

Open Eyes? Or Closed? **Luke 18:31-43**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

As Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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!" 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.

Who had open eyes in this text, and whose eyes were closed? I know what you are probably thinking, "Pastor, that is a silly question, the blind man obviously could not see! Jesus had to heal him, opening his eyes."

Yes, it is true, the blind man could not see the physical things around him; people, the landscape, the sun he could feel on his face, the clouds in the sky, not even the very road next to which he sat. His blindness was obvious to anybody who walked by as he sat there begging.

But those whose eyes were physically able to discern the blind beggar sitting by the side of the road were the ones whose eyes were truly closed. Their eyes may have worked perfectly well, but their eyes were closed to the world around them – purposely closed. "Hey, you foolish, blind, beggar, you are disturbing the visit of the holy man, Jesus. Be quiet! Shut your mouth! Today is a great day, Jesus is here and you are causing a scene."

Their words however, did not silence the blind man. His faith moved him to ignore them, and he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" In his blindness, he saw more clearly than did the others. This is the first time in Luke's Gospel that someone calls Jesus, Son of David. This blind man is the first person who sees Jesus in His Messianic role. It is as if this blind beggar is saying, "Messiah is here, and his purpose for coming is to have mercy. Isaiah proclaimed it years ago, that when He comes the eyes of the blind will be opened."

The blind man's eyes were already open, he saw clearly that Jesus was indeed the Son of David, God's Messiah, come to bring healing and life.

But there is something else going on. Those who could see the blind man, and avoid stepping on him, who could see that he was begging because he was unable to work, disdained him. Physically, they were completely able-bodied, but they could not see with compassion the man who God created for them to serve.

How about you, are your eyes open? Have you seen the blind man sitting on the side of the road begging and take compassion? Or did you pass him by? Never seen a blind man begging by the side of the road? OK, Did your heart go out to the child in the wheelchair being pushed by his mother? Or, did you even avoid eye contact with her, only staring at them when they were not looking? After all, you did not want to have to get involved?

Did you see the young girl acting out and thought, “Maybe the parents ought to do something, discipline that child!” Too bad that you did not know that this young girl, has a mental illness which assaults her so that there are times she cannot control herself. So sadly, her mother sits in church ashamed, feeling the accusing eyes upon her, wishing someone would just give her a smile, instead of the accusing dirty looks. She wonders if she should come back to church again, nobody understands.

How often have we overlooked the hurting, those with lives in shambles because of their own illness or disability, or because of the illness or disability of someone in their family? How many times have we avoided a situation where we could, and should have brought a word of hope and the Gospel? How often have we looked the other way and walked on, when we should have asked, “What can I do to help?” “May I keep you in my prayers?” Or at the very least, offered a smile.

How sad it is that we can so easily be like those in our text who told the blind man to be silent, instead of reaching out a hand and helping them come to see Jesus. How many have we passed by who did not know of Him.

Thankfully the blind man knew, he saw the truth of Jesus with the eyes of faith, knowing Christ’s mercy. Even when he was rebuked and told to be quiet, He knew of God’s mercy, and He cried out all the louder.

We have seen those on the side of the road who have needed Christ. Where God’s mercy ought to be proclaimed, or at least lived out in our lives – did we proclaim it? Did we live it? While we may not have rebuked others, we have certainly kept silent, or maybe wished those who make us feel uncomfortable because of their problems, were somewhere else.

Too often our eyes are closed to the needs of others, we walk by sight and not by faith, our ears stoppered shut to the sobbing tears of those whose lives are torn by trials and tribulations. You and I ought to repent!

Christ came to have mercy on sinners. He came to have mercy on all whose lives are ravaged by a world corrupted by sin, who are hurt and struggling. He came to open the eyes of the blind, to make the lame walk by faith, and the deaf to hear the Gospel.

Christ has mercy on sinners by going to the cross. He did it when He was delivered over to the Gentiles to be mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, flogged, and crucified. Our text proclaims however that this saying was hidden from the twelve, they did not understand it.

And when they drew near Jericho, they rebuked the blind man. They did not understand! When the blind beggar asks who is going by, they name Jesus the Nazarene, and he understands. This is the One promised. He agrees with Martin Luther who proclaims, “we are beggars, this is true.” And so, it is as a beggar that he cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” And when rebuked, cries out even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Here is a man who knows his sinfulness, a beggar for the mercy of God. Are we like those who rebuked the blind man, or are we beggars for the mercy of God? Do we have open eyes, or closed?

Even when we do not know it, the Holy Spirit works through the Word we hear to open our eyes and make us beggars crying for mercy. Our cry for mercy is near the beginning of our service and repeated throughout it again and again – even when do not truly see our need for it. Our liturgy confesses our need for mercy, even when our fleshly eyes do not see our need. When we sing and speak the kyrie – Lord, have mercy – we are the blind beggar at the side of life’s road asking God for His mercy.

God, we beg your mercy – forgive us for failing to see those around us for whom we ought to reach out to in mercy. Forgive us for our failures to love our neighbor and for looking down upon those less fortunate than us.

Forgive us our blindness, open our eyes to see opportunities to bring Your mercy to those in need. Open our eyes so that we are no longer blinded by the cares and pleasures of this world, blinded by what we want, so that we do not always see those in need – or sometimes even our own need.

Have mercy upon us Lord, open our eyes to see the needs of others. We have gathered to bemoan our own loss and begging for Your His mercy, as we lay before You our sins, for our greatest need is for the mercy that only the Son of Man can provide.

He was delivered over to the Gentiles, was mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, flogged, and crucified. He did not remain in the grave, but rose again on the third day. It is this same Jesus who comes to you here every time we gather together in His name.

As He did to the blind man, so Jesus delivers to you. His mercy flows from his open wounds to heal you of sin and bring healing to souls distressed by guilt, granting forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

His healing Word opens your eyes to embrace His forgiveness, giving you the strength to walk by faith, and opens your ears to hear the sweet message of the Gospel.

Yes, we gather as blind beggars, and each week Christ comes to us and answers our pleas for mercy. Christ visits us and grants us our sight, opening our eyes to see where we might touch others with the same mercy and love with which Christ has touched us. Christ visits us and grants us salvation in the gifts God gives us. In the gifts Christ purchased upon the cross, He delivers and confirms your faith to life everlasting. Amen.