

## The Blind Beggar and the Mercy of Jesus: Luke 18:35-43

This encounter that Jesus had with a blind beggar comes soon after his encounter with a rich ruler (18:18-30). There couldn't be a starker contrast between the lives of these two men: one had everything he needed, and more. The other had nothing. One walked away from Jesus "very sad". The other followed Jesus while "glorifying God."

Who was this blind man? We know virtually nothing about him. We do know that he was in dire straights. Quite apart from the challenges of living without sight, society did not treat the blind well. They were despised and, in those days, some babies born blind were known to be abandoned. As such, this man's existence would have been a continual struggle. He could only receive what he was given and so he begged for food and all his other needs. His life literally depended on the mercy of others.

Not only did he need to be given food and clothing (or money to purchase these things), but he needed to be told what was going on. As he heard the noise of a crowd passing by "he inquired what this meant" (ESV). He was then told that "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by". Everything he had, he received from others – including knowledge of the world around him.

Mercifully, he had heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Although he had not been an eye-witness of the life of Jesus, he would have heard about Jesus through the testimony of others. He would not have seen the miracles of Jesus but he would have heard about them – particularly the works of healing.

He had heard that this Jesus could help him, and he believed it. So, he cried out "Son of David, have mercy on me!". Reflecting the low view of the blind and disabled, those around him rebuked him and told him to be silent. Yet, 'he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"'

Jesus calls him over and asks him what he wants Jesus to do. Unsurprisingly, he asks for his sight, which Jesus grants, saying "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well."

Note, that this man called Jesus "Lord". He did not view Jesus as simply a means to an end—a way out of blindness. He recognised who Jesus was, his true identity: "Son of David" with all of its unmistakable messianic meaning. This man wasn't just calling out to a healer, but to his Saviour.

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In this life, we are unable to enjoy the blessing of encountering Jesus in the flesh. That joy will happen in the life to come! In this life, we encounter him in the Spirit by faith. In fact, as followers of Him, it is our duty and delight to encounter Him and, through Him, to encounter the living God.

However, would our encounter with Jesus make us sad, as it made the rich ruler sad? It might. Why was the rich ruler sad? He was sad because he was asked to turn away from his riches and to turn to Jesus. The reason why it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God is because the allure of riches is great. He didn't want to receive anything from Jesus, but wanted to keep what he already possessed. Jesus wants to release our grip on everything that keeps our eyes, our security, our hope, or our trust away from Him. He will challenge us to do the same. How would we react?

When we encounter Jesus through our prayers, does that lead to us glorifying God—not as something we are supposed to do, but because we have seen something, or someone, glorious?

Perhaps our times with the Lord have been stale and routine. How do we gain the passion that the blind beggar exhibited? This can be done by recognising that spiritually-speaking we were just like the blind beggar – unable to see, and would always be unable to see unless someone opened our eyes. Even materially, everything we own and possess we have received as good things from God. We have these things not because we've worked hard, but because of the grace and mercy of God. Many people around the world work exceptionally hard simply to avoid starvation. Once we recognise that apart from the grace of God we have nothing, and that everything we have is from Him, we now have every reason to glorify the God of mercy.

We also learn from the blind beggar to value and treasure the knowledge we receive about Jesus. There is nothing more important than to know about Jesus, and then to encounter Him and to know Him personally. Church is very different for us nowadays, but our hunger and desire for the word of God should be as strong as ever. We may be very used to hearing about Jesus every week, but hearing about Him is never a trivial or mundane thing. We will never hear a more important word – even if we've heard it before! After all, being able to learn about Jesus is yet another expression of His mercy towards us, as it was for the blind beggar. It is not to be taken for granted.

But, what is mercy? An essential dimension of mercy is a heart-felt compassion towards someone in need or in helpless distress. Mercy isn't just an action that happens to help someone but a movement of the heart towards the one in need. When this blind beggar cried out to Jesus, he was asking Jesus to turn His heart – His love and affection – towards himself in his predicament.

Understood in this way, we also can cry out “Son of David, have mercy on us!” Nothing we own or possess can be relied upon to bring us all the things we truly need. In some ways, we are still like the blind beggar in our need of Jesus. Jesus has everything that we need most, day-by-day, which is the grace and mercy of God:

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Exodus 34:6)*

*Then David said to Gad (the prophet), “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.” (2 Samuel 24:14)*

*As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! (Psalm 40:11)*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. (2 Cor. 1:3)*

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. (Eph 2:4-5)*

I pray that we would all know how much we need the mercy of God and why we need it; that He would pour out his mercy upon us, and that we would recognise how glorious it is to be recipients of his mercy.

(Richard Hobson, October 2020)