

Spiritual Blindness

Welcome to the first week of our study! I am so glad you are joining me as we seek to know our Lord and Savior better. Jesus will surely bless your endeavors to seek his face. He wants you to *know him*, not just know *about* him. His love for you knows no bounds. He loved you before you were conceived, before you had ever heard his name, before you ever acknowledged your need for him. He has known and loved you all your life. Now he wants you to know him. This week we will discover that when we seek to know him, he will give us the spiritual sight to see him. This is a gift from him alone. Only he can give us the eyes to see him. Our own eyes cannot see into the realm of the spirit without his touch.

This week we will look at a few stories having to do with blindness. First we will meet a blind man from Bethsaida. Then we'll explore the story of Bartimaeus who is blind but does not hesitate to call on Jesus. Finally, we will look at the story of Zacchaeus, who, while not physically blind, desperately wants to *see* Jesus. Do you see a theme building? We will be examining spiritual blindness as it is taught to us through stories of physical blindness. All of these stories will prepare us for our group lesson about Jesus healing the man born blind.

Jesus Restores Sight to a Blind Man

*Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored,
and he saw everything clearly. (Mark 8:25)*

Throughout the gospels we hear many stories and reports of Jesus healing the blind. In today's scripture passage we will look at a miracle unique among Jesus' healing stories. We will be taking a brief detour from our timeline approaching Jerusalem to look back at an event earlier in Jesus' ministry. We are in the town of Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Our passage is short, but nestled within is an important truth about spiritual understanding. Let's take a few minutes to pray. *Heavenly Father, we are thankful for the provision of your word that we may gain spiritual understanding and a true vision of your blessed son. We ask that today you will bless us with the eyes to see the truth contained in your word –Amen.*



Read Mark 8:22-26 and answer the following questions.

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What did the people who brought the blind man to Jesus want him to do?

What did they anticipate Jesus' touch would do?

Why do you think Jesus led the blind man out of the village?

How many times did Jesus put his hands on the blind man?

How well could the blind man see after the first time Jesus put his hands on him?

How well could he see the second time?

❖ What do you think is the significance of Jesus healing the man's sight in two stages?

Why wasn't the man healed in the first attempt? Was it a failure in Jesus' method, or does it point to a truth that Jesus is revealing through this sign? What do you think it means?

In the scriptures physical blindness is frequently a metaphor for spiritual blindness. Spiritual blindness is an inability to perceive or recognize Jesus as the one sent by God, and a lack of understanding of the things of God. This story illustrates that because of the little bit of faith and understanding of who Jesus is, the man's sight was partially restored. It takes the work of God to come even this far in understanding who Jesus is and choosing to come to faith in him. It takes a second or continued touch from Jesus for our understanding to increase, for our faith to mature, for us to see the things of God with any clarity. The fact that Jesus led the man out of the village to heal him points to the fact that we need time alone with Jesus, away from the crowds and hustle and bustle of life to come to know him better. Jesus draws the man away from distractions so the man can learn to focus his eyes on Jesus, both physically and spiritually.

When have you experienced blindness to the presence of Jesus in your life? What did Jesus do to draw your focus back to him?

Jesus Heals Bartimaeus

*Immediately he received his sight
and followed Jesus along the road. (Mark 10:52)*

Today we will be joining Jesus and his many followers as they travel to Jerusalem. Along the way they come through Jericho and encounter a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Before we begin our study today, let's take few minutes to come to the Lord in prayer: *Lord Jesus, we have set before us a quest to see you better. We ask that you will bring these scriptures vividly to life and color for us that we may see you in them and come to know you better. We ask for your blessing and for understanding –Amen.*

In preparing this lesson I learned that Jericho was a beautiful resort city in the Judean desert built by Herod the Great as the location of his winter palace. It was a popular destination not far from Jerusalem just west of the Jordan River. “It was a rich and flourishing town, having a considerable trade, and celebrated for the palm trees which adorned the plain around.”¹ It was beautiful, prosperous, and famous. Jesus, coming from the area of Perea east of the Jordan, would have come through Jericho on the main road on his way to Jerusalem for Passover. Let's join Jesus and witness a miracle.



Read Mark 10:46-52 and answer the following questions.

Who was accompanying Jesus?

Describe where Bartimaeus is sitting and what he is doing.

When he hears that Jesus is coming what does he do?

When he was rebuked what did he do?

Why does he address Jesus as “Son of David”? What is the significance of that title and what does it reveal about Bartimaeus’ faith?

¹ Easton's Illustrated Dictionary

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Why do you think Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants? Isn't it evident what Bartimaeus needs?

What has healed Bartimaeus?

Read 1 Peter 1:8. How does this verse speak to the passage we are studying?

➤ Up to this point, what do you think Bartimaeus' faith is based on?

When his sight is restored, what does Bartimaeus do?

Bartimaeus, blind and sitting on the roadside likely collecting alms, *heard* that Jesus was approaching. His response was to call out to Jesus addressing him as the Son of David. Son of David is a messianic title. In calling Jesus by this title, Bartimaeus was affirming his belief that Jesus was the awaited Messiah. He believed that Jesus was who he claimed to be. Even when he was rebuked and the crowds attempted to silence him, he called out more fervently to the one he knew could help him. How did he know that Jesus could help him? Being blind, Bartimaeus never saw any of Jesus' miracles. He likely heard about them, but never witnessed or participated in one. He heard the stories from others, and believed what he heard. He put his faith in Jesus. If Jesus could do and say all the things Bartimaeus heard he could do, he must be from God. Despite his physical blindness, Bartimaeus had the spiritual sight to recognize the Messiah without laying his eyes on him.

Jesus calls for Bartimaeus to come him. In asking what Bartimaeus wants Jesus is encouraging him to give words to his faith for others to hear. By asking for his sight Bartimaeus is pointing out to all in the crowd that he believes Jesus can restore his sight. He believes Jesus has the healing power of God to give him sight. And Jesus does. The word translated "healed" also means "saved". Jesus not only physically healed Bartimaeus, but also spiritually saved him in response to Bartimaeus' faith. Jesus gives sight to Bartimaeus because he already had faith, the faith doesn't come because of the miracle. The miracle becomes an illustration of spiritual salvation. Because of his faith in Jesus, Jesus delivered Bartimaeus from darkness (blindness) to light (sight). Bartimaeus recognized his inability, trusted Jesus as the one who could show God's mercy on him. Now that Bartimaeus can "see" his Messiah, he follows him as Jesus departs the city. Bartimaeus becomes one of Jesus' followers. The final statement that Bartimaeus "*followed Jesus along the road*" also carries a secondary, spiritual meaning. "Following Jesus on the way" is a technical term for

being one of Jesus' disciples². Because Bartimaeus' name is recorded in this story also gives weight to his having been counted as one of the disciples.³



What does the story of Bartimaeus teach us about blindness, faith and discipleship?

Zacchaeus

*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.
(Luke 19:10)*

Our last passage of scripture this week is the story of Zacchaeus. This is one of those funny little stories that causes us to chuckle as we watch little Zacchaeus, short of stature scramble to climb up a tree all to see Jesus. You're probably wondering why were looking at this story, there is no blind man in it for Jesus to heal. Well, there may be no physical blindness, but there is someone having trouble seeing, more than one someone, in fact. Jesus wants all of us to have a clear vision of who he is and what he's come to do. This story is an illustration of Jesus, the Light of the World, coming to give sight to those in darkness.

If you haven't yet, let's take a minute to come before the Lord. *Lord Jesus, You have placed this passage before us to consider carefully what it means to be able to see you clearly. Help each one of us to have the eyes to see you clearly and to understand the spiritual truth you have hidden in this story. Bless us all with a clear vision of you -Amen.*



Read Luke 19:1-10 and answer the following questions.

From the description in the passage, what sort of person had Zacchaeus been before he knew anything of Jesus? (See verse 1, 7, 8,9)

² New American Commentary

³ Ibid.

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Do you think Zacchaeus was a well respected member of society? How do you think he was viewed by the town's people of Jericho?

Why do you think Zacchaeus so desperately wants to see Jesus?

What kind of response did the people of Jericho have when Jesus wanted to stay with Zacchaeus?

Why do you think Jesus said that he "*must*" stay at Zacchaeus' home?

How much does Zacchaeus give to the poor and return to those he cheated? What has happened that Zacchaeus would do this?



What is Zacchaeus able to "see" that the people who muttered did not?

Our scriptures tell us that Zacchaeus is "a chief tax collector and wealthy". He would have been despised and considered a traitor by all the "good" Jews of Jericho. Zacchaeus, too is a Jew. But he's a Jew who does the work of Rome – collecting taxes. These taxes support an oppressive pagan government, and an oppressive pagan pantheon of gods. Tax collectors were allowed to collect more than the required tax and to extract their own fee before giving the required tax to Rome. Tax collectors were known to gouge their fellow Jews in order to line their pockets. No wonder the Jews of Jericho hated Zacchaeus so much

and muttered when Jesus chose to stay with him. Zacchaeus was considered an outsider in Jewish society – ranked among the lepers and Romans. Judging by the crowd's response, Zacchaeus had been a rather crooked tax collector.

Up to this point in Zacchaeus' life it is easy to imagine that money and wealth was all he sought, and perhaps a little revenge against the Jews who hated him. Being the tax collector gave him power over the town's people. He had power over their lives. But evidently Zacchaeus noticed something missing in his life – acceptance, love, God? He heard Jesus was coming, had heard the stories about him, and desperately wanted to *see* Jesus. Something had already begun to change in Zacchaeus before Jesus even entered the city, otherwise he would not have gone to such lengths (or heights!) to get a view of Jesus. Something had already touched Zacchaeus' spirit enough to give him a glimpse of the truth – that Jesus could change his life. And Zacchaeus *wanted* Jesus to change his life.

When Jesus calls him out of the tree to come stay at his home, Jesus says, "*I must stay at your house today.*"(v.5) The little word "must" conveys an important meaning. It implies a divine necessity for Jesus to do so. It is the reason (or one a few) that Jesus came to Jericho. Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was there waiting to respond to his offer. Zacchaeus needed him to come. Zacchaeus was ready to accept and believe in Jesus. Jesus' coming to Jericho to meet Zacchaeus was part of the divine plan, just as much as Jesus going to Jerusalem to the cross. This one man's faith was important to Jesus, because he came "*to seek and to save what was lost.*"(v. 10).

Zacchaeus had a glimmer of spiritual truth that motivated him to climb a tree so he could better see Jesus. He received a better sight of Jesus. He responded to Jesus "gladly". That word gladly means "with rejoicing", and Luke used it nine times in his gospel as a response to faith and receiving salvation⁴. Zacchaeus' inward transformation is displayed in an outward action. He gives half his wealth to the poor and returns four-fold what he had cheated out of the tax payers.

On the other hand, the people who mutter against Jesus for staying with a sinner, could not see what Jesus had come to Jericho to do. They did not understand the point of his ministry – to bring salvation, to bring forgiveness and reconciliation between man and God. Jesus restored Zacchaeus back to a right relationship with God. Zacchaeus was saved by his faith, and this story points out that salvation is not a birthright. We know that Zacchaeus is a Jew, but so are the other people in the town. We hear only that salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus. No other is mentioned in this passage because no other Jew acknowledged Jesus in this story. The people of the town were blind to the truth of Jesus.

⁴ Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Personal Reflection:

Before you close up your homework for the week, take a few minutes to reflect on Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah. Turn to Isaiah 42:6-7. Jesus promises "*to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*" What kind of blindness and darkness do you think the Messiah is freeing captives from? Have you experienced Jesus restoring your sight and freeing you from darkness? Write either a reflection on your experiences or a prayer of gratitude to the Lord for the transformations he has made in your life.