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Sunday School Lesson

The Master's Touch

Matt. 20:29-34

with parallels in
Mark 10:46-52 & Luke 18:35-43

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Matt. 20:29-34 (N-A 28th ed)

29 Καὶ ἐκπορευομένων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Ἰεριχῶ ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῶ ὄχλος πολὺς. 30 καὶ ἰδοὺ δύο τυφλοὶ καθήμενοι παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἀκούσαντες ὅτι Ἰησοῦς παράγει, ἔκραξαν λέγοντες· Ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, κύριε υἱὸς Δαυίδ. 31 ὁ δὲ ὄχλος ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα σιωπήσωσιν· οἱ δὲ μεῖζον ἔκραξαν λέγοντες· Ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, κύριε, υἱὸς Δαυίδ. 32 καὶ στὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐφώνησεν αὐτούς καὶ εἶπεν· Τί θέλετε ποιήσω ὑμῖν; 33 λέγουσιν αὐτῶ· Κύριε, ἵνα ἀνοιγῶσιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν. 34 σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἤψατο τῶν ὀμμάτων αὐτῶν, καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέβλεψαν καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῶ.

Literary Structure of Miracle Stories:

Need:

Action:

Consequence:

Mark 10:46-52 (N-A 28th ed)

46 Καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Ἰεριχῶ. Καὶ ἐκπορευομένου αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ Ἰεριχῶ καὶ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ ὁ υἱὸς Τιμαίου Βαρτιμαῖος, τυφλὸς προσαίτης, ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν. 47 καὶ ἀκούσας ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρηθὸς ἐστὶν ἤρξατο κράζειν καὶ λέγειν· υἱὲ Δαυίδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με. 48 καὶ ἐπετίμων αὐτῶ πολλοὶ ἵνα σιωπήσῃ· ὁ δὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔκραζεν· υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με. 49 καὶ στὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· φωνήσατε αὐτόν. καὶ φωνοῦσιν τὸν τυφλὸν λέγοντες αὐτῶ· θάρσει, ἔγειρε, φωνεῖ σε. 50 ὁ δὲ ἀποβαλὼν τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ ἀναπηδήσας ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν. 51 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω; ὁ δὲ τυφλὸς εἶπεν αὐτῶ· ραββουνι, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω. 52 καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῶ· Ὑπαγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέβλεψεν καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῶ ἐν τῇ ὁδῶ.

Luke 18:35-43 (N-A 28th ed)

35 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ ἐγγίζειν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἰεριχῶ τυφλὸς τις ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐπαίτων. 36 ἀκούσας δὲ ὄχλου διαπορευομένου ἐπυνθάνετο τί εἴη τοῦτο. 37 ἀπήγγειλαν δὲ αὐτῶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος παρέρχεται. 38 καὶ ἐβόησεν λέγων· Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με. 39 καὶ οἱ προάγοντες ἐπετίμων αὐτῶ ἵνα σιγήσῃ, αὐτὸς δὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔκραζεν· Υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με. 40 σταθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν ἀχθῆναι πρὸς αὐτόν. ἐγγίσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτόν· 41 Τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Κύριε, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω. 42 καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῶ· Ἀνάβλεψον· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. 43 καὶ παραχρῆμα ἀνέβλεψεν καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῶ δοξάζων τὸν θεόν. καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἰδὼν ἔδωκεν αἶνον τῷ θεῶ.

(NRSV)

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. 30 There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" 32 Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" 33 They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

(NRSV)

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

(NRSV)

35 As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." 38 Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40 Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." 42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." 43 Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Exegesis of Passage:

The interpretation of a scripture text first seeks to determine “what the text meant” to the initial readers. Once this has been established within reasonable boundaries, the second question to be answered is “What does the text mean?” The establishment of historical boundaries of meaning establishes boundaries for potential application in our world. Following this time honored principle of interpretation helps prevent us from eisegesis, i.e., reading our notions of meaning back into the text as though this was what the text meant. Instead, this principle helps keep us doing exegesis, i.e., letting the text speak today out of the boundaries of what it first said.

To determine what it meant requires two areas of investigation: the historical aspects and the literary aspects. When dealing with a text from one of the Synoptic Gospels such as here, some more considerations come into the picture. Usually two or three of the gospel writers will describe the same event in Jesus’ public ministry. Because often the wording of the original Greek text among the two or three parallel texts is exceedingly close to the others, the question automatically arises, Who copied whom? And we are confronted with the central issue of the Synoptic Problem, i.e., the nature of the literary connection among the three gospels. Although a major field of scholarly research since the late 1800s, the conclusion that I came to many years ago is that Mark is the first gospel to be written in the middle 60s. Matthew follows Mark in the early 70s, and finally Luke in the middle 70s to middle 80s. Matthew had access to a copy of Mark’s gospel, as did also Luke. Hotly debated still is whether Luke also had a copy of Matthew as well.

The caution always is to be wary of making a single gospel story about Jesus from this inner connection interest. Through most of the 1900s, this preoccupation with the gospels as three biographies of Jesus that needed to be blended into a single story of Jesus’ life and ministry clouded the understanding of the unique portrait of Jesus presented by each gospel writer. The emphasis on the latter came to dominate American scholars in the second half of the last century. This while European and British scholars clung to the former approach. In the present century, a better balance between the two perspectives exists in scholarly circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another interpretive dynamic arising from a Synoptic Gospel parallel text is the closer conceptional linkage between the historical and the literary aspects of

every ancient written text. The compositional history of a gospel parallel text depends heavily on literary conclusions drawn about the scripture text. For that reason, I will discuss both these aspects interchangeably. The transcriptional history, i.e., history of the copying of the scripture text to 1516, remains distinct and standard within normal guidelines. I will forego this analysis for the sake of brevity.¹ The only significant variation occurs in verse 30 whether the word for Lord should be inserted after the plea, “Have mercy on us.” The evidence is pretty evenly divided between including or omitting it.

The function of this miracle story inserted by Matthew in Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem is well stated by Donald Hagner,

Just before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus performs a striking miracle in the healing of two blind men, who appeal to him using the title Son of David. This is the same title with which Jesus will be greeted on his entry into Jerusalem (21:9). In the temple Jesus will again heal the blind and the lame too (21:14). The present passage thus at once rounds out the preceding main section of the Gospel and serves as a transition to the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem and the events to occur there. The present miracle has the effect of confirming the messianic identity of Jesus as the Son of David. With sover-

¹The critical apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 28th edition text lists most of the variations in wording over the centuries of copying. Note the following:

29 ^ϛ ηκολουθησαν αυτω (- *45) οχλοι πολλοι (οχλος πολυς Γ 1241) *45 D Γ 1241. 1424 it vg^{ms} sy^h bo^{ms}
30 ^ϛ κυριε ελεησον ημας B L Z 085. 0281. 892 lat samss bo
| ελεησον ημας ϛ D Θ f13 565. 700 it syc mae
| txt *45vid C K N W Γ Δ f1 33. 579. 1241. 1424 * f q syp.h sams
ϛ p) υιε *45 C D 085. 0281 f1 33. 565. 579. 1241. 1424 pm
| Ιησου υιε ϛ L N Θ f13 700. 892 c e h n samss mae bo
| txt B K W Z Γ Δ pm
31 ^ϛ εκραζον ϛ2a C K N W Γ Δ f1 33. 565. 579. 1241. 1424*
| εκραυαζον Θ f13
| εκραυασαν *45
| txt ϛ*.2b B D L Z 085. 0281. 700. 892
ϛ (30) κυριε ελεησον ημας ϛ B D L Z Θ 085. 0281 f13 892 lat syp
samss bo
| ελεησον ημας 579. 700 e
| txt C K N W Γ Δ f1 33. 565. 1241. 1424 * f ff2 q syc.h sams
mae
ϛ p) υιε ϛ(*).1 C D L N 085. 0281. 33. 579. 892. 1241. 1424
| txt B K W Z Γ Δ Θ f1.13 565. 700 *
32 ° B
33 ^ϛ ημων οι οφθαλμοι C K N W Γ Δ Θ f1.13 565. 579. 700.
1241. 1424 *
| txt ϛ B D L Z 0281vid. 33. 892; Or
34 ^ϛ αυτων (- Θ) των ομματων B Θ
| p) των οφθαλμων αυτων ϛ1 (αυτου ϛ*) C K N W Γ Δ f1 33. 565.
579. 700. 1241. 1424 *
| txt D L Z f13 892; Or
ϛ αυτων οι οφθαλμοι C K N W Γ Δ 565. 579. 1241. 1424 * q
syp.h sams

eign power he brings sight to the blind, and they respond by following him in discipleship—all this in strong contrast to the way he will be received by the Jerusalem authorities.²

Matthew has his own purposes for including this miracle story at this point. His inclusion of two unnamed blind men, over against Mark describing Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus as the single individual, underscores a distinctive trait of Matthew including ‘two witnesses’ to Jesus’ actions.³ The Torah required at least two witnesses before a testimony could be accepted. For the Jewish Christian audience of Matthew’s gospel, this was critically important. But for Mark’s basically non-Jewish

²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 584–585.

³The significant Matthean departures from Mark are the following. Matthew omits Mark’s opening sentence καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Ἰεριχώ, “and they came into Jericho,” which serves no real purpose and stands in tension with the reference in the following sentence to coming out of Jericho. Matthew omits Mark’s specific reference καὶ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, “and his disciples,” including them instead in the plural genitive absolute, with which Matthew begins. Matthew refers to ὄχλος πολὺς, “a great crowd,” instead of Mark’s ὄχλου ἰκανοῦ, “a considerable crowd,” and unlike Mark has the crowd follow Jesus (ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ, “they followed him”). Matthew omits the reference to “Bartimaeus the Son of Timaeus,” as well as the word “a beggar” (it is clearly implied that his two blind men, sitting beside the road, are also begging), and prefaces his reference to the two blind men with his favorite flag-word, ἰδοῦ, “look” (v. 30). Matthew omits Mark’s ὁ Ναζαρηνός, “the Nazarene” (Mark 10:47), after Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus” (v. 30). Mark’s υἱὲ Δαυὶδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47), becomes ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, [κύριε], υἱὸς Δαυὶδ, “have mercy on us, [Lord,] Son of David” (v. 30; cf. 9:27); the same is true of the repeated cry in the following verse in each Gospel, except for Mark’s omission of Ἰησοῦ, “Jesus.” In v. 31 Matthew has also substituted ὄχλος, “crowd,” for Mark’s πολλοί, “many,” and μείζων, “greater,” for Mark’s πολλῶ μᾶλλον, “much more” (Mark 10:48). Matthew omits the reference to the crowd telling the blind man the good news that Jesus was calling him and the blind man throwing off his mantle and jumping up (Mark 10:49b–50); Matthew comes directly to the exchange between Jesus and the blind men. He alters the blind man’s address of Jesus as ῥαββουνί, “Rabbi,” to the more appropriate κύριε, “Lord,” and the request in Mark, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω, “that I may see,” is expanded to ἵνα ἀνοιγῶσιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν, “that our eyes may be opened” (v. 33; Mark 10:51). In v. 34 Matthew inserts σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἤψατο τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν, “moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes” (an unusual type of insertion for Matthew), while omitting Mark’s ὑπάγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, “go, your faith has healed you” (Mark 10:52), a point with which Matthew does not want here to distract his readers (but cf. 9:29). Finally, Matthew omits ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, “on the road,” after the concluding note that the men who had been healed followed Jesus (v. 34; Mark 10:52), thus pointing to true discipleship rather than the mere accompanying of Jesus to Jerusalem.

Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 585.

audience, such thinking was irrelevant. Who the individual was had more importance to Mark’s audience. The same thing could be said for Luke’s audience, so much so that Luke did not even bother to identify the man beyond him being a blind beggar (Note Luke’s τυφλός... ἐπαϊτῶν, in comparison to Mark’s τυφλὸς προσαίτης). Interestingly Mark tells the story of Jesus within the framework of the ancient Roman biography, while Luke’s audience of Theophilus (Lk. 1:1-4) is Greek.

Of particular importance is the similarity between Matt. 20:29-34 and Matt. 9:27-31. “The common elements between the two Matthean pericopes are particularly striking: (1) both concern two blind men (δύο τυφλοί), who (2) cry out with nearly the same cry, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς [κύριε not in 9:27], υἱὸς Δαυὶδ, “have mercy on us, [Lord,] Son of David,” (3) to Jesus as he passes by, and (4) whom Jesus heals by touching their eyes (ἤψατο τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν/ὀμμάτων αὐτῶν, “he touched their eyes”).”⁴

Especially noteworthy is the repeated cry of the blind men: ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, [κύριε,] υἱὸς Δαυὶδ, Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David. The Messianic assertions of this cry are clear and low to Matthew’s original Jewish Christian audience. Mark goes a little different direction with his, Υἱὲ Δαυὶδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με. Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me. That Matthew is a little more Christological oriented can be also noted in his abbreviated wording from Mark: Mark’s καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, and he followed Him on the road, becomes Matthew’s καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ, and they followed Him.

As I call attention to in THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST: A Chronological Listing,⁵ this miracle story mark the end of Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem Jesus will heal blind people in the temple (21:14). But here at Jericho the Jesus has arrived for the Passover celebration and will be greeted by large crowds using the same title as here in Jericho (21:9). So as Jesus prepares for the Jewish Passover, the people are recognizing Him as the long awaited Messiah. Yet, their definition of Messiah is culturally shaped rather than biblically defined. And upon His arrest, they will turn on him with the same intensity that they are welcoming Him. Their preconceived biases have trapped them into wanting a violent ruler who will bring materialistic success.

⁴Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 585–586.

⁵<http://cranfordville.com/Miracles.htm>. Accessed March 28, 2020.

Exposition of Passage:

What can we learn from this gospel text? One foundational principle of interpretation is that the closer the perceived 'now' meaning matches the 'then' meaning, the stronger it becomes in accuracy. When it is a matter of historical details corresponding closely to modern situations, there is real challenge. There's no longer a Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The human Jesus of Nazareth is now the risen Christ in Heaven. Etc. So how can we apply this text in Matthew legitimately to our situations today?

Donald Hagner offers some insights here.

Jesus on the way to his death in Jerusalem does not cease being the Messiah who meets the needs of individuals. The giving of sight to the blind is a dramatic miracle that points to the dawning of the era of messianic fulfillment. The Son of David is present among his people. And as he compassionately delivers them from their literal darkness, so he continues on his way to Jerusalem, where in his sacrificial death he will deliver all of humanity from an even greater darkness—that of the bondage to sin and death. Thus the cry of the blind men, "Lord, have mercy on us," becomes in the Kyrie Eleison of the church's liturgy the cry for deliverance from sin and its judgment. This healing pericope thus may be seen as the gospel in a microcosm.⁶

Here is another commentator's insights. That of John Nolland in the New International Greek Testament Commentary:

Matthew does not share Mark's interest in what happens 'on the way', so he drops the phrase here. Otherwise he prefers the aorist to express the blind people's following Jesus. In Matthew this following puts them on a par with the crowd in v. 29: they have not necessarily become disciples in a more developed sense, but like the crowd they have behaved in a way that points towards discipleship (cf. at 4:25). Given, however, the rather symbolic handling of sight, the juxtaposition of 'gained their sight' and 'followed' may well hint at more.

The crowd which in v. 31 was eager to silence the two blind voices will in 21:9 echo their assessment that Jesus is the Son of David; as the blind people gain their sight, the crowd comes to appreciate their insight.⁷

Still further is that of Craig Keener:

Despite the notorious dangers of roads like the one from Jericho to Jerusalem (20:29;88 cf. Lk 10:30; Jeremi-

as 1972: 203), many beggars would have sought alms from Passover pilgrims there at this season (Lane 1974a: 387).⁸⁹ Jericho was a relatively wealthy community with a priestly establishment (see Jos. War 4.459–75; Schwartz 1988; Finegan 1969: 81–88; Coughenour 1982: 995–96), boasting also Herod's winter palaces (Gleason 1987; Netzer 1989). Although Matthew, abbreviating Mark's account, omits the label "faith" here (Mk 10:52), he nevertheless illustrates the same principle (Mt 9:29). While this text does not promote selfish prayers like the one illustrated in 20:20–21, it does provide Matthew's audience principles for one with a desperate, life-affecting need (20:32–33).

First, these suppliants recognized the identity and authority of the one whose help they entreated (20:30). They recognized that Jesus was son of David—rightful ruler in God's coming kingdom (1:1; 15:22; 21:9);⁹⁰ they also acknowledged their need of mercy (5:7; cf. 6:2–4—"alms" originally literally meant "acts of mercy"), humbly depending on his favor rather than their own merit.

Second, they refused to let others' priorities deter them (20:31). The crowd already "following" Jesus (20:29, 31; cf. 8:1; 19:2) did not want the teacher to be interrupted by beggars; many probably wanted him to get on with the business of setting up the kingdom they suspected he would establish (21:9). They did not understand that the agendas of the kingdom involved serving precisely the weakest (20:28; cf. 19:13). But the beggars exercised sufficient faith in the Lord's authority and concern that no one else's impatient dismissal of their need would keep them from persisting in their dependence on the teacher (cf. 8:7; 15:24–26).

Third, Jesus' compassion was the ultimate motivation for his acting (20:34). God knows the pain in his people's lives, and Jesus acted from compassion (cf. 6:8; 9:36; 14:14; 15:32). Biographers might praise the kindness of leaders who admitted to their presence even the lowliest of persons (Corn. Nep. 1 [Miltiades], 8.4), which fits the situation here (20:31–32). The immediacy of the healing is frequently mentioned in ancient healing reports, though Matthew often omits Mark's characteristic "immediately" (Theissen 1983: 66).

Finally, recipients of Jesus' gifts should follow him (20:34). Although Mark's "go" (Mk 10:52) makes their following even more striking, Matthew is equally clear that the formerly blind men, now able to follow Jesus, do just that. When Matthew speaks of "following" he refers especially to following as a disciple (8:19, 22; 19:21), which in this context means following to the cross (20:17–28).⁸

⁶Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 588.

⁷John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 830.

⁸Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 488–489.