptures that we've already preached on during this series. The first passage is from Luke 4. Pastor Evan preached on this passage on January 14 while I was in Thailand. On a Sabbath day, Jesus preached these words from Isaiah 61 in his hometown synagogue. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). Recovery of sight for the blind is listed as one of the defining pieces of evidence that the Messiah had arrived.

Two weeks later when I preached on Luke 7, I pointed out that when John the Baptist, who was in prison, sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He were really the Messiah, Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him what they had seen and heard, and then Jesus quoted these words from Isaiah chapter 35: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy

are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Luke 7:22). The first sign Jesus identified was “the blind receive sight.”

Jesus pointed to the healing of blind eyes as evidence that the kingdom of God had arrived, and He connected the physical healing of blind eyes with the opening of hearts and minds that enabled people to understand spiritual truth. That is what Luke appears to be doing when he places Jesus’ third prediction of his death to his disciples in Luke 18:31–32 just before the healing of the blind man in verses 35–43.

Jesus’ interaction with the blind people He healed is often fascinating. Sometimes He asked them questions. On one occasion, He strangely rubbed dirt and spit on a blind man’s eyes, and then He healed a blind man in stages. When Jesus first touched him, he said he saw people that looked like trees, but when Jesus touched him again, he could see clearly.

In this case, Jesus asked the man, “What do you want me to do for you?” I understand wanting to have someone take ownership of their situation, but wasn’t it odd for Jesus to ask a blind man who had called out to Him for mercy what he wanted Jesus to do for him? The man said, “I want to see.” Jesus responded, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” After gaining his sight, the man followed Jesus, praising God. Jesus healed the man’s eyes so he could see, but this man was also now a believer and a follower of Jesus.

“So, Pastor Layne, the story of Jesus’ healing of the blind man is kind of interesting, but what does that have to do with Lent? And more to the point, how does any of this apply to my life?” I commend you for asking those great questions. 😊

Our hope is that during these 40 days prior to Easter, all of us will turn our eyes toward Jesus. I met with a person this week who is walking through some incredibly difficult circumstances. This person told me about many prayers they’ve been praying to God, but their sense was that God wasn’t listening. After listening for a while and praying silently, I asked, “You’ve talked a lot about God, but who is Jesus to you?” This person thought for a bit and then said, “I know He’s God’s Son and that He was sent to die for our sins, but I don’t really think about Jesus much.” I told this person that God sent Jesus to be with us so we might get a clear picture of who God is. In Colossians 1, the Apostle Paul writes these words,

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

In other words, to get a clear picture of who God is, turn your eyes to Jesus. Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us. For some of us who don't really know Jesus, turning our eyes to Him may simply be increasing our curiosity. Perhaps we've never really thought much about Jesus, or we've kind of written Him off as irrelevant to our lives. My hope is that as you join us for worship, you'll open your heart and mind to who Jesus is and consider how placing your faith in Him might impact your life.

Others of us here have known who Jesus is, placed our faith in Him, and have walked with Him for many years. My hope is that this Lenten season will be a time of renewing and strengthening your faith, of having the eyes of your heart and mind opened in new ways to who Jesus is and what following Him looks like for you. Hebrews 12 offers some great counsel for us as we journey through Lent.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)