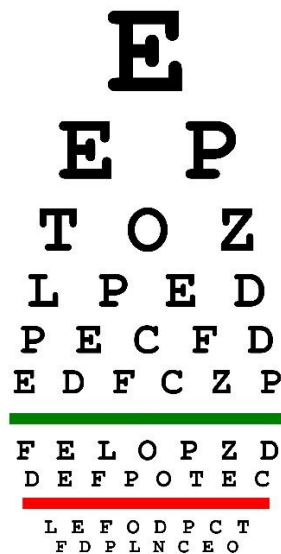


Food for Thought Article:

“The Seeing Blind Man and the Blind Seeing Man” ~ Luke 18:35 – 19:10.



I don't know about you, but I am always getting reminders from opticians saying that it is time to have my eyes tested! The letter in front of me reads, in large letters gradually getting smaller –

‘Book Your Next Eye Test You Know You Should’

This gospel reading from Luke (do read it before continuing), is about two men who were having difficulties with their sight.

Firstly, (Lk. 18:35-43), we have the unnamed, unemployed, poor, blind beggar man, who could see spiritually but not physically (until Jesus healed his physical sight). And secondly, (19:1-10), we have Zacchaeus, the named, small in stature, rich man, who was employed by the Roman Revenue & Customs Department and who could see physically but was spiritually blind (until Jesus opened his spiritual eyes).

So, this passage, (forget chapter divisions, they often divide what God wants to be kept together), is contrasting two very different types of people and two very different types of seeing. Physical sight, which going to your optician can help you with, and spiritual sight, which is about seeing and understanding who Jesus is and which no optician will be able to help you with!

This passage opens for us, I believe, three questions: Who do we think Jesus is? What do we want him to do for us? Why did Jesus come to earth?

Let's look, then, at this poor blind beggar sitting by the roadside just outside Jericho. He is blind but has great hearing and can hear the commotion of a crowd passing by.

Often, when we lose one or more of our senses, the others develop to compensate for what we have lost (or never had). This man had acute hearing.

Recently, on TV, I saw something amazing! A man who had completely lost his sight was now a woodworker. He said that when he went blind, he wanted to challenge himself! And there he was, turning out (pun intended!) beautiful wooden artefacts using lathes, chisels, hammers, saws, and other potentially hazardous implements! He said that he firstly imagines the piece he is going to make and then 'senses' how the wood is responding as he works with it. He listens to it, feels it, smells it! Quite remarkable!

But back to the poor, blind beggar just outside Jericho. This man, to whom you and I may not have given a second glance, is actually very special. He says something amazing! He calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" In other words, he gives Jesus his Royal, Messianic title, 'Son of David.'

This man had put two and two together and somehow knows that this 'Jesus of Nazareth' who is passing by, is the Royal, Davidic, Jewish Messiah. He knew who Jesus was. **And he is the only person in the whole of Luke's gospel who addresses Jesus with his Royal, Davidic, Messianic title. That's why he is special. This guy, who was physically blind, was spiritually seeing.**

Who do we think Jesus is?

So, the first question we must ask ourselves is this: "Who do we think Jesus is? Jesus was always asking people who they thought he was. Some said they thought he was John the Baptist come back to life (wrong). Some said they thought he was the prophet Elijah (wrong). Some said they thought he was Jeremiah the prophet (wrong). And then Jesus would say to his disciples, 'Yes, but who do **you** say that I am?'

There is, however, no excuse for us not knowing who Jesus is! God has given us four gospel accounts which are essentially biographies of Jesus. Have you ever wondered why there are four of them? Well, they were all written for different audiences and there is one that is written especially for you!

Matthew's gospel is written for new Jewish believers to help them understand that Jesus is the King of the Jews and to help them live in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Mark and Luke wrote their gospels primarily for unbelievers to help them come to Jesus and put their faith and trust in him.

John wrote his gospel with older believers in mind; people who already believed in Jesus but needed to have a deeper understanding of who he was/is. It is an encouragement for 'already disciples' to go on believing that Jesus is the anointed Christ/ Messiah and to go on having life in his name (Jn. 20:31).

Another reason for having four gospels is that they all start in different places in the life of Christ. Matthew starts with Jesus' ancestors (especially his Kingly ancestry). Mark starts his gospel when Jesus is already 30 years old and is about to begin His ministry. Luke starts with the birth narratives of Jesus and his human ancestry. John expands our faith and understanding of who Jesus is by taking us right back to the beginning where Jesus existed with God before Jesus was born.

The four gospels also emphasise different aspects of who Jesus is. In Matthew, Jesus is primarily King of the Jews, in Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man, in Luke, Jesus is the Saviour of the World, and in John, Jesus is the Son of God.

Also, the gospels are all different lengths so if you haven't got much time, read Mark, it is the shortest with 14,949 words. The longest is Luke's gospel with 25,640 words. I would qualify this, however, by saying that I would never give Mark's gospel to a Muslim. The first verse will stick in their throat. Rather give them Luke, where, in the first few pages, they will read about angels, which Muslims believe in, and the human ancestry of Jesus which, for a Muslim, authenticates his humanity.

So, we can be thankful that God has given us four gospels, four biographies of Jesus which complement each other. There really is no excuse for not knowing who Jesus is! And gradually the penny did begin to drop even for Jesus' disciples!

Peter was able to proclaim, in answer to Jesus' question, "Who do **you** say I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:15&16) and Martha was the first woman to say, "I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world" (Jn. 11:27).

But back to the poor, blind beggar. The crowd weren't happy with him shouting out 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me;' they told him to shut up.

However, blind people can be incredibly determined and strong-willed so he shouted out louder than ever, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.'

I remember a few of us leading a blind man up Helvellyn, which is the third highest peak in the Lake District (3117 feet). He was determined to reach the summit even though it meant us traversing a narrow, rocky, knife edge with a few hundred feet drop on either side!

So, this absolutely determined blind man continued to shout out 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' This prayer, for that is what it is, then causes Jesus to stop. It grabs Jesus' attention. How might our prayers grab Jesus' attention and cause him to stop in his tracks?

And then Jesus orders the man 'to be brought to him.' Jesus doesn't go to the man, rather he orders the blind man to be brought to him. Jesus is now acting in his Kingly role. In the country where I live, we have a King (Charles III), but I couldn't just decide I wanted to have an audience with him. Only if he commanded me to come to him could I meet him. King Jesus commands the man to be brought to him.

And then Jesus asks the man a very personal and pertinent question, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied, "Lord, I want to see." He could see spiritually, now he wanted to be able to see physically. And Jesus said, "OK, receive your sight, your faith has healed you." And the first person the blind beggar saw was Jesus. What a thrill that must have been!

What do we want Jesus to do for us?

So, the second question we must answer, once we know who Jesus is, is to be clear in our minds what we want him to do for us. This is something each of us must answer for ourselves.

This man's request to be able to see physically had dramatic implications for him. Now he could see, he went from sitting by the roadside to following Jesus; from being static to being dynamic.

We can ask ourselves, "Is my Christian faith static or dynamic?" Do I just believe in Jesus, or am I following him? This whole passage has a dynamic about it; Jesus is constantly on the move. As he passes by, what do we want him to do for us?

And so, we move on. This healing of the blind beggar had taken place on the approaches to Jericho, and now Jesus had entered Jericho and is passing through.

I have been to Jericho; it is one of the oldest cities on earth, about 11,000 years old. It's an archaeologist's paradise. It is in quite a dry area but is served by many fresh water springs. In Old Testament times it was known as the 'City of Palms.' Jericho is about 16 miles northeast of Jerusalem and is 258 metres below sea level whereas Jerusalem is 754 metres above sea level. So, for Jesus and his followers it was now uphill all the way as they journeyed from Jericho to Jerusalem.

We are now introduced to another man by the name of Zacchaeus. By way of contrast to the poor, blind beggar, he is wealthy and well-known. He is the Chief tax collector in the Jericho district and has left his office for one reason, he wanted to see who Jesus was. Isn't it great when people want to see Jesus and find out who he is!

But there were three things that could have kept Zacchaeus away from Jesus and prevented him from finding out who Jesus was: -

1. Physical imperfection
2. Guilty conscience
3. Social stigma, i.e. the shame and dishonour which had attached itself to him because he was a tax collector.

And these same 3 things still prevent many people today from coming to Jesus and getting to know him. Let's look at them one by one.

1. Physical imperfection. There may be something physical about us that we don't like. Maybe we think we are too tall or too short. Too fat or too thin. Our nose is too big or the wrong shape. Our breasts are too small or too large. We can't see properly, we can't walk properly, we can't hear properly, we can't speak properly. The latter was Moses' problem; he didn't think he was eloquent enough! Whatever it is, there is something physical about us that prevents us from coming to Jesus.

Zacchaeus was small in stature and couldn't see Jesus because of taller people standing in front of him. How frustrating is that!

2. Guilty conscience. Why was his conscience troubling him? Well, it was because of all the money he had cheated people out of. He took more tax money from the people than the Romans required him to do – he defrauded them. Alternatively, he had power to ease your tax burden, if you gave him a bribe.

The Romans didn't pay tax collectors much so they felt the need to make up their wages by cheating, defrauding people and taking bribes. Just like in many countries around the world today, where, if you want anything from the government, you will have to pay their civil servants a bribe because the government doesn't pay their employees enough!

It's quite funny when Zacchaeus says to Jesus 'and **if** I have cheated anybody out of anything' The bystanders must have said to Zacchaeus, 'What do you mean **if** you have, of course you have!'

3. Social stigma i.e. the shame and dishonour which had attached itself to him **because** he was a tax collector. Everywhere he went people booed, called him names, spat on him or, in today's context, sent him hate mail.

As far as the Scribes and Pharisees were concerned, 'tax collectors' and 'sinners' were synonymous. As far as this crowd was concerned, Zacchaeus was 'unclean,' as 'unclean' as the blind (now seeing) beggar. A Jewish man collecting taxes from the Jewish people on behalf of the hated Roman occupiers didn't endear himself to anyone.

However, the wonderful thing is that Zacchaeus took steps to deal with each of these setbacks. It is important that we learn how to turn setbacks into springboards!

He dealt with his small stature by climbing up into a sycamore-fig tree so he could see Jesus from that vantage point.

He dealt with his guilty conscience by making restitution to those he had defrauded and by giving half of his possessions to the poor. Can you imagine? Folks must have been jostling to get in position in the queue whilst Zacchaeus dished out the dosh!

Incidentally, we could see this as an example of the redistribution of wealth, and it takes place not through any political theory or policy ~ that has never worked either through capitalism or communism ~ but it comes about when people meet Jesus and have a change of heart concerning money, possessions, giving, and the poor.

In the early Church we read: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:44&45).

However, the most difficult problem Zacchaeus found was getting rid of the social stigma that had attached itself to him. If you live in many countries today and have a disease like AIDS or Leprosy, it is very difficult to get rid of the social stigma/ shame/dishonour associated with those diseases.

Or, if you are a Dalit living in India, how are you going to get rid of the social stigma attached to being from the lowest caste? And this is not just a problem in India. In 2020 the Civil Rights Department in California filed a lawsuit against the Tech giant Cisco alleging caste discrimination against a Dalit engineer.

There is also a caste system among Muslims but it is not so defined as it is among Hindus. For example, Muslims in Bangladesh with surnames Khan and Sheikh claim they have ancestry from the Middle East and they are often more wealthy and fairer skinned than other Bengalis.

So, what is the answer to these things which could keep us away from Jesus? Meet with him anyway! Bring your physical limitations to him! Confess to him those sins which are on your conscience! Believe in him! Receive the Holy Spirit!

He can heal our bodies and even if he doesn't, he can still use our infirmities for his purposes and his glory. God's power is made perfect in weakness. He can cleanse our guilty consciences from **all** sin, and even if social stigma sticks, as it may well do, Jesus delivers us from the pervasive, paralysing fear of being concerned with what others may think about us, say about us, or do to us. Indeed, the gospel is often better received among ethnic minorities than it is among majorities.

But back to Zacchaeus wedged in the tree! Jesus spots him and says, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus was overjoyed. The people were not. There was a murmur of indignant disapproval, a grudging complaint that rippled through the crowd, because Jesus was going to the home of this sinner, this thief, this defrauder.

The same crowd, who a moment ago had been praising God for healing the blind beggar, was now upset that Jesus had invited himself into Zacchaeus' home. But this is just an example of how fickle congregations and crowds of people can be!

Why did Jesus come to Earth?

He has come to bring salvation to hearts and homes. He has come to heal those who are sick in body, mind, and spirit. Those who have need of a physician but haven't got access to one.

There has been a programme on one of our T.V. channels recently which perfectly describes why Jesus came. The programme is called 'Saved and Remade.' In the programme, folks arrive at a tip (Civic Amenity Point) to get rid of old, worn, broken down tables, chairs, sofas etc. At the last minute, someone arrives and rescues the items from being chucked into the skip. They take them away (rescue them), and then recycle, renew, renovate, rejuvenate, and restore them. What they become is very different from what they were!

This is exactly what salvation through Jesus means. We are saved/salvaged from perishing and remade in the image of Christ. Writing to the Church in Corinth, Paul asserts that 'some of you were thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, but you were recycled, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.' (See 1 Cor. 6:9-11)

Summary:

Who is Jesus? According to this passage from Luke's gospel, he is 'Jesus of Nazareth,' he is the 'Son of David' and he is the 'Son of Man.' What do we want him to do for us, as individuals and as a Church? We can only answer that question for ourselves. Why did Jesus come? To bring salvation to hearts and homes. To give us physical and spiritual sight. To seek and save the lost. To recycle that which was perishing and heading for the rubbish tip. To transform us so that in Christ we are now 'new creations.' Praise God!

George Irving – October 2025

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