

THE MERCIFUL SON OF DAVID

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:31–43

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:39)

1. Geetha, David, “The Evolution of Cataract Surgery,” *Missouri Medicine: The Journal of the Missouri State Medical Association*, January–February, 2016, 58–62. bit.ly/TPWMMissMedicine (downloaded Dec 5, 2023).
2. Fred Hollows Foundation, bit.ly/TPWFHollows (downloaded Dec 5, 2023).

Daily Bible Readings

M	Dec. 23	Luke 4:14–21	Mercy for Those Who Suffer
T	Dec. 24	Luke 6:27–36	Show God’s Mercy to All
W	Dec. 25	Mic. 7:14–20	God Delights in Compassion
Th	Dec. 26	Ps. 25:1–10	Remember Your Mercy, O Lord
F	Dec. 27	Ps. 25:11–22	God Relieves a Troubled Heart
Sa	Dec. 28	Luke 18:9–14	Mercy for Sinners

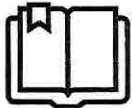
STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Maybe you know someone who has had cataract surgery. Maybe you’ve had that surgery yourself. After healing from surgery, the change in vision is remarkable. Equally remarkable is that surgeons have treated cataracts since the fifth century before Christ.¹ Early surgeries involved moving the cataract aside. In 1753, a cataract was removed for the first time. In 1949, a surgeon removed a cataract and inserted a replacement lens. Cataract surgeries continue to improve, and today they are extremely safe.

Cataracts continue to impede vision and cause blindness where surgery costs are insurmountable. Fred Hollows (1939–1993), a New Zealand-born ophthalmologist, found his life’s mission in the Northern Territory of Australia, working to improve eyesight for Indigenous Australians.² In the 1980s, he offered training in Southeast Asia and Africa, where he discovered that the cost of replacement lenses for cataract surgery was the major obstacle in restoring sight. He founded laboratories in Eritrea and Nepal to manufacture and provide lenses for a fraction of the cost of lenses made in the U.S. or Europe. The Fred Hollows Foundation continues his work of bringing sight around the world.

Untreated cataracts can lead to blindness for people who must cook over an open fire. For people who work in many trades, poor vision can cost them their job. Vision matters in so many areas of life, and Jesus' healing of several blind people shows he knew how significant vision is. We see the physical world with our eyes. We perceive emotional and spiritual realities with our eyes, hearts, and minds, which help us "see" real things that cannot be seen, measured, and quantified. Jesus brought sight to his followers, and that sight involves their (and our) whole beings.

Creator God, you gave us eyes to see the physical world and the eyes of our hearts to perceive emotional and spiritual realities. Heal us when we are blind to things that are important to you. Guide our seeing, so that we can grow in seeing as you see. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:31–43

18:31 Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. ³²For he will be handed over to the gentiles, and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. ³³After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again." ³⁴But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

³⁵As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." ³⁸Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰Jesus stood still and ordered the man 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 see again." ⁴²Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." ⁴³Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God, and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

RECOVERY OF SIGHT

Luke 18 opens with stories of persistence: a widow, a repentant tax collector, and parents with their children (vv. 1–17); these parallel the persistence of the blind man (vv. 35–43). The middle verses of the chapter present the story of a man who is spiritually blinded by his possessions (vv. 18–25), a parallel to the blindness of the disciples who cannot comprehend Jesus’ true purpose (vv. 31–34). The healing of the blind man fulfills several functions in this chapter. It provides a picture of seeing and faith that contrasts with the rich man and the disciples. This story of physical healing, typical of Jesus’s ministry, demonstrates the health and well-being brought by the kingdom of God, while also illustrating what it means to truly see and be saved.

Early in Jesus’s ministry, he reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in his home synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21). Jesus chooses the first two verses of Isaiah 61, which announce good news for the poor, release for captives, and “recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). In our modern Bibles, Isaiah 61 does not contain the words about healing the blind, because our translations are based on the most reliable Hebrew texts. The Greek translation of the Bible (the Septuagint) and some ancient Hebrew texts contain the words about restoring sight to the blind, so Jesus must have been reading from a scroll copied from those texts. For Luke, healing this blind man evokes the good news and release foretold by Isaiah that Jesus read aloud in the synagogue in Nazareth.

In the first century, blindness was considered God’s judgment for sins committed (John 9:1–2), so receiving his sight would have been the equivalent to being rescued from God’s judgment. By naming Jesus “Son of David,” the blind man also places himself under Jesus’s authority as the Davidic heir to God’s kingdom. The man could have heard Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:41), as a superficial query into his post as a beggar (see Acts 3:4–6). Instead, this persistent man let Jesus’ question sink in deeply to expose his true need, helplessness, and vulnerability, a model for us today.

Luke 18:31–34 contains the seventh allusion to Jesus’s death in Luke (see Luke 5:35; 9:22, 44–45; 12:49–50; 13:32–33; 17:25). Every time Jesus mentions his death, the disciples reveal their inability to see the truth; this contrasts with the blind man’s

faith and insight about Jesus's true identity. The Son of David inaugurates a kingdom of healing, restoration, wholeness, and vision.

? What does this persistent man teach you about approaching Jesus and responding to Jesus' work in his (and our) life?

FREEDOM TO SEE

After Jesus reads the first two verses of Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16–21), he indicates that Isaiah's words have been fulfilled in himself, here and now. Thus, he is teaching that he has been anointed by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the “year of the Lord's favor” (vv. 18, 19). The kingdom Jesus announces is characterized by well-being in every area of life. The blind man's physical vision is restored, and his release and recovery extend to his spiritual vision as well. He has encountered Jesus. He becomes a follower of Jesus, and his healing and praise of God are a powerful witness to others.

Jesus accomplishes this work of healing. Yet Jesus obviously noticed the man's repeated shouts because Jesus tells the man, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you” (Luke 18:42). The man's persistence raises a perennial question. Did the healing come because the man persisted in trying to draw Jesus's attention? Or did Jesus heal as a sign of God's kingdom, grace, and power now present? The answer must be both. Our efforts make a difference in our spiritual healing and growth, but God's grace and goodness remain at the center. Describing how these factors work together in healing is challenging.

Perhaps the key component of the man's faith is shown not so much in his persistence but in the words he uses as he shouts: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 38). The man is physically blind, but he sees that Jesus stands in the Davidic line of kingship and he sees Jesus as a source of mercy. Maybe the man is thinking about the psalms attributed to David that call for God's mercy. Psalms 51 and 57 ask God directly for mercy, but many other psalms attributed to David call for God's help (see Ps. 4, 5, and 7). Maybe the man remembers that God wouldn't let David build a temple because God wanted the people of Israel to continue to experience God dwelling with them wherever they go, including now in Jesus.

The specific help that the man asks for relates to physical sight, but Jesus gives him much more, including the ability to see who Jesus is, the desire to follow Jesus, and the ability to do so. The healed man's praise of God speaks to others in a joyfully contagious way, as does his immediate willingness to follow Jesus. The kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus, is good news of freedom and release from whatever binds us. The kingdom of God reveals God's favor to us (Luke 4:19).

? When you think of being healed from spiritual blindness, what comes to mind?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

In the complexity of life today, we may enjoy stories where things are clear. Jesus heals us. We follow him. Our lives witness to Jesus. Sometimes, however, simple and straightforward stories are aggravating. What about the chronic illness I have prayed about for years? What about those many moments when I want to follow Jesus, but somehow I do the thing I don't want to do? What about the family members who don't see my faith as a positive witness but instead view it as an irritant?

In these moments, we embrace the notion of spiritual vision, which God gives us through the Holy Spirit as we follow Jesus. Even in the middle of chronic illness, sometimes we can see God's kingdom present through small victories, kind medical professionals, growth in compassion, and people who come alongside to help. In our best moments, we can see our repeated failures to follow Jesus as a source of forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Our friends and family members who do not appreciate our faith in Christ provide an opportunity to pray consistently and to see small openings to serve.

We gain spiritual vision through the ordinary components of the Christian life, including the Bible, prayer, Christian community, service, and worship alone and with others. We gain spiritual vision through our willingness to slow down and notice the beauty of God's world and God's acts in our lives, in the lives of those we love, and in our neighborhood, city, country, and world. We gain spiritual vision by recognizing that we need it and that we depend on God's Spirit to help us see what really matters and what faithful and joyful living looks like in the

midst of challenges. We regain spiritual vision over and over as God continually forgives our sins and restores our souls.

Stories of spiritual vision in the Bible almost always involve other people. When we're scared or overwhelmed, we may wish to run away to the wilderness like Elijah and have angels minister to us (1 Kings 19:3–8). In most instances, the angels who care for us and help us regain spiritual vision are friends, family members, members of our faith community, and sometimes even strangers. We need spiritual vision so we can see the gifts that come to us every day from God and through the people in our lives. Seeing a few gifts helps us to see more gifts. Pondering the role of clear spiritual vision in our lives can help us pray for it and look for it in new ways.

? What has helped you experience renewed spiritual vision and enabled you to see God's kingdom?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. The man who was blind could have heard Jesus's question (18:41) as a superficial query into his post as a beggar (see Acts 3:4–6). Instead, he let the question sink deeply in to expose his true need, his helplessness, and his vulnerability. Jesus answered him and healed him at the level he internalized Jesus's words.
2. It is important to note that where Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you" (Luke 8:48), he refers to someone's belief in Jesus's ability to rescue them, not their faith that Jesus will do as they ask (Mark 9:24). Our faith is in God's strength and goodness to rescue/save, while accepting God's sovereignty and what might seem the strangeness of God's plan. We know God can do it; we ask that God's will be done.
3. We see Luke's emphasis on witness. Here we see the contagiousness of witness: we who experience God's rescue find our testimony bubbling out of us. Those who hear then bear witness themselves and honor God for God's actions.