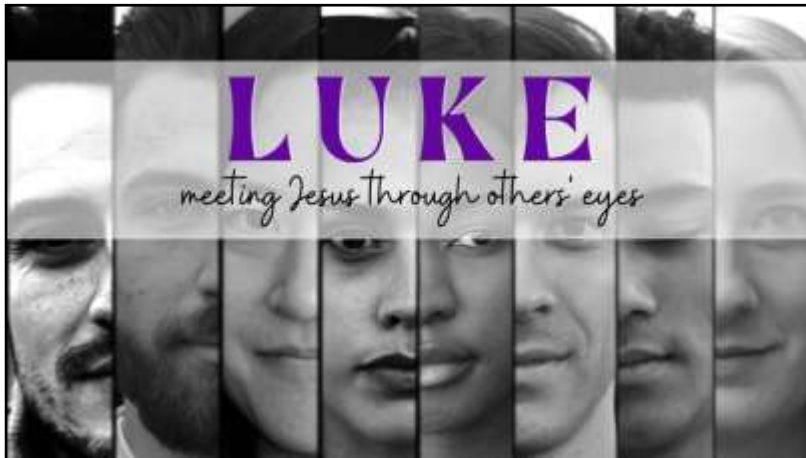


Luke: Meeting Jesus Through Others' Eyes
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Spring 2023
Pastor David Palmer
May 21, 2023

TEXT: Luke 18:35-19:10



We continue this morning in our spring series from the Gospel of Luke on “*Meeting Jesus Through Others' Eyes.*” I want to praise God publicly for the ways in which Jesus still allows people to meet Him today. We meet Him as we look at the Scriptures, and I want to praise God for the number of people who met Him yesterday at Belmont Correctional as a team from Kenwood joined with others to share Christ with the inmates there. This morning we look at two passages, and you'll notice that these passages represent two meetings, two very different people it seems at first glance. You'll notice that the first meeting is in Luke 18, the second in Luke 19. I want to remind everyone that the chapter divisions in the Bible are not original. The chapter divisions were added later by Robert Stephanus in the 16th century while riding horseback on his way to Paris. I think that accounts for some of the breaks. The first one he blew. Genesis 1 and 2 are in the wrong spot. Genesis 2 comes in a little early. This one, also, cuts right in the middle of two scenes that Luke actually wants us to hold together. He wants us to hear these together because both of these men, a blind man who is begging by the roadside and a wealthy tax collector who is sitting at a tax booth, as different as they are by human sight, actually share this core desire to see Jesus. This core desire to see Jesus is a desire to see Jesus because of their own condition of blindness. The blindness of the blind man by the roadside, as we will see, is easy to see, but the wealthy tax collector's blindness is a little more challenging to see, and yet he also is blind and longing to be set free to see by meeting Jesus. So, let's look at these two together.

The first meeting takes place as Jesus drew near to the city of Jericho. Jericho is the oldest

inhabited city on planet Earth. If you were here in the fall, you remember Jericho as the site where Joshua led our ancestors across the Jordan River. The walls of the walled city of Jericho came down, and Rahab, the woman of the night, put her faith in Christ and then came to be included eventually in the genealogy of God's family. It's a beautiful story. Jesus is coming to the same city, hundreds of years later. This city is not only the oldest city in the world, it is the lowest city in the world. You come from Jericho and you ascend to Jerusalem several thousand feet of elevation. As Jesus is close to Jericho, there is a blind man sitting by the roadside, and Luke tells us that he is begging. I want to ask you, in the chambers of your heart, to recall how you feel when you see someone begging. We all see this, and I think we all feel a complex set of emotions. There is a desire to help; there is a wondering what the back story is there. How did this person get in this situation? Sometimes we wonder if this is a real story. There are all these things that float in our minds, and then there is part of us that wants to move toward them with compassion, but then we have second guesses. I suspect that for many of us, the majority of the people we see begging we pass by without any type of visible response. I think most of us, when we do pass by, we have some regret. We're not sure what to do. Jesus sees this man, and as He's going by, the focus of the attention shifts to the man. The man hears the crowd going by. He can't see, but he asks what this might mean, and the people tell him that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

I want to invite you, whatever perspective you're taking so far on the story—the posture of someone in the crowd or a disciple with Jesus—to identify yourself with the blind man. For some of us that might be easier than others, but I want you to be in that spot as best as you can. Imagine that you can't see, but you hear activity, and you are told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. What happens to you when you know that Jesus is nearby? What happens to this man? He gets loud. He really does. The verb that is used here is a typical verb for yelling, or it's a verb used for loud communication. He cries out, speaks out loudly, to get Jesus' attention in Luke 18:38: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* Whatever your situation, whatever your need, when you get word that Jesus is nearby, ask Jesus for help. This is what launches inside this man's soul, and I want to give you permission, space in your soul, in your discipleship, in your journey of faith, that when you hear that Jesus is nearby, if you can't get anything else out, you can always shout out, “Have mercy on me.”

The Jesus Prayer is a prayer that is used predominantly in Eastern churches. It's a prayer that people often pray as they are walking or living. The prayer is just: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” You say it as you walk and breathe and live. This ask, “have mercy on me,” if you can't think to say anything else, Jesus Christ hears that. He hears that prayer, and notice the man addresses Him as Son of David. For some of us, that might be a surprising form of address. In fact, that's one of the first things we learn about Jesus in the New

Testament, that He is Jesus the Messiah, or the Christ, that He's the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. God had promised David that one of his descendants would rule and reign forever and that He would reign in righteousness, and that as He ruled and reigned in righteousness, His global reign would have particular care and attention for those who are marginalized, hurting, the poor, and those who are suffering. So, when this blind man calls out "Son of David," he is invoking that. He is identifying Jesus as the One He is promised to be. Jeremiah 23:5-6 says:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely."

So this man in need calls out to Jesus. What happens next is surprising. The people around him, tell him to be quiet. Isn't that surprising? Wouldn't you think that everyone would be excited? Here's a man calling out to Jesus for mercy, and instead, people tell him: "Hey, quiet down!" They rebuke him and tell him to be quiet, but he doesn't take their advice. Instead, he gets louder, and he cries out even more: "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Then we see something more remarkable still: Jesus stops! I think that's my favorite word in this meeting. Remember that Jesus is on His way to Holy Week and He stops. Jesus Christ stops to hear and respond to the plea for mercy. We read in Luke 18:40-41a:

"And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he came near, He asked him, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'"

What do you want Me to do? The blind man now calls him "Lord." Luke 18:41b:

"He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight."

Jesus says in Luke 18:42-43:

"Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."

That's the language of discipleship: "He follows Him, glorifying God." Do you remember, a few weeks ago, the leper who was healed on the way? When he realized he was healed, he started glorifying God, and he went back and began to worship Jesus. This man immediately follows Jesus; he glorifies God; and in the end, all the people who see this glorify God as well. This man's blindness that is transformed, his sight causes the people around him to praise God.

Let's look at the second meeting. In the second meeting, in Luke 19, Jesus goes a little further on His journey. He enters Jericho, and He was passing through. He's on his way to Jerusalem. Jericho, as I already mentioned, was an old city, and it is a low city. It was also a very wealthy

city. It was a wealthy city because Jericho sits at the trade intersection of the balsam groves. Balsam was an extraordinarily expensive item in the ancient world. The balsam trees grow in this region. They grow in modern Saudi Arabia, and balsam produces a resin that's used for very



expensive cosmetics. When you think of those gift certificates to the spa and essential oils, how much can you charge for something that small? Well, it's all about the quality and the purity of those ingredients. The aromatic resin from the balsam tree is part of what the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon. It grows only in this region.

Josephus tells us that the Roman army fought a serious-pitched battle to gain control of these balsam groves. Why is that important for our story? It's important for our story because Jericho is the intersection where all the goods from the balsam groves are transported, and so that is the place where taxes are collected over the balsam trade. The man that we meet there, named Zacchaeus, is the chief tax collector, and he is the one who is collecting taxes over the most expensive goods over the most traveled area. That's why he is also described as extremely rich.

As Jesus meets Zacchaeus, He sees a man who is wealthy. He sees a man who is on the margin of his society in a very different way than was the blind man. People who collect taxes are not usually popular. In the Roman world, there are direct taxes, such as a poll tax or a head tax and a land tax for property ownership. But the most frequent type of taxation are indirect taxes over the transport of goods. This job was farmed out and bid on like a contract worker. You bid on it based on how much tax you say you can collect. The contract goes not to the low bid but to the high bid. Whatever you said you could collect, you would pay into the Imperial treasury. But, if you could collect more than that, you could keep that. You can imagine that this is a system that has corruption baked into it, and so you can imagine why the people who are in charge of collecting these taxes are unpopular, disliked. They represent Roman power on the one hand, but they also represent a disloyalty to the community, and they represent a person who is siphoning off the profits from trade and commerce to line his own pocket. Yet, this man, who we might say is blinded by his ambition and by the accumulation of wealth, also wants to see Jesus. But, like the blind man, the people around him are in the way. In the blind man's case, they are in the way because they are telling him to be quiet, as though Jesus needs to focus on His way to Jerusalem. Here, the people are literally in the way because Zacchaeus is short and he can't see over the crowd. Yet, Zacchaeus finds a way around it. He identifies a

sycamore tree.

Israel has a number of really, really old trees. I have enjoyed seeing these old trees in Israel. Some of the trees in the Garden of Gethsemane are thousands of years old, and you know they were there when Jesus was praying there. It's really moving to think that if those trees could speak, they would tell us about that night. There are some other trees that are also really old. There is a date palm tree that's called Methuselah, who was the oldest man recorded in the Bible, because botanists found date palm seeds in the storage containers of Herod the Great on Masada, 2000 years old, and they put the seeds in a nutrient-rich solution and they germinated. So, this tree, a date palm, growing in south of Israel is nicknamed Methuselah because it's from a 2000-year-old seed. Even if you don't love trees, that's cool.

This sycamore tree, one of my favorite trees in Israel, is in Natanya. Look at this tree. This is a short man's dream tree. This is a tree you don't even have to think about how you're going to

get up there. There are about ten different routes beckoning to you. It looks like it has a built-in safety net. If you fall from one of those upper branches, you're going to land on one of those lower branches. Zacchaeus gets up in a sycamore tree. It has this type of a branches, but it also has big leaves, which is helpful for short people who want to not be seen, for someone who has a certain status in society and perhaps doesn't want to be as visible to



others in his quest to see Jesus. But, Jesus sees him, and the same word that's used of the blind man to see, Jesus now uses for Himself. "I see you, Zacchaeus," and He says in Luke 19:5:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus comes down and receives Jesus joyfully into his home. At this moment, the story has an infusion of tension. It all seems to be a happy story, and yet, when the crowd or the community saw that Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house, Luke tells us in Luke 19:7:

"And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'"

They all grumbled. "Grumble" is an onomatopoeic word. When you say "grumble," you are grumbling. This is the only time in the whole New Testament where we read that everyone grumbled. Sometimes a segment of us grumble. Grumbling is related to murmuring, which is also an onomatopoeic word, but murmuring usually happens with a portion of us. It is rare for everyone to murmur. But here, not only a segment, but everyone is grumbling. Everyone is

upset. Why do you grumble? You grumble because you're afraid to say publicly what you're really thinking. You're upset about something, but you can't quite verbalize it out so you get it halfway out, and sometimes you get it halfway out with a turn to the side. Grumbling comes not with direct look, not with open speech. It is partial and sideways, and if you're speaking halfway out of your mouth and sideways, you're probably not saying great things.

The people are grumbling. Why? We are ready for this as readers of Luke's Gospel because we heard this already in Luke 15 a few weeks ago when Pastor Scott preached on Jesus' most famous parable, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In Luke 19:1-2, we read:

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

That challenges our discipleship. When you and I see people who are sinful coming to Jesus, being received by Jesus, and then Jesus gives them forgiveness of sins and a place at the table, what's our reaction? The reaction of a thriving church is to say, "Hallelujah! Do you want to sit here?"

A group of us will be traveling in a couple of weeks to retrace Paul's journeys. We will be in Turkey and Greece and Italy. There are many things I love about being in these places, but one thing I love, especially in Turkey and Greece, is that when you're in public transportation, something happens that I never see here. It's like an echo of the biblical world. Lots of people take public transportation, so it's always crowded. It's not like Asian crowded, but it's crowded, and there is no one employed to push people onto the bus, which I liked when I lived in Asia. There, when the doors open, people dump out, and people working for the bus company push you on to load you. You don't have to hold onto anything on an Asian bus because there is nowhere for you to go. You're all packed in and you're all in it together. No one can get hurt. In Greece, public transportation is still crowded, but what happens when someone gets onto the bus who is older or has any type of physical need, people just pop out of their seats and say: "Take my seat. Here's my seat." I love to see that, and in a healthy, thriving church, when you see someone who has a visible need or an invisible need coming to Jesus, we have to pop out of our seats and say: "Would you like to sit here?"

Zacchaeus receives Jesus, and then he stands up in his home and addresses Jesus. He calls Him Lord, which is another shared link with the blind man. The blind man also calls Jesus Lord. In Luke 19:8, Zacchaeus says in Luke 19:8:

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

No one asked him to do that. He spontaneously, in response to meeting Jesus and being forgiven, springs into generosity and also restitution. Exodus 22:1 gives this formula:

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.”

So if you take someone's sheep and you sell it and profit from it, then you restore it by giving back four sheep. You don't give back just one sheep; you give back four sheep. That's where Zacchaeus gets this formula, if you will, or this category, but notice that his meeting of Jesus reworks his heart immediately. Remember, this is a man who was siphoning off community wealth for himself. Jesus doesn't give him an extended six-part series on generosity. He doesn't walk him through the nature of tithing. He doesn't talk about automatic giving in the local church. He just comes into his house.

I want us to see that the blindness of the man begging is linked in a very similar but profound way by Luke to the blindness of the man who thinks that the accumulation of wealth will be his happiness, and he is blinded by it. But, meeting Jesus, he's free. He's free like the man who receives his sight on the road, and now, Zacchaeus is free. He's free to follow Christ. He's free to live with generosity, and he is free from the blindness of idolatry. Then, Jesus interprets what just happened. He says in Luke 19:9:

“Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”

To be called a son of Abraham, a descendent of Abraham, that's family language.

Earlier, in Luke 13, Jesus healed a woman who had been sick for 18 years, and He says that “this woman is a daughter of Abraham.” Abraham in the Bible is the classic example of the pagan man, filled with idolatry, into whose life God burst and saved by grace. Then God said: “I'm going to bless you and in you and your descendants all families of the earth will be blessed.” We need to recover this as one of the punchlines of the New Testament. Sometimes we say: “If you believe in Jesus, then your sins are forgiven.” That's true. Sometimes we say: “If you believe in Jesus, then you will go to heaven when you die.” And that's true. Sometimes we say: “If you believe in Jesus, then you will be remade into a new creation.” And that's true. All those things are true and wonderful. But there's another punchline in the New Testament that I want us to make sure we recover and have in our active vocabulary, and that is: “If you believe in Jesus, then you are a descendant of Abraham.” Paul says in Galatians that it's all who have faith who are descendants of Abraham, and that language is so precious because it's family language. It means I get a new family history. It means that I'm also incorporated into a family that is identified as the ones to inherit the world. It means I'm no longer an outsider to God's promises, but I'm an insider. It means I'm adopted into the family of faith, and God has a large, growing family of faith.

The first time I ever preached a series of messages on my own was in Argentina. I'd been invited to preach a series, three messages. It was the first time in my life when no one who really knew me, none of my seminary professors, were around. It was my first, my maiden voyage. What was I actually going to do? I prepared, and I got the series ready, and I preached a series of three messages on Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King. It was a very significant moment in my life because I felt like I acquired my own preaching voice in that moment. At the end of the series, a woman came up and talked to me, and she was trying to tell me that she thought that one of her great ancestors had some Jewish ancestry. I could see she was really working to try to establish this connection. I sensed that it was important to her faith and identity and that she felt if she could just identify that, then she would be part of God's family. I asked her, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" She said, "I do." I said, "Then you are a descendant of Abraham. You are part of God's family." I could see the joy wash over her. God's family is open to all who experience new birth in Christ. It actually doesn't matter who your ancestors were. It doesn't matter the womb that you were born from. What matters is that you have trusted in Jesus Christ, that you been born again. Then Jesus says: "You are a descendant of Abraham, and you are part of My living, growing family that will inherit the new heavens and new earth with Me." Lastly, Jesus says in Luke 19:10:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

That's the glory of these two meetings. Let's apply it together.

Number one: ***Meeting Jesus for both of these men shows all of us that Jesus wants to open our eyes.*** Our blindness may be physical, it may be material. It may be a blindness by idolatry. But, whatever it is, whatever is making it so that we can't see clearly, Jesus wants to take care that.

Number two: ***Meeting Jesus will overcome barriers within our own community or sub-community.*** Sometimes the people around us aren't as excited about our wanting to see Jesus as we would hope. Sometimes they really try to block it or prevent it, or they're upset about it, and it's okay. So, if you're seeking to see Jesus and you're experiencing a little bit of turbulence in some primary relationships, it's okay. Jesus is strong enough to overcome that.

Number three: ***Meeting Jesus causes my community to see Jesus as well.*** Where Jesus leads in the end shows us that when you and I are allowed to see Him and He removes the scales from our eyes, we can see that what ends up happening at the end of both of these meetings is that others in my community come to see Jesus as well. When I come to see Jesus, other people around me see what's happened to me, and they see what's happened to you. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your Word, for Your presence among us, for opening our eyes to see You, and for welcoming people to meet You. We give You praise. We give You thanks, and we thank You for your capacity to work wonders among us. Continue to do that, we pray.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.