

Blindness and Sight

Luke 18:31-43 | June 14, 2020 | Bryce Beale

Faith does not create. It does not invent. Faith simply sees what already is.

Philosophers have asked, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” The answer is yes. Hearing does not create sound, it only receives it.

And faith does not create what it believes in; true faith only receives those facts which already are—out there, in the real world.

Some are of the persuasion that faith should not be necessary. Our other senses are more certain—sight, sound, taste, touch, smell. Why try to travel beyond these?

And I answer: because no one can live their lives at the level of these five senses. In fact, those things which matter most to you can never be touched or tasted, heard or seen or smelled. You cannot taste logic, cannot see reason. You have never directly heard any of the scientific laws, like gravity; nor have you ever smelled mathematics. And you never once have taken in by sight a glimpse of love or affection itself, nor of justice, nor of goodness. You have seen examples of all these, but not these themselves.

So then, have you merely invented all these invisible things, these most important parts of your existence? No, not at all. Instead you have seen the examples of them—of love, of justice, of goodness, of gravity—and from the examples have discovered the invisible facts themselves.

You take gravity by faith, but that does not mean you invented it. Your faith in gravity is not a creating faith; it is a receiving faith, one that perceives a gravity that, though invisible, really does exist out there in the real world.

So we cannot accept those ideas today called “New Thought,” which find their source not in the Bible but largely in odd thinkers like Phineas Quimby, an American clockmaker of the 1800’s, and which claim we can create reality by our beliefs. Quimby’s notions live on with a Christian spin in the modern Word of Faith

movement—you can force God’s hand, can alter reality, if you believe hard enough. Your faith can create reality.

But what does Scripture say of faith? “God chose you...to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief *in the truth*.”¹ Even when we must move a mountain by faith, our faith is in the objective fact of God’s power.

Faith is, to use the picture from today’s text, simply to open your eyes and see what is already there. When you believe you are entering into what seems an entirely new world, full of angels and demons and the sovereign intervention of God’s hand in the affairs of your day to day life. But you are not making these up. They were always there, but your eyes were closed.

To believe is to open your eyes and see what is there.

It is important to understand this fact about faith because it will be part of the picture Jesus provides in our text today. Unbelief is blindness to what is; faith is sight that sees it.

LUKE 18:31-43

Luke provides us with two events from the life of Jesus. We have come now almost to the most important turning point of Luke’s whole gospel. Jesus has been journeying toward Jerusalem ever since he set his face toward her near the end of chapter 9.² We are now only one chapter away from the Son of David’s entrance into the holy city.

Both the events of our text today remind us that this is so. First, Jesus predicts his impending death. And in the second story we find Jesus just outside of Jericho, which rests only eighteen miles from Jesus’ destination of Jerusalem. The story is moving faster and faster toward the cross, as though we were at the bottom of a whirlpool and spinning now in a narrow loop.

Jesus knows he has very little time left. And with that little time, he is intent to teach us, his disciples, a lesson on faith. We learn about faith by its absence in the first event recorded here, then in the second event we learn of faith by its presence. The disciples in the first event are themselves blind; but the blind man in the second story comes to see with his heart, which is then displayed

¹ 2 Thes. 2:13, emphasis mine; ESV.

² V. 51.

in his actual eyes. He sees with the sight of faith, and as a picture of that inward sight he also regains his outward eyes.

Let's begin then with the first story. Here is an example of the blindness of unbelief, before we turn to the sight of faith.

Blindness

In verse 31, Jesus takes "the twelve" aside. These are the core of Jesus' followers, later known as apostles. And he tells them what he has told them at least five times already and in no uncertain terms:

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.³

This is the clearest that Jesus has been thus far in Luke in predicting his own demise. And every detail will very soon be fulfilled.

The Jews will arrest this Son of Man in the Garden of Gethsemane by night, with the help of one of these twelve men, Judas. These aggressors will in the morning hand Jesus over to Pilate and the Romans, and then by guards and bystanders he will be mocked, ridiculed, spit upon, flogged, and killed. He will in three hours of darkness satisfy an eternity of wrath for all who believe in him. And of course, on the third day after this injustice Jesus will revive.

And notice what Jesus says about these happenings in verse 31: "everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."

The Old Testament leans in all its parts toward a Messiah, a descendant of King David who will prove greater than David was, and who will rule forever in Jerusalem, David's city.

Consider just this one prophecy of the Messiah found in Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

...

³ Luke 18:31-33. See also 9:22, 44-45; 12:49-50; 13:32-33; 17:25.

I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”
...
they have pierced my hands and feet
...
they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

To these we can add a verse from Psalm 16 concerning the resurrection: “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”⁴

The point is that the first chunk of your Bible is written about the Son of Man, and leans toward him. If the disciples wholeheartedly believed the Scriptures, they would accept what Jesus said. As Jesus told the Jews in John 5, “if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

But the twelve did not yet fully believe—they did not understand. Their eyes were half closed.

See verse 34: “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

Here is a miracle of providence that lives beyond our own ability to understand, yet we believe it, for it is written. More than that, we celebrate it. It is the full sovereignty of God over our intellect. For clearly, we cannot come to understand the truth unless the Lord causes his light to shine within our hearts. He must open our eyes.

With his twelve, he had yet to do so. “This saying was hidden from them.”

Not that Jesus’ words made no sense to them whatsoever—in another place, the twelve responded to words like these with shock and disapproval. “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never

⁴ V. 10.

happen to you.”⁵ They understood that he spoke of his own death.

But what they could not understand is how he could be the Messiah of the Scriptures, the victorious king of Israel, and also suffer at the hands of his enemies.

Our hindsight is much clearer: we see the Lamb of God standing before his twelve, men who will with one exception turn the world upside down. And we know that he, the Messiah, must first suffer and die, then be raised, that he might in his death take our sins upon himself. That is the message they will soon proclaim from rooftops; it is the message we now call “good news.”

So, can we say that today anyone who picks up a New Testament, who knows these points of data about why the Messiah suffered, has true understanding of what Jesus says here? Are the disciples only lacking bits of data?

The answer is no. The disciples are stunted under the effects of apathy, the same apathy that naturally grips us all. Right now heaven’s sacrifice stands before each of us and says, through the Scriptures, that he had to suffer, die, and be raised.

And to borrow the words of Paul, to this day whenever Luke is read a veil lies over the hearts of some. Understanding is kept from them. You may be in the same sandals as these disciples, hearing the gospel of eternal salvation, comprehending the mere data of it, yet not grasping it for yourself. You may feel an apathy, a lack of feeling toward the life and death of Christ. There you are, among the twelve. You understand none of these things. This saying is hidden from you, and you do not grasp what is said.

What hope is there for you?

Sight

I will show you what hope there is, by moving now from this tale of blindness to one of spiritual sight. We continue now in Luke to the next event, beginning in verse 35. The disciples stare with eyes wide open but unable to see. Now we shall see a man who is blind but who becomes blind no longer—physically, yes, but as a picture of what is happening on the inside.

⁵ Matt. 16:22.

As he 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!”⁶

We are told in the other gospels that there were two blind men here, and that one of them, perhaps the one who speaks on behalf of the two, is named Bartimaeus. This blind Bartimaeus is just outside of Jericho as Jesus passes through on his way to Jerusalem.

And when he discovers that Jesus of Nazareth is passing through, he begins to cry out. The crowds, like Jesus’ disciples had done earlier at the approach of children, think Jesus is too important for trivialities like blind beggars.

But this blind beggar knows nothing of the disciples’ apathy. He calls Jesus the “Son of David”—since the Messiah would be a descendant of David. And though he may not have understood all of the Old Testament’s teachings about the Messiah, he at the very least understands that he has no hope outside of this man. He is desperate, earnest. Peer pressure does not faze him. He cries out as though his eyes depended upon it.

And this is really the first requisite for those who wish to see. Those who want what this man wants must act like him:

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.”⁷

He wants to see. And the key is the want. No one enters heaven accidentally; no one comes to see the truths that only faith can see with no more than a cool interest in Jesus.

If you want wisdom, you cry out for her.⁸ If you want the Son of David to stop and summon you, and to open your eyes to see, you must be desperate enough to cry out.

⁶ Vv. 35-39.

⁷ Vv. 40-41.

⁸ Prov. 2:3.

The disciples can barely see, but they barely care. They are too interested in an earthly kingdom and earthly thrones. They cannot understand the significance of a Messiah who suffers. But here is blind Bartimaeus, already accustomed to begging, now begging this Nazarene to give him sight.

See what his desperation finds in verse 42: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.’”

And we know that his faith did more than touch the eyes in his head, for Luke afterward adds, “And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

The disciples are at this point comfortable, ready to become kings on earth at Jesus’ side. They are apathetic, not desperate for Jesus’ touch. The rich young ruler was not desperate for Jesus. He came to that good teacher to find answers to his questions, not as though his life depended upon that man. If Jesus failed him, he had wealth to fall back upon.

But blind Bartimaeus has Jesus or he has nothing. That is faith. Faith is not our disinterested spiritual questions and quandaries, nor even our interest in the Bible or sermons for their own sake.

Faith is the pleading cry of the beggar over the objecting crowds. For faith sees its own condition—dead in sin and destined for unending wrath—and sees that no worldly savior can save it. And then faith, as she hangs by the edge of the precipice, sees one branch jutting out which, if she can but reach it, promises salvation. And so with desperation, faith reaches toward that branch.

Toward this Son of David, this branch of the house of Jesse.

Right now the Savior summons you and asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

And if you know your need of him and your natural blindness to all that is invisible but true, you must beg, “Lord, let me recover my sight.”

And you will.