

The Jerusalem Road

2. Jesus is passing by

Luke 18:35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." 38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 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!" 40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. 42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. (NIV)

Text: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by" or taking our opportunities

The Jerusalem Road is a series of events that occurred as Jesus travelled through Jericho and to Jerusalem. In some ways it actually brings into final focus how huge the gulf was between who Jesus actually was and who people thought Jesus was. Last week we saw the way in which the disciples treated Him like an earthly king, wanting their own position of honour and we learnt how in God's eyes, the greatest Christians are those who obey God, who seek to honour Him by serving him. What about this week?

An elderly lady was waiting to cross the road but was finding the traffic heavy. A man came up to her and said "Do you mind if I cross with you?" She was ever so pleased and willingly allowed him to hold on to her arm. But as they crossed, the man began to weave backwards and forwards so much so that she had to drag him out of the path of oncoming cars. "What's the matter with you?" she said, "you're acting like a blind man!" "I am blind," he replied, "and I thought YOU were going to help me across the road". Then she noticed his white stick.

Blindness can be a terrible condition because it limits one's ability to do many of the things in life that those of us with sight are able to do. Even in these days of guide dogs and various aids to blind people, there is a limit to what the blind can do. In the time of Jesus, it was even worse to be blind because there was no social security, no disability benefit, guide dogs or similar. People who were blind were dependant on others and they had to beg to make a living. And here was this man sitting at the gate of Jericho - a pathetic sight; just begging day after day. He was trying to get whatever the world gave him.

They say that if you lose one of your senses, then the others improve to compensate. I don't know how true that is but certainly blind people have a greater ability to listen. They don't miss things we sighted people miss.

And here was this blind beggar, sitting at the approach to Jericho listening. Someone was coming? A celebrity? Who? So he asks.

36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

It's Jesus of Nazareth. Notice the words that they gave. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. OK so it was a throw away phrase. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. He's passing by. He certainly isn't stopping for the likes of you is maybe what was implied. The city gate was not Jesus' destination as far as they were concerned.

But the man was blind, poor, suffering. What was his reply? *38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 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!"* Do you notice the difference between his response and their answer to his question. To them He was just Jesus of Nazareth. He did interesting teaching,

he was good to hear. He did stunts, he was spectacle. He's that guy from Nazareth. They had eyes that saw spectacle but their ears had not heard. But he had no eyes to see so only his ears had heard, and he had been listening. He wasn't that rabbi from Nazareth - He was Jesus Son of David - the Messiah, the One who was from God, the One who could meet him in his need and rescue him. How did he know Jesus was the Son of David? Jesus was. But that isn't what people called him. Unlike the others, the man had no eyes to see spectacle, he only had ears to perceive the world and he had understood Jesus in a different way. So who were the ones who were blind? The ones who could see!

Do you remember last week how the disciples had heard Jesus but only heard what suited them? It's the same with seeing. When we use our eyes we only see what we perceive - what we want to see. Sometimes we are guilty of the same sin. We see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear but who is He. He's Jesus, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the exalted One, the one who ever lives to make intercession for us. He's the One who has sent His Spirit into our lives. But who is Jesus in the reality of our lives?

Over the past 6 months there have been a number of themes that have recurred in my preaching because I believe that they are fundamental to our understanding of the gospel. First of all What sort of God? And secondly So what? Let me change it tonight. What sort of Saviour? And So what?

1. He's a Saviour who changes lives.

To the people He was just Jesus of Nazareth - an interesting chap from an unfashionable town in Galilee, but to the blind beggar, He was the life-transforming Son of David, the King - the promised One in Scripture. For us it is simply a question of how seriously we take our Saviour. So what happened next? When they told him to shut up he shouted louder. He knew his need and he knew Jesus could deal with it - so why stay silent? Why should he listen to those who didn't understand who hadn't listened. Conform. You're not important. We're spectators so let us spectate. Jesus isn't for the likes of you.

But that's why Jesus was there, to transform people's lives. *40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. 42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

You notice that Jesus dealt with the man, not just with his physical need : *"Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."* *43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God* The change wasn't just a physical one but a spiritual one.

And that's where What kind of Saviour? leads us. The salvation the man received that day was not just physical not spiritual. Too often we can put it the other way around. I can do that too. We talk much about eternal life. But when does eternal life start. It starts now. *John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

What sort of Saviour? A Saviour we only "cash in" on when we die, or one who deals with us in our situations of life now. If He is who we say He is, then like the blind beggar, He can intervene in our lives now, not in eternity.

And that's important but it's so easy for us to forget.

Swaffham is a beautiful place but behind it all are the same pressures in life as other places - and all the same issues of life. And I've seen some of those stresses and strains over the time I have been here. And I've seen some of those stresses and strains in our fellowship. But Jesus can save us not just in eternal terms but in here and now terms.

The blind beggar is an interesting case in point. Sure his life was transformed, but being a seeing person didn't exempt him from all the strains of life - he still had to go through all the joys and disappointments but he had new sight and a new faith to enable him to go through it.

It's the same with us - we are not exempt from the stresses and strains of life - but Jesus gives us strength to deal with them - but oh so often we treat him like Jesus of Nazareth and not Jesus, Son of David. Yet He is the One who has come to free us from sin and the consequences of sin.

Are you suffering from the stresses and strains of life? Let Jesus transform you

2. He's come to make us see

Through faith, the man got to see Jesus. Jesus came to deal not just with physical issues but with spiritual blindness. Very sadly, for many Christians spiritual blindness does not end when they become Christians, but we can still move with God blind or partially sighted because we had faith to accept Jesus of Nazareth but not Jesus, the Son of David, the King, the Lord. Many Christians walk through life but not under His Lordship. *42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.* We are called to see and follow Him.

If Jesus isn't Lord of all, He's not Lord at all. We may not be exempt from the stresses and strains of life by following Christ and I'm sure that this man wasn't, but Jesus Christ being Lord meant he was following Jesus praising God.

3. His opportunity is now

Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. For the blind man, there was no concept of I'm leaving this until next week or next year. 'I'll think about it and get back to you'. Jesus is passing by and wants to deal with your situation now. Not maybe next year. If the man had waited there wouldn't have been a next week or next year. This was the last opportunity Jesus was giving the people of Jericho to experience His personal presence. And He was quite prepared to stop to deal with people's needs - the blind man this week, Zaccheus next week.

As we come before the Lord this evening, I believe God is challenging us.

- suffering depression - Jesus is passing by - He wants to free you from that which locks you out of serving Him
- locked down by personal problems - Jesus is passing by and he wants to deal with them
- locked down by problems understanding what God's will is for your life - Jesus is passing by, He wants to minister to you
- locked down with worry about your future - health, eternal issues - Jesus is passing by and wants to deal with that worry.