

“Recover Your Sight” (Luke 18:35–19:10)

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Though my children are young, they often have homework to do. The other night, Simon had a math sheet with some basic addition problems. Then, he had a sheet with words that he had to place in categories based on their vowel sounds. Simple stuff. As he was working on them, I could see the answers immediately. But he couldn't. And that's the way it is for many areas of life. Some of us can see things that others can't. Some people can look at a broken machine, like a car, and immediately see what's wrong with it, while others of us wouldn't have a clue. Some people can look at what's in the fridge and in the cupboards and immediately see the ingredients of a meal, while some of us have a hard time boiling water. Some can see in their mind's eye how a room could be repainted and redecorated, with the furniture rearranged, to renovate a living space. Some of us can see groupings of letters and see a foreign language that we understand, while others see only gibberish.

Some of us can see what others can't see. Some of us could see those things with a bit of help. Others of us could never see those things.

And that's how it is with spiritual realities. Some people will immediately apprehend the things of God. They see the light, so to speak. Other people have an interest in those realities but need help seeing. Many will never see those things. Some of those people will be indifferent and apathetic. Others will try to keep other people from seeing what they cannot.

We will see this in two passages in the Gospel of Luke that are back-to-back. We'll begin by looking at how Jesus heals a blind man who cries out for mercy. That's in Luke 18:35–43. Then we'll look at how Zacchaeus comes to faith in Jesus in Luke 19:1–10. I think Luke means for us to see these two episodes together, juxtaposing them to show how two different men come to see Jesus, and how both faith and repentance are necessary for salvation. We might miss this juxtaposition because of the way one chapter number ends and another begins. But keep in mind that chapter numbers were added to the biblical text in the thirteenth century and verse numbers in the sixteenth century. They help us find passages, but they're not part of the original biblical text, and sometimes they create divisions where divisions shouldn't be.

With that being said, let's begin by reading Luke 18:35–43:

³⁵ As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” ³⁸ And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹ And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” ⁴² And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” ⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.¹

For some time, Jesus has been approaching Jerusalem (since Luke 9:51). That is where he will die by crucifixion. Here, he approaches Jericho, the only specific location mentioned in this section of Luke. He’s getting close to his last days before dying. He knows his death is coming, but he isn’t hiding. He’s not running away from it. He will perform one last miracle outside of Jerusalem to show who he is and what he came to do.

As Jesus approaches, he passes a blind man. This man is begging. He is completely relying upon the mercy of others to help him. The man hears a crowd, and since he can’t see what’s happening, he asks others. They tell him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Clearly, Jesus has a public reputation. People have heard about his miraculous healings and his teachings. I suppose the mention of Nazareth is important. This is where Jesus grew up, but it’s also where he was earlier in Luke, when he began his public ministry. He famously read a portion of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, which says:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19, citing Isa. 61:1–2).

Jesus said he came to fulfill that Scripture (Luke 4:21). He came to do all those things, including bringing sight to the blind.

The blind man can’t see Jesus, but when he hears that Jesus is coming, he can see something that no one else could. He sees that Jesus is the “Son of David.” He’s the only one in Luke’s Gospel to call Jesus that. David was the great King of Israel who reigned roughly a

¹ All biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

thousand years earlier. David was told that one of his offspring would reign forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16). This Son of David would be born, but he would also be called “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace,” and he would establish peace forever as he ruled with justice and righteousness (Isa. 9:6–7). He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit and would bring about an era in which there is more death. The nations would come to him (Isa. 11:1–10). At least, that’s what passages in the Old Testament promised. The blind man could see that Jesus was the one to fulfill these promises. Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed King in David’s lineage. He was the one who can fix the brokenness of the world.

So, the blind man calls out to Jesus, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” But the crowd rebukes him, telling him to be quiet, just the way that Jesus’ disciples rebuked people who brought infants to Jesus (Luke 18:15). They thought Jesus was too important to be bothered. But the blind man won’t be shut up. He continues to call on Jesus. He perseveres in faith, because he knows Jesus is his only hope of seeing again.

Jesus isn’t too important for the blind man. Jesus hears him. Jesus stops and asks the man what he wants. Of course, the blind man wants to see again. At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, said that God was going to “to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). That is what Jesus does here. He realizes that this blind man has put his faith in him, and he heals the man. He simply says, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”

And with that, the blind man sees. And what does he do? He follows Jesus, something that all people who respond rightly to Jesus do (Luke 5:11, 27–28; 9:23, 59, 61; 18:22, 28). He also glorifies God, giving God the credit for his healing and praising him. Again, in Luke, Jesus’ miracles lead to people glorifying God (Luke 1:64; 2:20; 5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 19:37). Other people also praise God for what Jesus has done for this blind man.

This blind man is a model of faith. He realizes his poor condition. He knows he can’t fix his own blindness. He realizes that others can’t, either. And he sees that Jesus is the only one who can. He recognizes who Jesus is and he calls out to him for mercy. Faith is the instrument through which this man is healed. He could already see the truth, and the truth set him free.

The fact is that this man could see much better than many others. Many people don’t see who Jesus really is. That is because they are spiritually blind. The apostle Paul, Jesus’ great

messenger, once wrote that the message about Jesus, the gospel (which means “good news”) is “veiled” to people who can’t see its truth. But then he wrote this:

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:3–4).

Those who can’t see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” are blind. They can’t see what’s really there. This good news is good in light of some other news we find in the Bible. God made us in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–28), which means we are supposed to represent him on Earth, ruling over the world by first coming under his rule and blessing. We are supposed to reflect his glory; when other people look at us, they should get some idea of what God is like. But we don’t represent and reflect God well. God is perfect in every way. He is love (1 John 4:8, 16). We are often not loving. He is righteous. We often do what is wrong. God made us to love him, worship him, serve him, and obey him. We don’t do that. He made us to love each other, and we often fail there, too. And the bad news for all of us is that God demands righteous people. He can’t have unrighteous people making a mess of his creation. So, God gave us a partial punishment for sin. He removed us from his special presence, which means living in a fallen world, in which there are bad things like natural disasters, diseases and disabilities, including blindness, and death. And if we continue to reject God through our lives, even until we die, we would be condemned after that to live an eternal life apart from God’s presence and blessing. We call that hell. That’s what we deserve.

Yet the good news is that God sent his Son, who took on a human nature, becoming more than just God, but also a human. And Jesus of Nazareth is that Son of David who will bring about peace and justice and who will rule forever. He is the only human who has ever been perfectly righteous, always doing what is right, always obeying, honoring, and worshiping God the Father, always loving other people. He is the true image of God. When we look at Jesus, we can see what God is really like. Jesus came to fulfill God’s designs for humanity. If we would only turn to him, we would find healing. Perhaps not in this life—Jesus never promised that he would heal every disease or fix all the world’s problems when he came that first time. But, in the end, Jesus will fix all those problems. And that is great news.

Not everyone can see this. But the blind man could. God must have given him that ability to recognize who Jesus is. I already quoted the apostle Paul’s words about our spiritual

blindness. Right after what I read earlier, in 2 Corinthians 4, he writes this: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Just as God created the universe, he can recreate us to be the people he wants us to be. He can shine light into our darkness, revealing the truth, showing that his glory is on display in the person of Jesus. If see our sad condition, as people who have sinned against God, and we see who Jesus truly is, and we come to trust Jesus as our only hope and help in this life and the next, then we can be healed.

That is what faith looks like. But faith is one side of the coin of salvation. The other side is repentance. And we get a model of repentance is the next episode in Luke’s Gospel. Let’s read Luke 19:1–10:

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus now enters Jericho, and again he is attracting attention. A crowd has come to see him. Among the people is a man named Zacchaeus, who isn’t just a tax collector, but a chief tax collector. As I’ve said before, tax collectors had bad reputations in first century Israel. They were known for collecting more taxes than they needed to and for pocketing the excess taxes. In other words, they were dishonest and greedy. But far worse than that, they were viewed as traitors. They helped the Roman Empire, the superpower of the world at that time and the occupying force in Palestine, collect taxes. They were aiding and abetting the enemy. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. This meant that he had paid the Roman Empire for his position. The Romans farmed out tax collection to people like Zacchaeus, who would pay the Romans what they needed once a year, and then had taxes collected in his area. He was free to charge more than what he needed, and he pocketed the excess funds. That’s how he became rich.

I used to deliver *The Salem Evening News*, a local newspaper, for about two years when I was a boy. I had about twenty-five papers delivered to me, and I had to deliver those papers and collect money from the customers. I think the price was something like \$1.60 per week at that time. I had to pay the newspaper company each week, and I was allowed to keep whatever was left over. If I told the customers that the price was \$2.50 or \$3.00, and then I pocketed the rest, I would be like a tax collector. If I was the guy who delivered the papers and collected from the paperboys, telling them to pay more than they needed to, I would be like Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector.

Zacchaeus wasn't just a tax collector who was rich. He was also short. He had a problem seeing over the taller people in the crowd. Earlier this year, I attended the Patriots' Super Bowl parade in Boston. I had to go into the city for something, so I decided I would watch the parade, too. The city was packed, and when I arrived there, it was hard to find a space along the parade route. I did manage to find a spot on Tremont Street, and though there were some people on the sidewalk in front of me, I could see the parade because I'm fairly tall. But there were others who couldn't. I was across the street from the Granary Burying Ground, right next to Park Street Church, on the edge of Boston Common. There was a man who went through that cemetery and climbed onto a large stone pillar or column in order to get a better view. The police kindly invited that man to come down.

That's like what Zacchaeus does here. Since he can't see well, and since he really wants to see Jesus, he climbs a tree. Other people probably thought he looked foolish, but he didn't care about their opinion. After all, they already hated him for being a tax collector.

When Jesus passes by, he calls out to Zacchaeus. He calls the tax collector by name. How did Jesus know his name? It's probably because he doesn't just have a human mind, but he also has a divine mind, and God is omniscient. (See John 1:47–48 for a similar event.) Jesus knows this man.

Jesus asks Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and he gives him a reason: "I must stay at your house today." This is odd. Why must Jesus stay at this man's house, this man with whom he hasn't had a relationship yet? Luke often uses the language of "must" to describe things that Jesus had to do, or things that had to happen (Luke 1:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:16, 33; 15:32; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44). Theologians call this "divine necessity"—these things have to happen

because they are part of God's eternal plan. Jesus had to spend time with Zacchaeus because Jesus came to save people like Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus responds to Jesus eagerly. He comes down from the tree with joy. If one of the Patriots asked me to come out of the crowd and get on one of their duck boats, I would have been full of joy, too. But Jesus is far more important than a star football player. And Zacchaeus seems to know this.

Though Zacchaeus is excited about Jesus, the crowd isn't excited about what Jesus is doing. They grumble. They complain that Jesus is going to go the tax collector's house. The Jewish religious leaders have already grumbled that Jesus would spend time with tax collectors and other sinners, and that he would even dare to eat with them (Luke 5:30; 15:2). In their eyes, such sinners were too unrighteous, too unclean to spend time with. How could Jesus be a teacher and even a prophet, much less the Messiah and the Son of God, if he's hanging out with deplorables like Zacchaeus?

But the grumbling crowd doesn't seem to affect Zacchaeus and Jesus. When Zacchaeus is in Jesus' presence, he announces a change in his life. He is now going to give half of his belongings to the poor. On top of that, he is going to give back four times as much as he defrauded from others. In the Old Testament Law, the Israelites were required to give away about 20 percent of their earnings. This was considered generous. Zacchaeus went far above and beyond what Israelites were supposed to give away. And the harshest penalty for stealing, in terms of paying back what one took, was to give four or five times the amount taken (Exod. 22:1; 2 Sam. 12:6). But Zacchaeus does this, and he seems to do this voluntarily. That's because he has come to see how he has been greedy and dishonest, and he has come to see who Jesus is. If he wants to follow Jesus, he must renounce his old ways. He must straighten up and fly right.

This is what repentance looks like. When we put our trust in Jesus, we realize that we cannot fix ourselves and that only Jesus can make us whole. Salvation is a gift, but it's a gift that is meant to change us. We can't have real faith in Jesus if there's no change in our lives. We must repent of our sins, turning away from our old ways of doing things. Zacchaeus repented of taking too much in taxes. That's exactly what John the Baptist had told tax collectors to do in Luke 3:12–13. And he freely gave away what he didn't need. He must have realized that Jesus came, not to collect taxes from him, but to pay his debt. And if Jesus gave Zacchaeus everything, the least that Zacchaeus could do was share his wealth with others. He is the opposite of the rich

man that we met last week (Luke 18:18–23). That rich man refused to part with his wealth in order to follow Jesus. Zacchaeus is that rare camel who fit through the eye of the needle, all because of the grace of God. God had opened up his eyes to see the glorious face of Jesus. When Zacchaeus could see rightly, he gave away what he didn't need, and he tried to make up for his dishonesty. That is repentance.

When Jesus hears what Zacchaeus resolves to do, he declares that salvation has come to Zacchaeus. And he says that Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham. As a Jewish man, Zacchaeus could already trace his ancestry back to Abraham, the great father of the Israelites who lived about two thousand years earlier. When Jesus says that Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, I think he's saying that he is a true son of Abraham. That means he, like Abraham, is trusting God. Abraham trusted God's great promises to him, and that faith was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Zacchaeus trusts Jesus and he is declared righteous. The apostle Paul says that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 4:16–17; Gal. 3:7–9, 29).

Jesus also states why he came. In verse 10, he says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Jesus is the "Son of Man," a divine figure prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 7:13–14). He came to find the lost and to save them, the way a shepherd looks after lost sheep. Jesus knows who his sheep are. In this case, he came to find a particular sheep named Zacchaeus.

Jesus doesn't say here how he saves the lost. As I said earlier, part of how he saves the lost is by living the perfect life that we should but do not live. But that's only one side of the coin. Just like faith can't be separated from repentance, Jesus' righteous life can't be separated from his atoning death. When he died on the cross, he paid the penalty of sin that we should pay. He didn't just die a terribly painful physical death. That would be bad enough. But on the cross, he experienced the wrath of God, God's righteous judgment against sin. And that is something we can't fully appreciate. Basically, Jesus experienced hell on the cross. He did this so that all his people could be set free from condemnation and eternal death. All who come to Jesus are credited with his righteousness, his moral perfection, and their sins were credited to him. When he died on the cross, he was regarded as sin itself, and he was crushed. Because God is a holy judge who can't have sin exist forever in his creation, and because he desires to save lost people like you and me, he took our sin, put it on his Son, and crushed him. And the Son, Jesus, took this on voluntarily.

It's interesting to compare the blind man and Zacchaeus. Both men were outcasts from society, though for different reasons. The blind man was poor and had to beg. His disability separated him from society. Though he was rich, Zacchaeus wasn't respected. He was sort of like Martin Shkreli, the CEO of a pharmaceutical company that jacked up the price of their antiparasitic drug from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill. You might have seen the smug Shkreli in front of members of Congress. He was called "the most hated man in America" and was eventually sent to prison. He was rich, but hated. Zacchaeus was a bit like that.

Both men needed healing. Zacchaeus needed salvation just as much as the blind man. We have a tendency to think that the poor and the sick need salvation more than the prosperous. But the fact is that all have sinned and all are in need of salvation. This includes poor and rich, drug addicts and the clean and sober, people with disabilities and pro athletes.

Both men had a problem with physical vision. The blind man was obviously blind, and Zacchaeus had a hard time seeing over the crowd. But both men pursued Jesus.

Both men were opposed by crowds. But they didn't listen to the crowds. They persevered in their pursuit of Jesus.

Both men received salvation, and their lives were changed. Both followed Jesus. Both experienced Joy. Both glorified God. They weren't saved in order to do have easy lives, or to live for themselves. They were saved so that they would follow Jesus and glorify God.

The question for us today is, are we like these men? Do we have the faith of the blind man, seeing what only the eyes of faith can see? Are we repenting like Zacchaeus, not only putting an end to our sinful ways, but also trying to do what is right?

If we have truly come to Jesus, we will trust in him. We will see things that not everyone can see. We will see that God is the Creator of the universe and everything exists for him. The whole point of life is to live for our Maker. We will see that we have failed to do that. And we will see that Jesus is God's lifeline, the only means we have of coming back to God, of getting into a right relationship with him. We will trust Jesus and we will start living as we should.

If we have the faith and repentance of these men, there may be obstacles in our way, things that might stop us from following Jesus. But we won't let those obstacles keep us away. A lot of people say they are interested in Jesus, but they let other things stop them from pursuing a relationship with him. I think that being part of a local church is one important part of following Jesus. The church is Jesus' design for his followers to worship together, live together, declare the

gospel together, and teach together. Yet many people make lame excuses for not even showing up when the church meets. The blind man wouldn't let his blindness stop him from calling upon Jesus. He wouldn't listen to the crowds who tried to tell him to be quiet, to tell him that he wasn't important enough for Jesus. Zacchaeus also wouldn't let the crowds stop him. He didn't care if he looked foolish climbing a tree. He didn't care that the crowds grumbled, saying that he was too sinful to spend time with Jesus.

The fact is that Jesus came for people who are unimportant in the world's eyes. Jesus came for the worst of sinners. He has come. We're hearing about Jesus right now. Are we responding to him the way that these men did? Are we pursuing him, not letting obstacles stop us? Are we ignoring the crowds, the ones who can't see who Jesus really is? Are we trusting in Jesus and repenting of our sins? Are we following him and joyfully praising God? If not, salvation has not come to us, and we are not true children of Abraham, true children of God.

If that is where we are, then we need to run to Jesus. I can't make this happen for you. But if you are starting to see who Jesus is, I would love to tell you more about him. I would love to talk to you about what it would look like for you to follow Jesus. I'd like to talk to you about how you could serve God in this church and help us glorify God together.

But if you are a Christian, keep this in mind. Part of our goal is to tell other people about Jesus so that they, too, can follow him. We want other people to enter God's kingdom, to be freed from sin and condemnation, and to live forever with God. There will be a lot of people around us who can't see the truth. Some of them will oppose us. Many simply won't care. But there will be a few who see. Some might see the truth instantly, like the blind man. Some people might need a little help to see the truth. The world has crowded the truth from their sight, and they need you to tell them the truth, to explain it to them in ways that they can understand. We have to be willing to look for those people and help them.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And all his sheep will be saved. We can save no one. We can't pay for anyone's sins. But we can seek out the lost and tell them how they can be saved. We should do this. Yes, many people won't see the truth. But some will. And they will follow Jesus joyfully, praising God and living lives that glorify him. Let us go out and find those people.