

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(March 12, 2023)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

**Sermon Series:** The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom  
(*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*)

### **King Jesus Heals!...and He doesn't**

(Luke 18:35-43)

Study #10

#### **Introduction: Jesus' very different kingdom...**

Over these last couple of months, we've been exploring the Gospel of Luke and have seen the very different ways in which Jesus' kingdom operates vs. a typical, earthly kingdom.

Today, we'll watch as He thoroughly invests Himself in helping a man most kings wouldn't have helped. How very different.

And we'll end up reflecting on His policy to not help - in the ways we typically think of helping - resolve so many of the problems we face. Again, what a very different kind of king and kingdom.

*On the road to Jericho(s)*

When we catch up to Jesus this morning, He and His disciples have been traveling. They have moved through the region of the Decapolis and then into the land of Perea.

Both of these regions were located on the east side of the Jordan River, outside of the land of the Jews.

They were lands where Gentiles lived. These Gentiles have now heard the Good News of God's love from Jesus Himself.

As He approached the southern end of the Jordan River, which empties into the Dead Sea, He and His crew crossed the river right across from the city of Jericho.<sup>1</sup>

***[Luke 18:35a] Now as Jesus was approaching Jericho...***

Jericho may well be the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth. So, even by Jesus' time, Jericho was ancient. It had already been destroyed and rebuilt several times.

Thanks to archaeology, we now know that there were two Jericho's in Jesus' day. There was the Old City, which was mostly broken down. Travelers crossing the Jordan would pass through Old Jericho first.

And then there was the New Jericho, which lay south of the old city and had been built by Herod, mainly as a setting for his own magnificent winter palace.

As we come to our passage for today, we are nearing the end of Jesus' life. His death is just around the corner.

So, to preview what is to come, after leaving New Jericho, Jesus will continue traveling another twenty miles southwest to Jerusalem. That journey will be a tough slog.

New Jericho was the last town a traveler would reach before hitting Jerusalem, and from there it was an uphill hike all the way.

There is a three thousand, five hundred foot elevation gain from the Jordan River to Jerusalem - and that's a lot of elevation gain!<sup>2</sup>

But before they departed Jericho for Jerusalem, Jesus had an exchange with a desperate man.

---

<sup>1</sup> They crossed at about the same point that Joshua and the Jews had crossed before them, right across from the ancient city of Jericho, some fourteen hundred years earlier to take possession of the Promised Land.

<sup>2</sup> At the Jericho crossing, the Jordan is already 840 feet below sea level and Jerusalem is right about 2700 feet above sea level.

## A Blind Beggar

***[35] Now as Jesus was approaching Jericho, a man who was blind was sitting by the road, begging.***

We don't know if Jesus and His followers had spent much time in Jericho, if Jesus had taught or healed people there, or if He had performed other miracles there.

But as they exited the old city *enroute* to Herod's New Jericho, everyone saw "that guy." The blind beggar was always there.

It was common to see blind beggars in the ancient world outside the gates of a major city. There, they were likely to receive help, even from strangers. This man was strategically placed between the two Jerichos.

In that time - even in Israel - there wasn't much of a state-run social safety net. Families and friends took care of the disabled.

But the disabled were often responsible to provide for themselves as much as possible, even if that was by means of begging.

There is so much we'd like to know about this man, and don't. We don't know how old he was, his general health, his family's story, how long he had been blind - only that he was blind and a beggar.

Luke's choice of words, though, describing his physical location, gets our attention.

He was "***sitting by the road.***" It is probable that someone (family member? friend?) positioned him there every day so that he could beg.

But that phrase - "***sitting by the road***" - speaks not only of his physical location. It speaks to his place in society.

He's off to the side. He's marginalized. Jesus had just been talking with a rich young ruler. (Luke 18:18-34) This man we're meeting today is on the opposite end of the scale of social status.

The blind beggar (And, by the way, I'll refer to him this way throughout, this morning. When Mark tells this story, he named the blind man - Bartimaeus - but Luke doesn't. Luke wanted to highlight his "nobodiness", so I will, too) wasn't rich or politically connected. Society would have called him a nobody.

That doesn't mean that he was unaware of what was going on around him.

## **The Blind Beggar Wants What Only Jesus Can Provide (vv. 36-39)**

### **The Blind Beggar Learns that Jesus is Passing By (vv. 36-37)**

So there he was, like he always was, sitting there, hoping for charity, when he heard the sound of an approaching crowd.

In lots of other scenes in the gospels describing this season in Jesus' life, the crowds were there BECAUSE OF Jesus. That is likely not the case here.

It was the Passover season. At Passover, there were always crowds on the Jericho Road heading toward Jerusalem.

This crowd that the blind beggar heard passing by was made up of pilgrims from all over the place, making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

The blind beggar was able to pick up a few words here and a phrase or two there. He heard people mention "*Jesus.*" But, back then, Jesus was a common Jewish name. There were lots of Jesuses around.<sup>3</sup>

***[37] They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.***

---

<sup>3</sup> Or, in the language of that day, "Joshua" or "Yeshua."

And this was the Jesus the blind beggar had been hearing about for months. Jesus the Nazarene.

Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And, yes, His home base for ministry was Capernaum. But He was raised in Nazareth, a small city out on the plains, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. So, Jesus was a Nazarene.

But when this blind beggar called out to Jesus, he used a different identifier, and the nickname he used shows that he might not have had eyesight, but he had keen insight.

### **The Blind Beggar Called Out to Jesus for Help! (v. 38)**

***[38] And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"***

This guy *saw* what others missed. His reference to "**Son of David**" tells us that he knew that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

How he knew is anyone's guess. But sitting by the road day after day, he heard things.

People always spoke about this Jesus with respect. This Jesus was a leader and a healer and a teacher. This Jesus was going up to Jerusalem - and the blind beggar simply put two and two together.

Who else could He be? Clearly Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> And you and I are cheering him on for his spiritual insight.

But there were those in the crowd that day who were not pleased with his shouts. They didn't cheer him on. They shouted him down.

### **The Blind Beggar is Unsuccessfully "Shushed" (v. 39)**

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 7:11-14 - Messiah will come through David.

*Resistance (v. 39a)*

***[39a] Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet...***

Over these last several weeks, we've seen plenty of times when Jesus told people to be quiet.

In fact, often after He performed a miracle, He would tell those who saw it or those who benefited from it to not tell anyone. That's OK. Jesus always had His reasons for doing that.

But pity the person who told someone to be quiet who was coming to Jesus for help.

Like the time, not long before this when parents were bringing their babies to Jesus that He might touch them to be blessed. On that occasion, the disciples rebuked those parents.

Rebuking the disciples (!) Jesus ***[Luke 18:16] called for the little ones, saying, "Allow the children to come to Me, and do not forbid them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."***

The disciples had learned their lesson on that day. So I don't think they were the ones "shushing" this blind beggar.

It was probably the other folks on the road, or those who were from Jericho and had known this blind beggar for years, who may have thought of Him as a nuisance, a nobody, a blight.

They didn't have time for him. They were certain that Rabbi Jesus wouldn't either. *"Jesus isn't interested in you - or in people like you!"*

They intended to shut this man up. Well, Mission NOT accomplished.

*Persistence (v. 39b)*

***[39b]...but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"***

And don't you just love this guy? Nothing's going to keep him from crying out for Jesus' attention. He wants Jesus' help. Opposition just fanned the flame of his persistence.

Somehow, he knew that Jesus was the only One who could meet his need for "*mercy*" - and he refused to back down. He kept on asking Jesus to do for him what only Jesus could have done for him.

This tells us a lot about this man. He had never talked with Jesus before. There was a lot about Jesus that he didn't know.

But he definitely knew his own abject need. And, sight unseen, he was convinced about who this Jesus was. He was persuaded that He was the Messiah.

So, he kept on crying out to Jesus, hoping against hope that this "*Son of David*" would take notice.

### **The Blind Beggar and Jesus (vv. 40-42)**

#### **Clarity (vv. 40-41)**

*Jesus clearly heard the blind beggar shouting (v. 40a)*

**[40a] And Jesus stopped...**

At the risk of being dramatic, I'm going to pause for a minute at "*Jesus stopped*" and consider the enormity of what's going on here.

Everything is on the line for the blind man. He has pinned all his hopes on Jesus being ABLE *and* WILLING to do something for him. All his apples are in the Jesus basket.

If Jesus ignores him, he's lost. If Jesus just walks on by and doesn't help, he's hopeless.

That's the situation from the blind beggar's position. Now, consider the situation from Jesus' standpoint.

He is surrounded by His disciples and by a large crowd.

The large crowd may not all be following Jesus. But lots of them have heard about Jesus. They may have been caught up in the mystique of this increasingly famous Rabbi. And we, in 2023, get that.

The election cycles in America last longer than they used to. And, so, the 2024 cycle is just now getting spun up. It will soon be in full swing, and you and I will, again, get front row seats to view what candidates for public office do on the road to election.

We will watch them hob-knob with the rich and famous. They will spend time with the movers and shakers. They will invest personal capital where it will provide the most "bang for the buck" to get them elected or re-elected.

This crowd on the Jericho Road knew that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. There's an expectation that He is moving up to bigger and better things. To power and to authority and to political success and to kingship.

People on the road to claim their crowns don't stop for blind beggars. They hobnob with other kinds of people.

But highlighting just how different Jesus' kingdom priorities are, He - the Son of David, the Messiah - stopped dead in His tracks in the middle of the road when He heard the blind beggar's cries over the sound of the crowd.

**[40] And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him.**

Ok. There. Jesus finally did something kingly. He issued a command.

And the crowd instantly obeyed. They made the psychological about face from shushing the blind beggar to helping him make his way across the road to Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> So far, Jesus has followed a policy of keeping His messiahship secret. He begins to relax that policy now, not bothering to rebuke or silence the blind beggar for his

He's now standing right in front of Jesus. The Lord has a question for him.

*Jesus clearly asked the blind beggar what he wanted (vv. 40b-41a)*

**[41a] "What do you want Me to do for you?"<sup>6</sup>**

To which we say, "What a question!"

What does Jesus expect that a blind man would want? What would a hungry man want? What would a lame man want?

And of course, Jesus knew what this blind man wanted. He asked the question because He wanted to engage with him. To Jesus, this man was more than a problem to be dealt with. He was more than a project. He was a person to be pursued. A man to relate to.

So, Jesus asked the question. And the blind beggar answered.

*The blind beggar clearly asked to be healed (v. 41b)*

**[41b]... "Lord, I want to regain my sight!"**

Not just, "I want to see." It's, "I want to see again."

See, he wasn't born blind. He lived some years with sight. He can recall what the world looks like. He wanted to see the world again. And he believed that Jesus was the key to his sight.

His cry to Jesus was the cry of faith. His walk across the road, guided by unseen hands, was the walk of faith. His passion to get to an unseen Son of David was born of faith.

Jesus loves to see faith. So, this.

### **Healing (v. 42)**

**[42] And Jesus said to him, "Regain your sight; your faith has made you well."**

Just like that, the blind man is no longer blind. And the beggar will soon no longer be a beggar. Not only his physical loss is restored, but his life's calling changes.

### **Conclusion:**

**[43] And immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.<sup>7</sup>**

Two things happen at the end of this story, and they are both wonderful.

FIRST, there is the miracle of the gift of sight.

The blind man can now see. With no medical treatment, no special words, and no touch, he is healed - just like that - by Jesus, in response to the man's faith.

Clearly, you and I have gathered here today to worship a powerful, miracle-working Jesus.

---

**"Son of David"** address because, as He gets closer to Jerusalem it must be understood that He is entering as the Messiah and will die as the Messiah.

<sup>6</sup> We've heard that question before. It is exactly, word for word, the question Jesus asked James and John when they told Him that they wanted Him to do for them whatever they asked. (Mark 10:36) There, Jesus wanted to expose the selfish hearts of the two apostles. Here, He exposed the sincerity of Bartimaeus' faith.

---

<sup>7</sup> Before John's death, he sent some of his own disciples to ask Jesus to confirm if He was the expected Messiah or not. Jesus told John's disciples to go back to the prison and tell John, **[Luke 7:22] "People who were blind receive sight, people who limped walk, people with leprosy are cleansed and people who were deaf hear, dead people are raised up, and people who are poor have the gospel preached to them."**

In recent weeks, we've watched Him cleanse lepers, calm stormy seas and stormy, demon-possessed hearts, heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on water, and multiply fish and bread. This is our Jesus.

He is the One who has all power over the physical world just as surely as He saves souls from eternal death.

He performed miracles like the one we've seen today. These miracles validate that He can perform the even more glorious miracle of redeeming people like us who need eternal life.

SECOND, and just as beautiful, is the direction of the now formerly blind beggar's life, post-miracle.

When Jesus healed him, the man began following. Now that he can see, he takes his first steps on the road as a disciple of Jesus.

He has no idea what he is getting himself into. He doesn't know that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to embrace a cross. He doesn't know that those who follow Jesus may find their own cross.

All he knows is that he has been given a priceless gift by this "Son of David" - and wherever Jesus is going, he's going, too.

The last potential recruit for Christ-following we saw was the rich young ruler who spoke with Jesus right before this scene. That guy was respectable, influential, and had 20/20 vision.

But he walked away, blinded to what was at the crux of life by his "extreme wealth." (Luke 18:23)

And then we come to this blind beggar who "saw" Jesus for who He really was. He started out seated BY the road, sidelined and marginalized, and ended up following Jesus ON the road.

Have you heard Jesus invite you to come to Him? And having heard Him, have you walked to Him to receive mercy from Him?

Did He open your eyes to the wonder of His salvation? Did Jesus give you eternal life and welcome you into God's family, call you "son" or "daughter" and give you His Spirit when you believed?

He did? Great!

Then follow the formerly blind beggar and follow Jesus, the Son of David whose kingdom priorities extend to the least, the last, and the lost - people just like us.

Walk with Him. And pray and love and give and serve and tell.

King Jesus' priorities are stunning for His focus on people who are usually overlooked.

And for our final minutes together, we'll look at another way in which Jesus' kingdom priorities are stunning.

### **Postlude: A God Who Doesn't Always Heal...**

Let's back away from what we've seen so far today to look at Jesus from the vantage point of people who live in a broken world filled with suffering and pain and disease and death.<sup>8</sup>

We're looking at life with God, now, from a 2023 perspective.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus healed a blind man just outside the Jericho city limits. It's all fantastic.

As wonderful as this story is, the heartbreaking truth is that there were a lot of people on that day who were not healed of diseases, who did not avoid accidents, and who did not escape tragedy.

The same is true today. And this is the way it has always been. Suffering is an inescapable part of the human condition.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> One of my annual reads is Gene Edwards' little book on the life of John the Baptist, [The Prisoner in the Third Cell](#). I highly recommend the book and am grateful to Edwards for having helped me come to grips with the pain and suffering that is in this world in light of God's power and goodness.

We regularly remind ourselves of God's glorious redemption of the nation of Israel from Egypt through the parted Red Sea. Great stuff.

We don't spend as much time thinking about the four hundred years-worth of disappointed Jews who were born, lived, and died as Egyptian slaves, all the while crying out to God for a deliverance He didn't give.

Think about that.

And think about...

...Job on his heap of ashes, mourning his losses before he ever heard the rest of his story.

...Jeremiah up to his armpits in a muddy cistern, just for obeying God.

...faithful John the Baptist as he was taken from his cell to be beheaded for speaking truth to power.

Think about all the times that the people of God have cried out to God for this or that deliverance - and were not delivered.

We expect that God will do certain things in certain ways under certain conditions.

---

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis wrote what follows in 1948 in response to a question raised by a reader: "*How are we to live with the constant threat of nuclear warfare?*" I find his response helpful in 2023.

Lewis replied, "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, syphilis, paralysis, air raids, railway and car accidents. In other words, let us not exaggerate the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering...because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty." From "*On Living in an Atomic Age*" (1948) in Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays.

But, while God is always faithful to His every promise, He very frequently doesn't behave as we expect Him to.

We may walk through life angry and disappointed. And if we do, we think we are upset with an enemy or with a friend who has treated us badly.

Actually, we're upset with God.

We know He could have kept our loved one safe, could have kept the sickness away, could have creatively arranged things so that we avoided pain - and He didn't. (To put it in crasser terms, He didn't live up to our expectations.)

Jesus healed the blind beggar, which was wonderful. And the Gospels describe Jesus' miraculous healing of many others, too.

Now, think of all the people who lived in Palestine in the time of Jesus who were *not* healed. Think of the epileptics and the lepers and the blind and the lame who lived unhealed.

Clearly, it wasn't Jesus' plan to heal everybody of everything. He performed enough miracles to validate His claim to be able to do something greater than heal broken bodies: He would heal broken people.

His plan was to leave His Father and camp out with us for a few years. He would endure all the hardship everyone else in His day did.

Then, around the age of thirty-three, He would allow Himself to be arrested by Romans and Jews who would see to it that He was crucified.

And His death would serve as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. And He would rise from the dead, victorious.

We may be tempted to think that the ultimate questions in life revolve around the problem of innocent suffering.

So, we ask:

"*WHY did God allow this terrible thing to come into the life of my husband, wife, friend, son, daughter?*" or

*“WHY did God not rescue me?” or  
“WHY does God allow this or that injustice?”*

These are not life’s ultimate questions. These things are givens. Injustice and suffering are a part of the promise Jesus made, **[John 16:33] “In the world you have tribulation.”** There’s truth.

So, if any of us expect that following Jesus means escaping the normal sufferings and problems and challenges and persecutions and disasters that this broken world regularly hands out, we will be greatly disappointed because we are greatly mistaken.

Again, Jesus’ kingdom is different than we would have thought. He doesn’t rush to the rescue of His people at every moment of pain and suffering.

The question of all questions, the question before you and me today is this: *“Having seen the grace and love of this God poured out for you in Jesus, will you follow where He leads? Will you follow a God whose ways you don’t fully understand?”*

Let’s join in NOT trusting that He will do such-and-such if we do so-and-so. We will simply trust. Period.

And, yes, we will follow. Wherever He leads.