

## REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

**Luke 18:35–43**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Luke 18:35–43 (NIV)

“As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ He called out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ 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!’ Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘Lord, I want to see,’ he replied. Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.”

This story of the healing of the blind man reads very fast. But there is more to the account than meets the eye. If you look at the first three Gospels in each of their accounts, you will see that it is as though this story has been filmed from three different cameras. It’s like the same news story, but it’s carried on channel 2, channel 4 and channel 7, and each camera has picked up the story at a different angle. The Holy Spirit has allowed the Gospel writers to do this and even take some liberty in editing the material to suit their own programming purposes.

Luke’s camera shows us that Jesus is entering Jericho when blind Bartimaeus begins to call out. In fact, Luke doesn’t name him. Mark’s camera, shooting from a different angle, picks up his name. It’s Bartimaeus. Out of the thirty-five healing miracles of Jesus, it’s—to my knowledge—the only miracle where a person is named. Everybody else is unnamed. One of the other miracles—the raising of the dead—Lazarus is named.

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

### **Luke 18:35–43**

Why is Bartimaeus alone named? Was it perhaps because he becomes a well-known follower of Jesus in his later years and that's his testimony? The other followers went back to obscurity, but Bartimaeus continued as a leader in the body of Christ.

But Mark's camera shows us that the healing took place, not as Jesus was entering Jericho, but as Jesus was leaving Jericho. There are some who look at this and say, "There's hopeless confusion. Luke shoots the shot with Jesus entering Jericho and Mark with Jesus leaving. Where did the miracle take place?" If you're a careful student of the Gospels, as I've tried to be, you will see that often the Holy Spirit has given the Gospel writers liberty of editing material without regard to chronological sequence. As westerners, our mental mindset is much more chronologically oriented and the eastern mind is much different in its thinking process.

So what has actually happened is Luke has taken the story and given us an added dimension. The healing did take place as Jesus left Jericho. Mark and Luke say that, but the approach began as Jesus entered Jericho. Rather than making a differentiation in the timing, Luke simply wants to get the story told, and so he tells it all here, without putting the healing after the meeting with Zaccheus and the teaching of the parable of the pounds. He just lumps it all in one moment as one news clip. His has kind of a disregard with chronology, except to note that Bartimaeus began to call out as Jesus was entering.

Then Matthew's camera comes along and he shows us that there were two blind beggars that were healed, and that Mark and Luke had only done a close shot of the one. Matthew says there were two.

So when we get all three Gospel writers together and see all three screens, what we have is this: Jesus is entering Jericho. What a beautiful place to enter and what an awful place to be blind in. Jericho, the beautiful town below sea level, the fertile oasis with Elisha's spring, where fruit

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

grows in abundance and is delicious. It's by the Jordan and all around is the Judean desert. And the climb up to Jerusalem. Jesus comes to that town. Blind Bartimaeus believes something about Jesus. He's not just Jesus of Nazareth, but He's the Son of David. That's a Messianic phrase. He evidently has come to believe, for some reason or other, that Jesus is the Messiah. "Help me." As Jesus enters the town for whatever reason, Jesus doesn't hear it, or chooses not to get to him, so he's left.

Jesus goes in, eats with Zaccheus, teaches. In the meantime, Bartimaeus is tapping his way around town. Where did He go? Where is He coming out? On the way, He picks up another beggar who goes along, tapping with him. There was only one way—in those days—in or out of Jericho, so they go back and they take their place and say, "When He leaves there will not be as big a crowd, and the noise will not be as strong. Maybe we can get to Him then." So they were there, crying out. That's the whole picture.

I'm submitting to you that this little story that takes a few seconds to read took hours of Bartimaeus' time as he tapped around town that day, trying to get to Jesus. As I look at Bartimaeus' life, I always take a view of Scripture that says that's the way it happened. What does this say to me? I've got to find myself in the story. You've got to find yourself in the story. I realized, as I studied this, that there were four things that could have kept Bartimaeus from getting to Jesus and getting his sight. These are the same four things that will keep you or me from getting out of life and out of Jesus all that we need in order to live life with a clear perspective, sight and insight. The same four barriers have to be overcome. That's why I've called this message "Removing the Barriers to Success." I don't like the word "success," so I'll let you define it. Success to me is "knowing God's will and doing it."

Removing the barriers that keep us from being all that God wants us to be.

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

### **I. I think the first barrier that Bartimaeus had to overcome is the barrier of blame.**

We know that people in that day theologized as to why people were ill. They do it still in this day. “I know you’re ill because you’ve sinned or you haven’t had enough faith,” or something like that. We’re all great at telling someone else why they’ve had financial reversals or sickness or the like. The disciples of Jesus were that way. In John 9:11 and following, Jesus is in Jerusalem and He encounters a blind man. What’s the instinct of the disciples when they first see him? They say, “Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents?” That’s such an awful thing that’s happened to him in life, there must have been somebody who sinned badly. Maybe it was his parents. Maybe it was himself.

Bartimaeus must’ve had a lot of things going on in his mind. If you put yourself in Bartimaeus’ place, I would imagine you would be tempted to be embittered and to say, “Whose fault is it that I am in the mess I’m in? Whose fault is it? Did my parents sin?” And if he wasn’t born blind but became blind, “Was it some sin that I committed?” Surely, living in that society, he had to have some blame against the people he lived with. Why didn’t they take better care of him? Why didn’t they have a handicapped educational program so that blind people didn’t have to sit and grovel for the rest of their life as a beggar on the side of the road? Something’s wrong with a society that does that to people. Why not just sit there and say, “Everybody else is responsible for the shape I’m in”? He had lots of people to blame. He may have even raised his blinded eyes to the heavens and shaken his fist at God and said, “You’re the one who made me this way!”

Blame seeks to establish an answer to this fundamental question: Who is at fault? But I’ve found that, if you find the cause, you don’t solve the problem. It just allows us to escape responsibility in our own life. If I can blame somebody else for all of my problems, then it means I can be irresponsible. I can be irresponsible in my attitudes. I can be irresponsible in my actions, because

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

### **Luke 18:35–43**

it's all their fault. It's all my kid's fault. It's all my wife's fault. It's all my parents' fault. It's all society's fault. So I can't help the way I am. Somebody else made me the way I am. It excuses responsibility.

Blame does some very nasty things to our lives. It makes us bitter. It orients us to the past, rehearsing and reliving all the things that have gone wrong. It makes comparisons, "I at this stage of life should be where she or he is. It's not fair." It creates self-absorption—me, me, me. And it excuses irresponsible behavior.

The difference between faith and blame is that faith takes responsibility. Faith does not go looking for the cause, but faith goes looking for the cure. Blame is concerned about the cause, but faith is looking for the cure.

I've found that it doesn't change a thing if you find out who's responsible. One has to move ahead. Bartimaeus that day must've had the attitude, "There is absolutely nothing that can be done about my past. But something can be done today which will change my tomorrow. I will get up and I will begin to scream."

He couldn't do much of anything. The only thing he could do is say, "Help me!" It's a great thing to at least get started. I'll do something today that will change tomorrow.

At Westmont College's commencement a couple of years ago, Dr. David Swoop told about a moment in which he met Mother Teresa when he lived in Washington D.C. He asked her in the conversation, "Don't you ever become angry at the causes of social injustice that you see in India or in other parts of the world?" Mother Teresa said to him, "Why should I expend the energy in anger that I can expend in love?" What an attitude toward life! Why should I spend my time in anger when I could spend it in love?

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

### **Luke 18:35–43**

I might say, with Bartimaeus, “Why should I spend my time in blame when I could spend it in faith?” Bartimaeus, in his day, as we do in our day, has to come out of an atmosphere and a climate of anger and blame and bitterness, into an atmosphere of faith and opportunity. If we let blame be the cause of our not making progress in life, it’s a barrier to getting the wholeness Jesus seeks.

### **II. Roadblock number two: despair and depression.**

There is a hopelessness to being a beggar. Any of us who have had experience in the Orient, or in third-world countries—as I have—knows what it is like to see a beggar that is sitting by the side of the road. There’s nothing more pathetic, almost nothing more hopeless on the human scene, than the beggar sitting in his filthy, dirty rags on the side of the road. The beggar is such an awful sight that you don’t even want to give to him because it’s almost like you’re going to pick something up from them.

Bartimaeus was not only a beggar, he was a blind beggar and he, I’m sure, had had moments of despair in his life. But beyond his moments of despair, somehow, when Jesus came to his place, there was a seed of faith. If he had let despair totally dominate his life, he would have said, “I will always be this way. I may as well give up.” But that day Jesus came into his town, there was a ray of hope in the midst of the black night of despair in his life.

Sometime ago, there was this Garfield cartoon. It showed Garfield the cat and Odie the dog chasing one another through the yard. Garfield runs up a tree and is sitting on a branch. Odie is chasing after him, and Odie goes right up the tree and sits down next to him on the branch. The two of them are sitting there side-by-side, high up in the tree, when their owner, Jon, comes along. Jon looks up and sees Garfield the cat and Odie the dog in the tree. He says, “Odie, dogs

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

can't climb trees." Whereupon Garfield says, "It's amazing what one can accomplish when one doesn't know what one can't do."

So often, our negative attitudes prevent us from even beginning to reach for those goals which are attainable. Let alone those goals that appear unreachable.

There's a little publication called *Mile High Evangelist*. It carried, some time ago, a blurb about the seven differences between a winner and a loser.

1. A winner says, "Let's find out." A loser says, "Nobody knows."
2. When a winner makes a mistake he says, "I was wrong." When a loser makes a mistake, he says, "It wasn't my fault."
3. A winner goes through a problem. A loser gets around it and never gets past it.
4. A winner makes commitments. A loser makes promises and excuses.
5. A winner says, "I'm good, but not as good as I ought to be." A loser says, "I'm not as bad as a lot of other people are."
6. A winner tries to learn from those who are superior to him. A loser tries to tear down those who are superior to him.
7. A winner says, "There ought to be a better way to do it." A loser says, "That's the way it's always been done around here before."

What right actions and goals do we feel stirred to take but have held back because of the rationale: "It's no use. I can't do it"? If I've learned anything as a Christian, it is that the voice of the Holy Spirit is not something mystical or spooky. It doesn't vaporize out of thin air. The voice of the Holy Spirit speaks to us in two ways. First, when we read the Bible, there are certain things we're asked to do. We look at some of those and say, "I can never do that!" But faith says, "Oh, yes you can. If it's in God's Word, you can do it." Secondly, another way is the Holy Spirit

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

### **Luke 18:35–43**

will often put impressions in our hearts and we just know. Somehow, to see the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and watch the work that He's going to build in us, God has to help give us a lift out of our despair and out of our depression.

Bartimaeus could have that day when he heard Jesus was coming to town, instead of calling for help, he could have slumped back, along to his usual spot, by the side of the dusty road and said, "It's no use." But he wouldn't sit down and he wouldn't shut up.

### **III. Barrier number three: put-downs.**

We've all got to fight our way through those. Look at the put-downs. All three Gospels tell us about the put-downs that could have been a barrier to Bartimaeus getting sight in his life, getting to Jesus. Mark 10:48, "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet." Luke 18:39, "Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet." Matthew 20:31, "The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet."

"Rebuke"—that's a very strong word. It's like pouring salt on a slug. I get intrigued with Scripture. Sometimes we read it too fast. "Many rebuked him." What does that mean? Have you ever stayed out all night at the Rose Bowl parade to save your place on the sidewalk? You're there on the curb, holding down your spot, and five minutes before the parade begins, somebody comes up who is taller than you and stands right in front of you. You've been there all night. The marshal comes along and he doesn't make them move. Other people see it and you don't turn around and say, "On the count of three, let's all turn around and tell these people what pikers they are!" But there are little digs thrown in. People are saying different things and there's this "Booo!" kind of a feeling.

I think that day, when Bartimaeus started to cry out, both as Jesus was entering the town and as He was leaving, it was as though everybody was saying altogether, "Be quiet old man! Sit down.

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

Jesus doesn't have time for you!" One after another, everybody was coming to him saying, "You'll never make it. You're no good. You're never going to do it. Jesus doesn't have time for you. You don't belong to the right social class. You can't do it." Put-downs.

There are terrible put-downs in life. Probably every one of us at one time or another has had a put-down in life. Some of us may have had a whole bunch. "You'll never amount to anything. You can't do anything right. You're stupid. You're ugly. You make me sick." How can you like a person who makes you sick? "You'll never change!" All these boxes we put people in.

There's a story out of my own life. I wish I could share it more often, but I realize pastors get voted out of churches for repeating stories, so I try to save mine and use the good ones about every three years or so. Hopefully, people who were here three years ago have forgotten it. One of my very favorite stories out of my own life is that I was a victim of a terrible inferiority complex when I was younger. I felt I was ugly, left-handed and all those kind of things which I am. But it's amazing how, when you get older, you don't look nearly as bad as you thought you looked when you were younger. I've met some girls I used to date that told me they thought I looked kind of neat when I was younger, but I always thought I was so ugly. Interesting. A lot of the ugliness is in between our own ears. We were living in Springfield, Missouri, in my teenage years (fourteen through sixteen). That's the headquarters of our church, the Assemblies of God. A lot of people are in denominational positions, college positions and the like. My dad, however, was an itinerant minister who preached in smaller churches and who was frequently gone, because that was the way our family income came in those years. We lived in a very, very small home right next to a whole lot of large homes that were lived in by the leaders of the denomination. To help make ends meet in the family, I had a paper route. The only problem was the paper route was three or four miles across town and it was a four in the morning and four in

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

the afternoon paper route. I had two paper routes. So everyday I was out, pumping up Grant Avenue, going up the hill with my bicycle with a basket full of papers. As I turned sixteen, my friends, some of which had families with far more means than mine, were now driving their own cars and they were going by waving at me, and I felt like I was just at the bottom of the pile. I felt I was a social misfit and outcast and would never amount to anything in life—and all these sorts of things that you go through as a teen.

But I worked hard. Years went by and at the age of twenty-nine, I had finished my doctoral degree at Fuller Seminary and gone back to my college alma mater, Evangel College, to teach. I'll never forget my first day back in the cafeteria. Now I'm a teacher and a doctor. Doctor George O. Wood. That sounded impressive. It sounded so good and I was so young and I knew so much. One of my colleagues was with me in the cafeteria. Across the distance, I saw one of my friends from those years when I was a teenager. He had been one of those kids who had a car and everything he needed. But as time had gone on, I think he coasted on his family's reputation. So he'd dropped out of school and was kind of bumming around, not doing anything. I sort of had a superiority attitude that I'd made something of myself. He comes across the room and my colleague doesn't know that I know him from years ago, so he proceeds to introduce me. He says, "I want you to meet a friend of mine, Dr. George Wood." My old friend looks at me and says, "You mean the old paper boy!" After I recovered from that, and later thought about it, I realized that my pride was getting in my way.

I love what C. M. Ward says "When we all get to heaven and lay our trophies at Jesus' feet, we ain't going to be able to see Jesus." Titles aren't where it's at, friends. Just call me George, call me for dinner, call me pastor. But please don't call me "reverend." Only God is reverend.

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

I thought to myself that he really still sees me as the kid riding the bike throwing the papers. If my fate and destiny had been left up to my boyhood friend, I would never have been anything in life. Not that there's anything wrong with being a paper boy, but he had me locked in a box that said, "This is all you're ever going to be."

I wonder how much we do that to one another. It's so easy. The people we do it to the most are the people in our family. Once we get used to somebody, it's hard for us to envision that they can ever change. "You will always be this way! I know you!"

But this day, Bartimaeus was getting past all the put-downs to get to Jesus. When you're trying to get past put-downs, it's helpful to have what Bartimaeus had. He had somebody at his side, screaming with him. "Help me, Jesus!" That's why I like Matthew's account, where there are two of them, because we're not alone in life. We need people at our side. That's what the church is for. We put an arm around one another and say, "I believe in you. Jesus believes in you. We can make it!" When you're down, it helps to have somebody by your side saying, "Let's scream together!"

**IV. The fourth barrier: I'm calling it blockage; a failure to act on opportunity when faith is present.**

When faith is present, we feel like it's time to go for it. Blockage is when we say, "I could never do that!" There are moments in life when we're called upon to make a decision. The mixture of faith and opportunity is present. It's combustible. All we have to do is light the fire of decision. Such a moment, if we delay, may never come again. We have to act on it. That's why, at every service, I want to give people the chance to respond to God. I used to think, "If people listen to the message, they'll go out during the week and make a decision." No, that's probably not the

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

way it happens most of the time. We go out and the influence is diminished. We need to make our decisions while it's hot, while there is a climate of faith and opportunity.

There are moments when we're called upon to make a decision: to lay aside bitterness, give forgiveness and get closure on an incident in our life; to determine to become oriented to the present and the future rather than the past. To make that decision.

I ran across a little story of a newspaper reporter who visited the then-Oakland Raider football camp several years ago. This reporter had just been to the Jack London historic monument and was very impressed with it. He had come back with a sample of Jack London's prose from the monument. He spotted the quarterback and began to read this to him, what Jack London had written. What the reporter read was this, "I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time." He said to the quarterback, "What do you think about that great thing that Jack London said? What does it mean to you?" The quarterback looked at him and said, "I think it means to me: throw deep. Throw deep." You've got to be a football fan to appreciate that.

There are times in life where you've got to go for it. It's a desperation play. The last play of the game, and you're six points behind, and you're on your own goal line. There's one play left.

You've got to throw deep.

Bartimaeus says, "Jesus is coming through this town." So he's hung around all those hours and now Jesus is leaving. He didn't know it, but it would be the last time that Jesus would ever pass that way, because Jesus was on His way up to Jerusalem to give His life. It was the last time. So

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

from the depths of him, Bartimaeus cried out. Psychotherapists have a term. I like the term. It's a term of urgency: "primal scream." I don't know what all they do with that, whether they lock people in a padded room and just let them yell from their depths or what. But I sort of think that's what Bartimaeus did here. There was something in his life that wanted to tear loose and I think that day when he was saying, "Jesus help me!" he was crying out with primal scream in his life.

The people who know God and who meet God are the people who get desperate in wanting a relationship with God. The rest of us kind of float along in a kind of nodding relationship, but the people who really see God at work in their life are people who call to God, not just from the head—which is important—but from the gut. "Help me!"

The great thing is, Jesus is there when we call out from the depths. Bartimaeus could have done everything and if Jesus hadn't been there, he would've had to go back and sit on the road and beg anyway. But Jesus is there.

He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. You may be here today and you're facing something bigger than you. It may be an opportunity that's bigger than your resources. It may be an illness that's bigger than your health. It may be trouble in your family or relationships that are bigger than your power to deal with. It may be bills that are bigger than your resources. When we face those moments, we can start blaming, despairing, listening to the put-downs and blocking the opportunity to act.

Bartimaeus has an important principle in life—lay all that aside, take that right mixture of faith and opportunity. Get to Jesus, ask Him to do today what you need for today so that all tomorrows will be different. It doesn't do any good to live in the past. Go into the future.

**Closing Prayer**

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS**

**Luke 18:35–43**

Father, if we could all tell our stories and shed the tears over our losses in life, we would fill this sanctuary with water. There are very few people here who have not had, at one moment or another in their life, a deep wound, a deep hurt, deep grief. And some have had those kinds of things for years and years. Like Bartimaeus. With all of our heart, we want to be whole. How interesting, Lord, that You would ask Bartimaeus, “What do you want Me to do for you?” You saw that he was blind. You surely knew what he wanted. What he needed. But You wait for us to articulate it. Because we need to know what we want. In this service today, Lord, there is an unusual opportunity, because faith is present. Faith comes when we hear Your word preached; and when the Spirit bears witness to our heart that this is Your message for us. I pray that each of us, in the depths of our heart, will take a deep look within, and then out of that, take a deep look at You. And say, “Lord, touch me. Lord, help me to look at life with healed eyes. Take the blindness of prejudice, the blindness of seeing things from a warp. So many of us, Lord, never see ourselves clearly. Other people see us and we’re just blocked from seeing ourselves. Lord, open our eyes. Help us. Heal us. There are things I cannot do for people here. I can’t put broken homes together. I can’t heal sick bodies. I can’t meet needs, but You can. I can’t save anybody. You can. I pray, if there’s anyone here in this service who has not confessed You as their Lord and Savior, that they would have the faith of a Bartimaeus who would say to you, “Son of David, Messiah, Jesus, I own You, I acknowledge You.” May boys and girls who are in this service say that today, and old men and women alike. Let’s all believe You, Lord, for You’re at work. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.