

JESUS OF NAZARETH PASSETH BY (Lk. 18:37)

On the northern outskirts of Jericho, the excited crowds were announcing, *Jesus of Nazareth passeth by*. ... *Jesus is coming!* ... What a day that must have been! ... They would have been pushing to see Him ... the Teacher, the Miracle-worker, and perhaps even the Messiah! In your mind's eye, you can see them lining up on each side of the road in anticipation. Along with Him was the increasing number of followers on their way to the Festival of the Passover in the city of Jerusalem, about fifteen to twenty miles away.

Along the way, every man and woman stopped what they were doing for no matter how busy they were, *Jesus of Nazareth passeth by* ... and Jericho was *teeming* with people, - residents, travellers, merchants, pilgrims but when Jesus arrived, all their attention was upon Him. By the way, this was the last time Jesus would pass through Jericho and if they did not meet Him *this* time, they would never meet Him again. This was *their* opportunity.

We are going to 'spend a day' in Jericho. This morning we shall look at a poor man Jesus met on His way into the city, and this evening we shall look at a wealthy man He met on His way out of the city

Jericho is the 'city of palms', on the northern edge of the desert which stretches away down to below Sharm El-Sheikh on the Sinai Peninsula, about three hundred miles. For travellers today, the main attraction in Jericho are the ruins of the old city and its walls. It is the oldest continually-inhabited city in the world, and it is also the lowest city on earth at 846 feet below sea level. When you stand on the old city excavations, behind you in the hills of Judea is the Mount of Temptation, where you can see the Greek Orthodox monastery built on the mountain cliffs ... and you look in front of you out over the city, with its palm trees dotted everywhere ... and if you go into the city you can find its only sycamore tree, just a short distance from the busy centre ... and Jesus was coming through on His way to Jerusalem. ... **Lk. 18:35** And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: **36** And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. **37** And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. **38** And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. **39** And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. **40** And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, **41** Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. **42** And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. **43** And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

If the blind man had not called out to Jesus when he had this opportunity, it would have been gone forever because this was the final time Jesus passed through

Jericho. On His way to the city, He had healed many blind men and women, and deaf and dumb, and lame and lepers ... and this *blind* man, - although he could not see anything else, - he *saw* Jesus was the answer to his need! ... This was ...

HIS DAY OF OPPORTUNITY. Before he heard Jesus was coming along the road, this blind man never ever saw any way out of his predicament, - it simply didn't exist! He had no aspirations to see, because he considered it impossible and he had given up all hope of ever being able to see. He lived in complete and constant darkness, - the daytime was no different to the night-time for him. If someone would have been able to take the sun and shine it into his eyes, he still could not have made out its light! But ... Jesus was passing by. This was the blind man's **day of opportunity** ... and if anyone could give him his sight, it could be Jesus.

As he sat there, he knew there was no point asking for anyone else's help for all his fellow-beggars were sitting with their hands out, begging for something from the crowds. ... But *he* was looking for something far more than the crowds could give because he was looking for something only Jesus could do for him. ... **His day of opportunity** came the day Jesus came into his life. ... Yes, of course, he could have been like all the rest, with his hand out, and using his blindness to 'tug at the heart strings' of these pious pilgrims on their way through Jericho to Jerusalem ... but this blind man wanted something only Jesus could give.

Maybe you are not saved, but you can visualise this picture of the blind man as he *senses* Jesus is near. Maybe Jesus has been near to you on many occasions, maybe in Sunday School, or when your parents taught you about Him, but throughout the ensuing years, you have just let pass you by. He has graciously and patiently given you opportunity after opportunity to call to Him, but so far all you've done is hold out your hand and taken from Him, without going any further. ... Here though, is a blind man who wanted to escape his darkness.

All credit to this blind man on **his day of opportunity** because he was not for allowing Jesus to pass him by. ... Look again at those other beggars sitting there. Some were blind, some were lame ... they had all kinds of conditions which ostracised them from the general public ... but only *one* called out, ... only one whose heart was stirred to cry to Jesus!

When the Gospel is preached, it has different effects on different people. Some receive it, while others reject it. Some aren't bothered ... they are not stirred, it does not 'flinch' on them that Jesus is passing by and the *lost* opportunity could be their *last* opportunity ... but it does not bother them! Some people *struggle* with it, - yes, they want to be saved, but they know it means changing to be on the side of God, and it is too much of a wrench!

Well, it puts *that* type of person into the same category as those beggars who let Jesus pass on by without calling out for His attention. They had already decided to do nothing, and they would sit there day after day, and have nothing to look forward to. But this blind beggar sitting at the side of the road as Jesus was passing by, this was **his day of opportunity**.

HIS DAY FOR ACTIVITY. This wasn't the time to do nothing! Doing nothing would have wasted the opportunity! *Jesus is passing by* ... and He will never come this way again. If He is to hear me, I *must* call out to Him *now!* ... As Paul wrote, **II Cor. 6:2** *now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

But some people don't see it like that. They look at Jesus and think they can 'pick Him up' when they feel like it ... They think they can be saved whenever *they* choose ... when the circumstances suit *them*. But this Gospel story tells you that is not so because if the blind beggar had left it, he would have *lost* it! If he hadn't called to Jesus then, - in his day of opportunity, - he *never* would have called at all!

"Ah but what if I make a fool of myself in front of all these people?!" ... The blind man was more concerned about his condition, than the crowd. He realised he had to shout above them for that's how much he needed Jesus ... and if he was to grab the opportunity, he *had* to call upon the Saviour then and there!

Look at this man again, - he could not see a single thing. Whether his eyes were open or shut, it made no difference because he could not see. Even when he was told to keep quiet (v.39), he couldn't! This was *his* opportunity. ... The crowds told him to 'shush' ... Nobody's interested in you ... Jesus can't hear you, He's too busy to bother with someone like you. But the blind man was in such a need, he could not stop! ... He cried out once, and he cried out again, *Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me (vv.38,39)* ... He cried from the depths of his heart to the Saviour for compassion ... I cannot see You, but I know You are there for I can feel Your presence and I *know* You can help me ... ³⁸ *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

This **his day of opportunity** had become **his day for activity**, for it was ...

HIS DAY OF GRACE. Look again ... The blind man had been told *Jesus* was passing through. He could '*sense*' Jesus was passing through ... He could not *see* Jesus, and yet he knew Jesus was there. ... *What is my point?* You cannot see Jesus, but He *is* near. There is a chorus which says, "Reach out and touch the Lord as He goes by. You will find He's not too busy to hear your heart's cry. He's passing by this moment, your need He'll supply, Reach out and touch the Lord as

He goes by.” ... The man did not have anyone to encourage him to reach out to Jesus, ... but he knew he had to if he wanted to be healed from out of his darkness. They told him to keep quiet ... but if he had, he would have *lost* his opportunity.

Notice he called out *twice*. That shows you how the Holy Spirit was working in his life for the blind man did not give up. He wasn't content with holding his hands out looking for *pity*, but he was crying to Jesus for *mercy*. ... And he shouted out in front of everyone his need. ... It wasn't a 'take it or leave it' request for he was so serious about it, he had to make himself heard above everything else, as Jesus was passing by ... And if you would have talked with this man afterwards, he would have told you ... I was sitting in a hopeless state, sitting with all my hopeless and helpless friends, staring out into nothing for that was all I could see, but then I heard Jesus passing by, and I called out to Him, He heard me, He healed me, and He changed my life. ... Yes, I was born into a religious family for I was brought up a Jew ... but my religion could do nothing for me ... only Jesus could and did. He stopped, and He looked at me, and He asked me, ⁴¹ *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?* He addressed my need and the words came out of my lips, *Lord, that I may receive my sight*. ... He *knew* what I needed. He could *tell* what I needed but He had to hear me confess my need. I took Him at His word and I came for previously he had issued the invitation, *Jn. 6:37 him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out...* And I threw to the one side my 'old tattered garments' and when Jesus stretched out His hand and raised me up, I stood before Him no longer a *tramp*, but a *trophy* of God's grace!

The beggar had no hesitation in answering Jesus' question, *v.41, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?* He knew what he wanted for he knew what he needed, "Lord, I want to see" ... and the very first person he saw when his blindness was healed was the Saviour! *Thy faith hath saved thee*, Jesus said ... saving faith which is the free gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

There is a beautiful picture in *v.40, And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him*. The man was blind, and Jesus was surrounded by the crowds. There were obstacles in the man's way of getting to Jesus but Jesus stood where He was and told the people who could see to bring the blind man ... to take him by the hand, - his hands wouldn't have been washed in ages, - and to lift him up off the ground, - dirty, stinking, foul ... and yet, that's what Jesus told the people who were following Him to do. And they went over to the man and did as Jesus commanded.

When Jesus gives you the privilege of bringing someone to Him, it doesn't matter who they are or what they are because it is such a privilege to lead them to the Saviour. ... You could be the one who is with them when they 'open their eyes'

and they see Him for the first time ... the One Who loves them and Who gave Himself for them. Today is the day of salvation for we are still in **the day of grace**.

CONCLUSION. There were other beggars on that roadside who did not cry out ... and they remained in their miserable condition. For them, Jesus coming into Jericho was a *lost opportunity* for He did not pass that way again. ... But Jesus made the difference in this man's life from *never* being able to see to *being* able to see. ... That is what the Gospel is about. The Gospel is about recognising Christ as your Saviour. It is about acknowledging you are a sinner but Jesus took your sin, and suffered the penalty of God's wrath in your place so that you would be saved out of a lost eternity in Hell and promised a place in Heaven.

This blind man ... the moment he believed in Jesus, *immediately he received his sight, and followed him*. It happened immediately, - he hadn't to do anything but believe ... and Jesus did all the rest. And indeed, he received more than his sight because he left his old life of misery behind when Jesus came into his life ... And he went along the road, - leaving Jericho and all his old memories behind ... for he was now in the company of those pilgrims, walking by the side of Jesus, - *glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God*.

His day of opportunity, his day of activity, his day of grace. It's a beautiful and powerful account Luke describes when he writes, *Jesus of Nazareth passeth by (18:40)* ... And a few verses later, Jesus was on the road out of Jericho and He wouldn't be there again. ... Let's finish with a very appropriate verse from the Old Testament which says, **Is. 55:6** *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*