

Quinquagesima, February 19, 2023

Readings: Isaiah 35: 3-7, 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13, Luke 18: 31-43

Faith Alone

The seeing are blind, while the one who is blind can see (Luke 18:31–43). Jesus tells the twelve that He is going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise again, but they cannot understand or grasp what He is saying. The meaning of His words is hidden from their sight. However, as Jesus makes His way up to Jerusalem, a blind man calls out to Him for mercy. This blind man sees that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, for he calls Him “Son of David.” Indeed, Jesus is the Lord’s anointed, the keeper of sheep (1 Sam. 16:1–13) who goes to lay down His life for the sheep. He is the incarnate love of the Father who suffers long and is kind, who is not puffed up, who never fails us (1 Cor. 13:1–13). Jesus opens the eyes of the blind (Is. 35:3–7) to see Him not according to outward appearances of lowliness, but according to His heart of mercy and compassion. Those who behold Him thus by faith follow Him to the cross through death into life.

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here we have, in the Gospel lesson, Jesus going towards Jerusalem. Luke has a very big travel narrative. He has Jesus moving throughout His ministry, going from place to place, and this is towards the end of that. And he finally puts us in a place of where He actually is in Jericho as He's heading towards Jerusalem. This is about the third time, the third major time, that Luke records Jesus explaining what is going to happen to the Messiah. He probably talked about it a lot more than that, but Luke records it at least three times. Now here Jesus says that this is what is written about the Son of Man by the prophets. So here Jesus is saying, "The Son of Man will suffer. He will die. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles, mocked, shamefully tested, spit upon, flogged and then they will kill Him." All of that He says is found in the prophets in the Old Testament. In other words, He is saying what is in the Old Testament testifies about Me, and this is what it means. And I don't know about you, but it seems fairly clear. Okay, He's going to be delivered over to Gentiles, mocked, treated shamefully, spit upon, flogged, and they'll kill Him. Third day He'll rise. There's not a lot of ambiguity in those words. They're pretty straightforward. They're pretty clear. And yet the disciples didn't have a clue what He meant. You've been with Him for three years and you still don't understand what He's talking about, even when He clearly lays it out step by step about what's going to happen?

But it was hidden from them. They were not able to understand because, one, it had not yet been accomplished and two, they were not given the Holy Spirit to interpret and to understand what was going on. We have the advantage of knowing and seeing exactly how it happened. But the disciples just could not figure it out. And for the most part, a lot of other people couldn't figure out either, partially because it did not fit their expectations. They were looking for the conqueror. They were looking for, what does Isaiah say? He says, "Be strong. Fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance with the recompense of God." So a lot of people were looking for power and might to throw out the Romans and establish the kingdom of Israel once more. The Son of David is going to come and rule. And so it just didn't fit their narrative. It was like cognitive dissonance. They heard the words, but it didn't make any sense because they knew it couldn't be that way. In other words, they were blind in their understanding. And it's very interesting to see.

Now they come to Jericho. This is a few days before, maybe a couple weeks before he goes into Jerusalem for Palm Sunday. And there's a blind man sitting on the corner. And this is a great place for the blind man to sit for a couple of reasons. One, it's the pilgrimage route that you take going into Jerusalem. Almost everybody goes through this way to go to Jerusalem for the Passover and for all the other feasts and festivals. So it's a great place to get money so he can survive. But there's another reason as well. He can hear what's going on. He can get the news of the day. And so he's sitting there, he's blind, he doesn't know what's going on. And he hears people, this great crowd coming. He says, "Who's here?" And they say Jesus of Nazareth. And instantly he cries out, "Son of David." How did he get from Jesus of Nazareth to the Son of David? He's blind. He's not followed Jesus around and heard His teachings. He's heard rumblings of it. But why does he call out Son of David, when the Greek Nazareth is very close to a word that also means branch. And so you've got this branch and he must have been thinking, this is what we've been able to figure out. He must have been thinking about the branch that comes out of the root of Jesse. And of course Jesse was the father of King David. And so he makes this connection from Jesus of Nazareth and all the things that he might have heard about him and he goes straight to Son of David. And he says, "Son of David, have mercy on me." This blind man seemed to understand better than anyone else what Jesus was all about because even the crowd rebuked him and told him to be quiet.

Kind of of the idea, why is Jesus here? Everybody was thinking along the lines of God will come with vengeance and with the recompense of God. Yeah. What's the next line in Isaiah? He will come and save you. Okay. When I think about vengeance and the recompense of God, salvation does not exactly fit. I think more of punishment than I do of salvation. It's like Isaiah takes a 90 degree turn at that second sentence. But why do we know that this is true? Look at what follows. "The eyes of the blind will be open, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy." These are the words that Jesus turned to and spoke when John the Baptist was in prison and said, "Are you the one or should we look for another?" And He pointed to these things and He said, "The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will speak, the lame will walk." And then He adds, "The dead will come alive." And He adds that to this, which is going to happen real soon with Lazarus just as a prequel. He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead very soon now. But this passage is what Jesus quoted as the reason why He's coming. In other words, Jesus comes to bring God's vengeance and the recompense of God. But for some reason, that means my salvation. And the blind man understood it. Everybody out there who could see didn't understand, but the blind man knew. He might have been blind physically, but he was awake and he could see spiritually because he knew that the Messiah, the Son of David, was coming to bring mercy, to bring love.

So what the 1 Corinthians passage is talking about is that it describes this word of love. It's the chapter that we use to describe love all the time. And we understand that this is a good explanation and good practice for us to try and live up to these standards. But that's not the primary reason this was written. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It's not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable or resentful. How many of you can say that you've lived up to that standard? All right. Not me. Okay. It's very easy for us to get offended. It's very easy for us to be irritable. It's very easy for us to be frustrated, to envy, to boast, to not be patient. I mean, again, the easiest thing for me to do is look at traffic and to tell that I'm not very good at this. I mean, you think about all the construction that is going on and you get stuck about a mile and a half back. How patient are you? How kind and generous are you with the words for the construction people? It's very easy for us to go from respectable individual to rude and resentful. We have to admit that, and in ourselves. So yes, this is something we should live up to and we should desire to.

But this is not primarily a description of what you and I are supposed to do. This is primarily a description about who God is. And because of who He is, then we learn what He has done for us. You see, you can replace the word love for God and it would read the same. God is patient and kind. God does not envy or boast. God is not arrogant or rude. God does not insist upon His own way. His own way is right, but He doesn't insist upon it. You can walk away from Him if you so choose. He loves you enough to allow you to walk away from Him. He doesn't want that, but He allows it. God is not irritable or resentful. God does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. He bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. God never ends.

You see, the blind man saw what the seeing people were blind to, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is Jesus, the Son of David. He comes not to rule, but to show mercy, not to conquer, but to forgive, at least in relationship to us because he had faith. And you notice that once Jesus calls the blind man to Him, how does the blind man address Jesus? Lord. The blind man sees while everybody else is blind. The blind man sees that the reason God came was love, the love that is going to bring vengeance and the recompense of God because God is rightfully angry at and resentful of sin. It offends Him. And the wages of sin is death. And so He has the right to come in His vengeance and to kill all and destroy all who have sinned. Now, that means you and me. However, however, He has also come to show mercy. And He did bring His vengeance upon the world. In fact, it was placed upon Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The vengeance of God was applied to His Son, who is also God, through whom He created the world. But He applied His vengeance upon Jesus so that He could apply His mercy to us. His vengeance is satisfied. The recompense of God is paid for in Christ. And so He has come with vengeance so that He might come and save us. So He endures.

We know in part, but we will be known fully and we will know fully, even as we are known in full right now. God sees us. And He wants us to have a childlike faith, a faith that trusts that He loves us no matter what, that He loves us often in spite of ourselves. The blind man saw. The seeing people were blind.

And I pray that you might receive the hope and the love and the faith that God gives because faith and hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love. Why? Faith and hope are what we have in relationship to God. We have faith that God is going to save us. We have hope that He's going to bring us to everlasting life. And why do we have those things? Because of love. Because love is God and God is love. And so love is the thing that endures forever. Love is above all things because love is God. And for the sake of Christ, we don't get the vengeance. We don't get the recompense. We get the love and the mercy. The blind man was told by Jesus, "Your faith has made you well." We often think that that means, well, obviously he got his sight. He was made well. Yeah, that's true. But more importantly, his faith was in the Messiah. Jesus is saying just as much, your soul is healed as much as your body, moreso because the healing of your soul brings about eternal life.

So let us be filled with the sight of the blind men, that Jesus comes in mercy to love us, to care for us, and to save us. And that even if we are anxious, even if we are frightened or scared, be strong and fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance. With the recompense of God, He will come and save you.

May that grace, that mercy, that peace, and that love be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.