

Can't you see?

Luke 18:31-43

Any Star Wars fan knows that towards the end of Episode IV, *A New Hope*, Obi Wan Kenobi goes to face Darth Vader - something he says he alone must do. And as Luke, Han and Leia are about to escape the Death Star, Luke looks back to see the two of them locked in a lightsaber duel. Then, something happens - something that Luke didn't see coming, but Obi Wan planned all along.

Obi Wan lets Darth Vader strike him down (having just told Vader that if he does that, Obi Wan will become more powerful than he can possibly imagine). Down goes Obi Wan (actually, bizarrely, he just disappears), and 'NO!' cries Luke, his world suddenly thrown into chaos because he didn't get that this was Obi Wan's end game. In this episode of the first trilogy, Luke can never quite see what Obi Wan is teaching him.

In Luke 18:31-43, we read about people who can't see what's coming, and who need Jesus to open their eyes. And we discover that when Jesus does open our eyes, it changes the way we see life and the way we walk in life forever.

We're coming back to Luke (the gospel that is, not the Jedi) at a turning point. Jesus starts by taking His disciples aside and telling them, 'We're taking the road to Jerusalem now. I'm heading there to die.' It's not the first time Jesus has tried to tell His followers this. It's about the sixth time He's mentioned it in Luke's gospel, but never quite so clearly and deliberately as this time.

He's sitting them down, looking them in the eyes and telling His friends, 'This is it, guys. This is the end game. Here's what I've been heading for, and leading you towards, the whole time. It's all been about this: I'm the One that your Bibles (what we call the Old Testament) say would come to die. *That's* the mission.'

It's more than that, though. Jesus spells out the nature of the death He's heading to. It's no quick, quiet, sudden execution. It's death at the hands of the Romans. It will feature humiliation, insult, torture, mockery - and then a cross. That's how they did it. Where Jesus knew He was headed was to the most humbling, degrading experience of death out there.

Jesus knows all this is coming. If it's not too blasphemous, can you begin to imagine what was going through Jesus' mind as Jerusalem grew larger in His

sights with every step He took towards it? He's not keeping this fate to Himself though. He confides in His followers, and they will one day be able to look back and say to each other - 'This wasn't an accident, this death. It wasn't God cobbling together a plan B when it all went wrong. *It was the plan all along for Jesus to die.* We know that, because, do you remember? He told us ahead of time.'

As well as being confident about the death that awaited Him in Jerusalem, Jesus was equally confident about the resurrection to life that would follow a couple of days later. v.33 is short enough that you'd miss it if you blinked. But it's an astonishing claim for Jesus to make. 'I will rise back to life. Specifically, it will happen on the third day. This *will* happen.'

We're so familiar with the story that it just blends in. But when you think about it, what an incredibly bizarre and crazy thing Jesus was saying with a straight face and confident gaze to these disciples! They probably didn't buy the stuff about dying in humiliation - no, not their *Leader!* Not this man who was clearly sent by God and who had crowds of people praising Him wherever He went!

And they definitely didn't buy the stuff about 'rising again.' At least, they would immediately have wondered, 'What does He mean by that? He can't mean it *literally* - is this one of His riddles? What's He *talking* about?'

The disciples were experiencing two problems here to just hearing and believing what Jesus was very literally explaining to them. They're both problems that people still have today.

One problem was that they couldn't compute that *suffering comes before glory*. Everybody likes a victory in life, but they don't want to go through the defeats to get there first. Everyone enjoys being treasured and thought well of, but no-one wants to go through shame and humiliation first. Everyone likes a God who will lead them to better things, but they don't trust One who drags them through suffering first.

Jesus went to the cross before He rose to glory. And His followers couldn't see that that's how life with God works. 'So... you're leading us *lower* Jesus - to death first, in the hope that God lifts us up to life afterwards?' Can *you* see that that's how life following Jesus works?

Or do you think your suffering means that there is no God after all? Or that God's cheated on the deal because you thought things were supposed to get

better now that you're a Christian? May God open our eyes to see what Jesus told His disciples here: 'The road I'm leading you on is suffering and humility first, then God lifting you to life and glory.'

The other problem the disciples had is explained in v.34. They just didn't get it, any of this stuff that Jesus was telling them; they didn't know what He was talking about - because *its meaning was hidden from them*. Something... or someone... is at work to stop them *getting* what Jesus is telling them. We're not told who is doing the hiding. Is it God? Is it the Devil? Who is keeping these guys from seeing what Jesus is spelling out?

Whoever is doing the hiding, there's only one solution for these guys - that *God* would open their eyes to see what they just aren't *getting*. We read about Jesus opening things up for them after His death and His resurrection, in Luke 24. The disciples are still getting over their completely dumbfounded shock at seeing Jesus alive again, when we read - 'Then He *opened* their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day..."'

When we read on into Luke's sequel, the books of Acts, we read about followers of Jesus who *get* it now - now their eyes are open, their mouths are open too, telling everyone around them about who Jesus is, why He came to die, that He rose to life, and how that changes everything.

I've seen and heard the same thing going on amongst some of you. In Life Groups and in conversations, we've talked about how you used to read the Bible and just didn't get it at all - but now, you read it and see all sorts of things you're learning from it! It's like, along with this life-changing faith in Jesus you've got, you've been given a pair of glasses that helps you read what God is saying in the Bible and you *get* it now!

When you believe in Jesus, you are given God's Holy Spirit. That's God Himself, resident in your life. And He makes you able to see truths about Jesus that you could never see otherwise.

If you're a Christian, and you're desperate to see someone you know come to believe in Jesus too, remember that no amount of explanation, carefully prepared answers, taking them along to evangelistic events or anything else you try, is going to open their eyes to the message that Jesus died *for them* and rose to life *for them*. Only God Himself can open their eyes. So pray that He will!

And if you're not a Christian, and you just don't *get* what we're all so excited about, and you don't see the good news that's written in black and white here - I pray that God will open your eyes to see why His eternal plan of Jesus going to the cross to die in shame, carrying *your* shame, and rising physically back to life again, is the news that will set you free from this day on and forever.

I can tell you this news: *Everybody needs Jesus* - you're a sinner who's separated from God by your rebellion against Him, but you're also loved so much that Jesus went to the cross to bring you back home to God, forgiven and free. And others in your life can tell you this news. But you won't get captured, captivated and changed by it until God opens your eyes to it.

How does knowing that only God can open a person's eyes to the good news about Jesus change your approach to talking about Jesus with other people?

Now we move from a bunch of people who could actually physically see the Son of God in front of them but who were blind to what He was sharing with them, to a guy who physically couldn't see a thing, and yet saw more about Jesus than anyone else around him.

We meet the blind beggar at the roadside in v.35. It was, to begin with, another ordinary day in a desperate situation for this guy - no sight, no work. No social welfare, and no social status. He was one of the 'expendables' in this culture. *Beneath* the unclean and best-avoided. Just an extra blighting the view on the roadside.

That day, he was where he always was. But there was something different about that day. In v.36, we read about a crowd 'going by.' In v.37, when the man asks what this noise is he can hear, they explain to him: 'Jesus of Nazareth is *passing by*.'

This day is different. Something - or rather someone - is heading through this way. But soon He'll move on, and the crowd with Him. The blind man realises that *this* is the moment, if ever there was one, to seize the day. '*Don't let Jesus pass me by.*'

Isn't it strange (and also a bit sad really)? Wherever there's word of Jesus on the scene in the gospels, there's a crowd desperately clamouring to get anywhere near Him, hanging off His every word. Wherever Jesus comes up in conversation in our community and amongst our friends and families,

there's no crowds. Just slightly nervous and strained conversation almost apologetically whispered in the sidelines.

Well, whether you act like Jesus is an embarrassment to you, or you don't consider Him worthy of your social embarrassment to take some opportunities with Him, this blind man is quite different. He doesn't care at all about sticking out in the crowd.

'Jesus! Jesus, over here! Jesus, Son of David! Please, over here! Jesus, Son of God! Would you help me?'

'Who's that?' they say. 'Hey, quiet you! Get back to your begging pitch. We're on the move. Jesus is on a mission. Off to Jerusalem. Full throttle, no time to stop. Not completely sure why we're going there, actually, we don't understand what He's telling us. But we know we need to crack on.'

'JESUS! HEY, JESUS, SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD! ARE YOU THERE? CAN YOU HEAR ME? WILL YOU HELP ME?!?'

The crowd just called Him 'Jesus of Nazareth.' That guy from Galilee who had been teaching and doing amazing stuff that everyone had heard of. This blind man though... He called Jesus 'Son of David.' Twice he said it; he really meant it. He was saying that Jesus was the Messiah. The promised King sent by God to rescue God's people. To say 'Son of David' was to believe this Jesus was 'Son of God' also. This blind man sees more about Jesus than all of the middle class Jesus fan club that's getting in his way.

And he's not embarrassed. He will yell it out. 'Jesus! You're the Son of God! You're the One that can help me!' And he won't be shut up or brushed off by people around him telling him to settle down. He won't miss this chance. When they come and tell him, 'Come with us... Jesus says to bring you to Him...', and his heart starts thumping, and the crowd goes quiet, he doesn't lose his resolve.

He feels the footsteps stopping, and his arms released - then he hears the voice - a voice full of authority and of warmth - 'What do you want me to do for you?' This is it. This is the moment that he knew he mustn't let pass him by. What now? Will he say it? Will he be bold enough to just say what he really desperately wants from Jesus?

A voice inside him says, 'Just ask for food or money. That's familiar and easy. Don't risk your heart on hope. It'll break you.' But the man knows - this time,

this day, the day that Jesus was passing his way - no, this is *not* the day to settle for the everyday. 'Lord... I want to see!'

There are moments in your life where you can almost feel that Jesus is walking by your way. Moments where the God you've been putting off for years is just suddenly on your radar. Where it's like, rather than your ears pricking, your *heart* sits up and pays attention. You *know*, Jesus of Nazareth is passing your way just now.

But He's more than Jesus of Nazareth. He's Jesus, Son of God. As He passes your way, there is not the least bit of sense in you watching Him walk by. How many times have I watched someone sense Jesus is drawing near and getting their attention, and they let it go and get on with an unchanged, unsaved life in the same old pitch? *Don't!* Seize this chance to come to Him!

I suppose you'll only do that if you think you need to. After all, it's terribly embarrassing, all this 'seen to be chasing after Jesus' stuff. This blind man *knew* he needed Jesus, that's why embarrassment or being told to settle down wasn't going to stop him - no chance! If you *know* that what I said before - *Everybody needs Jesus* - if you *know* that's true, then seize the day and call out to Him *today!*

If Jesus asked you, 'What do you want me to do for you?' what would you say - if you were being really bold?

Pray - Bring these things to Jesus in prayer

I don't know what God will say yes to and what He'll say no to about what we've just prayed. I just know that there's no point in holding back from asking. And that when Jesus said 'yes' to this blind man's request, like all the other healing miracles He has done on our journey through Luke's gospel, these things are a foretaste of the complete healing and wholeness that every person coming into the Kingdom of God will one day experience.

We know that wholeness of being - body, mind, soul, relationship and community - is what life beyond death in Christ looks like, because these miracles illustrate it. When I first read v.42, I wasn't surprised to read that Jesus healed the man completely - but I was surprised by Jesus' answer to the man.

It wasn't '*I* have healed you.' Or, '*God* has healed you.' It was: '*Your faith* has healed you' - or actually, more literally, '*Your faith* has *saved* you.' Why does

Jesus put the focus on the man's faith, rather than on God's power? When I read around a bit, I found that this is how Jesus has spoken to quite a few characters in Luke.

To a notoriously sinful woman in chapter 7 Jesus says, 'God forgives your sins,' and He also says, 'Your faith has saved you.' To a woman healed from 12 years of serious bleeding in chapter 8, Jesus says, 'Your faith has saved you.' To a leper whom Jesus healed who came back to say thank you, Jesus says, 'Your faith has saved you.' And to this blind beggar who boldly asked for His sight back, Jesus says, 'Your faith has saved you.'

What do these people have in common? A woman whose sins were the stuff of people's gossip. Another woman whose bleeding made her unapproachable to her community. A leper. And a blind expendable that everyone else made a point of being blind to. As well as needing restored, either spiritually in forgiveness or physically to health, *they were all people who needed restored to life in community.*

Jesus tells these people that it is *their faith in Him that saves them* - and that word, 'saved,' means to be made whole. Life to the full. Your faith in Jesus restores you in all sorts of ways. It brings you forgiveness for sin and innocence before God, that's *promised* to every believer in Jesus. It may be that for some of us today, we experience something of physical healing as we pray - but all of us who are in Christ can expect wholeness of being when we finish going through the suffering and being raised to glory.

But as well as these things, if you have experienced isolation and loneliness, or being sidelined, rejected, forgotten, or having a reputation that makes people avoid you, your faith in Jesus restores you to family and community with Him and His people. v.43 tells us that when the man was healed, he found his place straight away with this crowd of people who were following Jesus. He joined in the journey to Jerusalem, and all that was coming there.

In the last week or so, I've been asking myself this question - 'What's the point of church?' There's lots of answers to that, I know. But that's just the question that was tugging at me personally this week, and into that I read this passage, and this comment that Darrell Bock makes about it:

'No matter how low our social position has been, when we come to Jesus, we are elevated to the highest possible station in life, the position for which we were created - a relationship with God. *The function of the Christian community is to reaffirm this valuation of the believer.*'

When Jesus said out loud to these people in Luke, 'Your faith has saved you,' it wasn't just so that they knew it. It's so that His followers knew it to, and made a point of welcoming and affirming the person whom Jesus had just announced was part of the family now too.

It's not just that *I'm* here to tell you that your faith in Jesus makes you whole. It's that *we're* here to tell each other that. To show each other that. To make each other feel that every one of us putting our faith in Jesus is being truly *restored* to life *together* with Him. To see in each other's eyes an un-faked, Jesus-rooted love and welcome towards each other that spells out 'This is what *real* life is like.'

Can't you see? Can't you see that Jesus always intended to die - to die *for you*? Can't you see that His resurrection is a game-changer, a life-changer *for you*? Can't you see that suffering comes before glory? Can't you see that Jesus is passing your way now, and you need to grab your chance to speak to Him *now*, and not let Him slide out of your view *again*? Can't you see that faith in Jesus makes you whole - in all sorts of ways, starting now and finishing forever?

If there's any of this that you can't see, I pray that God will open your eyes to see it. This week. Today, even. That you will truly see, truly believe and truly live.