

Tested Sight Matthew 20:29-34

*Matthew 20:*³⁴ *Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed him.*

A great longing satisfied

A great not rightness in their lives made right

The Blind, the blind who called out to Jesus for mercy, see

And this gospel story prompts us to think - If Jesus can satisfy our longing for life instead of death

If He can make right what is not right in us, make whole what is broken and damaged

If He can shine the light of life in our dark hearts

Then, like the blind men, it's a reasonable conclusion to think it worth a little effort

Worth a little embarrassment and disapproval

To come to Him, and to stick with Him

Reasonable

The satisfaction of that longing for sight starts in the case of the blind men with a very reasonable conclusion about Jesus seen in their bold identification of Him as Son of David

*Matthew 20:*²⁹ *As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.* ³⁰ *There were two blind men sitting by the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"* ³¹ *The crowd demanded that they keep quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"*

Jesus is leaving Jericho, the last stop on the pilgrim route trod by many as they came to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

And hearing from the crowd that Jesus is passing the blind men cry out to Him

"Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Son of David – it is this identification of Jesus that lies behind their determination to be heard by Jesus

Son of David.

The Son of David was the longed for heir of God's promises to David. He was the King who would bring God's judgment and salvation, the One in whom the promises of an eternal reign, when God's people would know peace, would be fulfilled [2 Sam. 7; Is. 9:1-7, 11:1-9; Psalm 2; Ezk. 34; Amos 9:11-15]

2 Samuel 7: "The LORD declares to you: The LORD himself will make a house for you. ¹² When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. [When he does wrong, I will discipline him with a rod of men and blows from mortals. ¹⁵ But my faithful love will never leave him as it did when I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you.] ¹⁶ Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever." [7:10-11]

And that promised peace was not just the cessation of war

It was wholeness, security, the flourishing of the lives of His people, God's people, the renewal of creation

It was the time when, freed from their enemies, the ravages brought by Adam's rebellion against God, the rebellion continued and intensified in his descendants in violence, destruction, oppression, God's people and creation would be healed, made whole

You heard that time described in Isaiah

*Isaiah 35:³ Strengthen the weak hands,
steady the shaking knees!*

⁴ Say to the cowardly:

“Be strong; do not fear!

Here is your God; vengeance is coming.

God’s retribution is coming; he will save you.”

*⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

*⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy,*

*for water will gush in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;*

*⁷ the parched ground will become a pool,
and the thirsty land, springs.*

*In the haunt of jackals, in their lairs,
there will be grass, reeds, and papyrus.*

*⁸ A road will be there and a way;
it will be called the Holy Way.*

*The unclean will not travel on it,
but it will be for the one who walks the path.*

Fools will not wander on it.

*⁹ There will be no lion there,
and no vicious beast will go up on it;
they will not be found there.*

But the redeemed will walk on it,

*¹⁰ and the ransomed of the LORD will return
and come to Zion with singing,
crowned with unending joy.*

*Joy and gladness will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee.*

The Son of David would Himself bring that wholeness, would give that wholeness

And it was right for the blind men to look to the Son of David for their healing

But was it reasonable to identify Jesus as that Son?

Or were they just indulging in wishful thinking, desperate people grasping at straws

No. After three years of Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee and Judaea theirs was a reasonable identification – based, not on what they have seen, but on what they have heard

For they have heard what we have heard in the gospel, and more

They have heard of Jesus’ healings, what Jesus described to John’s messengers.

“The blind receive their sight [9:27-31], the lame walk [9:1-7], those with leprosy are cleansed [8:1-4], the deaf hear, the dead are raised [9:18-25], and the poor are told good news.”

Those healings were well known [14:14, 34-36;15:29-31] – crowds came to Jesus for healing -15:29 ff

*Matthew 15:²⁹ Moving on from there, Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee. He went up on a mountain and sat there,
³⁰ and large crowds came to him, including the lame, the blind, the crippled, those unable to speak, and many others.*

They put them at his feet, and he healed them. ³¹ So the crowd was amazed when they saw those unable to speak talking, the crippled restored, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they gave glory to the God of Israel.

Jesus' ministry was like the prophecies of Isaiah coming alive in their time [cf. Matthew 4:12-17, 12:15-21]

And the blind men have heard Jesus' teaching and preaching

Teaching that demanded a life ready to live under God's reign, a righteousness greater than the scribes and pharisees, a cleansed heart

For Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom was near [Matt. 4:17]— being brought by Jesus

As Jesus said to his religious critics *"If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* Matt. 12:28

In word and deed Jesus was bringing, embodying, the reign of God, that glorious time of peace

These blind beggars' identification of Jesus as Son of David was reasonable

And with that identification their determination to have their cry heard by Jesus is also reasonable

In fact, it would have been unreasonable to allow themselves to be put off, for here, and here alone, uniquely, could they have hope of seeing again

Of having lives of productive work restored to them

Of contributing, not depending on the charity of others

Of dignity and security

Of living lives enriched by colour and light

"Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

It is a humble request, isn't it?

They are not telling Jesus what He must do

They recognise He is in charge, not them

And they recognise His power, and ask for mercy

But the crowds, probably crowds of fellow Galilean pilgrims, are not interested in their need

They have their own agendas for Jesus

Keep quiet they say. Don't interfere with Jesus' progress to Jerusalem

Don't interfere with His becoming King there, and carrying us along with him into power

And the crowd wants their agenda to be Jesus' agenda, to have him do nothing else than achieve their goals

But healing embodies the nature of Jesus' rule

It expresses salvation for the humble who believe,

Shows the way He will use His power

Not to save Himself, but to serve

So He stops, stops and calls them

And they have a life changing exchange with Jesus which is wonderfully simple v.32, simple and personal

Simple

Matthew 20: ³² Jesus stopped, called them, and said, “What do you want me to do for you?”

³³ “Lord,” they said to him, “open our eyes.” ³⁴ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed him.

Jesus asks them directly “What do you want me to do for you?”

He engages with them personally

Even though their need appears obvious He does not assume

Even though He knows peoples’ hearts, he asks – so they will know their healing is not mechanical or automatic, not them getting the Lord to do what they want by pressing the right buttons, and not just some random co-incidence – the universe restoring their sight while talking to Jesus, but a personal gift from the Lord to them out of His kindness

And therefore a gift, a healing, they can be confident in

They ask for their sight to be restored – Lord, open our eyes

They ask for wholeness, for the restoration of Creation

It is a simple, direct expression of the longing of their hearts

And our Lord grants their request. With His touch their sight is restored

It is that simple – they ask, and they receive

It is simple because of who Jesus is

He is the Son – powerful to bring wholeness. He needs no incantations or delay to find materials, He has that power in Himself,

And He is compassionate – no need to bargain or persuade Jesus to be interested in them, to do good to them

It is simple because they are not relying on themselves, but wholly on Jesus

The rich man asked ‘What must I do’, and left sad

They call out for mercy, they depend wholly on Jesus, on His kindness and power, and hear Jesus say ‘What do you want me to do for you’ – and it is done

It is so simple, as simple as asking

And their response is simple, uncomplicated

Immediately they could see, and they followed him.

They see, and they follow

There is no negotiation, no calculation, they don’t seek permission

They are not held back by possessions or fear for their reputation

[They respond as Jesus calls all disciples to respond – If anyone would come after me let him deny himself, take up His cross and follow me]

They see – they experience Jesus’ power and kindness, they know He is the source of this great good that changes their life, they have their reasonable identification of Jesus confirmed in their experience – and they follow Jesus, the Son of David

But we cannot end the story there, for sight, like following, has consequences, and they are following a Jesus who is walking to Jerusalem, to the cross

Tested

What did those seeing eyes go on to witness as they follow Jesus to Jerusalem? What do we see in the gospel story?

Events that will test their decision to follow Jesus, their identification of Jesus as the Son of David, the coming King

First they will see welcoming crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem, welcoming Jesus as Son of David

Matthew 21:⁹ Then the crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shouted:

Hosanna to the Son of David!

***Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord!***

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

At first we think this will confirm their decision

But this passing popularity will contribute to their testing, for the crowds misunderstand Jesus

Their will for Him is not Jesus' understanding of His purpose and work

They want Him to conquer, not be crucified

And so the now seeing men will have to decide whether they will follow King Jesus Himself, or the King of popular imagination, the King who will further the crowds' will

Then as the week goes on they will see, Secondly, the fearful hatred of the religious authorities, that opposes Jesus and looks to trip Jesus up in His words, disputing with Him and plotting to destroy him [21:23-27, 21:46, 22]

And by the end of the week, Friday, they will see Jesus' apparent failure and defeat, His failure to be the liberating, conquering King of the Jews as He is mocked, dying, on that Roman cross

Matthew 27:⁴² "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He is the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God rescue him now—if he takes pleasure in him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Still Son of David, the King of the Jews?

Could they have been wrong? Could Jesus' opponents who decry Him as a fraud be right?

The cross would seem to say so

But there is a Conflict in their experience

That they could witness those events themselves, see them with their own eyes

Tells them Jesus was the Son of David

All the time, with every piece of contrary evidence they witness, those seeing eyes told them – they were right

That Even on the cross, Jesus was still the Son of David

How could they make sense of it?

And then they will hear of resurrection, of Jesus, alive, bodily, raised from the dead

Appearing to His followers

Then they would know He is the Son of David, greater than they imagined, truly the Son who would reign forever on David's throne

In Isaiah's words

*Isaiah 9: 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

The King who brings a security and a peace for His people – that would never end

Because on that cross, in Peter's words, HE was bearing our sin to bring us back to God

1 Peter 2: 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

He was in Paul's words cancelling our debt to God's law

Defeating the enemies who held us captive by their lies

Col. 2: 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

In bringing forgiveness by His sacrifice of Himself He was Destroying forever the capacity of sin and death to destroy and harm His people

The blind men's calling out to Jesus, the Son of David, for mercy – was Reasonable

And Receiving His mercy Simple

Their confession was sorely Tested

But they were Right to confess and follow, more right than they knew

A Picture of all Christian Faith

Friends, I so wanted to preach on this passage today because in the experience of the blind men we have a picture of all Christian believing – reasonable, simple, tested, right

Reasonable

To call out to Jesus on the basis of what we have heard is reasonable

Reasonable because of who He is, and reasonable because of our need

Like the blind men we are relying on reports from those who know Jesus, who have witnessed what He said and did, to form our understanding of who Jesus is

What have we heard?

The gospel witness

The gospel witness To his ministry and teaching – public events, being spoken about in the lifetime of those who witnessed them

Peter could say to the crowds at Pentecost

Acts 2:²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

And to Cornelius in Acts

Acts 10:³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

These are not made-up stories, but witnessed events

The gospel witness to a purposeful death

Not an accident

A death Jesus knew He was going to die, repeatedly told His followers HE would die

A death He knew was God's will to save His people

His life given for the life of the world [John 6:51]

John 6:⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

A death He said [20:28] was to ransom us, set us free, from sin and death

Matthew 20:²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

And we have heard The gospel witness to a sure resurrection

First century people knew the difference between the living and the dead

They weren't expecting the dead Jesus to live.

Jesus had to convince them He was alive

And He did

Appearing to Mary in the garden

TO Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus

TO the disciples in the upper room

To sceptical Thomas

Seen by them, talking to them, eating with them, offering His hands and side to be touched by them

And many more appearances

The gospel witness to Jesus is the testimony of real people to real events, preserved for us by being written down in real books whose reproduction can be traced through history, the foundation of something new, something real, in history – the Christian church

And it is reasonable to accept it

Why would they lie?

Especially when they are committed to a Lord whose word is truth, and to a God who hates liars

When there is no material benefit – just danger and loss, and the account of their own understanding and actions is so unflattering.

It is reasonable to accept the gospel witness

But we don't just have the testimony of the New Testament.

WE have the witness of thousands whose lives, like the blind men, have been changed by calling out to the risen Jesus

You are sitting among many of them, and will know others

It is fashionable to discount this or explain it away, but every believer has a story of asking Jesus for mercy, and being heard

Young, and haven't heard it, ask your parents

Curious – ask those you are sitting with, or having a cup of tea with

It is reasonable, based on what we have heard in the gospel and from believers now, to call out to Jesus, because He is the living Saviour, the Lord with all authority, and He hears

And it is reasonable to call out to Him because He alone can meet our need. No one else can.

We all sin – you can probably think of your sins – your lying and lust, your envy and selfish unkindness – or your bigger sin, your determination to ignore God, to not listen to Him, to push Him out of your life. We all sin, and the punishment for our sin is death

He alone can forgive our sin – for He is the Son of God, appointed by God to be the judge on the final day, and He has authority to judge or forgive [Rom. 2:16, Acts 17:30-31]

Because of our sin, we all die and will be condemned in the judgement to eternal death. He alone can give us life, eternal life

And in a world where our sin brings great grief and wounds and scars our lives

He alone can bring us to share in His kingdom, the new heaven and earth, the time that Isaiah spoke of, when sorrow and sighing will flee away, for He is the King, the Son of David

Not yet a believer – hear this.

It is reasonable to call out to Jesus, the Lord, The King

It is worth the effort to come to Him and not be deterred by others

Worth the embarrassment of being seen to be serious, of thinking that there may be something more than this life

Worth the acknowledgement of the not rightness of your life

Of admitting to yourself the longing to find wholeness, and knowing you cannot find it in yourself

It would be unreasonable not to be determined to be heard by the one who can give forgiveness, wholeness and life

Simple

And as the blind men found, dealing with Jesus is so simple because of who He is

He has the authority to forgive. He can do it by His word. He doesn't need to consult. And you can't add anything to that authority, do anything to unleash His power. He has all authority

And He is compassionate. You don't need to bribe Him to be merciful, or perform feats to get His attention. He is kind and merciful – that is the way He is, and will always be

He came to save, and In His word He says – everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved

And He lives – HE hears our cry for mercy

The mercy each one of us needs

TO be forgiven, to be made one of His people, to be given His Spirit

The asking symbolised in baptism

Because He has the authority, because He is compassionate, because He lives

Finding mercy is so simple – it is to ask, and receive

But it is personal dealing, asking – as every believer knows

It is not a mechanical, automatic transaction

And its not a reward

Perform this action, fill in this card, get the 100 points to claim your prize

It's a gift Jesus gives to those who ask

But You have to ask Jesus, you have to answer when He says 'What do you want me to do for you?'

That asking we call prayer – IF you have never prayed think of it as words spoken to the Lord Jesus – whether out loud or in your heart, the Lord you cannot see, but who is there, and hears

Asking – for that forgiveness, to be made one of His people, to be given His Spirit

It is simple - to ask for what He willingly gives, and receive, And then to follow, to follow by doing what Jesus teaches

A follower amongst followers – for our Lord teaches His word through His people

Tested

But, Just like the blind men, our confession of Jesus, and our following of Jesus, will be, is always, tested

It will be Tested by popularity, by the crowd and those who want to use the crowd, seeking to enlist Jesus to their cause – whether it is their prosperity, or their political power, or their respectability,

The crowd will praise Him, speak a lot about Him, but not listen to Him as He tells them His priorities, as He insists on being the Lord He will be – the Lord whose Kingdom is not of this world, who says you can't serve God and money, or who tells His followers you must love your enemies, or keep sex for marriage between a man and a woman.

Being carried along by the crowd can so easily divert us from following the Lord Jesus, make us lazy in seeking His will

And our following will be Tested by Hatred, the hatred of God that wants to oppose Him and undermine His rule through His word.

We have experienced that – the assaults of the new atheists like Dawkins who assert the Christian faith is for people who have abandoned their intellects, or of those who want to remove any constraint on their behaviour, who hate God because He challenges their autonomy and claim Christian morality is harmful

We have experienced over the last 100 and more years a constant assault on the reliability of the gospels

And dealing with these assaults will test us; they all take time and energy, and can unsettle us – sounding so plausible, coming from people who are well credentialled

Yet time and again – shown to be empty, but coming back like the many headed Hydra

We will be tested by hatred of God

And we will be Tested by failure, by the times when our experience does not seem consistent with our confession of Jesus as the living Lord

Whether it is failure to beat sin in our lives

Or experiencing the weakness of illness,

Or unjust treatment

When we seem so weak and powerless – while saying we are loved children of the living God

Our following will always be tested

Better off

But we are better off than those blind men who felt the conflict between what they confessed about Jesus and the cross He was enduring

We start with the resurrection, with knowing that suffering according to God's will is the road to glory

With knowing That weakness is not a denial of our being children of God but the context in which God shows the greatness of His grace and power [2 Cor. 12:8-10].

And we face hatred knowing Jesus taught that there would be trials and opposition

John 15: ¹⁸ "If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me.

Matthew 10:21-22, 24-25

As Paul said to the new believers in Pisidia, Acts 14:22

Acts 14:22 strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

The opposition that seeks to destroy our faith confirms the word of Jesus as true

And we have the Spirit, the Spirit who assures us of our present relationship with God, crying Abba Father, the Spirit who is the deposit guaranteeing what is to come, our inheritance [Romans 8:14-17, Eph. 1:13-14]

Our trials cannot deny the truth of the gospel, nor the reality of having our eyes opened to see Jesus' glory and receiving from Him forgiveness

And one day our confession will be publicly vindicated, that day when every knee bows to Jesus, and every tongue confesses Him Lord

Being a follower of Jesus, relying on Him for life He alone can give

is Reasonable

Simple

And it will be Tested

But it is right

Because Jesus is the Son of David, the promised King, the one to whom God has said

Psalm 110: A psalm of David.

¹ *This is the declaration of the LORD*

to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies your footstool."

Not yet a believer – like the blind men, call out to Him for mercy. Don't let the opposition of others stop you

Believer – to see is to follow, to follow through testing times to the resurrection. Keep on, for our Lord said the one who endures to the end will be saved.