

Things Jesus Taught Us (7)

By
Philip Gulley

Luke 18:35-43

When I was a kid, back in the Stone Ages before video games and we had to provide our own entertainment, we would play a game we called *What If?* **The game was played by asking questions beginning with the words “What if...”.** The questions were fairly predictable. What if you won a million dollars? What if you were the President? What if the communists invaded us? **The winner, of course, was the person who came up with the most creative answer, which meant there was never a clearly decided upon winner, since we all voted for ourselves.**

I had a friend named Kevin whose parents and grandparents were both deaf. **Because of that he was especially sensitive about disabilities and that became evident when we’d play *What If?***

“What if you had to lose one of your senses?” he would ask.

We would all say taste.

Then he’d get more specific. “What if you had to be either deaf or blind?”

We always picked deaf, our theory being that we could learn how to use sign language or read lips.

But I remember one day I said I’d rather be blind, so Kevin bet me a candy bar I couldn’t go an entire day being blind.

Of course, since he challenged me, I had to do it. So Kevin duct-taped my eyes closed and tied a bandana over my eyes. Pitch black. I couldn’t see a thing, not even the variations of light. **I still remember how helpless I felt.** To this day, whenever I see a blind person functioning and living fully, I so admire them. I was terrified, and only lasted about an hour before untying the bandana and ripping off the pieces of duct tape, my eyebrows with them.

So there is this man sitting by the side of road, begging. **As is often the case with blind people, his other senses were heightened, and he sensed in the people around him a growing excitement, as if the crowd’s pulse had quickened.**

“What’s going on?” he asked someone rushing past.

“Jesus of Nazareth is here”.

The blind man began to yell at Jesus, hoping to get his attention and be healed. **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** He kept yelling it, over and over, louder and louder.

Everyone is telling him to pipe down. **Here Jesus was coming to their town and the town lunatic is badgering him.** What an embarrassment.

Jesus heard him, stopped, and told the crowd, “Guide that man to me.”

When the blind man was brought near, Jesus said, “What can I do for you?”

“I want to see,” the man said. “People walk past talking about how blue the sky is. They talk about flowers, and pretty women, and babies, and sunsets. I want to see those things for myself. Please let me see.”

And Jesus said to him, “Your trust in God’s goodness has made you well. Open your eyes and see.”

This happened while Jesus was on the outskirts of Jericho with his disciples. **A few moments before, Jesus had been telling his disciples what lay ahead—how he would be crucified and resurrected.** “But they understood none of these things,” Luke tells us, “and did not grasp what he had said.” (Luke 18:34) **So Luke is contrasting the disciples with the blind man.** The disciples can see, but don’t understand. The blind man can’t see, but does understand. The blind man sees what the disciples cannot. Luke is reminding us that there is more than one kind of blindness.

I don’t want to criticize the disciples for not getting it. I don’t think Luke was judging them or being critical. He was simply pointing out a very human tendency—that all of us have our blind spots.

My nephew Pierson is taking driver’s education and he told me the hardest thing about driving was the blind spots. **Well, that’s true for all of us.** We all have our blind spots, things we don’t see and understand.

The point of this story is that Jesus helps us see what we’ve never seen before.

And you know that’s true, because it’s happened to you. You’ve changed. You see and understand things you never saw and understood before. **That is the gospel working in your life.** And here’s how it happens. When I was a kid, there was this boy who lived across the street from me. His name was Ricky. **These days we’d call Ricky developmentally disabled, but back then we called him retarded.** Well, I used to make fun of Ricky for being slow. But I could no more make fun of him today than I could hurt my own children. **I had a blind spot, you see, and the gospel began to work in my life and now that blind spot is gone.** Jesus helped me see something I’d never seen before.

Another kid I knew was gay. And someone found out and told everyone and we just made that boy’s life a misery. **He turned eighteen and moved as far away from our town as he could and I haven’t seen him since.** It shames me when I remember how we treated him.

But if he walked through our meetinghouse doors this morning, I'd be as kind and welcoming to him as I could be. And you would too. **That used to a blind spot to us, but then the gospel began working in our lives and made us more tender-hearted and we can't treat gay people that way any more.** It's just not in us.

We come here every Sunday, we're going to change. **The gospel is going to start working in us and we're going to see things we've never seen before.** If we don't want to change, we can stay home and watch ESPN or the shopping channel. **But if we come here and open ourselves up, we're going to change.** Will we change overnight? Probably not. I didn't. But we'll start to notice that things we used to do, we can't do anymore. **We used to be indifferent about some people, but now we care.** It didn't used to bother us to see someone made fun of, but now we can't stand it. Our hearts just ache for them. That's the gospel working in us. **We used to pitch litter out our car windows and ignore environmental concerns, but now we can't do that, because the gospel has been working in us and we know we are stewards of God's creation.** We see a documentary on TV about children starving in Africa or Asia and we used to be able to flip on to the next channel, but now we can't. **Now we make out a check and send it to World Vision.** We're seeing things we've never seen before, and that's because the example of Jesus is at work in our lives.

I used to vote my pocketbook. I'd step in the booth, draw the curtain around me, look at the list of names and try to figure out who'd cut my taxes and make me rich. **But now, I close that curtain behind me, the gospel starts itching at me, and I hear this voice. "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do unto me."** There are candidates out there that I'm sure are nice people, they're good to their children, kind to their dog, but I can't vote for them because I worry if I do, the poor are going to take it on the chin.

I'm not trying to be political. The contemporary American political landscape has provided us with ample reasons to be disgusted with both parties. **I'm just pointing out how the gospel gets to working in us, even in the private places of our lives when the curtains are drawn and no one else is watching.** The gospel is now running through our veins, and we just can't do what we used to do.

Now when you're a Christian, before long you're going to run into someone and they're going to want to know whether all those miracles attributed to Jesus are true. "You think he really helped blind people see?" they'll ask. **I used to give a big, theological answer to that question.** Now I just say, "Well, I tell you what happened to me. I used to have some blind spots I no longer have. The story of Jesus got to working in my life and I now see things I never saw before."

If someone asked you that question, you'd know what to say too, wouldn't you? **You could tell them the gospel had been working in your life and that you see and understand some things you hadn't seen and understood before.**

You could say that, couldn't you? I bet you could.