

How the blind see

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[0 : 00] Let's pray again. Let's ask God to teach us. Guide us, O God, by your word and spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find wisdom, and in your will discover your peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now imagine for a moment two people, and they are observing a friend of theirs. One of them says to him, Friend, I'm really concerned for you.

I can see that your face is all flush, your hands are sweaty, your pupils are dilating, and when I put my hand on your chest, I can hear that your heart is beating a little bit too fast.

In fact, you're starting to experience some slightly irrational euphoria. Perhaps you caught something from that girl you were standing close to a moment ago.

Anyway, I think you should go to the hospital to get yourself checked. So that is the first person. But now the other guy comes and says to his friend, Oh, wow, wow, wow, wow, wow.

[1 : 16] I'm so excited for you. Because look at you. Your face is flush, your hands are sweaty, I can even hear your heart beating fast. So, you must really, really, really like that girl, don't you?

I mean, look at the way you look at her. But don't be shy lah. Go for it. And pursue her. She is a good choice. You see, sometimes we can observe the facts, but fail to discern its meaning.

Can't we? We see what's happening, but we fail to truly understand. We completely miss the point. We apply the wrong frame of reference, imagining that certain biochemical reactions imply serious illness rather than an endearing lovesickness.

We see, but we don't see. And that is true spiritually as well. Sometimes, though we have the knowledge, we actually have little understanding.

We have not grasped the things of God at all. We see, but we don't see. So, how can we gain spiritual sight? How can we truly see what God wants us to see?

[2 : 41] Well, today's passage will help us in that regard. But before we jump in, let us first of all place today's passage in its wider context.

Back in Luke 17, verse 20, some Pharisees had approached Jesus and asked him, when will the kingdom of God come? And Jesus tells them, don't worry.

When the kingdom comes in all its fullness, you won't miss it. You can't miss it. It will be obvious for all to see. That's in the future. But then Jesus goes on to say, actually, right now, the kingdom of God is in your midst.

It's present. But here's the thing, it's not something that can be easily observed. You can't take a map or a microscope and say, there it is.

So the natural follow-up question is, how can we see it then? How can we perceive the kingdom of God so that we can participate in it?

[3 : 55] And that really is the major preoccupation of Luke chapter 18. Jesus says, there is really only one way.

It is by humble faith. You see, you could try relying on your good works and measuring yourselves against others.

That's what the Pharisee who went to the temple a few weeks ago tried to do. Or, you could try relying on your riches and your good and upright upbringing.

That's what the ruler from last week tried to do. But Jesus says that's no use. It won't work. You can't see the kingdom of God that way.

You can't participate in God's kingdom that way. What you actually need is humble faith like that of a persistent widow, like that of a tax collector, like that of a little child.

[5 : 02] And you need humble faith like that of a blind man. That's what Jesus will say today. For even if we are not relying on our good works or religious upbringing or any riches we have, could it

be we are still relying on something else?

In particular, could it be that we are relying on our human insight, our perceptive analysis, our sharp brain, if you do, Jesus says, you still won't get very far when it comes to spiritual clarity.

Because as we'll see from today's passage, spiritual blindness is our default reality. But thankfully that is not the whole story.

There is a way out. for if we cry out for mercy, in humility, we can see. So let us have a look at both these truths from today's passage.

Firstly, spiritual blindness is our default reality. Now for the last few months, we have been following Jesus and his disciples on a road trip.

[6 : 28] And in verse 31, we are reminded once again of his destination. It is Jerusalem. And we're close. Verse 35 tells us Jesus is approaching Jericho, which is just 18 miles from Jerusalem.

We're almost at journey's end. And so Jesus takes this opportunity to remind us why he is heading there. It's not for a holiday.

No, his final destination is not a resort by the Dead Sea, but death on the cross. Now, it's not the first time he said it, of course.

Just before they started their journey to Jerusalem, Jesus made clear what his trip is all about. Look at 9 verse 22 on the screen. And he said, the Son of Man, it should appear on the screen, the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.

Or have a look at 9 verse 44. Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of man.

[7 : 52] So Jesus keeps foreseeing and foretelling his impending death. He knows his future. But this time in chapter 18, he adds something new.

He doesn't just tell us what will happen, but why. It's so that, verse 31, scripture will be fulfilled, and the plan of God will come to pass.

The reason Jesus knows his future, you see, is because he knows the scriptures. He knows, verses 32 and 33, that he has to be delivered, mocked, insulted, spat upon, flogged, and finally be killed and be raised to life again because that's the point of it all.

You see, what is the Bible really about? It's not primarily about moral rules, although there are plenty of those. It's not primarily about life hacks, although if you do follow its advice, you will probably find yourself more content in the long run.

But that's not what the Bible is primarily about. God's true story of how he planned to redeem his people for himself.

[9 : 24] And God made human beings in his own image, designed to reflect his goodness and to relate to him. But we made a terrible choice choosing to cut ourselves off from our creator, and so we messed up our lives and the good world that he put us in.

But from Genesis 3 onwards, the Bible narrates God's big plan to rescue us from our mess and restore his creation so that everything is good again.

And at the center of God's plan is Jesus' death and resurrection. If Jesus does not die and rise again, scripture will be rendered untruthful, incoherent, and meaningless because the promises contained within would remain unfulfilled.

That is why Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. But look at verse 34. the disciples did not understand any of this.

Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about. They heard Jesus opening his mouth, but they had no clue what he meant.

[10 : 56] And it wasn't because Jesus was using a lot of big words. Now the disciples know what insulted means, they know what killed means, they know what Gentiles mean.

They knew all those words, but they couldn't put it all together. And remember, this isn't the first time they have heard this kind of stuff from Jesus' lips.

But even after months of listening, they simply had zero insight into what Jesus was really saying. God will know what God will know.

And I wonder if today that is where some of us in this hall find ourselves. You know the facts. You have heard me or someone else talk about Jesus coming to die on the cross for our sins.

You sat in church long enough to be able to parrot that. And you know the words. You're familiar with the language. Words like grace and faith and salvation and forgiveness and even gospel.

[12 : 06] But the truth is, you haven't really put it all together. You have no quarrel with the facts. You don't dispute that Jesus did die.

And you might not just be familiar, but even like the words. Grace and faith and forgiveness sound reassuring, even comforting, don't they?

But the truth is, you haven't actually figured out what difference Jesus' death and resurrection makes to your life.

You don't see how it really transforms the way you approach things. Not enough that your non-Christian friends notice, anyway. You haven't had him turn your life upside down because he's not at the center of your plan for your life.

You see Jesus, but you are still blind as to who he really, truly is. Which is why calling yourself a Christian hasn't actually made too much of a difference.

[13 : 19] And if that is you, God wants you to listen today so that you may understand and be changed.

Why is it that we're so blind? Well, look at verse 34 again. On the one hand, we are blind because we think we see, but we see wrongly.

We lack understanding and our lack of understanding is our fault. Our responsibility. That is where the disciples are at.

You see, even though the disciples have been with Jesus day after day for three years, they didn't have any spiritual clarity regarding his mission.

Instead, they had their own assumptions and expectations. They expected salvation to look like military conquests, to look like the overthrow of the hated Romans, to look like God restoring the physical land back to them again.

[14 : 30] And what Jesus was saying just didn't fit with their preconceived notions. They just couldn't get God's upside-down way of working things.

God's big rescue plan to have Jesus die was too contrary to their own agenda and framework. And so they remained blind.

They couldn't change their mind to make it conform to God's design. But on the other hand, verse 34 shows us something else as well.

Why is it we're so blind? It's not just us. God is responsible too. He has hidden the meaning.

In other words, unless God intervenes, we are totally unable on our own to gain any sort of spiritual clarity.

[15 : 35] The disciples could have perfected their biblical Hebrew so that they can read the Old Testament in more depth. They could have tried to improve their own logic and critical thinking skills.

But none of that is going to help them to truly see. Because not only are they stuck wanting to see things their own way, God has also actually kept them in the dark.

And so our spiritual blindness is both our own fault and God's doing. Now, that sounds paradoxical, doesn't it?

How do we make sense of this? Well, the good news is if we actually go back and look over what Luke has said previously, he has already given us the theological framework to understand what is going on.

Now come back with me for a moment to look to chapter 10, verse 21. Notice what Jesus teaches. At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

[16 : 57] Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. Now notice what Jesus is saying. Who are the ones who have spiritual things hidden from them?

Who is it that are blinded? It is the wise and learned. Uh-oh. Does that mean that all those of us who have university degrees are now excluded?

Is Renaud wasting his time doing university ministry? No. Jesus is not talking about those who are highly educated.

Rather, notice the contrast. the opposite of the wise and learned here are little children. So that means the wise and learned here are those who are not like little children.

In other words, they are self-sufficient. They think they already know everything. You see, little children are constantly asking adults questions because they know they don't know much.

[18 : 10] They need help understanding. My kids ask me tons of questions every day. But the wise and learned here don't think of themselves that way.

And Jesus says if anyone is like this, if anyone is already convinced that they can see God's truths without God's help, they are in reality spiritually blind.

Is that not where the disciples are? They are convinced that they already know what God's plan is for Jesus. They see. But they don't see.

And Jesus says if you think you know it all already, especially in spiritual matters, God will hide the kingdom's true meaning from you.

Because the kingdom of God has no place for the self-sufficient. salvation. That's what Jesus wants us to understand. Unless we are humble enough to receive spiritual insight and clarity as a gift from God, we will remain blind.

[19 : 27] Now back in Luke chapter 8, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. And in chapter 8 verse 10, while explaining the parable, Jesus says this, The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables so that those seeing they may not see, those hearing they may not understand.

again, did you notice how it is that we might know the secrets of the kingdom of God? Is it through our superior insight and advanced brain power?

No. It has to be given to us by God. But if we refuse to humble ourselves and to receive it as God's gift, then it doesn't matter even if we hear God's words.

We won't truly see or understand. We remain spiritually blind. The parable remains a riddle.

And so that's the reality. Just as we can't justify ourselves by our religion, we can't justify ourselves by our intelligence.

[20 : 44] We cannot rely on our good works or clever insights. Yet so often, even as Christians, we can act as we do, can't we?

Here at KEC, we emphasize the word. I make no apologies for that, but sometimes we might think that to be driven by God's word, as our second core conviction puts it, means the point is to master it and show how smart we are, rather than be mastered by it and to grow our trust in God.

Perhaps we begin to focus on accumulating more and more Bible knowledge, thinking that will give us profound spiritual insight. But if that knowledge drives us to pride, rather than dependence on Jesus, then we haven't really understood the kingdom.

We are still blind. Or perhaps we subconsciously begin to think that detailed Bible study in and of itself is a cure for our sin.

But if we read and read, but we never truly listen to God and repent, we are still blind. This week, as I prepared for this sermon, sometimes I found myself reading commentaries too much and praying too little.

[22 : 18] And so I needed to hear this too. Not that reading commentaries is a bad thing, but if I rely on my wisdom and scholarship, rather than cry out to God for insight and clarity in my sermon prep, ironically, I would have missed the very point of the passage I'm preaching on.

So let us acknowledge that spiritual blindness is our default reality. And let us acknowledge that we cannot overcome that spiritual blindness by ourselves.

let that reality sink in and cause us to be humble. But at the same time, don't despair.

For just like last week, we discovered that what is impossible with man is possible with God. When we come in humble faith.

And that takes us to our second point for today. Secondly, when we cry out for mercy in humility, we can see. When we cry out for mercy in humility, we can see.

[23 : 36] Having established the fact of our spiritual blindness, we move on in the story, verse 35. As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

And so we now meet a blind man. Now, in those days, a blind man would probably be unable to find any form of work, and there was no such thing as Sumbangan Tunai Ramah to help them out.

So he would have to beg to live. And this location would have been a strategic place. Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem would have used this road, and so beggars would line up the road hoping to receive some charity from them.

And actually, that phrase by the roadside in verse 35 is exactly the same phrase in Greek that is used in the parable of the sower, when the sower is sowing the seed along the path.

So I wonder if Luke is dropping a hint, as if to tell us, remember how Jesus has just sown the seed of his word to the disciples, but they simply don't get it?

[24 : 49] Well, let us see if this blind man is any better. Does he see where the disciples don't? Let's read on, verse 36.

When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Now, Nazareth is Jesus' hometown, and it's only natural that it was used as a common way to identify him.

And clearly, this blind man has heard of Jesus because he immediately starts calling for him. But instead of calling him Jesus of Nazareth, verse 38, the man rather surprisingly calls him something different.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. to call someone the son of David, of course, is to say he is royalty.

More significantly, it is to identify him with a messianic title. The blind man has identified Jesus correctly. He knows his scriptures, and more significantly, he recognises Jesus as the fulfilment of his scriptures.

[26 : 11] Who would have expected that? Here is a blind man, useless in the eyes of the world, but who sees clearer than anybody else.

He is very much like a little child, rather than the wise and learned. And God is pleased to reveal the kingdom to him.

And because he sees clearly, he cries out for mercy. After all, what is he? He's blind, he can't work, he can only back.

And that is exactly the position we are in. His physical state mirrors our spiritual state. And so this man does the only thing possible.

He cries for mercy. He knows Jesus is the Messiah, and so he knows that if there is anyone he should call upon for help, it is this guy. Now, of course, that makes the people around him uncomfortable.

[27 : 18] Perhaps, as my old boss and friend Andrew Chia suggests, some of them are worried that some of Herod's special branch members are around. And they certainly don't want trouble, which is what they will get if word gets around that someone other than Herod is being hailed as a king.

And so they try to shush him, quiet. But the blind man doesn't give up, verse 39. This is his one opportunity, so there is no way he's letting this go.

And so he cries out even louder, Son of David, have mercy on me. Do you see what this blind man is really like?

I think again to the wider context of Luke chapter 18? Is he not like the persistent widow, making sure that the one who can transform his life hears him?

Is he not like the tax collector, crying out for mercy, just like him? Is he not like the little children, who though rebuke, will still come to Jesus?

[28 : 34] Luke is crystal clear. This blind man captures exactly who we should be and what we should do. He is in need of mercy and so he should cry out for mercy.

And notice he doesn't just say, Son of David, help me see. Instead, he says, have mercy on me. Now, of course he wants physical healing.

But that's not all he wants. Like the tax collector, he seems to recognize in some way he is a sinner. Perhaps he is subconsciously echoing David, who in Psalm 51 verse 1 cries out, have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

And here's the thing, when you cry out for mercy with humility, Jesus has more than enough time for you.

Look at how the action unfolds. The blind man shouts and Jesus could have ignored him. But he doesn't. Instead, Jesus stops and then he speaks.

[29 : 58] He orders this man to be brought to him because he's interested in him and in what he wants. Verse 41, what do you want me to do for you?

He asks. Now, I'm pretty sure that Jesus does know what he wants. But Jesus asks because he's inviting the man to express his need and subsequently his faith.

He's giving him an opportunity not just to be a passive observer, but an active participant by giving him a chance to make a proper request.

And that's what this man does. He's not just humble before Jesus, he's also confident in Jesus. I want to see, he says.

Now, what you must know is that there is no precedent for this. I was surprised to learn this week that no one gets healed of blindness in the Old Testament.

[31 : 05] And so this man's request is actually quite audacious. He's asking for something unprecedented. But because Jesus is in the business of giving freedom to the captives and sight to the blind, Jesus does as requested.

verse 42, receive your sight, your faith has healed you. He says the exact same thing to him as he did to the leper back in chapter 17.

As he restores his sight, he's really saying to the man, because you see and acknowledge me for who I truly am, the son of David, the true king, you can see my kingdom.

You can be part of the kingdom. And so you can enjoy the benefits of the kingdom. You are fully restored. And that is the lesson that Jesus wants to teach us today.

This is not just a random miracle. No, Jesus is teaching us that we are spiritually blind, but if we humble ourselves, let Jesus be king, cry out for mercy, and basically follow in the footsteps of this blind man, we can see and experience the kingdom.

[32 : 31] You see, spiritual eyesight can never come from ourselves. It must begin with faith, with a deep and trusting acknowledgement of who Jesus is.

It is a gift of God. That is the first and primary implication from today's passage. Perhaps you don't consider yourself a Christian this morning, but you're interested in finding out more about Jesus and the Christian faith.

Now, by all means, explore, ask your questions, read up, but above all, cry out to God to open your eyes.

God because without his help, there is just no way you can see. Google and chat GPT cannot help you. YouTube videos by people with PhDs cannot help you.

Only God can. So, will you humble yourself in this way? So, that is the main implication, but here is a second one.

[33 : 37] Be persistent in asking for spiritual clarity for ourselves and for others. Did you notice how the blind beggar doesn't give up at the first sign of discouragement?

No, he keeps pursuing Jesus because he is desperate. And it is this kind of desperation Jesus responds to. You see, spiritual clarity is not always immediate.

We know that, don't we? We read a Bible passage a couple of times, we pray and we consult the study Bible, but sometimes we still scratch our heads.

What does this mean? But Jesus says, persevere. Keep praying as you study, keep asking God for help. Or perhaps we have some difficult decisions to make, and the way of wisdom is not clear.

Well, don't stop asking God. keep going, be desperate. And that is true not just for ourselves, but for our non-Christian friends and family too.

[34 : 49] Perhaps you've been sharing the gospel with someone for quite a while now, but there has been no progress. Perhaps you can't even help but feel pessimistic about inviting that person to joy has dawn because nothing else has worked so far.

well, have you actually asked God to show mercy on them and open their eyes? Have you asked Him with a desperate persistence?

Because we cannot just rely on our powers of persuasion. Remember, in the end, it is God who opens blind eyes, not us.

we play our part, but it is God who grants them insight. So be persistent in praying for them.

And here's a third and related implication. Be bold and don't stop coming to Jesus for your every need. I want us to look at verse 41 again and really listen to Jesus' question.

[36 : 03] What do you want me to do for you? And I want you now to hear Jesus asking not just the blind man, but you personally right now this question.

what do you want Jesus to do for you today? What is it that you need?

You see, isn't it true that we don't just need Jesus to be safe, but actually we need him simply to live every single day?

Don't we all struggle with something right now? Whether it's some family issue, or some financial hardship, or some health problem, or some habitual sin, or some doubt in your soul, or even just indifference in your spiritual life?

Don't you find that the cry of this blind man, Jesus, have mercy on me, is actually a cry that you and I need to come to Jesus with over and over and over again.

[37 : 38] So be bold. Jesus is asking you that question because he wants you to come to him with your every need. Perhaps today you are weighed down by guilt, and you need to cry out, Lord, have mercy, I need to experience your grace anew.

Perhaps today you are weighed down by questions, and you need to cry out, Lord, have mercy, I need a fresh understanding of your word. Perhaps today you are weighed down by your own half-heartedness, and so you need to cry out, Lord, have mercy, I need you to renew my zeal today. Whatever it is, remember when you humble yourselves, Jesus doesn't walk past you. Instead, he stops and he tenderly asks you, what would you like me to do?

Just ask. And finally, don't forget, where spiritual clarity exists, a life lived for Jesus also exists. Look at verse 43. What does the blind man do upon receiving his sight? He follows Jesus and praises God. That is his life now, and that too is our life.

[39 : 16] If you want to ask for spiritual clarity without any intention of giving your life to God, then forget it. That's not the kind of people God wants in his kingdom. But if you truly see Jesus, you would want to truly live for him.

Actually, that's a good test to see if you are seeing Jesus truly or not. So as we end, I want you to look at this image on the screen.

Ned, can you put up the image? And as you do so, I want you to reflect. What is your spiritual eyesight currently like?

Is it more like the left or the right side? Wherever you are, let us pray for mercy and grace that God might sharpen our view of Jesus more and more each day.

Let's pray. I'll just give us a brief moment to be quiet before God and then I will lead us.

[40 : 42] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, according to your word, we are spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins.

The God of this age has blinded us and we cannot see. But Father, thank you that even in our blindness, you had compassion on us and you came to find us and you came to open our eyes. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who by his death and resurrection enables us to truly see. And so Lord, we ask now by your spirit that you continue to help us to gain spiritual clarity more and more each day, to know your will, to know your purposes, us to know your plans for us.

And we pray that we will walk according to your ways and not according to our own agenda. We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.