

Luke 18:35-43, "An Eye-Opening Experience"

- ✚ "As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road.", **Luke 18:35**. We are told in Mark that this man's name was Bartimaeus, Matthew tells us that there was another blind man as well, but the focus is on this one. Luke says they were coming into Jericho and Mark says they were leaving Jericho which gives some who have too high of an opinion of what's between their ears the opportunity to say, "See, it isn't accurate." On the contrary, this incident demonstrates how precisely accurate it is because there were two Jericho's, the old Jericho and a new one that was built centuries later, you could literally be leaving Jericho and coming into Jericho at the same time. Additionally, the best place to position yourself wasn't on the outskirts of either one of the Jericho's, but in between them! This was holiday season, the week before Passover and a large stream of humanity would have been pouring south toward Jerusalem. They wouldn't go through Samaritan territory, so, they would cross the Jordan just below the Sea of Galilee and travel down the east side of the Jordan river until they were directly across from Jericho. They would cross the Jordan, this time of year, on a ferry because this is the exact same time of year that Joshua and Israel crossed the Jordan, a time when it overflows all of its banks. Jericho is the lowest major city in Israel, 850 feet below sea level and just 15 miles away was Jerusalem which is one the highest major cities in Israel.
- ✚ Such a land of contrast. It is not unheard of for it to be snowing in Jerusalem and sunny and 75 in Jericho. Other than the soldier's ear Jesus heals in the Garden of Gethsemane, this is the last miracle for the populace that Jesus performs. Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee paired with this miracle of the blind beggar form bookends to the absolutely wonderful story of miracles in the book of Luke. Jesus basically banished all disease and demonism from the land for the space of three years. These two miracles also serve as a picture of the expanse of Jesus' miracles geographically and metaphorically: Cana is one of the more northern towns and Jericho is very southern. Cana is one of the highest points in Israel and Jericho is one of the lowest. You could say that it's been downhill since the wedding in Cana to this point, all were in favor of Him back then but now they are plotting His death. It's a sad testament. He's filled Israel with supernatural power and presence, but it is now only the blind that see Him for who He really is.
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There is another amazing contrast that needs to be brought out here at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

- ✓ On the surface we see this gigantic crowd following Jesus, the movers and shakers of the culture are plying Him with questions, the superficial praise of the multitude that gives way to 'crucify Him' just four days later, and the trial, torture and murder of the God's Son. It is all in stark contrast to what God is actually doing which is rescuing people from their sins. In the macro: Jesus is the Lamb of God. He's not said to be our lamb, which is really strange because before this you brought your own lamb as a substitute for your sins. In this single case, God brings the Lamb. Your lamb was your attempt to get to God, but God's Lamb was His work to get to us.
 - ✓ In the micro: Jesus is becoming the Savior of some very unlikely people. In Jericho, it is this blind man and then it is a tax collector, the second to the lowest and the lowest classes of people in this culture. The blind were considered to be beneath the normal riffraff. Blindness was associated with sinfulness more than any other affliction: **John 9:2**. I guess they figured a person could sin in utero! A blind person could have all their other faculties, your entire body could be fit but your eyes kept you from all the possibilities that life offered. It was a considered a terrible curse coming to those who surely deserved it. But who was getting saved from more than just their blindness? "Your faith has saved you", Jesus says to him. The only class of people beneath the blind were the tax collectors, the most hated and despised of all.
 - ✓ The other person in Jericho who gets saved, on the same day, is a tax collector named Zacchaeus: **Luke 19:1-10**. All kinds of eyes are on Jesus at this point: the jealous eyes of the Pharisees, thrill seeking eyes, clueless eyes like those of the disciples, but mostly deceived eyes like the crowd or those of Judas. But Jesus is not distracted from His mission, Jesus is attracted to blind eyes that see Him for who He really is and repentant eyes that know they need a savior. It's an eye-opening observation when you realize that these two out of the thousands all around were the only two saved in Jericho.
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- ✓ There were big names there: Jericho was the Palm Springs and Las Vegas of Israel, desert oasis watered by cold springs. Popular among the elite, of all the palaces and places the Herod had built, he chose to spend his last days in his palace at Jericho; Herod dies in Jericho. Big names were there all around, you can be sure; all of them watching and listening to Jesus, but we know none of them, none of their names survive. We only know the names of these two, the least and the last among them who come to Jesus for the right reasons. It did the others no good to listen to Jesus or see Him. Just as it does us no good to hear about Him or witness His miracles, we have to place our faith in Him. It is eye opening when you realize the change that took place in these two men's lives. One, goes from sitting on the side of dusty street as a despised beggar who people shout down when he raises his voice, to walking in fellowship with the Son of God; all in one day. The first person this man sees with his newly healed eyes is Jesus, wow! The other man goes from being an object of scorn and hatred, to having Jesus stay at his house for the night. Zacchaeus went from robbing people to giving away most of his wealth in one day.

Again, why do we know their names? There were others saved who we are not informed on, but these two guys are made famous by the recording of their names. In all probability, we know their names because their names were known among the early church members. In all probability, these two were among the 500 whom Jesus appeared to after His resurrection and/or among the 120 in upper room on the day of Pentecost. In all probability, we are given their names by the gospel writers because they were well known to the early believers. These guys had been the despised, rejected and outcast members of society for most of their lives, and, in one day, they step into the family of God with God as their father, Jesus as their Savior, and a whole host of brothers and sisters, not to mention a home in Heaven! In one day, they went from outcasts to being among those who will walk with God in the New Jerusalem.
