



February 8, 2009

Luke 17–19

“Got Sight?”

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The chapter division¹ between Luke 18 and Luke 19 separates a continuous storyline into two separate incidents. Jesus’ encounter with blind Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus the tax collector, happen as he was passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. When you think of all the types of people Jesus might have met on his journey, it’s interesting to note that he met one man who was blind physically, but could see spiritually; the other man could see physically, but was blind spiritually. Each man, after they meet with Jesus, experiences the miracle of having both physical and spiritual sight.

Jericho is situated between Jerusalem and the Jordan River, about 12 miles east of Jerusalem and 5 miles west of the Jordan River. It is the oldest known city² in the world, and it was located along a major trade route. Jericho had a Customs Booth, as did Capernaum and Caesarea. One of the products Jericho is known for is balsam. Balsam is an oily, fragrant resin used in perfumes and medicinal balms. The word Jericho means place of fragrance. Today, Jericho is a West Bank city in Palestinian territory, with a population of about 20,000 Arabs.

As Jesus approached Jericho on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate what would be his last Passover, there was a blind man³ sitting by the roadside begging. This would not have been an uncommon sight, since Jewish pilgrims making the journey to Jerusalem, would see the indigent, lame and unemployed would line the roadways begging for money, which was their only means of survival.

When Bartimaeus heard the bustling of the crowd, he wanted to know what was going on, because he could tell someone prominent had come to town. The people in the crowd told him *“Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”* (Luke 18:37) The people identify Jesus by using his birth name, however, Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus using his Messianic title: *“Jesus, ‘Son of David,’ have mercy on me!”* His emphatic cry caused the

¹ Chapter divisions were added to the Bible in 1236AD.

² Damascus, Syria is the oldest continuously inhabited city.

³ Mark’s Gospel identifies this man as Bartimaeus.

people around him to rebuke him. As they tried to silence him, he cried out all the louder, because he did not want Jesus to pass him by.

What is so amazing about Bartimaeus is, though he was blind, he had a greater spiritual sight than anyone else around him, considering he identified Jesus as Messiah. When Jesus heard Bartimaeus, he ordered the man to be brought to him. **Luke 18:41** tells us Jesus asked him this question: “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Bartimaeus replied, “*Lord, I want to see.*” It’s not hard to imagine Jesus thinking, “You see better than anyone else around here.” **Luke 18:42–43** tells the rest of the story: “*Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*”

As Jesus continued his journey toward Jerusalem, he encountered Zacchaeus⁴, a chief tax collector, (**Luke 19:2–3**). The Jews would have despised Zacchaeus, not just because tax collectors were agents for Rome, but also because tax collectors were allowed to charge more than was necessary. Since he was a short man, he had to do the undignified thing; climb a sycamore fig tree to get a better look at Jesus. When Jesus “*reached the spot,*” Zacchaeus came down immediately and “*welcomed him gladly,*” (**Luke 19:5–6**) which jumpstarts the people in the crowd to denounce the “*sinner.*” Zacchaeus, wanting to demonstrate his changed life, immediately promised to give half of his possessions to the poor, in addition to paying back every single person he’s cheated, to the tune of four times the amount!

“*Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to see and to save what was lost.’*” (**Luke 19:9–10**) Now, the man who could see physically has spiritual sight! The Greek word for saved is *sozo*, which refers to the healing and delivering of the whole person, is used with Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus. This is the main point of the teaching: the greater work – more than providing sight to the blind – is to provide healing for the human soul so that the whole person can be saved.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Luke 18:35–19:10** to provide an overview of today’s study.
3. What, in your mind, stands out in the account of Jesus and Bartimaeus?
 - a. Why do you think Bartimaeus used the Messianic term “*Son of David*” when he called out to Jesus?
 - b. On a scale of 1 to 10, with ten being the most receptive, where do you think Bartimaeus was regarding salvation?
 - c. The Bible doesn’t give us any clues about what sort of life he had prior to his meeting Jesus. What sort of “life events” would you include in a list that would give some insight (no pun intended!) into his life prior to Jesus?
 - d. What do you think the Holy Spirit had been doing in his life prior to this account?

⁴ Zacchaeus is derived from a Hebrew word, which means pure. Literally, his name means innocent one!

4. If you have a hymnal or access to the Internet where your group meets, you may want to sing or read the words to Fanny Crosby's hymn *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior*. If you choose to sing the song as a group, you can practice by using this link to hear the midi file:
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/p/a/passment.htm>
5. The account of Zacchaeus clearly shows he was intentional in his quest to see Jesus.
 - a. What do you think the Holy Spirit had been doing in his life prior to this account?
 - b. Why do you think he was so quick to offer half of his possessions to the poor?
 - c. Do you think Zacchaeus knew what he was doing, or was he just trying to impress the crowd, the very same people who called him out as a sinner?
 - d. Allow the people in your group to talk about their experiences with "the fruit of repentance" and/or restitution.
6. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 4:4](#), regarding the blinding work of the enemy.
 - a. What are the characteristics of spiritually blind people?
 - b. How do you bring the Gospel to spiritually blind people?
7. Read and discuss [Acts 28:26–27](#).
 - a. What are the characteristics of people who have deaf ears and a calloused heart?
 - b. Is there any hope for the people you know who have turned a deaf ear to the Lord?
 - c. What are Christians called to do in the lives of the unrepentant?
8. Read and discuss [Ephesians 1:18–19](#).
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share their stories about their journey from unbelief to believing faith in Jesus Christ.
 - b. What were some of the major landmarks in your life while you were in the process?
9. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: allow the Lord to open the eyes of their heart that they might see his love, see his sacrifice on the cross, see their own sinfulness, as well as their need to receive the Lord's forgiveness; send them to spiritually blind people, who are blinded by Satan, the god of this world.