Matthew 20:29-34

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Date: 15 June 2025

Preacher: Ray Kelly

[0:00] Well, good morning and welcome back to Matthew's Gospel. As Joe just said, we haven't been there since April and it seems far too long.

! So Matthew chapter 20 and this morning we're going to start at verse 29 and finish the chapter. But just before we do, let's just remind ourselves of a few things. I mean, we've had this substantial break.
And so up to now, the first 20 chapters, Matthew has taken us through the genealogies of Jesus to demonstrate that he was the Messiah.
He was the one who had the right line of descent to be called Messiah. And he's taken us through that, through the line of Joseph, which indicates that though he had no earthly father, he was still, as an adopted son, able to sit on the throne of David.
He's also taken us through the virgin birth to show us that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 9, where the virgin birth was predicted and the stature of Messiah was predicted.
[1:24] He showed us through the virgin birth to be called Messiah. He showed us how John, who is known as the greatest prophet that ever lived, John the Baptist, he announced to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

He also showed us Jesus' humility in that Jesus subjected himself to baptism under John's ministry in chapter 3. and he also told us about the trial of temptation by Satan in chapter 4 all things to which Jesus did not have to subject himself but he did for our benefit and then we've read reports of lots of miracles all of which confirmed that Jesus was the Messiah they were all fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about what Jesus would do what he would be like and so on and we've also been the beneficiaries of four out of the five discourses that Jesus delivers in Matthew's gospel the first four being the Sermon on the Mount discourse the Mission discourse which is chapter 10 the Parable discourse which is chapter 13 and the Greatest in the Kingdom discourse which oddly has a bit of bearing on this morning and that's in chapter 18 the next one will be in chapter 24 I think so let's read a bit and then we'll go through it so this is Matthew 20 verse 29 to 34 as they were leaving Jericho a large crowd followed him and two blind men sitting by the road hearing that Jesus was passing by cried out Lord have mercy on us son of David the crowd sternly told them to be quiet but they cried out all the more Lord son of David have mercy on us and Jesus stopped and called them and said what do you want me to do for you and they said to him Lord we want our eyes to be opened moved with compassion Jesus touched their eyes and immediately they regained their sight and followed him so you've got this short passage that's full of riches and is also going to cause us to take small asides because there's some interesting things to discover I want the reason I take these asides this morning is because I think on the back of Joe's excellent series on the word of God what can be revealed to us in this passage is some of the precision and uh and veracity of God's word in other words God keeps his word and it's dependable and reliable and if God says he'll do it he'll do it and we also have an apparent contradiction in the scriptures that we will address um and it isn't a contradiction but I've said this before and I always repeat myself um where you find an apparent contradiction in scripture it pays to dig just there because usually if you dig at the point of contradiction you will you will unearth a gem and I think we're going to do that this morning uh it might just be that it excites me but um before we progress with what we've just read in chapters 16 to 20 Jesus has dealt with wrong attitudes of heart right and in particular in chapter 18 he's dealt with this uh which of us is going to be the greatest in the kingdom uh let me sit at your right hand no no let me sit at your right hand I should be there no no no I should be there and so what we've got here what we're going to be looking at here is the fact that these two blind beggars who have absolutely nothing to recommend them are actually far more noble than the disciples because the disciples are bickering about who can be at the front and these beggars are just saying lord son of

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David have mercy on us they have no illusion as to their
status they know their place they also know that God doesn't have to impart mercy to them they haven't gone there and said look I'm blind so you've got to heal me which I have to say is part of the theology part of the teaching of some parts of what calls itself the church you can make demands on God no you can't your position is Lord have mercy please be merciful to me a sinner um so these blind men much more noble than the disciples themselves in fact when we've just read that the crowd were telling them to shut up in reality the disciples were part of that crowd it could be members of the 12 amongst other disciples because the word disciple simply means followers but it could easily have been members of the 12 who were among those shouting for goodness sake shut up and they would not they would not be silenced and I pray Lord that we will get that determination not to be silenced about you and who you are now these these beggars they couldn't even earn a living they were reduced to the humblest place in society they were beggars uh they were blind beggars but they knew their place and so they called out for mercy um they recognized their own place their own predicament they knew their place and they knew they were in the presence of someone who could fix it because the way they addressed him was
Lord son of David have mercy on us son of David was a messianic title it was a uh you may recall back to chapter 12 i haven't written this in the notes but hey why be harnessed by the notes um you may recall back to chapter 12 when they had committed this sin that Jesus said could not be forgiven or would not be forgiven at that time the crowd that were gathered who had seen him heal the deaf mute said surely this can't be the son of David can't be the son of David can it and the title son of David was an automatic reference to messiah so anybody using that title to whomever they used it they were saying you are messiah they were bowing the knee in a worshipful way they were elevating that person to the status of the son of God and so these blind men were a lot more far-sighted than all the sighted people who were telling them to shut up they were actually able to see that this was their long-awaited and promised messiah and many of the crowd could not see that or had not yet seen that um and they knew that he was passing by now i think there's a lesson in this for us when it comes to dealing with our own salvation they knew that he was passing by and oh jesus jesus and they knew that they had to get his attention before he passed by and that their opportunity would be short-lived it makes me think of the jailer in the book of act who um was about to throw himself on his own sword because all the god had sent this earthquake and all the doors had flown open and the disciples didn't even bother to leave they stayed and they worshiped god in an open cell but the jailer thought they'd escaped and he's about to kill himself and he's about to throw himself on his sword and they said don't do it give your life to christ you can be saved and there was a sense of urgency about that another few seconds he'd have been on his sword the opportunity would have passed unfortunately we don't generally see when we when someone says to us you need to turn to christ how often do we get the response well i'll think about it well i might do it one day well i'm not sure yet and god's patience is not to be tried he's not to be trifled with and god god is patient gives people a long time to make their minds up but there does come a point when it's too late he's passed them by so i think there's a lesson in their urgency we've got to pounce on this opportunity while he's still there now you may recall that this whole event took place on the way to jerusalem and from jericho to jerusalem is uh i mean jericho's below sea level and jerusalem is about two and a half thousand feet higher and the trail between jericho and jerusalem is uphill for roughly 18 miles uh people differ some say 15 some say 20 roughly 18 miles of constant winding uphill grind so apart from all the persecution that jesus suffered when he got there he walked that walk for us and it was a tortuous road and he was embarking on that journey and it was the journey to his death
he had at best a couple of weeks left to live at worst it may have been only a few days but he had this difficult walk in hot desert conditions uh and he's got to get from jericho to jerusalem and why is it so urgent for him to get to jerusalem so that he can die brutally and painfully for us and i'll return to it at the end but he stopped for these two blind beggars now if it had been me my mind would have been on other things but in verse 34 we read he was filled with compassion for these blind men now i have to admit to being selfish and i doubt whether i would have felt compassion for anybody faced with an 18 mile uphill walk to my own painful and agonizing death i probably would have had my mind on me don't bother me i'm on my way to die but jesus had compassion for blind men and beggars and so he ministered to them but let's the account of this journey or this occasion is in uh mark's gospel and luke's gospel but there appears to be a contradiction and i love these contradictions because they do make you dig and it leads to some interesting things so in this

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gospel they were leaving jericho in luke's account which is in chapter 18 uh we read that they were entering jericho and in mark's account we read they'd arrived at jericho and were leaving so were they leaving were they arriving does it just describe passing through and many people who read this superficially particularly those who want to discredit the bible say there you go contradiction well let's dig you may recall that in the time of joshua jericho was raised to the ground demolished completely overwhelmed when god made the walls fall down so jericho was destroyed now at a later date a second jericho was built adjacent to the old one so the first point i'll make is this because there's a new jericho and an old jericho they could have been going both to and from jericho at the same time this is not a contradiction it's just that one account was talking about the jericho that they had just left and the other one was talking about the one that they were approaching um but just turn to joshua 26 joshua chapter 6 verse 26 so after joshua after joshua had destroyed jericho in verse 26 it says then joshua made them take an oath at that time cursed before the lord is the man who rises up and builds this city jericho with the loss of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates so what we find when jesus is doing his journey is that there are two jerichos so it's been rebuilt but there's a curse on anybody that rebuilds it so if we then turn to first kings chapter 16 now this is in the reign of ahab

[15:39] verse 34 is the key verse first kings 16 verse 34 and in his days and his days and his days were during the reign of ahab in his days hiel the bethelite built jericho he laid its foundations with the loss of abiram his firstborn and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son segub according to the word of the lord which he spoke by joshua the son of nun so jericho was destroyed because it was an evil place the lord said through joshua if you rebuild it whoever rebuilds it is going to lose his firstborn as he lays the foundations and is going to lose his youngest when he sets up the gates so on the completion of the city and what we've just read is that that happened now joshua's time was between 1355 and 1245 bc that was the time i don't know the precise date but that's as close as i can get um ahab's time was in 874 bc so that's 400 years or so later so the word of the lord given 400 years previously came to pass precisely during the reign of ahab and god must have foreseen that because nobody tried before however it did leave a city of jericho for jesus to go through on his way to jerusalem and that's got nothing to do with the passage that we're reading except that on the back of the excellent series joe has done on the word of god i just think it was worth a little departure to see just don't mess with god um it's on my heart to do some stuff in the future that talks about the current time in which we live uh something maybe entitled what comes next because it's all in here and uh people don't know that they're messing with god with god said it's going to happen it is going to happen so this reveals that the word of god is true and reliable um and the bit that we've just read has nothing to do with these healings but it does tell us why there is a second jericho and confirms that the second jericho was built against the will of god but was allowed to stand but the builder was treated exactly as god promised now there's another interesting fact about jericho before we move on and this is not contained in scripture it's a matter of history you can look it up um but jericho had more than its fair share of blind people and the reason for this is that there is a particular balsam grown in jericho and for a period of time it was grown nowhere else in the world and it wasn't a balsam that was likely to affect the eyes of anybody born blind but it was a very good good it produced a medication that was often beneficial for people who had these eye problems that have been contracted as a disease or through other damage like accident or getting sand in your eyes or whatever but people who'd been blinded and couldn't either couldn't see very well or couldn't see at all and this balsam sometimes helped them to see but it also helped with the irritation and the pain and all the rest of it so blind people in jericho were relatively plentiful and of course what we don't necessarily appreciate is that blindness was much more prevalent in those days than it is now they with modern medication and treatment we can deal with various degrees of blindness much more effectively than they could back then so uh all i'm saying is they were about and this the the climate down below sea level in jericho was such that it really allowed this plant to thrive and if i can pronounce it it's uh balsamodendron oppobalsamum but anyway it's it's grown plentifully and blind people went there to get it to use and to use it for their eye conditions and so matthew says matthew addresses the point where they're leaving jericho and i don't know whether they were leaving the first one or the last one to be honest i just thought there are two so it doesn't much matter but they were leaving jericho followed by this loud and loud and large crowd and they came across these two blind men sitting beside the road uh as i've said uh

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mark chapter 10 luke chapter 18 uh we find another apparent contradiction uh so it's worth a dig uh the other accounts suggest that there's only one blind person matthew says there's two the others say they talk of a blind person and mark actually names one of them as bartimaeus uh and this is not a contradiction it's simply the case that matthew refers to both of them and mark and luke only refer to one and it's probable that bartimaeus was maybe the spokesman or just better known so by including his name it would cause the readers to go oh yes bartimaeus we know about him um but this isn't a contradiction it's simply that the other gospels included both and matthew's gospel sorry the other gospels included only one matthew's gospel included both of them and in all three accounts they call out to jesus against the opposition from the crowds son of david so they're addressing him as messiah and so this shows us that they knew that jesus was messiah that they were were believers um next week we're going to look at the triumphal entry and what we note what we will be noting next week is that when jesus arrived he was followed by a crowd of believers as the people that were in the city who cried out for his crucifixion who were not believers but more of that next week we should note and i've already said this but i'm going to say it again anyway because it's worth repeating and it tells us how we should harness our own attitudes there was no suggestion in their attitude to jesus of entitlement you know they didn't try to put anything on to jesus or make him do anything they asked for his mercy uh a far cry from the attitude of the disciples that they demonstrated earlier in this gospel um but the revelation to them you remember when um when jesus said to peter who do you say that i am and he said you're the son of god and he said my father has revealed revealed this to you to you these men had had some revelation that this was messiah and therefore they knew that he could do it now another small departure um we don't know whether these men were born blind or had become blind if you put together the information in all three passages what they ask for is is they want their sight back we want our sight restored so it doesn't
the implication is that they weren't born blind that they had become blind but nevertheless in isaiah 35 verse 5 and a few other places it was always prophesied that a messianic miracle somebody that identified something that identified messiah would be the healing of the blind so isaiah 35 verse 5 and several other places that when he comes he will open the eyes of the blind and the rabbis always taught that anybody who healed somebody born blind that had to be messiah because if you're born blind you can't get well from it this is their thinking whereas if you become blind perhaps you can get well from it and perhaps some medication might restore your sight uh or perhaps you might respond to prayer but the thing is that blind men in jericho were not that rare but healing of a blind person had not even happened there's no record of it in any history that you can read other than when jesus arrives in town and the rareness of this particular miracle was supposed to make people think aha son of david which of course the blind men knew but all the ones who had eyesight didn't twig um i'm going to take a moment to read a bit of john 9 because it shows their attitude to the miracles of jesus and you'd think somebody turning up you would think that that anybody turning up and healing any blind person and especially somebody born blind you would think that would make them go wow he's here no need no need to look any further for messiah somebody's turned up and healed the blind um so chapter nine and i'm not going to study the chapter i'm just going to read quite a bit of it just to just for us to get the heart attitude which we look on as born again believing think how can you not see that that's jesus how can you not submit to him and yet they didn't because men are hard of heart as he passed by he saw a blind man from birth and his disciples asked him rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he would be born blind jesus answered it was neither that this man sin nor his parents but it was so that the works of god might be displayed in him we must work the works of him who sent me as long as it is day night is coming when no one can work while i am in the world i am the light of the world so he's talking of a man who can't see light and he's saying i'm the light of the world when he had said this he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and applied it to his eyes and said to him go and wash in the pool of siloam which is translated scent so he went away and washed and came back seeing therefore the neighbors and those who previously saw him as a beggar were saying is this not the one who used to sit and beg and others were saying this is he still others were saying no no but he is like him he kept saying i am the one so they were saying to him how then were your eyes opened and he answered the man who is called jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me go to siloam and wash so i went away and washed and received sight they said to him where is he he said i do not know they brought to the pharisees the man who was formerly blind so this is the religious leaders the ones who were supposed to be thrilled and the ones who've always been

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teaching that if somebody turns up and does this it is the messiah now it was the sabbath on the day when jesus made the clay
and opened his eyes the pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight and he said to them he applied clay to my eyes and i washed and i see therefore some of the pharisees were saying this man is not from god because he does not keep the sabbath but others were saying how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs and there was a division among them i'll bet there was so they said to the blind man again what do you say about him since he opened your eyes and he said he's a prophet the jews then did not believe it of him that he had been blind and he had received sight until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight and questioned them saying is this your son who you say was born blind then how does he see his parents answered them and said we know that this is our son and that he was born blind but how he sees we do not know or who opened his eyes we do not know ask him he's of age he'll speak for himself the parents said this because they were afraid of the jews for the jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed him to be christ he was to be put out of the synagogue can you imagine we've taught you that if this miracle shows up this is messiah but if you dare draw attention to the fact that jesus is messiah we're going to put you out of the synagogue and putting you out of the synagogue in that culture didn't just mean you stopped going to church it meant that you could no longer get a job you couldn't earn a living you couldn't trade nobody wanted anything to do with you you became a societal outcast there's a massive price to pay verse 23 for this reason the parents said he is of age ask him they they wouldn't admit to what had happened to him because they were afraid of the response from the religious teachers who should have been utterly thrilled at this verse 24 so a second time they called the man who'd been blind and said to him give glory to god we know that this man is a sinner he then answered whether he is a sinner i do not know one thing i do know though i was blind now i see so they said to him what did he do to you how did he open your eyes he answered them i told you already and you did not listen why why do you want to hear it again you do not want to become his disciples do you which was a piece of supreme sarcasm they reviled him and said you are his disciple but we are disciples of moses we know that god has spoken to moses but as for this man we do not know where he's from the man answered and said well here is an amazing thing that you do not know where he's from and yet he opened my eyes and he's saying look it's obvious he has to be messiah because only messiah can open they he might have even said it's obvious you taught us that this was the case you taught us that this was messiah verse 31 we know that god does not hear sinners but if anyone is god fearing and does his will he hears him since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind if this man were not from god he could do nothing they answered him you were born entirely in sin and you were teaching us so they put him out and they put him so the the man's reward from the religious leaders for getting healed of his blindness was they put him out of the synagogue
they treated him as a criminal and i thought that little diversion was worth it because it shows that when jesus was performing these miracles everywhere he went it was causing mayhem because there was there was a large crowd don't know the percentages but there was a large crowd behind him and for him the ones we'll read about next week who were putting palm branches on the floor when he came into jerusalem and then there's another crowd who were yelling crucify him crucify him who will not entertain the idea that he is messiah and these religious leaders i do not a i do not i do not want to even think about what their eternal life in hell is going to be like when they led so many people astray and the second point is i don't want to be like them my continued prayer is lord keep us straight don't let us ever fall into the traps that they fell into um now there's an obvious parallel which i'll mention but not dwell on and that is that there's an obvious parallel between opening the eyes of a blind person and opening the spiritual eyes of the spiritually blind and i can't speak for you but there was a time when i knew best and this god nonsense was just that god nonsense and he opened my eyes and enabled me to see in the spirit and enabled me to become born again i may return to it in a moment but uh they discerned who he was and was capable of hearing of healing them and like abraham before them they believed and it would be counted to be counted to be counted to be counted to be counted to be counted to be righteousness but their purpose as soon as they were healed it says they followed him when our spiritual eyes were opened we did the same our eyes had to be opened for us to follow him we may revisit that in a moment so we mustn't lose the depth of compassion that jesus must have had for these people and therefore the depth of compassion that he has for everyone and when i when i get frustrated with

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people i have to constantly remind myself that god deeply deeply loves these people um now he is on his way to his death he had yet to face the time in the garden of gethsemane which he already knew he was going to face he then had to face the crucifixion if we read things like psalm 22 it reveals that he already knew the awful things he was going to suffer it wasn't just a bit like i don't know lining up to take a bullet instead of somebody else which in itself would be loving enough i mean greater love has no man than he would lay down his life for his friends but this was knowing that he was going to suffer the most barbaric end and yet he made time on this purposeful yet terrifying mission to stop and deal with the problems of two blind guys even in this he didn't put himself first so we read in verse 34 he did this because he was moved with compassion what a time for selfless thinking what a time for letting the needs of others move you to action [36:07] lord i do pray that you'll move our hearts in this way because this is the transforming love of the gospel for those of us who are able to live the gospel not just talk about it self-sacrifice is the greatest witness apart from the actual preaching and so losing their physical blindness they followed him the result of losing our physical blindness is that we followed him too now next week we will look at the what they call the triumphal entry but i guess from what i've done in to bring it to the end of uh chapter 20 i'm left with this deep deep conviction that the new testament in ephesians 5 tells us to be imitators of god and that what we see in jesus should be something that we crave to emulate and i have to be careful as i say this because if one isn't careful one can turn the whole thing into a ministry of works if you were a proper christian you'd do this it's not that the only reason this is this is my view and i'm happy to defend it if you want me to but the only reason that the disciples laid down their lives for christ was because the holy spirit had empowered them to do so prior to the outpouring of the holy spirit upon them they were a cowardly bunch they were hiding from the authorities uh and they were fearing for their lives and god empowered them when he came into them by his spirit and they became fearless and they faced certain death again and again and again as i stand here today i do not know whether i have the courage to do that but my constant prayer for all of us is that he will endow us with that level of courage that even if we were on our way to our own death we would have we would make time to minister to those who needed it so father in in view of what we studied please lord come upon us and change our hearts write your word on our hearts that we might never ever forget you and lord bring your word to life in our hearts that we might demonstrate the same courage as you did on that day and that we might put the needs of others before our own and that we might become a magnet for sinners and lord i'm i'm moved and troubled by the fact that church attendance seems to be down all the time at the moment and i know there are lots of good reasons for that in many i've no wish to judge but lord please write it into our hearts that the most important part of life is to know you and the power of your resurrection lord restore our hearts to you that we might pursue you and crave your presence and crave your fellowship and crave fellowship with your people and show your love within and without the church in jesus name amen

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