

*Open Our Eyes, Lord*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*Psalm 98, 1 Peter 1:3-9, Luke 18:31-19:10*

Our final Scripture reading this week comes from Luke 18:31-19:10. Listen now to God's Word. "Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. 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. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.""

High school rivalry isn't what it used to be. Back in the day, fans gathered at the football field or basketball court...but times have changed. The latest rivalry to hit the press is between Shorecrest and Shorewood, both out in Seattle. Some students in an A/V course at Shorecrest asked their teacher if they could make a lipdub video, where the students would lip-sync over a song. The kids weren't content with just anything...they created a video that included over 200 students done in one single take without edits, all with lip dubbing exactly to the music. Those of us who know television and film know just how difficult this is to pull off. Take a look at just a couple minutes of it...

[play "Hey Ya" video] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPTd8MgAeqI>

When the video came out, Shorecrest challenged their rival to do better. The A/V class at Shorewood took them up on it and came up with something amazing. But before I tell you how they did it, take a look at the opening minute...

[play "You Make My Dreams Come True" video]  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7TI-AJi2O8>

Shorewood did the whole thing, still in one single take, this time with over 500 students on camera, and all of it backwards. Student director Javier Cáceres realized that you can't just lip-sync a song backwards, so he watched a tape of himself singing the song backwards for hours to get the syllables just right. Then he taught it to all the students who lip-synced the whole thing phonetically.

Since the videos debuted a few months ago, they've been viewed on YouTube nearly a million times. These students now have a calling card for film school. They've inspired schools across the country and appeared on national news. And why? Because they had vision.

Vision is the core of this week's Scripture lesson. When we read this Scripture, it seems Luke's repeating himself. It's the third time Jesus has predicted His death and resurrection. Jesus has healed countless times; He's forgiven tax collectors and sinners and eaten with them. What is Luke doing here that's new? The one thing that holds these stories together is vision.

The disciples don't have it. We can't be too hard on them because Jesus was out of their comfort zone and outside of their imagination. They simply didn't *get* resurrection. They didn't have the frame of reference to understand. Even now, it's hard for us to believe that anyone could rise from the dead. But Jesus outlines everything for them. He knows that His words will come back to them at the right time. He knew that, one day, their vision would be broad enough, and when that happened, the disciples would become the world changers we now know.

The blind beggar did have it. How do we know? For one, he used a different title for Jesus...not "teacher," not "rabbi," but "Son of David." This is the first time this title is used in Luke, and it means that the blind man understood Jesus was the messiah, the descendent of King David who would rule over God's people for all time. Second, he knew what Jesus was capable of doing. His cry "have mercy on me" was a standard way of asking for alms. But when Jesus asks him what he desires, he wants his sight back. He might not have been able to see Jesus with his eyes, but he knew who Jesus was and trusted that He was the long-awaited Christ come to save. The disciples could have used the vision of a blind man!

Zacchaeus has vision too. He was a despised tax collector, and the unwillingness of the crowd kept him from seeing Jesus as much as his height. But Zacchaeus gets up in a tree to see Jesus coming into town. Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus into his home. Without any prompting, he offers to give freely to the poor and make restitution far beyond the law for anyone he's cheated. Salvation comes to this man, Jesus says, a man who was lost and is now found, a man who has godly vision.

So what are the characteristics of godly vision that we see in this passage? There are several, but I'm going to focus on three today. The first one is that godly vision requires the willingness to get out of our comfort zones and get a better view. Another is the willingness to be creative. The third one is the willingness to look foolish to the world to accomplish what God desires. Let's look at these for a minute.

The first thing about vision: we need to get out of our comfort zones and into a better view. But just how is it that we can become open-minded in a godly way? How do we open our minds to God's possibilities we can't even conceive of? The disciples in this passage aren't stupid. Go to any culture anywhere in the world and tell them that someone is going to literally rise from the dead after three days, and they will think you're crazy. Sure, myths and legends have stories about gods going to the underworld and back, warriors honored in death for sacrificing themselves for their people, but resurrection is beyond our mind's eye. We can't imagine it because it's never happened in our experience. Plenty of people throughout the world can't accept Jesus because they can't accept the resurrection.

The only way we can get out of our comfort zones is through God's work in our lives. We need for God to come in and shake us around a bit. When Jesus told the disciples what was going to happen to Him, that's exactly He was doing. He was trying to get them out of their expectations, their hopes that He would be some conquering hero over the Romans, and make them think a little bigger. God shakes up a lot of people in the New Testament. Peter isn't comfortable around Gentile believers, so God gives him a vision where God gets rid of the Jewish dietary laws so Jews and Gentiles could come together in faith and fellowship. Paul is going around persecuting Christians, so God takes his sight away for a few days and shows him that Jesus is the promised messiah. John sits in exile on an island at the end of his life, and God sends him the vision that's the book of Revelation. That's still shaking up people today!

When God moves us out of our comfort zones, we can either risk responding in faith or staying within our little paradigm. The disciples loved Jesus and didn't want Him to die. But it was easier to be selfish, to have Jesus to themselves, than to accept God's plan for Him and for our salvation. God worked in spite of their lack of vision. Paul risked persecution from fellow Jews when he became a believer, and he risked rejection by fellow Christians because of his past. But he lived into the vision and became the core author of the New Testament. Peter's vision meant that he had to accept people he had long rejected. He risked it and brought many people to Jesus. John's vision was scary and difficult to understand, but in preserving it for the church, we have a glorious picture of God's final victory over sin and death.

What comfort zones do we have? Where are we a bit too comfortable? Maybe God is calling us to be witnesses to other people around us. Maybe God is calling us to give. Maybe God is calling us to grow in our knowledge of Him. Now we are always going to have comfort zones that are difficult to break. We won't ever get rid of them; we just have to be willing to let God broaden our vision. Let's pray together that God might remove any blinders we're wearing about what He wants to do.

Second, vision requires creativity. Vision requires action in a new and different way. The blind man gets Jesus' attention with a title, "Son of David," a title never before heard in Luke's gospel, one that showed that the blind man understood Him to be the promised messiah. Zacchaeus can't see, so he climbs up a tree to see Jesus! They show imagination in the way they approach Jesus.

Creativity is something inherent in following God. We were down at the dog show last weekend and we saw tons of dogs. I was a paperboy for eight years, so dogs and I don't always agree. And yet it was amazing how many different breeds there – different sizes and looks and personalities and abilities. You could spend hours looking at them all. If God was that creative with just dogs, and He created a universe full of stars and planets and nebulas and black holes and whatnot, His imagination is beyond anything we can imagine!

We eventually see this imagination in the disciples. When Paul preaches to the people of Athens, who have a monument to the unknown God, he says, "I know you're religious because you've got a tribute to the god you don't even know. Guess what? I know Him and want to tell you about Him!" The church in Jerusalem figures out that the Gentiles aren't bound to Jewish rituals because God has made a new covenant through Jesus. The Bible itself shows off incredible creativity. It's a book inspired by God; all of it is what God intended for us to know about Himself. But God used the ingenuity of His people to write the book in their own words. When we read the incredible poetry and prose of Scripture, we're reading God's very own expression of Himself that came through the passionate pens of real people.

How can we have this kind of godly imagination in our vision? It depends on taking your gifts and talents and the imagination you already have and putting them to work for God. The possibilities are endless! We've been talking about our needs for the roof and our general fund, but those things aren't all that hard if we work creatively. Everybody has a talent they could put to use. A photographer might sell photos. I might record a CD of original music I've written. A cook could do a bake sale. A teacher could tutor. A golfer could hold a tournament. A stamper could make cards. Everybody has some way they can help out. And what's exciting is, we can do those things even when times are great just to reach out and show the community that God loves them! And it doesn't matter if your creativity doesn't seem churchy enough. The church that sponsored my ordination has an oil change ministry. You come to church and they take care of your oil. It's a way that guys who love working on cars are able to show people God's love in a practical way. That's showing real vision.

But vision takes risk. We have to be willing to be seen as foolish to make the vision happen. The blind man shouts all the more when the people along the way are telling him to shut up. He risks their ridicule to show his faith. Zacchaeus, a grown man, climbs a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. Embarrassing? Absolutely. But he'd rather be seen a fool than to miss out on what Jesus is doing.

Doing something great always requires putting yourself out there. Think back to the videos we saw at the start of the sermon. Would you have risked looking like an idiot in front of your peers to make a video? But the silliest things, the guy in the straightjacket or the banana suit, the guy playing with the ET doll, the girl blushing when the handsome guy picks her up...those very things that could have been most embarrassing are some of the most memorable.

We see this willingness in the disciples, too. Paul is beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, whipped, persecuted, all this and more for Jesus, a man he never actually met in the flesh. Of the remaining disciples, all but John died violent deaths for the faith. They suffered for a faith many thought was utter foolishness...for a man who came back from the grave!

Are we willing to be the fools for Christ? What's the tree God is calling us to climb? Take the story of Samuel Morris. Born a prince in Liberia, he became a believer at age 14 after being kidnapped and escaping his captors due to God's intervention. In 1891, at age 18, he came to a small, struggling Christian college called Taylor University. He had planned to go back to his homeland and preach the gospel...but after eighteen months in the States, he died of a respiratory infection. To come all that way to learn about God only die on foreign shores seemed the height of foolishness. But his legacy lives on. The book written about his life – how he survived his kidnapping, his conversion, how the captain and most of the crew on his ship over to America became believers due to his witness, how he was on fire for God – saved Taylor University from bankruptcy. People still come to believe in Jesus when they hear of his faithfulness. His story has inspired countless missionaries to travel to Africa to spread the good news of Christ. Students from foreign countries come and study the gospel on a scholarship named after Him. Was he a fool for following the dream God gave him? To the world, yes. But he climbed his tree just like Zacchaeus, and God is still using Samuel Morris' foolish vision for his glory.

Maybe being a fool for Christ won't look like this for you. For you, it might be risking being the lay reader in church one week or telling a friend about Jesus. It might be learning an instrument to join the praise team or giving in faith that God will provide for what you've given up before you know how He'll do it. Godly vision may make fools of us in the eyes of the world.

But doesn't it sound worth it? Earthly vision creates companies, jobs, industries, inventions, and more. If that's what our vision in the world can do, what about godly vision? Godly vision restored a blind man who had insight beyond 20/20. Godly vision brought a tax collector into the Kingdom of God. Godly vision changes more than just local communities and churches – it changes lives and eternities. May we all be willing to risk getting out of our comfort zones, being creative, even being seen as foolish, so that the good news of Jesus Christ might grow in our midst. Open our eyes, Lord – we want to see Jesus!