Luke lesson 75 (2021)

“**RECEIVE YOUR SIGHT; YOUR FAITH HAS HEALED YOU”**

Luke 18:31-43

Key Verse: 18:41-42

“‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘Lord, I want to see,’ he replied. Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’”

 The central theme of Jesus’ ministry was the kingdom of God. It is most apparent in Luke’s Gospel, in which the phrase “the kingdom of God” is repeated more than 40 times. As he was aware of his approaching death on the cross in Jerusalem, Jesus taught his disciples many things concerning God’s kingdom in 17:20-18:30. First, we learned that God’s kingdom is both present and future, visible and invisible and internal and external (17:20-37). To experience and enter God’s kingdom, we should be like the persistent widow in the parable who pleaded the unjust judge until she got justice (18:1-8). We should be humble because we can never experience God’s kingdom if we remain arrogant before God and look down on others (9-14). Jesus welcomed little children to demonstrate that God is not angry with us, but he accepts us just as we are (15-17). Christian disciples, who are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, are not foolish. They are wise investors who would inherit great spiritual wealth now and forever (18-30). These are essential teachings of Jesus we should apply to our day-to-day life as Christian disciples.

In today’s passage, Jesus highlights the importance of our faith in him. He healed the blind man’s sight by saying, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” This morning, may we think about what Jesus meant when he said, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”

 ***First, the disciples didn’t understand the gospel truth (31-34).*** Look at verses 31-33. “Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.’” It was the third time that Jesus officially announced to his disciples about his impending death in Jerusalem (9:22; 9:43-45). This time, he took the Twelve aside and explained more in detail; he mentioned the insults, humiliation, and torture he had to go through. And then he would be violently murdered by the hand of men and rise on the third day. What Jesus seems to underline here is that all that would happen to him in Jerusalem were not an accident but the fulfillment of God’s prophecies concerning the Messiah.

For example, the Prophet Isaiah portrayed the suffering Messiah 800 years before Jesus came. Isaiah 53:3-5 states, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus’ life of suffering and death fulfilled the prophecy. Truly amazing!

Jesus, the Son of God, didn’t have to go through all this humiliation, torture, and violent death, shedding his blood on the cross. But he was willing to give his life so that he may fulfill God’s will, and we may no longer live in the vicious cycle of sin and violence, but live a new life of love and forgiveness and have everlasting life, the greatest treasure of all. Indeed, the Scripture declares that the Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection is God’s way of salvation for fallen humankind and the victory over sin, death, and the devil.

 How did the disciples respond? Look at verse 34. “The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.” We remember that when Jesus first mentioned his impending death, Simon Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord. This shall never happen to you!” (Mt. 16:22) In response to Peter’s reaction, Jesus turned and rebuked Peter by saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Mt. 16:23) Even though it was the third time that Jesus mentioned his impending death, the disciples still didn’t know what he was talking about.

Why not? It’s because it was hidden from them. In other words, the disciples were in spiritual darkness and not being to see the gospel truth through Messiah’s suffering, death, and resurrection. One main reason they couldn’t accept the gospel truth is their deeply embedded human idea about Messiah. Like most Jews in Jesus’ time, the disciples firmly believed that God’s Messiah should be powerful and victorious. And they expected that Jesus, their Messiah, should defeat all their enemies, including the Roman Empire, establish David’s kingdom on earth and rule the world forever and ever. So when Jesus mentioned that he would suffer, be humiliated, and even killed by men, it sounded nonsense to them. They didn’t like it at all.

We may laugh at their ignorance, thinking, *“How these top disciples don’t even know the basic gospel truth? They should be better than that.”* That’s true. But in reality, we are not so much different from them. The gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection, not our human dreams and expectations, should be the foundation of our faith. By this gospel, we are saved. But unless we hold firmly to this gospel, we have believed in vain, meaning we remain spiritually blind, like the disciples (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

***Second, Jesus blesses the faith of the blind man (35-43).*** In verses 35-43, Jesus heals the blind man’s eyes. This event is related to the previous passage, which reveals the disciples’ spiritual blindness. Look at verses 35-39. “As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ He called out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” According to Mark’s account, the blind man’s name was Bartimaeus, “son of Timaeus” which means “*one who honors God.*” (Mk. 10:46) If he were not born blind, he could have become blind later in life. Perhaps a severe eye infection caused his blindness. How unfortunate he was to become blind even though he might have wanted to honor God with his life! Living as a blind man was not easy at all, especially in those days. He was also poor and had to beg to survive. Perhaps, he blamed his parents for failing to treat his infection early enough. He could have been feeling bitter toward God with ingratitude, anger, despair, and hopelessness.

But the following verses indicate that he didn’t remain in darkness. He was a man of faith. Hearing that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” It appears that he had already known about Jesus. Even though he was blind, he was not deaf. I am sure he heard what Jesus preached, “The kingdom of God is near! Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15) From time to time, he also heard how Jesus demonstrated God’s great love and mercy on all people, welcoming notoriously tax collectors and prostitutes, healing the sick, and declaring the grace of forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ ministry seems to demonstrate the presence of God’s kingdom on earth. Beautiful!

We also notice that even people told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he still called Jesus “*Jesus, Son of David,” not “Jesus of Nazareth.”* The title “Son of David” was a title equivalent to the title **“Messiah.”** It signified to the Jews a person who is a promised descendant of David who will sit on the throne of the kingdom of Israel forever and ever (2 Sam 7:13). Jesus indeed is the Messiah promised to come as the descendant of David. But the beggar was rebuked and told to be quiet. But he neither was intimidated by peoples’ criticism and discouragement nor allowed them to get in the way. He sought Jesus’ mercy even more and shouted even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

There is something we can learn from him. We are often distracted and discouraged by what people say about us when we try to come to God just as we are. Then, instead of seeking God’s help, we tend to complain, saying, *“You know, I am so hurt by what people talk about me. I don’t feel comfortable coming to this church.”* Unfortunately, some people in the church are insensitive, intrusive, and critical. Some people feel hurt and rejected by insensitive comments. But we must know that Christians are not perfect people, even in their best. God our Father, however, is different. He is perfect and incredibly merciful to those who come to him. He accepts us just as we are. Zechariah said in his song of praise at the time of the birth of his son, John. “Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Lk. 1:78-79) Like the blind man, we should not allow peoples’ criticism to get in the way but come to God just as we are, practicing the presence of God all the time. It requires courage.

How did Jesus respond to the blind man’s plea? Look at verses 40 and 41a. “Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’” I am sure that Jesus was impressed by the blind beggar who overcame discouragement and criticism. However, instead of blessing him right away, he asked the man what he wanted. We wonder why he did that. Isn’t it obvious? What do you think? Do people know what they want? Do they express what they wish to honestly? Not really.

For example, in John chapter 5, Jesus saw a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years waiting for the water in the poor to be stirred. Jesus wanted to heal the man. But before healing the man, Jesus asked, “Do you want to get well?” Did the man say, *“Yes, Lord, I want to get well?”* No. Instead, he complained by saying, *“Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”* The man revealed that his real problem was not a physical disability but a spiritual disability, unthankfulness, dependency on people, bitterness, sense of competition, fatalism, etc. He had a sick mind. Jesus still healed the man anyway with a warning, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” (5:14)

Jesus could have been more than happy to help the man to receive internal healing from his unthankfulness, dependency, sense of competition, and fatalism. In reality, however, unless we are conscious or aware of our internal problems, we won’t receive deep, inner healing from God. If Jesus asks us, *“What do you want me to do for you?*” what would be your answer? Some people would say, *“Lord, bless me and make me happy!”* I don’t think Jesus would be happy with that kind of vague answer. Knowing what we want in life is important.

How did the blind man respond to Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you”? Look at verses 41b-42. The blind man didn’t even hesitate. His answer was straightforward. “Lord, I want to see.” Wow! His response showed that he firmly believed Jesus could restore his sight. However, for most of us, who are not physically blind, his reply “Lord, I want to see” may not be relevant in a physical sense. Yet, we surely need to have a spiritual desire to see the beauty of the Lord and his glorious kingdom. To see God’s kingdom, which is invisible and everlasting, we need the eyes of faith, spiritual sight.

The blind man’s response, “Lord, I want to see,” also reminds us of what King David said in Psalm 27:4. “One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” David could have asked many things from the Lord. But all of them could be summed up in one phrase, that is, “Lord, what I want is you, you alone!” The ancient Chinese wise man, Confucius, said, *“If a man knows what to do with his life at the age of 40, he is a successful man.”* Wow, the age of 40 seems to be too late in modern days. But it shows that many people have trouble because they don’t know what they want to do even when they are old. In life, we need many things. If you could ask only one thing from God, it will be challenging. But when we choose to seek him, God promised to satisfy and fulfill all our desires (Psalm 145:16). Psalm 37:4 states, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your hearts.” Jesus also said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Mt. 6:33) We, as Christian disciples, should have a yearning desire to see the beauty of the Lord and be like him (Phil. 3:10-11).

Look at verses 42 and 43. “Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw, they also praised God.” Even though the blind man in today’s passage was not one of the twelve disciples, he became a true and faithful follower of Christ. His testimony must have moved many people and brought glory to the Lord.

 In conclusion, we learn in today’s passage that Jesus blessed the blind man’s faith and restored his sight by saying, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” This statement highlights the importance of our faith as Christian disciples. Sometimes, we don’t see the evidence of God’s promise around us. We still have to struggle with many problems in our lives, internal and external. Seeing so many issues globally, we feel that God is not in charge of all things. Doubt arises in our minds and hearts. But God called each of us as his children to live by faith, not by sight. We can see the kingdom of God through the eyes of faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Heb. 11:1)

Like Jesus’ disciples in today’s passage, it’s easy for us to hold on to our human goals and expectations. The gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the key to the kingdom of heaven, which we must hold firmly. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation for all humankind. His death on the cross proves that God is not angry with us but is always willing to forgive us. It also shows that we should not live in sin but in the new way of love and grace. Violence is not the solution, but forgiveness is the solution. This gospel is the true hope for all people.

Many things in the world seem to offer us happiness and are attractive. But they are only temporary and cannot satisfy our soul. Jesus is the everlasting joy of living and the source of all of God’s blessings. He is the hidden treasure to be discovered and rediscovered by us. If Jesus asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?” how would you respond? Are you ready to say, “Lord, I want to see”? May the Lord open the eyes of our faith to see and discover the beauty of the Lord and his glorious kingdom day by day.