

Famous musician Stevie Wonder (**picture**) and professional golfer, Tiger Woods (**picture**), were in a bar talking. Not surprisingly, the conversation turned to golf and Tiger was shocked to learn that Stevie Wonder, who's blind, has been playing golf for years.

The golf pro just can't believe it. He wants more details so Stevie Wonder explains how he does it. "My caddy stands out in the middle of the fairway and yells to me. I listen for the sound of his voice and then play the ball towards him. Then, when I get to the spot where the ball lands, the caddy moves further down the fairway and I hit the ball again."

Tiger is obviously impressed, so then he asks, "But how do you putt?" The famous singer replies, "Well, I get my caddy to lean down in front of the hole and call to me with his head on the ground and his mouth just over the cup. I just play the ball toward his voice."

Tiger finds all of this amazing and then asks Stevie if they could play a round sometime. Stevie agrees but says that because people don't take him very seriously, so he only plays for money and he never plays for less than \$10,000 a hole. Tiger thinks about it for a minute and then says, "Okay, well that's some serious money, but I'm up for it. When do we play?"

To which Stevie Wonder answers, "Tiger, you name the night."

Today we want to look at two scenes of blindness. One man is obviously blind. He's physically blind. But while the others can see physically, they're in much worse condition, they're spiritually blind. We don't think this way but the Bible does – **There's blind and then, there's blind.**

Can you even imagine how terrible it would be to be blind? When I was a kid, the basement of my home had a couple of hallways and we'd play blindman's bluff. But even with a blindfold on, you could still see so we'd turn off all of the lights – yet you still weren't completely blind. Our passage in Luke 18 is about blindness. Please turn to Luke 18:31-43 (p. 878).

The Bible is clear, it's far worse to be spiritually blind than to be physically blind. **There's blind and then, there's blind.** Many famous people have been blind. Opera singer Andrea Bocelli (**picture**). David Paterson (**picture**), former governor of New York and philosopher and author, Aldous Huxley (**picture**). Christian hymnwriter, Fanny Crosby (**picture**).

Helen Keller (**picture**) was born both deaf and blind. Someone once very insensitively asked her, "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" Helen responded, "*Better to be a blind person and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing!*"

Jesus' disciples had good eyes but couldn't see. The blind man, Bartimeaus, (Mark's gospel tells us that was his name, Mark 10:46-52), after meeting Jesus received his sight. *Which one are you?*

You're not physically blind, but are you handicapped with a much more serious disability – spiritual blindness? **There's blind and then, there's blind.** Maybe you're here this morning, you're in spiritual darkness, and the worst thing is that you don't even know it. If you're taking notes...

**1.Those who think that they see often don't.** Our text divides into two parts. Verses 31-34 stand together and verses 35 to 43 go together. Let's pick it up again at verse 31. Listen for some key words: "*And taking the twelve, He said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise.' But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*" The disciples were spiritually blind and didn't understand what Jesus was telling them.

It's like the judge questioning a woman regarding her pending divorce, so he asked her, "What are the grounds for your divorce?" And she replied, "About four acres with a nice little house in the middle of a piece of land with a stream running by." No, the judge said, "I mean what's the foundation of your case?" "It's concrete, brick and mortar," she responded confidently.

Finally, in frustration, the judge asked, "Lady, why do you want a divorce?" "Oh, I don't want a divorce," she replied. "I've never wanted a divorce. My husband does. He says he can't communicate with me."

That's the disciples. Jesus is talking. He's repeating what He's told them before about His death, but they still don't get it. What's even more amazing is that they'd just professed that they'd left all to follow Jesus. Verse 28, "*See, we have left our homes and followed you.*" They contrasted their sacrifice with the rich young ruler who clung to what he owned instead of following Jesus. But they hadn't left all. They were still clinging to their nationalism and theological prejudices.

Leon Morris (**picture**) points out that this is the 7<sup>th</sup> time recorded by Luke where Jesus predicts His death. He's been progressively giving His disciples more and more information about His impending suffering and death.

We shouldn't be too hard on them. We're on the other side of Easter. They weren't. A dying King and Messiah didn't fit in their playbook.

***That Jesus would suffer and die for our sins is a consistent prophetic thread from Genesis on.*** The road to the cross was predicted by the prophets. Jesus said, "everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished." That's amazing! There are over 300 prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. If you're not already convinced that the Bible is the supernatural Word of God, I invite you to consider the following Old Testament prophecies about the death of Jesus. Though written hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He clearly fulfilled each of them.

***He would be betrayed by a friend, Psalm 41:9.*** Judas went to the Jewish authorities and offered to betray Jesus. He then led them to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

***He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, Zechariah 11:12.*** Judas was paid 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus.

***He would be silent when accused, Isaiah 53:7.*** Instead of arguing His innocence, Jesus remained silent when given a chance to defend Himself.

***He would be slapped and spit upon, Isaiah 50:6.*** The Roman soldiers took a whip and tore open the back of Jesus. They plucked out His beard and spat on Him. What Isaiah wrote 750 years before came true!

***His hands and feet would be pierced, Psalm 22:6.*** When David wrote this Psalm in about 1000 B.C., crucifixion hadn't even been invented as a mode of execution. That wouldn't happen for another 400 years.

***He would be mocked and insulted, Psalm 22:6-8.*** The crowd watching Jesus be crucified shouted insults at Him and sarcastically demanded that He call on His Father to rescue Him.

***The soldiers would gamble for His clothes, Psalm 22:18.*** Even this tiny detail was fulfilled.

***Not a bone of His would be broken. Psalm 34:20.*** It was highly unusual for someone to be crucified without having some bones broken. Though the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves crucified with Jesus, but because Christ was already dead, they didn't break His legs.

***He would be buried in a rich man's grave, Isaiah 53:9.*** Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy and buried Jesus in his own tomb.

Jesus told His disciples this, that He would "be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging Him, they will kill Him."

***Jesus' cross doesn't end in the grave.*** Some of you, like me, grew up in the first *Star Trek* generation. Dr. McCoy, Captain Kirk's (**picture**) ever present sidekick would examine a body and say, "He's dead Jim!" In the *Princess Bride*, Miracle Max (**picture**) when presented with the apparent dead body of Wesley said, "He's not dead, he is mostly dead."

If the disciples didn't comprehend Jesus' suffering and crucifixion, they certainly didn't understand Jesus' statement about His resurrection, "and on the third day He will rise." You're either dead or you're not. Dead people don't come to life. But Jesus did. God's final word will not be death but resurrection and life. Jesus never foretold the cross without including His resurrection. He always concludes with hope.

The death of Jesus was such a powerful event that to even this day the cross is a symbol of peace and sacrifice. From the Red Cross to Blue Cross to Holy Cross, even a lost world recognizes the power of the symbol of a cross. It's why in China crosses are being forcefully removed from church steeples.

Without Jesus' resurrection, we wouldn't have Christmas. The cross would have no meaning. At His birth, God became human flesh and dwelt among us. On the cross, Jesus became our Passover Lamb, taking our sins so we didn't have to face God's wrath and judgement. Only in His resurrection was Jesus able to verify everything He said and did. If there had been no resurrection, Jesus would have just been another great but dead religious leader like Moses or Buddha or Mohamed. Adherents of other religions visit the grave sites of their founders to honor their remains. There is no corpse for Christians to revere. Churches that have a body on the cross are communicating something that's not true. Jesus is alive!

***They had difficulty with who they thought Jesus was and the real Jesus.*** They were looking for a political Messiah, a king to rescue them from Roman oppression. Periodically, someone will say something silly, "Well, I think Jesus is like..." It doesn't matter what I think or you think, Jesus has revealed who He is in His Word.

In his book, *Finding Common Ground*, Tim Downs (**picture**) tells of visiting at North Carolina State University. Several student organizations had set up booths and bulletin boards announcing upcoming events. One large placard bore this message: **IT ISN'T WRONG TO THINK YOU'RE RIGHT, BUT IT ISN'T RIGHT TO THINK OTHERS ARE WRONG.**

At first glance that sounds very noble and tolerant, but it's impossible and contradictory. How can you believe someone is right and at the same time believe that someone else who totally disagrees with them is also right? What if I believe

cyanide is a medicine but you believe it's poison? Can we both be right? There's a growing "flat earth movement." Can that be true and the world still be round?

You can't be both right and wrong about Jesus. You can't make Jesus who you want Him to be. He's defined Himself. God's Word tells us who He is.

***They had a spiritual blind spot.*** Verse 34 is both powerful and sad. "*But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*" Three times Luke highlights that they didn't get it.

This should spur us to humility. None of us have all of our theological ducks in a row. We must submit before God, surrendering our preconceptions and prejudices. We're dependent on the Spirit to open our eyes, in what we call *illumination*. Like them, often our own spiritual preconceptions prevent us from seeing truth as revealed in God's Word. There's no place for arrogance in the Christian life. We must be humble and teachable.

***Satan blinds people.*** 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that "*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*" That's how Judas could be with Jesus for three years and still not get it. It explains how folk can sit in a Bible-teaching church Sunday after Sunday and never trust Christ. This time of year, everyone is singing our song, Christmas Carols, about the birth and sacrifice of Christ, yet they don't believe it. Satan has blinded their minds. We must pray that the Spirit will break through and open their eyes.

There is only one thing worse than blindness – it's not knowing that you are blind. Multitudes are blind to their darkness, blind to their sin, blind to their destiny, blind to their hopelessness, spiritually out of touch. They're so blind they don't even know that they need to be have their eyes opened and Jesus longs to open their eyes, if they'll let Him. That brings us to the second part of this passage.

**2. God often bring us to a point of desperation.** "*As [Jesus] drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.*" In a day before disability insurance or Social Security, if one had no family, there was little choice but to beg. It meant survival.

Giving alms to the poor was a recognized part of religious duty. The busy road and crowd going to Jerusalem for the Passover would have great potential for a beggar. Blindness was very common and there was no cure.

For blind Bartimeaus, the day began like any other. Waking up, he shook the straw from his shabby garments, got up and tapped his way to the main gate of Jericho. Perhaps he was able to beg a crust of bread or two at some familiar stops along the way. Arriving at the gate he took his regular place along with other beggars and pulled his greasy cloak tight around him against the morning chill. Like so many other mornings, he listened as the city came to life. As people approached the gate, the blind man intoned his beggar's cry, crying out, "*Backsheesh! Backsheesh!*" which means, "a gift, a gift."

Suddenly he tensed, his blind sensitive ears heard a throng approaching. Bartimeaus reached out to stop someone and asked what was happening. He was told, "*Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.*" Jesus, he'd heard of Jesus and His healing exploits. Messianic expectation was high among the Jews. Maybe he'd heard Jesus called Himself "*the Son of God,*" that He had the right blood line, was a descendant of King David and from the line of Judah.

His heart quickened. For the first time since he'd gone blind, he felt hope. He knew how great his need was. Yet, the trouble with too many today is that they don't feel a sense of need. Bartimeaus is an example for all beggars, for all who are desperate. Are you desperate today? He's our model. Luke uses this desperate beggar to teach us how to cry out to Jesus.

***There are opportune moments when Jesus passes by.*** When God moves in our heart, we need to respond. Scripture always speaks of salvation in the present tense – "*Today is the day of salvation.*" It's presumptuous to think that we have tomorrow. EMTs will be called out for many today who presumptuously thought that they had tomorrow.

***Bold faith is the first step you must take to receive mercy from God.*** Like Bartimeaus, we're blind and helpless apart from God. This blind beggar teaches us vital lessons about faith.

***Our faith must be in Jesus the Messiah.*** Bartimeaus is told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, but he cries out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" *Son of David* is a Messianic title. Ironically, he sees what the disciples couldn't see – Jesus is the Messiah, the promised One who opens the eyes of the blind. He saw clearly what others were blind to.

***Our faith is based on mercy not merit.*** He doesn't cry out to Jesus based on who he was or any good that he'd done. He cried out because he's a beggar with nothing. He didn't feel entitled or that he deserved his sight. He begs for *mercy*. Literally, "to bring help to the wretched." It's what Jesus is still doing today. He gives mercy, He's bringing help to the wretched.

God wants us to see that we're all blind beggars and need His mercy. We have nothing to commend us. We have no merit. It's perhaps the biggest stumbling block that keeps people from coming to Christ. They think that somehow

they're worthy of God's attention. God must open our eyes to enable us to see our true condition before Him. We're spiritually blind sinners desperate for His mercy.

**Our faith should be personal, not generic.** He doesn't say, "have mercy on us." According to Matthew's report of this, there were two blind beggars. But each had to come on his own. You can't come for someone else. You can't get mercy for anyone else. You must come on your own, individually.

**Our faith must be persistent overcoming all hinderances.** *"And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"* Someone is crying out to Jesus, wants to come to Jesus and they rebuke him. How sad! But Bartimeaus won't be swayed and cries out more and louder. Helpless as he was, the blind man went for it and God heard him.

Maybe they were annoyed because they were trying to hear Jesus teach and Bartimeaus was a distraction. They couldn't hear Jesus because he was so loud. Maybe they were embarrassed because he was making a scene.

At first he was shouting normally, but the word for "*cried out all the more*" in verse 39 is the word for "*scream, an almost animal cry.*" It shows his utter desperation. He's like the widow in the parable at the beginning of this chapter. She kept hounding the judge until he granted her request.

Mike Yaconelli (**picture**) writes: *"Threaten others with a loud and boisterous faith, and you will be politely (at first) asked to quiet down; dance your faith instead of sitting still in a pew, and you will be asked to leave; talk about your faith with passion and you will get expressions of concern about the inappropriateness of your emotions."*

There's something here that's very sad and must get our attention. Who's the hinderance? Who rebukes him for crying out to Jesus? *The Jesus crowd.* Sometimes it's the Jesus Crowd that's the biggest hinderance for beggars seeking Jesus.

Too many have bought into a lie. Our faith isn't just for Sunday and church. We're to live resurrection lives. Our faith is to be lived out at home in our marriage and family, at work, in the neighborhood and our social circle.

Earlier this week, I reached out to a young person who has gone AWOL spiritually. The parents have been critical of the church and then bounced from church to church. Yet, they're heartbroken at the spiritual apathy of their now adult child, but are oblivious that they were a barrier and turn off spiritually to their own child. If your adult children are turned off to the gospel, begin by first looking in the mirror and see if you're a barrier.

**Our faith should be specific.** *"[Jesus] asked him, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'"* It seems obvious but Jesus wants him to articulate his heart's desire. Bartimeaus knows exactly what he wants. His response acknowledges that he believed Jesus has the power to heal him and give him his sight back.

**Our faith should be bold in its requests.** To be healed of blindness is a bold request. Bartimeaus had never seen anyone healed of blindness. He'd only heard about it secondhand. Humanly speaking it's an impossible request.

God is in the business of answering impossible requests that bring glory to His name. What we can't do humanly, God can and will do. One reason his faith was so bold was that he's so desperate. He lived in total darkness.

A friend was staying in the same hotel as Ray Charles (**picture**), the blind singer. He knocked on the door and Ray Charles yelled, "Come in." He heard Ray's electric razor going in the bathroom but all the lights were off and the entire place was pitch black. Without thinking, he blurted out, "Hey, Ray, why are you shaving in the dark?" Ray good-naturedly called back, "I do everything in the dark."

Apart from Christ, we're all in the dark. It's only when we realize our true spiritual condition that we will sense our desperate need for Jesus Christ.

Do you pray boldly? Do you pray big? I was convicted as I was preparing this. My prayers are often so feeble and so small. God loves to do the impossible. We need to grow and learn to pray, and learn to pray boldly.

**3. Jesus always stops for those who cry out to Him for mercy.** *"And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he came near, He asked him, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me recover my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."* Wasn't Jesus busy? He's on a mission to go to Jerusalem. Within the next few days, Jesus would face betrayal, arrest, torture and crucifixion...and still He has time for a blind beggar.

There's never a bad time to cry out to Jesus. He's never too busy, never preoccupied. You may think that in the grand scheme of things of the universe, you're not important, just one of 6 billion humans sharing this rock. But God knows your name. You're of such importance to God, that when you call out to Him, He pauses to help you! God always has time for you.

There's a wonderful double meaning in the original language. The term *made you well* is the same word for *saved* and *salvation*. Bartimeaus didn't just get his sight back that day. He got saved that day. He got his spiritual sight. That's the greater miracle. He became a Christ-follower that day

Bartimeaus glorifies God. His excitement is contagious. All the people gave praise to God. Scholars say that Mark's Gospel preserves Bartimeaus' name because he became a faithful part of the Jerusalem church. He followed Jesus, witnessing the Triumphal Entry, the horror of the Crucifixion and the joy of the Resurrection. Talk about getting an eyeful!

My friend, have you trusted Christ? Is He your Savior? If you've been healed, then you've been given spiritual sight. Are you praising God? Is your gratitude and joy contagious?

**Conclusion:** A woman named Rose Crawford had been blind for 50 years. "I just can't believe it," she gasped as the doctor lifted the bandages from her eyes after her recovery from delicate surgery in an Ontario hospital. She wept for joy when for the first time in her life a dazzling and beautiful world of form and color greeted her eyes that now were able to see.

The sad thing about her story is that 20 years of her blindness were unnecessary. Rose Crawford didn't know that the surgical techniques had been already developed and an operation could have restored her vision at the age of 30. Her doctor said, "She just figured there was nothing that could be done about her condition. Much of her life could have been different."

Like Rose Crawford, many go on living in blindness needlessly. Not physical blindness – spiritual blindness. They live in darkness when Jesus wants to open their eyes, heal them and give them spiritual sight.

Is that you this morning? Do you need Jesus to heal your eyes? Like Bartimeaus you must come to Him. ***Our faith must be in Jesus the Messiah. It's based on His mercy not merit. It must be personal, persistent, specific and bold. Because Jesus always stops for those who cry out to Him for mercy.*** Have you cried out to Him for mercy?

What were the disciples meant to learn? What can you and I learn from their blindness and marvelous spiritual vision of the once blind beggar?

***First, we must see our need.*** Bartimeaus knew he was blind and articulated it. Are you blind – to your sin, your need of Christ?

Or, are you like the disciples? You're a Christian but your tradition or preconceptions has caused your blindness. Maybe unconfessed sin has cauterized your eyes to what Christ is asking of you. Whatever it is, you need to ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your heart.

***Second, once you see your need, you need to see who Jesus is.*** He's "*the Son of Man*" the awesome, glorious sovereign whom all peoples and all nations will worship and whose kingdoms and dominion will never end. He's "*the Son of David*," the deliverer. He is the Savior, Christ the King.

***Third, you need to cry out.*** "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*" Seeing your need, seeing who Jesus really is, then cry out to Him in faith, "Have mercy on me!"

Do you see yourself? Do you see Jesus? Have you called out to Him, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me*"? Do it today! And then join the throng, praising and glorifying Him!