

BROKEN
Matthew 20:29-34
Luke 7:36ff.

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Amarillo, Texas
March 17, 2024

I awoke every morning when I felt the warmth of the sun on my face, but I never saw a sunrise. I never saw light dance on the sea. I never saw my mother's smile. I never saw my father's dark eyes twinkle. I never saw the color red.

As a child, I could see; but my mother told me of a childhood illness, a high fever, and then the blindness. I don't remember seeing. I don't remember color. All my days seemed the same. I would fold up a colorless mat, eat colorless food, be led to the market to ask seeing people to put colorless coins in my colorless cup.

I did know that my mother was soft and round, and her face was smooth with little crinkles around her eyes. My curious fingers had felt her face – often. Sometimes she would stop what she was doing and let me look at her face with my little hands. And sometimes I would listen to familiar sounds that would tell me that she was making bread, or sweeping, or cleaning dishes.

Sometimes at night, before I went to bed, she would take me up on our flat roof where it was cool, and let me sit on her lap. I would sit breathlessly as she described the stars in the night sky over Jericho. I knew that there were times that she would weep for me, her blind boy. To me, stars and my mother's eyes were alike.

Not wanting to be a burden on my family, I did the only thing that there was for me to do – I begged in the market...for years. Being blind is not that different from being invisible. People tend to ignore you, to walk past you, or to stand within hearing distance and carry on a conversation as though you were not there. I learned a great many things, all these years sitting in the market in Jericho.

It was there that I first heard of a teacher from Nazareth. I heard Him called everything under the sun – from blasphemer, teacher, charlatan, to Messiah. All I knew was that whoever He was, He certainly got the people excited! Then one day I heard them talking about the fact that He, the Nazarene teacher, was coming to Jericho. My curiosity grew and grew until it became an obsession. I waited for days, straining my ears for evidence of His arrival. I got to my post as early as I could each day. I did not want my father to lead me home in the afternoon because I was afraid I would miss Him. I had heard enough about Him to know that if He could do even part of the things that people were saying about Him

– heal cripples, turn water into wine, feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and, wonder of wonders, give the blind sight – I had to meet Him. No, see Him! I had to see!

I heard them coming. They were still a good distance away. But it was as if the old walls had caught their sound and reverberated the news to me that Jesus was on His way. As the crowd grew noisier, I knew that He was getting nearer and nearer. The excitement was building in me, until I felt that I would scream. I had to run to find Him. Me, a blind man, groping down winding alleys trying to find a miracle. That would never work, so I began to call out to Him because I realized that in all that crowd of people following after Him, He might not see me. How would He know that I needed Him if I did not shout? So I began to call His name – I called louder and louder. “Jesus. Jesus. Over here. I’m over here. Help me! Help me, please. Jesus! Have mercy on me.”

I must have gotten someone’s attention, because the people that had moved into my area next to the little niche in the wall where I begged told me to be quiet. They said I was making too much noise. I was making too much noise? It sounded as though all of Jericho was screaming and calling out for something or other from Jesus. I called louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Someone pushed me down, then threw my cloak over me to shut me up. I felt a sob rise from the depths of my soul. The crowd must have blocked Him from seeing me, and I missed my chance. He had passed me by. I could hear the crowd moving on – then they stopped and all grew quiet.

I heard a voice saying, “Call him here.” Then I felt someone poke me. “Get up,” they said. “Jesus is calling for you.” And lying there in the dust, hope was reborn. With a jump, I was to my feet. I threw aside my cloak, and many hands directed me, leading me right to the Healer.

“What do you want Me to do for you?” He asked.

“I – want – to – see,” I answered.

“Go your way; your faith has made you whole,” He said.

I was stunned. Suddenly there was painful burst of light as I stood there accepting my miracle. There were thousands of bright, glittery things floating in the air, and right in the center of them was this man. He smiled. I knew it was Jesus. I looked at this One before me, at His dusty sandals, His worn robe, His beard, His mouth. “So this is a grin,” I thought. I looked at His eyes. And they looked back at my eyes. And that’s when I began to follow Him. (Blind Bartimaeus, Ragan Courtney, edited)

Why do we have these stories in the Bible? Jesus healed two blind men 2,000 years ago. So what? What difference does that make?

Are these stories recorded so that we can be amazed about what Jesus did in the past? I don’t think that this is all that there is to it. The purpose of the story is to tell us what Jesus does. Around every corner, by the sea, in the city – Jesus is busy touching people and changing their lives. Jesus

is as alive today as He was on the road from Jericho – His outstretched hand is as ready to touch our lives with God’s grace.

There is a catch, however. You see, it is really only the blind that cry out. Of all the people we see in scripture that come to Jesus, they have one thing in common – they shared a broken pride. In every story, in different ways, life had pushed these people to the edge of their self-sufficiency. They each made a decision, which God’s word holds up to us as an example. Their decision: to step beyond their own self-sufficiency and into the healing grace of God.

The stories are not primarily about physical healing. Rather, Jesus gave sight to the blind men to show that nobody has to go through life spiritually blind. Jesus fed 5,000 to reveal that He is the Bread of Life. Each story of healing points beyond itself to the power of God to heal life, itself.

But God’s healing is hindered until our pride is broken. God in no way can do the things He wants to do in our lives because we are pridefully depending upon ourselves.

In Matthew 20:29-34, Jesus’ disciples were leaving Jericho. A large crowd follows Jesus. Some in the crowd are simply curious – hey, they want to keep a safe distance. Many of us follow Jesus that way, as well.

- Don’t get too involved – it might hurt.
- Don’t be too loyal – you might get branded.
- Don’t show too much concern – they’ll crucify you, too.

We have a lot of people like that.

- People who keep religion in its place.
- People who don’t stir the water.
- People who reek with mediocrity.
- One who knows how to keep his distance:
“Now I’ll pay my dues and I’ll come once a week, but – well – you can get carried away, you know.”

Yes, as Max Lucado said, you can get carried away

**Up a hill
to a cross
and be killed**

Follow at a distance and you’ll deny the Master. You won’t die for a man you can’t touch. But if you stay near to Him, in His shadow, you’ll die with Him gladly. (Max Lucado, *On the Anvil*)

Bartimaeus. Mark is the only gospel that gives us the name of one of the blind beggars on the Jericho Road. His cry, “Have mercy upon me,” is a cry directed to God by the afflicted in the Psalms. The large crowd begins to build, and the blind beggars, without ceasing, cry out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” The “Son of David,” of course, being the title for the Messiah from Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34. Earlier in His ministry Jesus had silenced those who declared Him to be the Messiah. But now He stands at the

threshold of Jerusalem, itself, where His messianic vocation must finally be known and fulfilled. The messianic secret is relaxed because it must be made clear to all the people that Jesus goes to Jerusalem as the Messiah and that He dies as the Anointed One.

As they cry out with the messianic title, the crowd tries to silence them. “Be quiet.” The crowd was embarrassed by them. Didn’t they have any pride? “Don’t you see He’s busy? Now, pipe down,” another must have said. But they continued to cry, “Lord, have mercy on us.”

When you’re broken already, what do you have to lose? When you’re already blind, how much darker can things get?

The crowd thinks it sees, and these two men are blind. They know what it is like to walk with Jesus. The blind can only speculate. Or so they suppose.

Two blind men, sitting on the side of the road – passing time, passing life – in the dust. They knew that they were blind. Did you hear that? They knew their blindness: broken eyes, broken lives, missed opportunities, no great catch for the brides-to-be, no parent’s dreams of success to be fulfilled, no great expectations for a prosperous future.

But when they heard that Jesus was going by, two blind men “saw” a chance for hope in a name they had heard – Jesus.

Life can humble you when your self-sufficiency is stripped away. God comes to the forefront.

We cannot be a people of self-sufficiency and, at the same time, receive the graces of God. Did you hear that? We cannot, at the same time, be people of self-sufficiency and receive the graces of God.

Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” A cry for mercy from a broken heart always grabs the attention of God.

“Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.” Tired of life in the dark, willing to step into the light, willing to see color and cloud, streams of water and of light.

Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. The crowd was embarrassed, and Jesus was embracing. Jesus sees not two meaningless beggars, but two broken lives who need the touch of grace that heals. Brokenness becomes the key, once again, to wholeness.

They received their sight and followed him. These two stepped not only into the light of the sun, they stepped into the light of life. The saving touch of Jesus always produces a desire to follow the healer, and a heart of healing always yields a life of proclaiming.

Brokenness.

You know, some of us try to come to Jesus in the safety of the crowd, not really wanting anyone to see or know – probably not wanting to tell our own selves – that we are broken, that we are blind, that we are lame, that we are sinners in need of a savior.

I'm not really sure whatever happened to brokenness. I guess it's just gone out of style. Society tells us that what we did wasn't all that bad. Our neighbors declare that our sin is no worse than the next guy's. And we convince ourselves that we're okay. And Jesus keeps walking past us, because He can only stop when we, in our own brokenness, cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on us."

Brokenness is always a part of repentance.

But we live in a world, today, where people don't want to cry out in their brokenness – more worried about what someone else might think than we are about admitting our need for healing.

Do you remember when John the Baptist was in jail? He was unsure whether Jesus was the Messiah – God's answer to sin and suffering. In Matthew 11:2, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is preached to the poor."

Psalm 146:8 – The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

Some of us are unsure whether Jesus is really the answer. So we sit in the dark, by the road to Jericho, with only one thing standing between us and a new life in Jesus' light. That's our pride. The tragedy is Jesus is passing us by, unnoticed.

But in this story, only the blind cry out. And in this story, only the blind are healed. We can hide in the crowd, untouched by Jesus, or we can swallow our pride and step forward into the healing of God's grace. Jesus is passing by – on His way to the cross. What do you choose?

Do you remember that curious story from Luke's gospel, the seventh chapter? Turn over with me to Luke 7:36-39.

Mark describes it this way in his gospel : "She broke the vial and poured it over his head."

As long as the thin, slender neck of the vessel was intact, the aroma was held captive in the family heirloom – the treasure of the perfume. Only after it was broken was the room filled with the delicious perfume. Only then – only in the brokenness of the vial – could the head and feet of the Savior be anointed.

The broken vial is really a symbol of the brokenness of the heart of the woman. She was a sinner. She knew it. The religious people knew it. And, yes, Jesus knew it, too. But she came as a sinner – like her vial – in brokenness for the master.

There were others there, in Luke's gospel. The Pharisees were there. They were smug. Brokenness? Never! In fact, they could never see their own brokenness because they're so busy pointing out the brokenness of others. In fact, they were the picture of wholeness, of completeness. They would not be broken, so they could not be forgiven.

Look at verses 44-50. In her brokenness, she was completely forgiven. "Your sins have been forgiven," He declares in verse 48.

Yes, there were two types of characters there on the road at Jericho. Two blind men, willing to cry out in their brokenness. And the others, who were embarrassed at their public profession of their need.

Yes, there were two people that day at the table with Jesus. Which one are you? Are you the sinner, with the broken vial and broken heart, pouring yourself out before God, seeking Him because you are nothing, feeling the pain, the humility and the vulnerability of brokenness – but walking away, forgiven?

Maybe not. Maybe you're too embarrassed. Maybe you're not willing to admit that you are blind, to cry out for help. Maybe you will not show up with a broken vial.

Indeed, it's not very comfortable to show your brokenness. What will people think? We are such a smug, proud people. Don't be afraid to be broken. It is then that God is able to heal you. It is then that the aroma of forgiveness fills the room.

The other character at the table of Jesus – is that you? Is that me? A Pharisee – painted holiness, hidden sin? He won't budge. He is clean in his own eyes. His nose is long, long. He can look down on sinners. He does not have enough of the presence of God to know of his own need, so he won't be broken.

How about you?

Only the blind cry out.

Are you willing to come today and admit, before God and man, that you are a needy person – that you have sin in your life – that ultimately you have gone your own way and not God's way – that you have willfully and deliberately broken the commands of God – that, quite frankly, you are a sinner in need of a savior? Some of you here today need to come and make that proclamation. There are some of you who are watching by way of television who need to make that proclamation. Jesus will come to you when you're broken.

Pride is an incredible force. It keeps us from doing a lot of things. But, most of all, it can keep us from coming forward to be part of the people of God through the obedience of baptism, publicly saying, "He has died for me, and I proclaim Him to be my Lord and to be my Savior."

Another kind.

1 Corinthians 11:24

“This is my body which is broken for you....”