

Healing the Blind

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Preacher: Ian Weickhardt

- [0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on December 28th, 1997. The preacher is Ian Wyckart.
- The sermon is entitled Healing the Blind and is from Matthew 20, verses 29-34. Our Father, we know that the entering in of your word brings light to our hearts and souls.
- We ask this morning that you will bring more of the glorious light of the gospel into our very beings and into our lives this week.
- In Jesus' name, Amen. This morning, I invite you to see afresh with me how it is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- The reading this morning, the gospel reading this morning from Matthew's gospel comes from the gospel where in about chapter 4, Jesus makes a key statement about why he came.
- [1 : 1 2] He said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is breaking in on human existence. And we're going to deal with one powerful incidence of that as we look at today's reading from Matthew 20.
- And I want then to show you how it is that we are living agents of his kingdom in 1997 and 1998. First of all, I want to read you something of someone else's story.
- I have a book here called Assault on Eden, written by Eugenia Adams. And Eugenia and her husband, Jack, were university lecturers in a prestigious northeastern university in America in the 60s and 70s.
- And they dropped out to become hippies and lived in a hippie commune. And they tried the communal life. They tried the drug route. All kinds of things. And really reached the end of their tether until the day came when Eugenia said, I'm going to go to church.
- She'd been reared in the Presbyterian church as a little girl, a church which it appears at the time had little impact. But now I'd like you to hear her words as she reflects on what happened that day she went back to church.
- [2 : 3 4] She says, If the gathered faithful ever caught a sense of the wild, desperate hope with which outsiders from time to time approach their familiar sanctuary, perhaps they would recapture a sense of dangerous deliverance instead of the all-too-frequent cosiness or boredom that settles over them as they slip into their pews.
- A little further on in Eugenia's story, she says, We later asked the minister to visit us. When he did, we assaulted him with a barrage of questions and information about our predicament.
- I think he was surprised at finding other people as excitable as he was, to whom faith in God's gracious and powerful purpose was a matter of life and death.
- Had all we had been through not been after all in vain? It is hard for anyone whose life has begun again to contain or sustain that first joy.
- The sense of living in a cosmic drama exhilarates, almost intoxicates. We say we want our lives to have meaning. Yet when the fact that this is so dawns upon us, we can scarcely stand under the weight of the implications.

[4 : 00] Just think for a moment how that's... Her experience stands alongside a joke that's been in Anglican circles for a long time about this clergyman who dreamt that he was preaching in St Paul's Cathedral and woke up and found that he was.

A lot of Anglicans say, well, sometimes church seems like that. But when that kind of cynical thought comes to mind, it's good to hear the story of people like Eugenia Adams who says to us all, if we ever caught a sense of the wild, desperate hope with which outsiders from time to time approach their familiar sanctuary.

In one sentence, to sum up Eugenia's experience, the kingdom of heaven is at hand and had broken into the lives of Eugenia and Jack and in the context of a Sunday worship service.

The minister in that little Presbyterian church in Albuquerque, New Mexico that day would have had no idea why this couple and their two daughters probably sitting down towards the back wanting to remain inconspicuous why they were there or what this would lead to.

But certainly the living God was at work and certainly they experienced the graciousness and power of God. Which is exactly what happened to those two blind men in Matthew chapter 20.

[5 : 40] They experienced the graciousness and the power of God. I'll remind you of what happened there. They had called out to Jesus as he went past and he stood still and called them saying what do you want me to do for you?

They said Lord let our eyes be open and moved with compassion. Jesus touched their eyes and immediately they regained their sight. I wonder how good your memories are with incidents that show how the powerful people of this world the people who want to stay powerful the people who want to be seen as being prestigious how what they do in this kind of situation.

Jesus despite the fact the crowd were telling these two men to shut up it was Jesus who stopped and asked for them to be brought to him. But the powerful and prestigious of this world do it rather differently.

One of the incidents I'm referring to is what happened when there were Olympic Games in Barcelona. Just before the international tourists began arriving in Barcelona the government authorities rounded up the pickpockets the blind beggars and the prostitutes all those kinds of people who inhabited the central business district rounded them all up put them on buses drove them a long way out of town and told them to stay out of town until after the Olympics were over.

It wouldn't be good for the image of the city if they were seen around the central business district. Here again what Matthew records in verse 31 the crowd sternly ordered the blind men to be quiet.

[7 : 39] One of the evidences though that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and breaking into human life was in what Jesus did. Jesus the son of David the son of God he called the beggars over to where he was but in doing so demonstrated something of the graciousness of the in breaking of the kingdom of heaven.

You may recall that earlier in Matthew's gospel in about chapter 13 Matthew records several of Jesus' parables that begin with the statement the kingdom of heaven is like this the parables of the sower and the seed the parable of the mustard tree the parable of the wheat and the weeds all of them most informative teaching about the kingdom and here in chapter 20 although those words the kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven is like this are not used Jesus is doing it teaching kingdom of heaven truth by doing it I'd like you to notice also alongside this when this happened it's recorded in chapter 20 of Matthew and so it's happening in the final phase of Jesus' ministry in Matthew's gospel there's a couple of key sentences that define turning points in the ministry of

Jesus and they really allow us to see the big picture of the ministry of Jesus in three major sections and the third section the final phase of his life and ministry is defined by Matthew in one of these key sentences in chapter 16 where Matthew writes from that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised and so on this particular day as they were leaving Jericho on the way to Jerusalem they were well down the track on the way to Jerusalem on the way to the Garden of Tears amongst other things as we just sang sang it in that beautiful hymn The Servant King so it was a grim time a time of foreboding where Jesus knew exactly what lay ahead of him in fact he said to the disciples they weren't tuned in he said the son of man had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many he knew clearly why he'd come to this planet but did that knowledge and the fact that he was on the last phase of his ministry did that limit the power and graciousness of Jesus

I don't think I need to even raise the question what about with us gather here today in our individual and family experiences do harsh times limit his ability to show his power and graciousness through us well Wilma and I can say well the reverse is true we've seen a great deal of tragedy in our family over the past three years and as we're finishing our time in the parish of Belgrave Heights and Selby Wilma said to a group when the people said that some of them said thanks for putting up with us she said well thank you for putting up with us over the past two or three years because it's been a hard time one of the leading members of the congregation said actually seeing you live through that made you more real to us and your ministry more effective so harsh times can in fact bring about an enhancing of the demonstration of power

God's power and graciousness into other people's lives and now for what I signalled earlier on the business of how you and I are living agents of the kingdom of heaven and as it happens as Christian life progresses a lot of us will know what it's like to be God's agents in physical healing of perhaps severe disabilities there's something that happened to me that I will treasure the day I die in that regard it began with my father who had been widowed a few years living on his own in Caulfield said that he had shingles across his forehead and he went on to say that his doctor was extremely concerned about it because it was getting across one eye and that eye was very much in danger of the doctor concerned that in fact it may go right across his forehead and take out all his sight my father also said the pain was something the like of which he had never experienced before in his life and so with great concern the next night being

[13 : 08] Wednesday night which at our parish church at St Luke's Vermont was a night where there was a service for prayer for healing for those who were seeking God's healing work in their lives I went to church and in fact two things happened one I wasn't expecting of course I prayed fervently for my father but I also had the early stages of sinusitis I knew the warning signs of the pain over the eyes but that to me was not an issue it was my father's condition that it was a day or so later when I rang dad to see how he was he said well a lot better than I thought I'd be he said last night I went to bed I'd taken the painkillers and my experience was they weren't doing much good and I expected I wasn't going to get any sleep but he said in a surprisingly short time the pain died down and I slept like a baby and he said I've seen the doctor today and he said what on earth have you been up to and dad said well why do you ask he said because the shingles are receding he said

I expect him to keep moving for about six weeks and dad said actually your painkillers are starting to work too so as the doctor explored what on earth had brought about this unexpected change or what from heaven had brought about this unexpected change old Dr.

Smith who by then just had a few of his long term patients he wasn't in public practice anymore he sat back in his chair and he said well when you're a GP as old as I am he said you've seen a few cases like this where the patient's condition has changed because someone's prayed for them but he said whether a doctor is a believer or not we just have to accept that that is the reason the unexpected improvement in the patient's condition and the healing was so thorough that as the shingles receded the oculus that my father had to see said I really was afraid that you lose the sight of your left eye and he said it's intact he said see many years time see how it's going and there was no lasting damage from that but the second thing that happened which I wasn't expecting at all was when I got home I realised the sinusitis had disappeared and I knew from experience that as a lot of you probably do that once it starts you're in for a rugged time but no it faded out the fact is that the kingdom of heaven continues to break into so many encounters with life here in

Matthew 20 the encounter was Jesus was passing by he hasn't changed he wants us to remain confident in his power and graciousness and to quote again from Eugenia the fact is this is still the God who moves people so they write things like this if the gathered faithful ever caught a sense of the wild desperate hope with which outsiders from time to time approach their familiar sanctuary perhaps they too would recapture a sense of dangerous deliverance instead of the all too frequent coziness or boredom what God wants for us is the great blessing of being continually being refreshed in confidence in his power and graciousness and may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ refresh us all with that confidence even in the context of something as apparently ordinary as a worship service

Amen