

**LUKE 18:35-43**  
**THE STORY OF HEALING**

We entered the elevator at Reid Hospital, just me and a young man, and we prepared to do what men to do in the elevator: look anywhere but at each other. Then he spoke: "I hate hospitals." He spoke not with anger or even panic, but with a combination of resolution and resignation. I was startled. I should have said something wisely and wonderfully pastoral, but I could only stammer a useless word or two, and then the short ride ended.

Why have I remembered that moment? First, you rarely see such voluntary vulnerability in a young man. Second, I am sure many of you would say those very words. I used to say them. I simply have to be in hospitals as part of my calling, so I have grown to feel fairly comfortable in them. But most of us feel just like that young man.

Of course, it is not just hospitals. It is doctor's offices, nursing homes, and even dentist's chairs. With our hearts and with our words, we hate these places, for they are filled with pain and illness, dying and death.

Yet for that day at least, it was part of that young man's story, and for all of us, it is part of our story. As we have discovered this year, the story of our world and our lives is captured in five scenes, and we live in the scene after the fall, where sickness and death entered the world.

During this scene, we are journeying with Jesus as he declares and secures redemption: rescue from sin and freedom to new life with God. We meet him as he meets people, and today he meets a blind man. We discover how he brings his redeeming grace to this world of sickness and death. We see it in this man's story, and in our story.

Let's begin with **HIS STORY** - the man's story. Luke tells the story quite simply.

*THERE IS A MAN.* Luke writes, "A blind man was sitting by the roadside begging." As you might expect, this man is desperate.

He is physically desperate. There was, and there is, no man-made cure for blindness. He cannot work to meet his needs. He has none of the resources we have developed for the blind. His only choice is to beg.

But this will not be easy, for he is socially desperate. He is an outcast from society. As one writer writes, he is considered part of a group called "the expendables." He has no "government safety net." He has no network of charities. He probably has no family. He has only the Jewish tradition of almsgiving - giving to the poor. He may survive, but he will never thrive.

So *HE CRIES FOR HELP.* He hears the rumble of a crowd. He wonders what is happening. He is told that "Jesus of Nazareth" is on the way. He must know something of Jesus, for now he must have Jesus know him. He calls, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

He is saying much here. This is a title for the Messiah. The Jews are anticipating the day of the fulfillment of God's promise to bring a Son of David to rule over an eternal kingdom. When this man declares that man to be the Son of David, he is proclaiming his hope that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

He wants mercy from that Messiah. What is mercy? It is a matter of the heart and a matter of the hands. It is a heart that feels for the person in need, and it is hands that will act for the person in need. If you have a heart with no hands, you have useless sentiment. If you have hands with no heart, you may just have a cold instrument.

Jesus has both the heart and the hands. Somehow, this man knows that. So when he is told to be quiet - probably by some at the head of the crowd - he ignores the rebuke and cries all the louder: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" What does he have to lose?

There is a man. He cries for help. *JESUS HEALS HIM.* He orders the man to be brought to him, and he says to the man, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus knows, but he wants the man to tell him. The man says, "I want to see." This is the need he feels. In his desperation, he wants Jesus to meet him where he is, and to give him mercy.

Jesus does this. He simply says, "Receive your sight. Your faith has made you well." The man has not healed himself. Jesus heals him - through the man's faith in him. Here is a good way to say it: Jesus is the instrument of healing. But he does the healing through the man's faith. That faith is not the cause of the healing, but the path of the healing.

Then the story ends with this: *HE PRAISES GOD*. "Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God." How else do you respond to God? You cannot pay him back. You must not turn your back. He has come to you, so you follow him, praising him all the while. In fact, all the people join in this praise - surely even some of the people who did not want this man near Jesus in the first place.

The story is simple and straightforward. There is a man. He cries for help. Jesus heals him. He praises God. But still we hate hospitals. While that story seems simple, our stories never seem so simple. How does this scene on the road to redemption, speak to *OUR STORY*? Let's keep it before us, and let God use it to re-shape our stories.

I want to us to be guided by the words that Paul uses as he captures the heart of the Christian life in his first letter to the Corinthians. He writes, "But now these three remain: faith, hope and love." In this part of the letter, he is saying: you Corinthians can talk all you want about your "spiritual gifts," but when all is said and done, this is what is left: a story of faith, hope and love.

Our story is *A STORY OF FAITH*. As we think of faith, we have to start here: faith is about the real stuff of real life. In Christianity, we sometimes rush to "heavenize" everything. Here, we might say this: "This man's physical blindness reflects his spiritual blindness. Just as he cannot see the world, he cannot see the God who made the world. So just as Jesus shines light into his eyes, he shines light into this man's heart, so that he will know Jesus, believe in Jesus, follow Jesus, and go to heaven to be with Jesus."

That is all true, but if we go there first, we miss something: Jesus is the Son of God who came not to float above the earth, not to fly around the earth, but to face the hard realities of an earth of physical suffering and death. He came in a body to minister to people who live in bodies and suffer in those bodies. He came to do much more, but he came to do no less. This story of faith speaks to us in those real hospitals.

We face physical suffering. Our loved ones face physical struggle. We would rather not do it, and we may know we can live better with a healthier lifestyle, but sooner or later, we must meet sickness and pain. Through faith, there was mercy for that man. Can we have faith that there will be mercy for us?

Author R.C. Sproul tells the story of a friend with cancer. She was undergoing chemotherapy, and it was brutal. He asked how she was doing. She said, "R.C., it is hard to be a Christian with your head in the toilet."

In mercy, does Jesus care in his heart? In mercy, does Jesus act with his hands? This man's story calls us to a steady, sturdy, strong faith in Jesus Christ - the Son of David who comes with healing in his wings.

But wait a minute - am I promising healing? When I speak of the mercy of Jesus' heart and Jesus' hands, is this a pledge that you will be healed in the particular place where you struggle and suffer? Jesus did not heal every person he saw. Even when he healed, he did not remove the curse of death. When he raised Lazarus from the dead, he simply postponed the day of Lazarus' final departure from this earth. So this is no promise of a particular outcome.

Yet this story does call us to faith in the mercy of Jesus. If we know his redeeming grace, we trust that in times of physical suffering, he is the wonderful, merciful Savior. He is always able to heal, and he is always willing to help. Even and especially with physical maladies, Jesus is calling us to a soul-searching, heart-changing, courage-building, strength-sustaining trust in him.

Easy to say, hard to do. It is hard to be a Christian with your head in the toilet! But the Christian can look back at the cross, where God demonstrated his love for us, as sure evidence of the mercy of Jesus. One writer writes, "On the cross and in his agony, our Lord suffered not just our physical afflictions, but our mental anguish as well. Out of the depths we cry to him, and he reaches down into our depths to raise us up with him. God knows the depth of our suffering. He knows our fragile heart. And Christ's own heart, a heart of flesh, a

heart both human and divine, is merciful beyond measure.”

We live by faith in our Redeemer. We trust that even this suffering is from his loving hand. We trust that he has good purposes in this struggle. We trust that he will make us more like himself in this valley. We trust that when we are suffering physically, we may have a fellowship with him that is real and rich. We do not romanticize this; we know the realities. But we know Jesus will meet us in mercy, in all of these ways and more.

We may know this, because we have trained ourselves in this. Are you well today? Thank God. But use today to prepare for the day of physical suffering. Cultivate heart and life habits that fill your spirit with the mercies of Jesus. Fill your mind with the Scripture. Flood your life with worship. Fix your soul upon the truths that set you free. One day you may need to draw on those resources, and you do well to store them up now.

We will know this, because we have searched for this. Are you sick or hurting today? Seek God. Ask him for relief from pain and struggle, but also ask him to show you more of himself. Jesus is there, and he has a heart and hand of mercy. But sometimes we need to thoughtfully and prayerfully strive to see him there. Sometimes we need the encouragement of other believers to help us see what we do not see. Today, may you see Jesus with a heart and eyes of faith.

Our story is a story of faith. Our story is *A STORY OF HOPE*. Of course, hope is about the future. Hope is about the next minute, and all the minutes for eternity. Yet here, it is the hope of eternity that stirs hope in our stories today.

Where is the hope of eternity here? We find it in the title the man uses for Jesus: Son of David. Remember: this is the child of the great King David, who was promised an everlasting kingdom. The Messiah is the One who brings this kingdom and rules this kingdom. Jesus has also come to inaugurate a new reality, and to craft a new story for us - a story that will find its final fulfillment in his eternal kingdom, in the new heavens and new earth, where his healing is full and forever.

The story is told of Puritan writer John Owen, lying in a bed, soon to die. He dictated a letter which began, “I am still in the land of the living.” Then he decided to have his secretary change that. He said to write instead, “I am still in the land of the dying, but I hope soon to be in the land of the living.”

That is the hope of the Christian. As we immerse our spirits in the hope that is to come, we receive unspeakable joy and unshakable peace, because we know that while pain and struggle are too real today, the day is coming when we will no longer worry about pain or suffering or death, for we will be in the land of the living through our wonderful, merciful Savior.

The writer to the Hebrews said, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross...” How did Jesus do what he did? Joy was before him. He hoped for the forever of life that would follow the day of death. If we are one with him through faith, this same endurance and joy is ours. Through his endurance, we gain endurance. Through his joy, we gain joy.

Surely you know the saying: “Those Christians are so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good.” I wonder if the opposite is true. I wonder if we are so earthly-minded that heaven does us no good. We need to hear and heed this well: if we seek joy only in the possible healing of today, then we may rob ourselves of the joy of the permanent healing of tomorrow. It is good to pray for healing, but if our hearts are set only upon that, we may miss the joy that can be ours, as we hope for the day of no more pain or suffering or death.

If Jesus mercifully brings healing, we praise God. But unless Jesus returns first, he will not always bring healing. The road to death is well-worn, and it can be a brutal road. Whether you are 17 or 70, it is the hope of heaven that ultimately gives you the endurance and the joy you will surely need along this road.

Are you well today? Thank God. But know that a day is coming, when you will be reminded that you are in the land of the dying. Cultivate now, your hope of the land of the living.

Are you sick or hurting today? Turn to Jesus for mercy. But know that even today, you live in the land of the dying, and you find endurance and joy in the hope of the land of the living.

As we read the man's story, our story is a story of faith, a story of hope, and *A STORY OF LOVE*. If we read stories like this and think only of ourselves, we neglect the second great commandment: the call to love our neighbor. Just as this man followed Jesus, Jesus calls us to follow him. As those who have received this faith and rejoice in this hope, we must allow these words to call us to offer Jesus' love to those in physical need.

When I first wrote those words, I did not know how God would push me to that. This past Monday evening, I received a call from a friend in St. Louis. He told me of a couple we knew in St. Louis from our seminary days. They are very elderly now, and recently they were traveling to see their daughter in Ohio. There was a terrible accident. He is in Dayton, and she is here.

I went to see her Tuesday morning. She was in intensive care. She was confused. She was agitated. Her arm was in a sling, but she kept trying to pull it out of the sling. She was rocking back and forth in her chair, complaining and moaning. The nurse was doing her best, but it was hard to watch. By the grace of Jesus, I entered. I crouched. I looked her in the eye and told her who I was. I held her hand. I put my arm around her shoulder. I tried to find out what had happened, and to explain to her where she was. Then I poured out my heart to God in prayer for her. All the while, she kept pulling her teeth in and out, because they were not fitting right. The nurse wondered if they were her husband's teeth! When I left, thanks much to the care of the nurse, and thanks more to the power of prayer, she was calmer.

Is that how you want to spend your late Tuesday morning? Maybe not. I tell that story not to boast of myself. I am sure other pastors and many of you could have ministered to this woman far better than I did. I tell the story to let you know that Jesus calls his people to show his heart and hand of mercy as we love people in pain and suffering, and we may be surprised at how he urges us to do this.

You may pray. You may encourage. You may provide practical help. You may listen. You may speak of Jesus. You may just hold a hand and wrap an arm around a shoulder. But a heart that beats for Jesus will have his heart of mercy, and will offer his hands of mercy, for when we know the mercy of Jesus, we follow Jesus by reflecting his mercy.

But know this, too. In those moments, I was more like Jesus than at any moment this week, this month, even this year. And in those moments, I knew the grace of Jesus as much as at any time in the typical week, the typical month, even the typical year. For it is when we love as we have been loved, that the love of Jesus becomes fully true and utterly real to us.

There was a man. He cried for help. Jesus healed him. He praised God.

There is a man. There is a woman. There is a child. Jesus redeems them from their sin, and Jesus meets them in their pain and suffering. Then he calls them to write a new kind of story - a story of faith in the mercy of Jesus, a story of hope in the glory of Jesus, and a story of love in the name of Jesus.

As that man cried all the louder to Jesus, do you hear him calling all the louder to you?