



Lord, Have Mercy

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 20:29-34

March 17, 2013

Pastor Nick Shaffer

The more that we study the Gospel of Matthew, the more I am thankful for God's Word – that we have it, that we can read it, that we can, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, understand it and so have a fuller and richer understanding of who Jesus Christ really is. We really have been blessed to have been born in this era, on this side of the cross, after the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, a completed canon of the Holy Scriptures in our hands. I am thankful for the continual unfolding and explanation of the Scriptures regarding the character and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, this full picture that Scripture paints of our Savior. It is an immense blessing and an enormous advantage that we have over those who walked with Christ, who were His contemporaries, who were continually trying to figure Him out and most times falling so far short. It just seems that they never fully understood who and what it was that they had in Christ – not until after His death and resurrection, not until after the gift of the Holy Spirit. So often we see in this gospel that the crowds and even the disciples at times were profoundly blind to the true glory and greatness of Christ, his eternal and heavenly worth as opposed to the temporal blessings that He could and often did graciously bestow on people. But their understanding was so limited, so faltering, so skewed by their own striving for personal gain.

Consider the context of the last several chapters of Matthew, the motivations that have driven the disciples. Their focus is self-consumed – consumed with their own personal position, their relative greatness, their rewards, their merit, what they deserve for their sacrifices, and they have been oblivious to Christ and to His words. They are insensible and ignorant to His mission to seek and save those who are lost, to lay down His life as a ransom for many, to pour out His life's blood on a tree as the substitute for sinners, to drink the cup of God's wrath against sin to the dregs and deliver needy, helpless, lowly sinners from the hell which we deserve. They are blind to His condescension and humility, blind to His true character as the Lamb of God and what that means. They will come to know all of this, of course. They will come to know all of this as a blessing of God's grace purchased for them on Calvary, as a blessed consequence of Christ's saving work and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But for now, they have been debating and discussing things that are shallow and secondary at best. They are missing what is of most importance, what is of most value – Jesus Himself – though His worth is staring them in the face. It’s analogous to a doctor who treats toenail fungus on someone who has had a limb severed. They are lacking in perspective, lacking in spiritual understanding, missing the forest for the trees and that is the background to this encounter with the blind men – men who know their blindness and their need and that it can only be met in Christ. It is an enacted parable, a picture of the blindness around Him – the blindness of the disciples, the blindness of the crowds – a blindness that Jesus Christ must dispel and heal and conquer and which He will dispel, fully and finally, for all of His elect by going to Jerusalem, and suffering on the tree and rising victoriously from the dead. How perfect that on the way to Jerusalem, by way of Jericho, God the Father would ordain that Jesus, at the close of His earthly, itinerant ministry and before He goes to the cross to work His greatest miracle, would meet two blind men who can see more clearly Christ’s true worth than the multitudes around them who have sight. It is a fitting cap, a fitting conclusion to the ministry of Christ as His earthly life enters its last week – a beautiful and simple picture of the reason that He has come to the earth. As He is on His way to Jerusalem, on the outskirts of Jericho, Jesus meets with

A Passionate Plea (v. 29-30) “And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”” (Matthew 20:29–30, ESV) In Luke account, he says that this encounter takes place on the way into Jericho. There is a very simple explanation for that. Matthew and Luke don’t have their facts confused. In Jesus’ day there were really two Jerichos that were very close to one another– the ruins of the old city that had been conquered by Joshua which Matthew, as a Jew references in His gospel, and the new Jericho that had been rebuilt which Luke, as a Gentile, references in his. Jesus was leaving the old and entering the new Jericho when this scene takes place.

Now I want you to picture the scene. Jesus is travelling toward Jerusalem with a great crowd, a mixed multitude, around Him. Some are true disciples and followers of Christ, but others are merely curious, excited about the possibility of this powerful preacher and miracle worker striding into Jerusalem, taking the throne and orchestrating an unstoppable military coup that would leave the Israelites in charge of their country and the Romans tossed out on their ears.

There is a groundswell of excitement around Jesus, a renewal of the fervor of the common people, and so Jesus is travelling with this great crowd all around them.

And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David! The use of the word “behold” means that Matthew wants us to understand that what takes place here is very significant and is worthy of considering and contemplation by us. There are two blind men that are on the way, blind men that have been reduced to being beggars. They are outcasts, the lowly, nobodies, the societally worthless, a drain on everyone. Quite often their blindness was caused by some infection or disease – their faces often swollen and eyes running continually. Blindness was considered to be a result of personal sin in the messed up Judaism of that day. These blind men were discarded, rejected and despised.

Somehow they come to know that Jesus is passing by and they begin to cry out to him. The word cry out is the Greek word “krazo” which means to croak or cry with a loud and raucous voice. They were boisterous and noisy in their cries, piercing through the crowd noise in order to reach Jesus’ ears. They plead for mercy, not offering a list of good things they had done like the rich young ruler, not talking about their sacrifices like Peter, not making promises they could never keep like James and John, not even complaining about how unfair it was that they were blind. They offered nothing to Jesus but pitiful cries for His favor. Christ owed them nothing and so they pled for mercy.

The title by which these blind men call out to Christ shows just how highly they regard Him, how highly they think of Him. They call Him “Lord”. They call Him the “Son of David.” They are calling Him the Messiah – that’s what the title meant. They see in Him, not only the one who could heal them from blindness, but also the one who would deliver them from blindness. I want you to see the scope of what this means, because it is important. That they would believe that Jesus could heal them from blindness is no small thing. There is no record in the OT anywhere of any prophet or preacher healing anyone from blindness. In contrast, however, is the fact that giving sight to the blind was the most common of Christ’s miracles. Why? Because Scripture says that God alone gives sight to the blind. It is the Lord who “who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.” (Psalm 146:7–9, ESV) Giving sight to the blind was

something only God could do, something the Messiah would do. Speaking of His Messiah, of Christ, of God's servant, the Father says: "'I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.'" (Isaiah 42:6–7, ESV) When John the Baptist was doubting if Jesus was truly the Messiah, truly the Christ, Jesus answered and told John's disciples to go and tell Him: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'" (Matthew 11:5–6, ESV) To open the eyes of the blind was supremely a revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah.

These blind men see that Jesus is uniquely the servant of God, the Messiah of God, and that He could heal them but even more than that, they believe that He is merciful and that He would heal them. It was not only that He had the power to heal their blindness; it is that He had the compassion and the heart that made Him willing to do this. Despite their blindness, these men saw more clearly than many. They recognized the authority and ability of Jesus and His mercy and kindness. They believed that Christ had the power to heal them of their blindness and that He would. In all their raucous pleading, they confessed His greatness and glory. With all their pleading, they were confessing His worth. They were not making this plea of some traveling hack, some snake oil salesman. They made this request of the Son of David, the Christ, the Promised One, who would rule forever on David's throne as the Messianic King of an eternal kingdom. And their cries are met by

A Callous Crowd (v. 31) "The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"'" (Matthew 20:31, ESV)

Here are these blind men, crying out to Christ for mercy and the only thing that that the crowd sees fit to do is to rebuke them for it, telling them to quiet down. Why do they do that? There are probably many different reasons. They were on the way to Jerusalem, getting ready for Jesus to march in and make His kingship known. Maybe they didn't want these blind guys spoiling the mood. Maybe they didn't think they were important enough to bother Jesus about. Maybe they were concerned about "religious manners" or polite restraint and social propriety. There are many things that it could have been called, but the real issue was their own blindness.

Paul says in Ephesians 4 saying: “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (Ephesians 4:17–18, ESV) Though Paul is speaking of Gentile unbelievers, the same diagnosis could be made of the Jews who were crowding around Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. They were blind to their need and blind to the truth that only Jesus could meet it. They were blind to who Jesus really was and to His essential character and nature. They were blind to who He was and what He came to do.

Here’s the truth. People who do not see their own desperate needs are often embarrassed by those who do. Those who do not call upon Christ for mercy are often bothered by those who do. It is awkward, uncomfortable, embarrassing, and humiliating to be around people who call upon Christ, like that, who value Christ like that, who desire and long for Christ and His mercy like that if you do not. We only cry out to the Lord like that when we know we are in need. It is only those who know their awful predicament who cry out to the Lord like that for mercy. The crowd did not see and so their concern is to quiet the blind men.

But the very real truth is that this crowd is in desperate need. The need of the blind men is more obvious, right? But the crowd is even more desperately needy than they are. They suffer from a far more profound blindness. Trying to keep the blind men away from Jesus proves that. They did not really comprehend the heart and the mercy of Christ. They did not have a clue about the true worth of the One they were crowding around.

But these blind men know. They know Christ’s worth, they know their desperation and they can discern the importance of the moment they are in. They are earnest in their crying out, importunate, repetitive and persistent in their pleading. They get louder and louder. There was no way that they were going to miss this chance, no way that they were going to simply let Jesus pass by and wait for a better time. This was the day of their salvation. This was their opportunity to cry out to Christ and there may not be a tomorrow. They didn’t care about religious decorum or propriety. Religious manners can keep people from crying out to the Savior for saving mercy. Polite restraint and propriety can obstruct people from crying out to Jesus for what they desperately need. And when you're blind—and the One who can give you sight is passing by—who cares about religious manners? It's a time to cry out with passion and persistence, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” What a blessing their blindness was! In response to their cries comes a beautiful picture of

The Merciful Messiah (v. 32-34) “And stopping, Jesus called them and said, “What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.” (Matthew 20:32–34, ESV)

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to accomplish the most significant, miraculous work in all of history – to offer Himself as our substitute on the cross, to endure the cup of the fury of God’s wrath against our sins as the perfect sacrifice, to deliver Himself up for our transgression and to rise again from the dead for our justification. The events that are before Him are weighing on His greatly – betrayal, arrest, a mock trial, scourging, mocking, beating, crucifixion and despite the weight that is upon Him, He hears the cry that is sweet to His ears – the cry of the lowly, who know that they are lowly and needy, for mercy which He alone can give.

He stops everything. He tenderly asks these men what they want. He wants them to say it. “Lord let our eyes be opened.” And in pity, Christ touches them and heals them. Pity, compassion and mercy flowing, Christ touches them. the picture we get of Christ is of one who is both all-powerful and matchlessly merciful. In the willingness of the Son of David to stop on the way up to Jerusalem is all the difference between Jesus and some mere political or earthly king, or between Jesus and some dry religious icon who is absorbed in Himself. Even the nearness of His own decisive suffering awaiting Him in Jerusalem does not get in the way of His mercy. How could it? It is the very reason He came – to have mercy on the needy, to serve rather than be served.

And I want you to see this. When it says that Jesus “touched their eyes” – the word that is used for eyes is a poetic word for eye -- *omma*, not the common one, *ophthalmos*. It means that Jesus touched not only their physical eyes and restored their physical sight, but that He opened their perception, their understanding, their knowledge and comprehension – He made them to see and to understand spiritual realities and the inference is that He made them to understand to a much greater degree who He, the Christ, is. And then they followed Him, they became His disciples, the company of the called and delivered of the Savior King.

In becoming followers of Jesus, these formerly blind men proved that they saw more clearly who Jesus was and why He came into the world than the multitudes on the road that day who had never been physically blind but who could not see the worth of the One standing before them. The first shall be last and the last, first

These men, considered lowly, outcasts, are a clear illustration of what salvation demands – that we see that Jesus Christ is our only hope, that He holds eternal life in His hands, that there is no life and no truth apart from Him. There is no saving ourselves, no making ourselves better, no stacking up of accomplishments, no sacrifice great enough, no promises that we can make. Salvation is found in no other way than that we confess our desperate need and lay hold of Christ alone to save. Sadly there are so many who would rather remain in darkness if the price of seeing the light means to confess that you are as blind and needy, desperate and dependent as we really are. Self-sufficiency and pride blind the human heart to the distance between us and God and the Christ who alone, by His cross, bridges the gap. But for those who humble themselves, who are unashamed to cry out to Christ, there is the salvation joy of being able to say: “Once I was blind, but now I see.”

I am so grateful that at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, while He is on His way to the cross, we have recorded and forever memorialized for us such a succinct and vivid picture of what Jesus came to do – to save the lost, to destroy the power of sin -- ultimately by His work on the cross and to give sight to the spiritually blind by His gracious mercy and to make disciples who follow Him. This is the mercy of Christ displayed. We have no claim, no reason to expect His forgiveness and salvation other than His own grace and goodness and love. But because He is infinitely good and gracious, He kindly and gladly receives those who cry out for His mercy like these blind men, those who confess in faith His worth, His goodness, His faithfulness, His saving power and work upon the cross, and His unfailing love. This is such a great picture of the mission of Christ.

What do we take away from this encounter with the blind men and really from the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry?

The story is not about us primarily, not about our glory, not about our greatness, not about our merit, not about us at all – the star of the story is Jesus Christ. The mission of Christ has never

been about our merit, not about what good things we have earned, not about some good things we deserve. It is about God's mercy in Jesus Christ. Christ has come on a mission of mercy, not for your or my validation. He has come on a mission of mercy, not to establish a new merit system, new religious points system, not to applaud and refine and refocus our human efforts, but to save the helpless, the needy and the lowly who know it. He is the hero. He is the rescuer; we are the rescued. He is the deliverer; we are the delivered. He is the Savior; we are the saved. He is the Master; we are the slaves. He is to be worshipped; we are the worshippers. He is the Lord who serves; we are His servants who have been freed to do the same. He is the merciful one; we need mercy. He is the glorious One. No doubt, this story serves as an illustration of the blindness of the crowd, of the blindness of the disciples, but also of our own. We do not always see things as we should. We can get easily distracted, have our vision obscured to what is most valuable and important but this encounter with the blind men at the end of the ministry of Jesus and all that we have seen through the gospel of Matthew so far focuses our eyes afresh and anew on what really matters, on the heart of things.

Beloved, We need to remember the simplicity and power of the gospel message and live it. We need to remember that our only standing with God is by His grace. The first point of contact with Jesus Christ, the foundation of our relationship with Him is not our goodness but our need. The first link between my soul and Christ is not my goodness but my badness, not my merit but my misery, not my standing but my falling. And the difference we see illustrated with the blind men who are saved and the profoundly blind crowd who does not know the salvation in their midst is this: The degree to which you are willing to cry out to Jesus for mercy is determined by the degree to which you understand your desperate need. When God graciously allows you to see the truth about yourself; and when you realize that you are a lost sinner, with God's just and righteous wrath hanging over you for your sins; and when you then discover that God has mercifully provided the righteous life of His own precious Son on the cross as the payment for your sins; and when you realize that right now is the day of salvation, and that there may not be another, that is when you let go of religious manners and cry out to Christ.

Our most desperate need is for Christ, for His mercy, for His forgiving and saving grace. What we need more than anything else is a saving relationship with Christ. And then we need His mercy as we are continuing to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord, growing in a love for Him and a love for His word- hearing it preached and expounded, studying it, believing it, knowing Christ more intimately through it. When our lives our actions, our thoughts our attitudes do not line up with that word, then we repent. By His grace we find ourselves drawn to God's people, growing in self-denying love for both Christ and our neighbor and especially

for God's people. This is what the gospel of grace does in us. Our most desperate need is Christ and a life that is turned upside down and transformed by His grace. Seeing Christ as He is should bring forth unabashed worship, unabashed prayer, unabashed desire and delight in His fellowship.

How thankful I am for the refocusing power of this text. Before we enter the rapid pace of the last week of Jesus' life on this earth, before we hear His last teaching, see His last confrontations with Pharisees, and watch the horrific sufferings of His humiliations in His crucifixion, we are once again reminded of who Jesus Christ really is. Jesus Christ is the God of all power, the true God of mercy and compassion, giving hope to desperate souls, who delights to save the broken. He is Sovereign Lord, the Messianic King – the Son of David. He is the One who has offered Himself at the cross on your behalf, if you will humble yourself and believe. He is life and joy and peace and He is the One whom above all we must follow. Our most desperate need is Christ – now and always.

Jesus earthly ministry and mission can be summed up so well with these words that we have read before: "At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."" (Matthew 11:25–30, ESV)

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2013

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.