

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men
Matthew 20:29-34
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

The story of the healing of the two blind men by the roadside was preceded by Jesus' declaration that "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" and is followed by the story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem in both Matthew and Mark's Gospel. This structure points to the purpose for why Christ was willingly entering the city where He knew He would be killed, in order to give His life for the many.

The story of healing of the blind men occurring as Jesus heads to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for many shows us the essence of Christ's deliverance of people from their sinful state. It will also teach us about the role of faith and the compassion of God.

While Mark's Gospel aligns with Matthew in placing this account between Jesus' words to the disciples about giving His life as a ransom for many and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mark 10:46-52), Luke omits these words and places the healing after Jesus' prediction of His death.

Furthermore, Luke's account in Luke 18:35-43 is followed uniquely by the story of the conversion of Zaccheus (19:1-10) and the parable of money usage (19:11-27) before recording the triumphal entry. Therefore, Luke did not make the same connection between Jesus' words about His atonement and the triumphal entry that other synoptic writers did.

The place of the healing (20:29)

Matthew describes the healing of the blind men as occurring "*as they were leaving Jericho*." This does more than orient the reader to the location of the miracle for Jericho was a notable place in the history of Israel, being the first town that Joshua encountered as Israel came to the promised land after their wilderness wandering. It was the location of the dramatic conquest of the city when the double walled system to protect the city fell down after being encircled by the Israelites for seven days (Joshua 6).

Mark 10:46 agrees with Matthew 20:29, "*Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples...*" However, Luke 18:35 records the miracle as occurring, "*As Jesus was approaching Jericho*." So did Jesus heal the blind as He was leaving Jericho or as He was approaching Jericho?

Several solutions have been offered to address this issue. One is that this is an example of mistakes that exist in the biblical accounts. However, we can discard this notion because (1) God is the co-author of the Scripture, and God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), (2) there are other very reasonable explanations, and (3) we give authors the benefit of the doubt, not assuming they are seeking to mislead readers without any evidence of this intent.

Some have claimed the healing in Luke took place as Jesus left Jericho and that it was only His initial contact with the blind man when He was entering Jericho. They notice the blind man was continually begging to be healed (Luke 18:38-39) and may have followed Christ through the city. However, since it was after the healing when Jesus entered and passed through Jericho (Luke 19:1), this is an unlikely explanation.

Another suggestion is that Luke wrote about a different event than Matthew and Mark. Under this view, Luke recorded the healing of one blind man as Jesus entered Jericho and Matthew recorded the healing of the other men as he left the city. This is further supported by noticing the crowd grows between His entering and leaving the city. When He enters, Jesus encounters a “multitude” (Luke 18:36) and when He leaves there is a “great multitude” (Matthew 20:29; Mark 10:46). The first healing resulted in the word spreading as Jesus passed through the city. This may be why there were more blind men meeting Him as He left the city.

However, because “multitudes” and “great multitudes” are not used by the same author, there is doubt about the significance of this difference. Also, it would be expected that people from Jericho would join in heading to Jerusalem for the Passover, regardless of whether Jesus healed the men. Finally, all three accounts are very close in their wording, making it unlikely that Luke recorded a different event.

The best solution to this apparent problem would be that Jesus was between the Old Testament city of Jericho and the new city of Jericho, with its large Herodian palace to the south of the old city. This would explain how Jesus could be leaving Jericho (the Old Testament city that lay in ruins) in Matthew and Mark and at the same time entering Jericho (the city built by Herod the Great), which would be on the way to Jerusalem.

It would stand to reason then that Luke, a Gentile writing for the Gentiles, would reference a city that was modern, while Matthew, a Jew writing for the Jews, and Mark, under the influence of Peter, would refer to the much older historically significant city of Jericho where the Jews would have entered the land promised by God.

Jericho was on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, and was at the northwest side of the Dead Sea. As the Jews headed to Jerusalem, they would pass through Jericho as they traveled around the area of Samaria. Jericho would be the first city that those headed to Jerusalem would pass through after they crossed the Jordan River from Perea and traveled to Jerusalem.

It is also notable that God faithfully delivered the Israelites of the wilderness into the promised land through Jericho. Jesus would deliver His people from their sin by giving His life as a ransom for many by first going through the old city of Jericho. Just as the physical descendants of Abraham were delivered by first going through Jericho, so the spiritual descendants of Abraham are delivered by the sacrificial death of the Messiah who also went through Jericho.

Jesus had been followed by a large crowd from the beginning of His public ministry (Matthew 4:25) so there is nothing unique about this comment. However, this crowd would be mixed with people who were not only following Jesus wherever He went for the sake of His miracles, but also many people who were headed to Jerusalem from Galilee and elsewhere for the purpose of observing the Passover feast.

The request for the healing (20:30)

As Jesus was leaving the ancient, ruined city of Jericho and as He was approaching the modern city of Jericho, there were *“two blind men sitting by the road.”* Mark and Luke inform us that the purpose of sitting by the road was to beg. It would be expected that the begging would take place before the populated city of Jericho in order for the beggars to gain the first opportunity to request money from the travelers.

While Matthew states that two blind men were crying out to Jesus, *“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David,”* Mark and Luke only mention one man there who made this request. This has been another accusation of an error in the Biblical text.

While Mark and Luke only record one blind man healed, they do not limit the number to one by saying that only one blind man was healed. Of course, whenever there are two people, there is always one. Mark speaks of only one man possibly because he was personally familiar with the blind beggar, since he mentions him by name (Bartimaeus). It is understandable then why he may only focus on one of the two men. This account is similar to the story of the two demoniacs in Matthew 8:28, where in this healing also, Matthew is the only gospel that records both men.

Some have suggested that Matthew records two blind men healed to satisfy the minimum number of witnesses that Matthew's Jewish readers would have required. However, there was a large crowd who were also witnesses of this healing. It is better to view this as Matthew's personal report of this event.

Bartimaeus means "*the son of Timaeus*" (Mark 10:46) and he was the spokesman for the two. That Mark provided his name may mean that he was known widely to the early church and the other man, only mentioned by Matthew, was not known by them. They would be drawn to this region of the Dead Sea, since it produced balsam, which was used at the time to treat eye disease. Balsam remains in use today for eye care.

The blind men were accompanied by someone who was able to tell them when Jesus was passing by. This moved them to cry out "*Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David.*" This is reminiscent of the same request of two other blind men in Matthew 9:27 who "*followed Him, crying out 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'*"

In both cases, the messianic title, "*Son of David*," was used. This is in recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, and of the Old Testament promise of the Messiah, "*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened*" (Isaiah 35:5). This is why we often find the title "*Son of David*" used by people in connection with restoration.

We also saw the Canaanite woman cry out, "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David*" in Matthew 15:22. Also, the father of the boy with epilepsy said, "*Lord, have mercy on my son*" in Matthew 17:15. Those who pleaded with Christ for healing viewed this as a request for mercy. They viewed Christ's healing as the merciful removal of the judgment that resulted from the fall of man. We ought also recognize that all physical ailments ultimately are derived from how the sin of Adam has affected our human bodies. The Messiah will deliver us from this judgment in due time.

The opposition to the healing (20:31)

Many of those who were ahead of the crowd of people, and who were following Jesus to Jerusalem, took exception with the blind men's request of Him (Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39). This was similar to when the disciples saw the Canaanite woman's request for mercy as a bother (Matthew 15:23). But this rebuke by the crowd only caused the men to shout louder at Jesus, likely to be heard over the commotion. These men in need sought to take advantage of the opportunity that was present for healing. This is an example to us, for when the Lord provides us with the opportunity to bring our request to Him, we must not delay.

The question about the healing (20:32-33)

After the blind men reiterated their request for mercy, “*Jesus stopped and called them, and said, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’*” Jesus probably stopped because He was behind some of the crowd who had led the way and who had first heard the blind men (Luke 18:39) and when the men shouted louder, Jesus was upon them. Mark 10:49 notes that Jesus had others find the man and call him to come to Him. And when Bartimaeus responded to the call, “*he jumped up and came to Jesus*” (Mark 10:50).

The Lord’s request of the blind men seems odd since He would have known why they were asking for mercy. Therefore, He was asking them specifically to vocalize their need to regain their sight. This was not only for the sake of the blind men, but more for the sake of the crowds. With so many people in the crowd that were not from Jericho and who did not know the men, Jesus sought to make it clear that they were indeed blind.

The healing by Jesus (20:34)

The two men were healed of their blindness and immediately followed Jesus on the road. Whether they had other plans to attend the Passover is unclear, but now they did not hesitate to join with the crowds who were following Jesus to Jerusalem. Matthew wrote that they “*immediately regained their sight,*” implying that they had been able to see previously but had lost that ability.

Matthew described both Jesus’ attitude toward the men and His action in healing the men, “*Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes.*” He did not only heal them as a validation for the crowd that He was indeed the Son of David, He did so out of care for the two men.

His healing in this case included touching their eyes, which He had also done in the case of the two blind men healed in Matthew 9:29. There was no protocol for Jesus’ miracles, but at times He touched the person when He healed them (cf. Matthew 8:3, 15, 9:29). This healing was not progressive but immediate.

In Mark 10:52 and Luke 18:42, Jesus spoke to the reason He chose to heal the men, “*your faith has made you well.*” This should not be interpreted as their faith produced the miracle, but rather that Jesus was moved to heal them in light of their faith. Faith does not guarantee immediate healing and was not present in every account of healing in the New Testament (e.g. Mark 9:14-27). The healing came from the power and prerogative of Jesus alone.

Luke concludes this account by noting that the man who was healed was *“glorifying God”* and then describes the crowd likewise, *“when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God”* (Luke 18:43). This miracle brought praise to God. This praise is a precursor to the praise Jesus received in Matthew 21:9 and 21:15-16, *“Hosanna to the Son of David.”*

Certainly, the two blind men were part of all the people who were praising God, and their ultimate act of praise was to immediately begin to follow Jesus. Unlike the two blind men that Jesus healed in Galilee (Matthew 9:27-31), there was no command by Jesus to not tell anyone about the healing. With the large crowd following, the healing ministry was more public than ever before. Since His purpose was to travel to Jerusalem to be killed, there was no longer a need to delay the opposition to Him by the religious leaders.

Conclusion

This account of the two blind men appears in all three of the synoptic Gospels as Jesus approached Jerusalem to be crucified by the Jews as a ransom for many. It served as a final public declaration of His miraculous power. This demonstrated that He was the Messiah and should be regarded as such by the people. Yet in just a few days, He would be rejected by those who He came to save.

It is significant that this miracle involves the healing of the blind. Even though the men were blind, they were spiritually perceptive in recognizing Him as the Son of David, able to deliver them. In their blindness, they could see, whereas many with sight were spiritually blind. These men serve as rebuke to the nation that was spiritually blind to who Jesus was and would reject Him.

As Matthew 20:20-28 revealed, even the disciples themselves failed to perceive the significance of the moment even though Jesus had told them just prior. Likewise, the crowds who praised Him did not understand what was happening either. True understanding only comes from the illumination of our mind by God, as Jesus taught Peter in Matthew 16:17, *“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”*

Jesus would present Himself as the messianic King of the Jews as He entered Jerusalem, and while there was spiritual blindness about what was truly happening, Jesus would give His life to deliver people from their spiritual blindness in order to bring them to praise Him as God had created them to in the beginning of creation.