

THE
MIRACLES
OF JESUS

in Luke's Gospel

PART 4

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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LESSON 1 | POWER AND DECISION

JESUS HEALS A MUTE MAN | LUKE 11:14-28

If you look through the channels, podcasts, or streaming services, you will discover that crime dramas and documentaries are popular entertainment genres. People love watching real or fictional shows involving Crime Scene Investigators, Police detectives, and lawyers. In the same way Sunday football produces armchair quarterbacks, some people fancy themselves armchair investigators, lawyers, or lab technicians.

It might be fun to try to figure out how you would have conducted an investigation when you are staying up late watching tv. But there is one place where such entertainment has had a negative consequence: in actual law courts. Some lawyers talk about what they call the CSI phenomenon. Many jurors don't want to use their reason to think through the available evidence to make the best decision possible. They are used to seeing shows where people are convicted because, with 5 minutes left in the episode, an investigator returns to the crime scene, finds an overlooked piece of evidence, examines it in the lab, and confirms indisputably that a person is either guilty or innocent. Sadly, most cases are not like that. There is enough evidence for a reasonable person to come to an educated decision, but not for a person stubbornly refusing until they see conclusive proof.

The same thing happens in religion. Christianity is an evidence-giving religion. We should encourage people to ask questions and voice their honest doubts. But there is a difference between honest doubt and dishonest doubt. Honest doubt is humble and seeking. It wants answers. Dishonest doubt is arrogant and unconvincible. Answer one question, and another question pops up. That is what happens in today's miracle. Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem for the final time. Along the way, he performs a miracle. The response that people have reveals not the humble doubt of people who are eager to believe but have some questions. They show themselves to be professional skeptics who are never satisfied and always see through things. For such people, Jesus doesn't perform any more miracles. Instead, he invites them to use their reason, challenges them to understand what their dishonest doubt reveals, and finally warns them of the risk of staying where they are.

THE REACTION OF INDECISION - V14-17

The specific healing in this passage is quickly described. We don't get a long backstory or a vivid recounting of the encounter. The whole miracle is recounted in verse 14: "And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute; when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed."

The focus of this passage is not on the miracle itself but on the controversy that resulted. The demon is described as "mute" because that is how the possessed man was affected. Jesus casts out a demon from a man who cannot speak. The result is that the man speaks. The crowd's reaction is the interesting part. The text simply says that the crowd marvels or is amazed. The marveling is not necessarily a positive thing. The amazement seems mainly that something unusual has happened, not necessarily that what has happened is a sign of something good.

The rest of the passage recounts the complete reaction of the crowd and the response it gets from Jesus. The crowd reacts with indecision. They have seen a marvelous thing but don't know what it means.

Some claim the source of Jesus's power is Satan himself. Verse 15 says, "But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.'" Beelzebul is a Jewish corruption of the name of a Canaanite god mentioned in 2 Kings 1:2-16 named Baal-zebub, which translated means "Lord of the Flies." It is sometimes also rendered as "Beezelbub" or "Baalzebul." Because the Jews saw Baal as the chief antagonist of their God, they gradually began to use the name to refer to Satan himself. In this passage, Jesus understands their reference to Beelzebul to refer to Satan.

Some in the crowd respond with a demand for further proof. Verse 16 says, "Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven." This response, however, is not the humble request for help from people who are having a hard time believing. This was the arrogant and selfish demand of people who wanted to see a show.

It is essential to realize the difference. There are two kinds of doubt. Honest doubt is humble and seeking. It is the cry of the man who brought his son to Jesus in Mark 9:24, "I do believe; help my unbelief." Dishonest doubt is stubborn, arrogant, and immovable. Dishonest doubt is a scoffer who sees through everything. A dishonest doubter keeps asking for more evidence, but the truth is that they are never convincible.

THE REFUTATION OF INDECISION – V18-22

In the face of dishonest doubt, Jesus refuses to perform any more signs. Instead, he tells them they have enough evidence to decide, so they must choose well. What follows is not more signs. A few verses later, in verse 29, He says, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.” Jesus will not give them any more signs because signs aren’t what they need.

Instead, he gives them teaching that encourages them to use their reasons to figure out what this miracle indicates. Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal once famously wrote, “There are two equally dangerous extremes: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason.” There are times in the Christian faith when we are faced with things that are beyond our reason. But there are also many times when we are expected to use the brains God gave us and figure stuff out. This is what Jesus is telling the people in this crowd. He encourages them to think about what they have seen and what some have accused Him of. He then asks them to make a decision based on that reasoning.

First, Jesus refutes the idea that he uses Satan’s power to cast out demons. If that is true, Jesus reasons, Satan is defeated. Verse 17-18 says, 17 But He knew their thoughts and said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.”

He then asks them what standard they use when one of their own leaders casts out demons. Verse 19 says, “And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?” Jesus tells them that if he casts out demons with the power of demons, so do other Jewish exorcists.

He ends by pointing them to the logical conclusion of his chain of reasoning. In verse 20, He says, “But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” If he doesn’t use Satan’s power to cast out demons, they have to come to the only other possible conclusion: he is manifesting the power of God in their presence.

The finger of God is an odd expression. It comes from Exodus 8:19, “19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”

Jesus is highlighting that they are in the position of Pharaoh. By using this expression, Jesus tells them they are in a similar position to Pharaoh. Even the skeptical and antagonistic magicians realized that the works Moses had done were from God. Pharaoh chose to harden his heart, which meant that he closed his mind and refused to accept any evidence contrary to what he wanted to be true.

THE RIVALRY OF INDECISION – V21-23

Having confronted these people with the fundamental nature of their indecision, Jesus then tells a parable that emphasizes his point. Verses 21-22 say, “21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. 22 But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder.”

This exorcism proves that Jesus is the victorious warrior who has overpowered the strong man and plundered his kingdom. Failure to embrace this and realize what this reveals about Jesus is more than simple indecision. The reality is that it is rebellion and hardheartedness under the mask of doubt. Jesus unmask this form of dishonest doubt for what it is in verse 23 when he says, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” The people who were questioning and commenting wanted to stay on the sidelines. They wanted to remain Christians and third-party observers. Jesus tells them there are only two kinds of people: those helping him do his job and those hindering him. They are either helping others follow Jesus or hindering them from doing so. That is the reality of their indecision.

Neutrality is impossible. The Jewish teachers revealed their hostility to Jesus by alleging that his power to cast out demons had come from Satan. They weren’t really struggling with doubt and indecision. They are really his opponents.

THE RISK OF INDECISION – V24-26

Jesus ends this section with a parable about a demon that has been cast out. The purpose of this parable is to underscore the fact that it is not enough to passively not do evil. Not doing evil puts the house in order, but it is not enough. Evil must be replaced with good. Verses 24-26 say “24 “When the unclean spirit goes out of [s]a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ 25 And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”

People who sit on the sidelines finding fault and refusing to move are doing more than hindering the kingdom of God. They are actively putting themselves in danger. Their souls are unoccupied residences. They have witnessed a great act of God but have not responded to it. They have left themselves open to experiencing a worse end than before.

APPLICATION

This series of parables and lessons by Jesus are heavy and hard to wrestle with. But they remind us of the importance of deciding. These words aren't addressed to those searching and asking honest questions. Jesus directs these words to people who refuse to believe. They always find reasons to doubt because their doubt is a smokescreen. They wish to remain where they are. They don't want Jesus to intervene in their lives. Though we may not express it so explicitly, dishonest doubt often intermingles with our honest questions. We stubbornly resist the word of God because we expect some inconvenience for ourselves if it turns out to be true. We are like a person who hears a phone ring but refuses to answer because we don't want to be assigned an unpleasant task. We all experience such moments in our lives. If we aren't careful, such moments will become a lifestyle. And such a lifestyle will turn our lives into opposition to God. Our lives will be empty shells suitable to be overpowered by whatever spiritual winds are blowing because we have rejected the help of the strongman.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the difference between honest doubt and dishonest doubt? How do the people in this story manifest dishonest doubt?
2. What is the relationship between using our reason and having faith? How does the Blaise Pascal quote apply to this situation? How does it apply to our lives?
3. Where does the expression "finger of God" come from? Why does Jesus use it?
4. How do we sometimes manifest similar tendencies? How can we learn these lessons?
5. What is the risk that Jesus points us to with the final parable about the seven spirits who return to find a clean house?

LESSON 2 | POWER AND GRATITUDE

JESUS CLEANSSES TEN LEPERS | LUKE 17:11-19

I heard somebody say that cats were worshipped in Ancient Egypt as gods...and cats have never forgotten it. I think that is why there are cat people and dog people. The distinction, though, also applies to theology. Some people have cat theology; others have dog theology. Dog theology says, “you feed me; you take care of me, you love me...you must be god.” Cat theology says, “you feed me; you take care of me, you love me...I must be god.”

That analogy is a humorous way to talk about gratitude. Some people seem to take the good they receive as owed them. It never produces thankfulness, just entitlement, and expectation. Such people are rarely satisfied. Others always seem thankful even when they don't receive very much. They see what they received as a gift, not an entitlement.

The difference is gratitude. Gratitude is more than just an attitude of thankfulness. It is a way of looking at the world. It profoundly affects how you view yourself in relation to God. Today we are looking at a miracle that Jesus performs for a group of people. They all have the same problem. They all ask Jesus for the same thing. Jesus responds the same to all of them. Only one receives the miracle and responds with gratitude. The difference gratitude makes in this person's life is profound.

As we look at this miracle, hopefully, we will discover what genuine gratitude looks like and what it produces.

THE REQUEST – V11-13

Most of the miracles that Jesus performed are recorded by Luke in a section of his Gospel that spans chapters 5-9 and is usually designated “The Great Galilean Ministry.” The purpose of those Miracles was to reveal the power and identity of Jesus. It culminates in the Transfiguration and Jesus asking his disciples, “who do you say that I am?”

At the end of Luke 9, a new section starts. Luke 9:51 says, “When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem.” The literal transition is that Jesus “set his face towards Jerusalem.” Jesus is focused on his final mission. Luke chapters 9-19 contain a travelogue as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem for the last time to face the cross.

This is one of miracles that Jesus performs as He journeys to Jerusalem. Verse 11 says, “While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee.”

He is right on the border, leaving Galilee and entering Samaria. While entering a village, Jesus is met by a group. Verses 12-13 say, “ 12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; 13 and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

We’re not told which village. Maybe it was Samaria; maybe it was Galilee. It doesn’t matter. Ten lepers meet Jesus. Remember, leprosy in the Bible refers to a variety of skin diseases that required you to separate yourself from family, friends, and community. The core Old Testament text is Leviticus 13:45-46 which says, “45 “As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be [ae]uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ 46 He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

Because leprosy isolated you from people without leprosy, people with the disease often banded together into communities. A group of ten lepers meets Jesus. They stand at a distance and call to him. This is the end of Jesus’ three-year ministry, so stories of his teachings and healings are widespread. Everyone everywhere is talking about Jesus. And these lepers believe what they have heard.

THE RESTORATION – V14

When Jesus heals the leprose man in Luke 5:13, it says, “He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” This time, He does it differently. Verse 14 says, “ 14 When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed.

Notice: Jesus doesn’t touch them or even tell them they are clean. He tells them simply to show themselves to the priest to certify they are clean. That is something that you would only do once you had been healed. Evidently, the idea is that some faith is required. Jesus tells them to start heading to the priest and trust that something will happen. All ten lepers demonstrate a level of faith. None of them responds to Jesus, “But we haven’t been cleansed yet. We still have leprosy.” Jesus commands, and they trust Jesus and obey.

THE RETURN – V15-19

While they are headed to the priests, they are healed. One out of the ten decides to return to Jesus. Verses 15-16 say, ‘15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.’

The man does four things in response to being healed: He praises God. He does so in a loud voice. He throws himself at the feet of Jesus. He thanks Jesus. This last expression is significant because this is the only time in the New Testament that thanks is given to Jesus instead of God. Evidently, this leper realized something important about the man who healed him.

Seeing the man returning alone, Jesus says the following to him in Verses 17-18, “17 Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? 18 Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”

We learn something important about the man and his companions. This man was a Samaritan, evidently the only Samaritan in a group of Jews. Then Jesus says something amazing. Verse 19 says, “19 And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.” This sounds like a typical conclusion to one of Jesus’s healing miracles. But the Greek actually says, “your faith has saved you.” Jesus uses a different word here than in v 14. Verse 14 says they were cleansed; here, He says the man was saved. The physical healing led this Samaritan to find spiritual healing as well.

THE SIGNS OF GRATITUDE

The point of this miracle is gratitude. We know Jesus can heal leprosy. He has done so previously. Perhaps as we look closely, we will learn the attributes of genuine gratitude and learn to live a life of gratitude as well.

Gratitude Sees – Some people think they are not grateful because they don’t have any reason to be grateful. They sincerely believe they would be grateful if given something of value. But the truth is that gratitude doesn’t come from the circumstances. All ten men in this story were in the same circumstance. They all had the same disease and experienced the same healing but only demonstrated gratitude. Gratitude is a choice. It is a choice to see the power of God in the details. It’s a choice to see everything you have as a gift from God. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus says that God “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” God gives good gifts to all. Many choose either not to see it or not to acknowledge it as a gift.” As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why

do you boast as if you had not received it?” Gratitude sees what you have, not what you don’t have. Gratitude sees what you have as a gift.

Gratitude Celebrates – More than seeing, gratitude also celebrates what God has done. All the men realized they were healed, but only this Samaritan celebrated it. He praised God with a loud voice. He fell at Jesus’s feet. He gave him thanks. We often aren’t good at celebrating. One easy way to start celebrating is to repeat something continuously. A workplace management principle says, “What gets celebrated gets repeated.” Well, it works the other way as well. One way to celebrate something is to repeat it over and over what has happened. This happens all through Jesus’s ministry. He heals someone and tells them to keep quiet. But they just can’t keep from telling people. As Peter and John responded in Acts 4:20 to the Jewish leaders who had commanded them to be silent, “we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” I wonder what the other nine lepers did. Did they realize they were healed and respond with a “huh?” Did they move on to the next thing on their to-do list? Gratitude celebrates. It also works in reverse. You can discover what you are really grateful for by looking at what you do take the time to celebrate.

Gratitude Sacrifices – Many people don’t celebrate the good that God has done because there is a cost associated with it. It costs money to through a party. It seems wasteful. Even when you aren’t throwing an actual party, demonstrating gratitude frequently requires sacrifice. Maybe one of the reasons the other nine didn’t turn back is because now that they were healed, they had another errand to run before they could reenter society. They had to be certified as clean by a priest. This Samaritan who returned still had to do that too. Turning back to Jesus cost him time and delayed his recertification. But he couldn’t help it. Real gratitude sacrifices and willingly pays the price. Sometimes it’s hard. That is why there are numerous references in the Bible to bringing God a “sacrifice of praise.” A sacrifice is an offering. A sacrifice costs something. To bring a sacrifice of praise means to praise God even when it is hard. Praise God is easy when things are obviously going well. But even in those times, we might be tempted to take credit for our good fortune. But when times are bad, often we would rather bring God our criticism or complaint. It is hard to bring our praise. That is when it is a sacrifice. God asks us to trust him that he is in control and working all things out. That is why the book of James starts off with the exhortation, “Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials...”

Gratitude Saves – The importance of developing a life of gratitude is underscored by Jesus’s final words to the healed Samaritan. Your faith has “saved” you. Real gratitude will save your soul. Why? When you see goodness in your life that you don’t deserve and seek its source, you embark on a path that leads you to a God who knows your need, can heal your diseases, forgive your iniquity, and restore your life. Learning to be grateful –

any gratitude towards anyone – redirects your focus away from yourself and what you feel like you deserve. It helps you see your own need and your own inadequacy. It places you on a road that eventually leads to God, the ultimate source of all goodness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the four things the healed man does to demonstrate his gratitude to Jesus? What is unique about him giving thanks to Jesus?
2. What does it mean that gratitude sees? Why do we not see the good gifts of God in our life?
3. What does it mean that gratitude celebrates? Are you good at celebrating what God has done in your life? What do you do to celebrate? How can what we celebrate be used as an indicator of what we are really grateful for?
4. What does it mean that gratitude sacrifices? What does it cost to be grateful?
5. What does it mean that gratitude saves? How does gratitude save?

LESSON 3 | POWER AND PROMISE

JESUS HEALS BLIND BARTIMAEUS | LUKE 18:35-43

If you had one wish, what would you wish for? That question, in various forms, is told and retold in countless books, movies, and late-night chats with friends. There is Aladdin and the Magic lamp with the promise of three wishes. Some versions contain the caveat that you can't wish for more wishes. Then there is Edgar Allan Poe's tale of the Monkey's Paw, where people are promised three wishes but warned that those wishes would be taken literally and perhaps twisted to be used against them. Various cultures have stories about people who have prayed or asked God for things only to have the granting of their request turn out to be a curse. One such example is the Greek story of Eos and Tithonus. Eos is immortal, but Tithonus, her husband, is not. Eos has the gods to make Tithonus immortal. The problem is that she forgets to ask for everlasting youth for him. So he ages but never dies. His body and mind continually waste away into nothing. Those stories portray God or "the gods" as somehow out to get us. The punchline seems to be, "be careful what you ask for." These cultural tales or myths reflect the human tendency to think we know what is wrong with our lives and what will fix them. It also shows our suspicion that we might be wrong or not fully understand what we are asking for.

Sometimes we import this view into our relationship with God. We sometimes pray for something and wonder why it doesn't happen. Or we are worried about praying for the wrong thing. Or don't know what to pray. It all gets complicated. But God isn't trying to prank you, trick you, or hurt you. You don't have to inform him of your need or convince him to act on your behalf. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:8, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." And again, in Matthew 7:11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

The starting point, though, is our desire. God wants us to pour out our hearts before him. If you look at Jesus's encounters with people, many are stories about how he fulfills and frustrates their expectations. The miracles are stories where he does wonderful things for people. Other times, though, he asks them a question and then doesn't give them what they are expecting, like the woman at the well. Som. Other times he gives them one thing and then another, like the paralytic let down through the roof. Jesus forgives his sin first, then heals his body.

Today, we will look at a miracle Jesus performs, which starts with Jesus asking the man a simple question: “What do you want Me to do for you?” It’s a simple question and perhaps an obvious one. But Jesus still asks it. Perhaps as we look at how the story unfolds, we will understand the identity of Jesus more clearly and gain the confidence to pour out our hearts to him, even if sometimes he doesn’t do what we ask or expect.

The story happens in Luke 18:35-43. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem and is almost there. This story unfolds near Jericho. Before we examine what the miracle means, I want to use this miracle story to discuss resolving Gospel differences.

RESOLVING GOSPEL DIFFERENCES

This story is told in all three synoptic gospels. Here and in Mark 10:35–45 and Matthew 20:20–28. The problem is that all three gospels tell the story slightly differently.

1. **The Number of People Healed** – Matthew 20:30 mentions two blind beggars. Mark 10:46 only mentions one blind man and gives his name, “a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus.” Luke 18:35 mentions only one blind man begging but doesn’t name him.
2. **The Manner of Healing** – Matthew 20:24 says, “Jesus touched their eyes.” Luke and Mark both record Jesus healing with his words rather than his touch.
3. **The Location the Miracle Happened** -- Matthew 20:19 says the event happened “As they were leaving Jericho.” Mark 10:46 also says this happens “as He was leaving Jericho.” Luke 18:35 says it happened “As Jesus was approaching Jericho.”

What are we to make of the differences? Well, it should be evident that the first two differences are quickly resolved. Mark and Luke’s mention of only one beggar doesn’t preclude there being another that Jesus healed as well. Similarly, he could have healed with both his touch and his words. Selection of material for interest or emphasis is not the same as altering or inventing material to serve your purposes.

The one issue that is hard to reconcile is where the miracle occurred. Matthew and Mark say it happened on the way out of Jericho. Luke says it happens on the way into Jericho. Which is it? Various attempts to reconcile this discrepancy have been tried.

1. Some say that the gospels record different events. Jesus healed both going in and going out. But the structure and content of the miracles are almost identical. It seems more reasonable to believe that they are telling the same story. So why the differences?

2. Some say that it doesn't matter or that one or more of the gospel writers has modified the story to fit the picture of Jesus they are developing for their audience. Though this might help reconcile the differences in the story, it undercuts the reliability of these accounts and the Bible in general. If the stories are being presented as historical, what parts can we trust if the writers change things to fit their interests?

3. One possible solution comes from Greek. If you look closely at the Greek words Luke uses, the phrase translated as "was approaching" can also be translated as "was near." This would take out any reference to going in or out of the city from Luke's version. This story simply happened in the vicinity of Jericho.

4. Another possible solution comes from archeology. There were two Jerichos. There was the ancient site of Jericho from Old Testament days, and there was a Roman Jericho that Herod had built. It was close to the ancient site but not built right next to it. Matthew writing for a more Jewish audience, tells the story in reference to the old Jericho. Luke writing for a more Roman audience, tells the story in reference to the new Jericho. So, in reality, the story probably happened between the two cities.

The point of this discussion is to encourage us not to be afraid or unsettled by differences or problems in Bible accounts. The Bible isn't a single book but a collection of multiple books written by multiple authors. Understanding it requires brain power. Rest in the knowledge that it is okay to wrestle with the Bible. There are answers. Seeing problems and seeking answers is a great way to strengthen your faith in God's word.

RETURNING TO THE STORY

THE CRY V35-38

The story starts with a blind man sitting by the road, hearing a crowd pass by. We know from Mark's account that his name is Bartimaeus. This is the only person whom Jesus heals whose name is given. It is probably because, as we shall see, he started following Jesus and was evidently part of the early Christian community.

Because of his blindness, he was one of the people in society who were compelled to depend on the charity of others to sustain himself. Like other disabled people in that day, he was probably dropped off at the city gate by a family member and then picked up at the end of the day. People are used to seeing him there. He hears a crowd coming and asks who it is. Jesus is outside Galilee, so the people refer to him by his hometown. Verse 37 says, "They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by."

He immediately begins crying out to Jesus when he hears who it is. Verse 38 says, “And he called out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” This is the only time in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus is called the “Son of David.” This, coupled with the fact that Bartimaeus follows Jesus after he regains his sight, means that he probably had heard about Jesus and realized who He was. He wanted to follow him but was hindered because of his sight.

His cry was more than just an attempt to get Jesus’s attention. It was a testimony to those around him of who He knew Jesus to be. He also knew the Messiah had come to bring “sight to the blind.” This caused him to cry out not just in testimony but in request. When people tried to keep the blind beggar quiet, he persisted even more. Verse 39 says, “Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” This shows the depths of his faith. He knows who Jesus is. He knows what Jesus can do. He knows that it applies to him. He refuses to be silent.

THE CALL V40-41

Jesus becomes aware of the situation and tells people to bring Bartimaeus to Him. When they meet, Jesus doesn’t immediately heal him. Instead, He asks him a question. Verse 41 says, Jesus says, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And he said, “Lord, I want to regain my sight!” We think that the answer is obvious. But it isn’t. This is a grown man whose livelihood at this point was being a blind beggar. Asking to see again meant being deprived of his primary source of income. It meant getting a job and taking care of himself. He would no longer be known as the blind guy at the city gate. This request was an additional part of his faith.

THE CONCLUSION V42-43

Jesus does what we expect him to. Verse 42 says, “And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”

What is more interesting is what Bartimaeus does. Verse 43 says, “Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God.” Immediately upon being healed, he begins praising God and following Jesus. As we said earlier, the reason he is named in Mark’s gospel is probably because he was a member of the Early Christian community. Upon being healed, he praised God and immediately began a new life as a follower of Jesus.

APPLICATION - FAITH LIKE BARTIMAEUS

What would it look like for us to have faith like Bartimaeus?

1. **Faith in Jesus** – He believes Jesus is who He said He is. He realized what the stories of Jesus meant. He knew who Jesus was.
2. **Faith in His Promises** – His knowledge of Jesus led him to realize what that meant for his life. If Jesus was the Messiah, and one of the Messiah's missions was to give sight to the blind, then this promise was for him.
3. **Faith to Ask** – Jesus asks him what he wants. He could have asked for something easier to do. He could have asked Jesus to encourage the people around him to be more generous. But he had faith that gave him the freedom to ask big.
4. **Faith to Follow** – The miracle is impressive. It also turned his world upside down. Anybody seeing for the first time would undoubtedly go through an adjustment period in their life. But he doesn't take time to regroup and reassess what he wants to do with the rest of his life. He immediately starts following Jesus.

CONCLUSION

What if you were Bartimaeus? What if Jesus summoned you to his side and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" What would you say? What is that one thing that you would ask Jesus for? This isn't about wishing for three more wishes or getting the car you always wanted. This is about asking yourself what promise of God do you worry doesn't apply to you. What would it look like if you believed those promises did apply to your life? What would you ask him to do for you? Would you be ready to praise him and follow wherever he led, even if it turned your world upside down?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever noticed a Bible difficulty or supposed contradiction? What did you do? How did you respond? What resources do you go to when you have Bible questions?
2. What does Bartimaeus's call reveal about what he already about Jesus?
3. Why did Bartimaeus ask for his sight back? What promise in scripture did he think Jesus could fulfill?
4. What did Bartimaeus do immediately after being healed? Why might that have been harder than we realize?
5. What would it take to have faith like Bartimaeus? What aspects of his faith are most challenging for you? What promises do you have the hardest time trusting apply to you ask well?

LESSON 4 | POWER AND FORGIVENESS

JESUS HEALS MALCHUS'S EAR | LUKE 22:47-51

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian women who lived in the Netherlands during World War II. Her book, entitled, "The Hiding Place" discusses how her family helped hide Jews in a secret room in their house. Her whole family was eventually arrested. She and her sister were sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her sister died there. Corrie was eventually released.

In 1947, two years after the war ended, Corrie traveled to Germany to spread the Christian message of love and forgiveness. After a talk at a church in Munich, she met one of the guards from Ravensbrück. Listen to what she says:

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me. "But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein"—again the hand came out— "will you forgive me?"

What would you do? We are constantly told that we have been forgiven and should forgive in the same way. But we still sometimes reserve in our hearts a category of things that we would never forgive somebody for. Have you ever said or heard somebody say, “I will never forgive them for what they did?” Why? Where does that feeling come from?

The truth is when we feel like saying we will never forgive someone, we have actually found something that forgiveness is really for. When we talk about forgiveness, we often mean accepting someone’s reasons or excuses. But forgiveness isn’t for things I have a good reason for doing. It is for things that are inexcusable that forgiveness is for.

Jesus knows it’s hard to forgive but tells us to do it anyway. Today, we will look at a miracle where Jesus performs a miracle for an unlikely person. Perhaps seeing Jesus perform this miracle will give us a greater understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do, and in the process, give us a greater ability to forgive others as we trust him more.

THE MEETING – V47-48

The context of the miracle is the night Jesus was arrested. They celebrated the Last Supper. They have gone to the Garden of Gethsemane so that Jesus can pray and prepare himself for what He knows is about to happen. While they are there, they see a crowd coming. The Garden of Gethsemane is on the Mount of Olives. You can stand in the garden, look out over the Kidron Valley, and see the temple. No doubt, Jesus could see the torches and know what is happening. That is why he tells the sleeping disciples in Mark 14:41, “ Behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” He could have run away. He had escaped the authorities before. He could have fled the opposite direction over the mount of olives and gone to Bethany. But he doesn’t. He is prepared to do what HE has been sent to do. That is the context of the Miracle.

THE MISTAKE – V49-50

Jesus might have been ready, but the disciples weren’t. They had misunderstood his message and wondered if this conflict that Jesus was walking towards would lead to armed conflict. Verses 49-50 say, “49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.”

When you read “slave of the high priest,” think of him more as the “personal assistant.” He is a powerful man. He is there to make sure everything goes smoothly. He is in charge. All four Gospels tell this part of the story. Mark 15:47 just says (and Matthew 26:51 repeats almost verbatim), “But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the slave of

the high priest and cut off his ear.” John 18:10 adds the name of the one who wielded the sword and the one he injured, “10 Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave’s name was Malchus.” From both Luke and John, we learn that it was specifically the right ear that was cut off. However, only Luke records the miracle.

THE MIRACLE – V51

Luke 22 51 says, “51 But Jesus answered and said, “Stop! No more of this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.” First, Jesus stops Peter from going further. His words are difficult to translate but mean something like “let it happen” and “don’t go any further.” Jesus is telling Peter he’s gone far enough.

Jesus then touches the ear of Malchus and heals it. We aren’t explicitly told what happened. Was the ear separated entirely from the head of Malchus? Did Jesus have to pick the ear up off the ground first? Was it just sliced thoroughly but not separated? We don’t know. It doesn’t say. We know that Jesus touched Malchus, and the touch healed the damage done by Peter’s sword.

THE MEANING – V51

As we look at this miracle, several things stand out as essential lessons for followers of Jesus to learn.

1. **God Loves** – Jesus loves Malchus. Jesus heals Malchus. Malchus then leads Jesus to the high priest for trial and eventual execution. This means Jesus loves him even though he knows he is still about to commit wrongs against him. We think we are Peter defending Jesus, but the truth is that we are Malchus more times than we can count. We betray Jesus. We sin against God. This miracle shows us that our sin doesn’t stop God from loving us. Jesus loves all the Malchus’s of the world.

2. **God Wins** – One reason people say they can never forgive someone is because they think that the other person’s actions ruined their life. But the truth is that our lives are in God’s hands, not theirs. Jesus knew it was the Father not Malchus, who put the cup in front of Him to drink. God doesn’t approve of sin. But sin doesn’t wreck God’s plan. The best example of this is Genesis 50:20, where Joseph tells his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result.” This verse doesn’t excuse evil. It does show that God’s plan isn’t thwarted by evil.

3. **God Restores** – Peter is mistaken. Peter does something stupid. That stupid act is irrevocable. You can't unslice someone's ear. But God can. This miracle shows us that God is able to restore what sin breaks. It might not be right now like he does for Malchus, but God promises in Revelation 21:4, "Behold, I am making all things new."

CONCLUSION

What unforgiveness do you still carry in your life? What wrongs against you do you refuse to let go of? Who do you think is worthy of the scorn and hatred you bear towards them? Let this miracle show you that God loves that person, that God is still in control, that person didn't wreck your life, and that God is in the process of restoring all things.

Listen to how Corrie Ten Boom's story ends:

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

"Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who is Malchus? Where is he healed? Why does he need to be healed?
2. Have you ever had to face someone who you needed to forgive but didn't want to? What did you do?
3. What does Jesus healing Malchus show us about the love of God?
4. How does Jesus healing Malchus show us that God is in control?
5. How does Jesus healing Malchus show us that God is about to restore all things?

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