

Lent is coming. Which means all your favorite TV channels—The History Channel, The Learning Channel, The Discovery Channel—all of those channels will have some sorta special on to try to undermine the Bible. They'll do whatever they can to make you question your faith, doubt the credibility of the Scriptures, and second guess what you believe about Jesus Christ. You can almost set your watch by it—it happens about this time every year.

But it's obvious these people don't really get God's Word. It's apparent that they don't really understand its complexity and appreciate the richness of the text. Because, if they did, they would find the Bible to be a commanding work of literature, a grand narrative so beautifully composed it could only be divine. It's not nearly as simple, and primitive, and thrown-together as they usually make it out to be. Just look at today's Gospel, for example. The whole story is dripping with irony, which is a masterful literary device.

You see, Jesus also knows that Lent is coming. That's why He's on His way to Jerusalem, to get the show on the road. And as He and His disciples make their way, Jesus glances over his shoulder and tells them what they can expect in the days ahead. He says, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise."

Now, as they say, hindsight is 20/20. You and I, we get what Jesus is talkin' about. We have the benefit of having had this all explained to us back in Sunday school. But while we get it, Luke says this about the disciples: "But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said." What you and I take for granted in this text, these disciples did not yet see. All they saw when they looked at Jesus wasn't their Savior from sin, but their Savior from the Roman Empire's occupation. Instead of seeing His mission as one of heavenly salvation, all they could see was how Jesus was going to save the Jerusalem here on earth. Rather than seeing His cross as the place where the world would be saved, they could only see it as an instrument of Roman execution. Sure, they each had a pair of eyes with which to see, but yet somehow they were blind to the things of God.

And here's where the irony comes in. As Jesus approaches Jericho, we hear about a blind man begging by the roadside. When all of a sudden, this blind man senses a commotion. Around him, the voices grow more numerous; the crunching of feet on the road gets louder; he can even smell the mass of bodies as they crowd about. And the blind man starts wondering, "Hey, what's going on?" And somebody leans down and responds, "Why, it's Jesus of Nazareth—He's almost here." Keep in mind, these people, standing around waiting for Jesus, probably had the same blinders on as the disciples. In other words, they also were somewhat blind to His greater mission of salvation.

But funny how this blind man—the one guy who can't see—actually sees Jesus for who He really is. He gives it away when he calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Now, *Son of David*, that's a messianic title. The blind man sees Jesus as exactly who He said He was—the One who is to accomplish everything that's written about Him by the prophets. And here's one of the things the prophet Isaiah wrote about Him (we heard it in the Old Testament Reading just a few moments ago):

"Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
'Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come and save you.'  
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."

This blind man knows that Jesus is God come to save, and ready to open the eyes of the blind. That's why he calls out, "have mercy on me!" Even when he's shushed by those around him—"Shut up!" they tell him—he persists. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" he keeps saying. His faith in the Messiah, in the mercy of the Son of David, and the salvation of his God, simply will not quit. Truly, this blind man has a vision like no other seeing person does. And it's that faith that makes him well. I love the irony here.

But interestingly, Luke continues that irony with the next story. If we were to keep reading beyond chapter 18 of today's Gospel and began chapter 19, we would find that in the next verses after approaching Jericho, Jesus would then enter into Jericho. And just like the commotion outside the city there'd be a similar commotion inside the city. Surely, people crowding around to see Jesus as He passes by. And like the blind man, another man—a tax collector—would hear about Jesus' arrival. And although he wasn't blind, most Jews would've thought there was something wrong with the way the tax collector saw things. After all, he apparently saw nothing wrong with getting rich by taking from his own people and giving it to their oppressors, the Roman Empire. Not just that, but this man's short stature would've kept him from seeing over the wall of human bodies in front of him. Because he was a tax collector, nobody would step aside for him. So, between his profession and being vertically challenged, that man might as well have been blind.

But ironically, he's not the one with a vision problem, but it's everyone else. No, he sees Jesus for what He truly is—a friend of sinners. And such faith sends him scurrying up a tree, desperately intent to see his Savior, Jesus. Then, just like with the blind man, Jesus deliberately addresses the tax collector too. Stopping just under his tree, Jesus looks up and says, "Zacchaeus, what're you doing up there? Come on down! It's your house I'd like to stay at today." And with that, as Jesus later says, "Today, salvation has come to this house . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Again, incredible irony. You'd expect those with a front row seat to have the best view, but they don't. Rather, it's those you'd think would be blind to the things of God who are the ones that actually see.

So, which camp would you fall into—the disciples and the crowds . . . or the blind man and Zacchaeus? Even though you have two eyes, are you still blind? Or, no matter the results of your last vision test, do you see Christ with faith's perfect 20/20?





My guess is, our trouble isn't so much seeing Christ as our Savior, that's nothing new for us. But what does give us trouble is seeing just how much we actually need Him. Here's what I mean. On some level, we all know we're sinners—we've owned up to it, in fact we confessed it today. We think, *Well, of course, nobody's perfect.* But, instead of that deeply troubling us, do we instead find it strangely comforting? Is it reassuring to know that we're all in the same boat, that we've all fallen short of the glory of God? That while we might not be better than anyone else, we're also not worse than anyone else either? Do we find safety in numbers?

But isn't sin, no matter how small, always a big deal? Isn't all sin idolatry, choosing something else over God? Isn't each random act of sin a random act of violence against the very One who's given us life, and done nothing but love us, bless us, and save us? Imagine if you were in a serious relationship with someone, and they chipped away at trust and fidelity the way you and I do with God. There's no way to describe the intense heartache and the raw pain that person would inflict on you—well, imagine what we do to Him each and every day!

- *A little bending the truth never hurt anyone.*
- *It's only pornography—who's gonna know?*
- *It's barely even stealing—nobody will miss it.*
- *What's wrong with getting back at someone—after all, don't they deserve it!*
- *Hey, it's not like I robbed a bank or killed anybody.*

Whatever it is, let's stop kidding ourselves, and open our eyes to the truth—sin . . . is *sin*. If that's not clear to us, then we won't see our Savior with full clarity either.

Zacchaeus could see Jesus clearly though, because he knew all too well he was a sinner—nobody would let him forget it. And the blind man, well, just think of having to go through life being called *unclean* all the time. Or having to hear people speculate if you'd been struck blind by some sin. Remember the disciples' question to Jesus once, "Who sinned—this

man or his parents—that he was born blind?” Well, that was enough to make him see Jesus as none other than the merciful Son of David. If you and I only see as our sins as this big  then our Savior will only be this big.  But if we have big sins  then you and I have a big, big Savior  .

That’s perhaps the greatest irony in the Bible. Ironically, the Son of God was made the Son of Man, so that the sons of men could be made sons of God. He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God. The Lord of life dies on earth, so that mortals like us would live in heaven. The Bible is all about such ironies—it’s brilliantly written with the upside-down, backwards, topsy-turvy salvation of God. It’s counterintuitive—no man could’ve ever come up with it. The first are last and the last are first? The righteous are sinners and the sinners are righteous? It’s the seeing who are blind and the blind who see?

In today’s text it says that after when the blind man received his sight, he began to follow Jesus—which means that he most likely went up with his Lord to Jerusalem. Imagine, seeing your Savior with fresh eyes and watching the whole Passion drama unfold. And while the whole mess was obscure to the heartless Romans, the rebellious Jews, and the confused disciples, I wonder if to the man who’d once been blind everything was clear as day. Well, you and I don’t have to just imagine—this Lent, having fresh eyes to see our sin for what it really is, even more we have new vision to see Jesus for the Savior He actually is.

As we go with Him through this Lenten journey, let us gaze into the very heart of God. Let us discover just how forgiven we truly are. Let us find out the full extent of his extravagant, lavish, abundant grace and mercy. Let us fully grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Let it finally dawn on us the lengths He’ll go for you and me. That’s the wonder that lies ahead of us this Lent. Won’t you join me?