

## Prayer

When we have wandered and lost ourselves on the way, return us to Your heart, Lord Jesus. Rebuke our waywardness, receive our repentance, and revive our souls with the healing and the blessing of Your love. Strengthen us to stand before Your righteousness so that we may receive the perfect salvation You alone can give. All praise to You, Lord Jesus: Alleluia!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Rural life

*Pray for all who work with animals, reared for all the different dairy and meat products. Pray that they will show in all their work the care due to all God's creatures in life and death.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who live within the on-going violence in Iraq*
- *Give thanks to God for water and how it sustains life*
- *Pray for people who are struggling to maintain a living*

## Meditation

How glorious, Lord Jesus;

For in deepest despair we may turn to You  
and find hope again at the foot of the Cross.

In life's hardest struggles we may stand  
and take hold of the whole armour of God.

In work's toughest challenges we persevere  
and find inspiration in Your example.

In the midst of the greatest tension you hold us firm  
and offer us Your presence and Your peace.

In disastrous situations we may find Your pathway  
and walk it into liberty and freedom!

And in our spirit's yearnings, in all life's circumstances,  
You have more love for us, forever and ever ...

How glorious, Lord Jesus, we praise You!

## Bible Study - Matthew 29-34

<sup>29</sup> As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. <sup>30</sup> Now 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!' <sup>31</sup> The crowd scorned them and told them to stop; but they shouted even more loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Lord! Son of David!' <sup>32</sup> Jesus stopped and called out to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' <sup>33</sup> They said to him, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened.' <sup>34</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

## Review

The story of the healing of two blind men completes the public ministry of Jesus outside of Jerusalem, and our text today is the last individual story of a healing in the Gospel. The incident illustrates Jesus' ministry and Messianic task so completely it is possible that it was intended to form a summary of this aspect of Jesus' earthly work. Most Biblical commentaries offer little analysis of this story other than brief comment on the reported facts, and some speculative comment based on the questions raised by the text. Although the two men are given their sight, is the crowd blind? Does the shouting of the blind men imply that we should be persistent in our prayers for healing? Even though faith is not mentioned, is it implied? Is the story more about spiritual insight rather than physical? And, do the two blind men represent the blindness of James and John, who had just misunderstood Jesus completely (20:20-23)?

**The Crowds** By this point in the Gospel, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem appears to have gathered a crowd on the way (20:29). It probably contained a mixture of local people who had heard of Jesus but not seen him before, and also those who were also going to Jerusalem from Galilee. If the time for Passover was drawing near, as we suspect, then many would have been coming to Jerusalem just then. We can only guess at their expectations, for we already know that some believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the long awaited redeemer of God's people.

It is unlikely that they would have seen two blind beggars crying out at the side of the road as worthy of attention from them or from the Messiah. Jesus however, could hear the men above the noise of the crowd and stopped to speak to them. Jesus' reported emotions in this story have caused great interest over the years. The Greek word conveys deep feelings, like a twisting of the stomach (the Greek verb is 'splangnidzomai'). Jesus had not showed such emotions when faced with sick people before so why did He find the appeal of these two men so appealing? Perhaps it was simply because He knew His time was short; but the story has more to tell us yet.

**The two blind men** Who are these two blind men?. Are they Bartimaues (of Mark 10:46-52) plus one other? The stories are in similar positions within both Matthew and Mark. Is this story a repeat of the earlier healing of two blind men in Matthew 9:27-31, signifying the beginning and the ending of Jesus' healing ministry in Matthew? We cannot be sure; we can only read and interpret the story as we have it here in Matthew, for whom it would have been understandable that Jesus healed more than a few blind men. There would have been many blind people in Jesus' without our modern facilities for handling eye care, and dealing with cataracts and other eye diseases. It was also very hard for blind people to engage in the worship of God at the Temple, which was highly visual in nature. However, it was always expected that the Messiah would come and 'open the eyes of the blind' (see Isaiah 35:5). It was natural therefore that any blind person, on hearing that there was someone around who was thought to be the Messiah would immediately have hoped to benefit from His ministry!

**The faith of the blind men** All this lay behind what happened in the story. The blind men called out to Jesus twice, saying 'Lord, have mercy, Son of David'. This was an astonishing call, implying worship, prayerful request (see Psalm 51:1; 123:3;) and also Messianic expectation. It sounds almost cruel to us that Jesus should ask the two men what they needed from Him; surely this was obvious! However, Jesus' question drew out from them their inherent faith in the Messiah, and this was the evidence Jesus needed to hear. People claiming to be the Messiah had come and gone over the centuries and everyone knew it, yet Jesus was asking the men to affirm that they believed Him to be God's authentic Messiah. When they said, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened', it was the only time in Matthew's Gospel when the plight of individuals rather than crowds caused Jesus to

be 'moved with compassion' (see comments above). Indeed, the men's words are reflected in church liturgies to this day because they represent a moving request for God's help: 'Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, let me ... be healed'

**The eyes of the blind men** Jesus touched the eyes of the men and they were healed, they then followed Jesus immediately on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There are two interesting things about this; firstly, this is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that those who were healed followed Jesus immediately. Everyone else He healed had either been caught up in their own situation, told by Jesus to go their own way, or told to remain quiet about what had happened to them (for example, the other two blind men, 9:27-31). This was probably because Jesus encouraged the faith of the two men, and time was short before they reached Jerusalem. Lastly, the word for 'eyes' in the last verse ('let our eyes be opened' 20:34) is a rare poetic word in Greek which often, but not always, means 'the eyes of the soul'. If this is really what Matthew meant, it could indicate that the blind men were not only healed physically, but spiritually; and so their following of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem may well have been a natural consequence of their healing.

All of this leaves us with the focus where Matthew would really like it to be, on Jesus. He had begun His public ministry with the healing of the sick (4:23-25), and now ended it with this miracle which, yet again, proved His credentials as Messiah.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Have you ever considered using words from scripture such as those in this passage, when praying for healing? What other words might you use?
2. What do you imagine that the crowd made of what happened?
3. Summarise the public ministry of Jesus and the place of healing within it. What do we learn from Jesus' healing ministry in general?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This is a very touching story, and it is possible to read into it too much. Perhaps we should be content to just accept that this is a healing Jesus did out of pure compassion, and allow this fact to challenge us. How much do we do for others which arises from pure compassion which changes our course, as it were, and demands that we give time and attention to people we had not planned to do this for? In this alone, Jesus sets us a high example which we should not pass by too quickly.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Who are the really needy, poor and sick in your community, and ask yourself, does illness really make you feel anything? How do you respond to other people's illness? Let the Lord challenge you to consider your own emotions, and consider whether you need to be able to express them more fully, as Jesus did.*
- *Pray for those who minister to the sick. Pray that they will be supported well by the family of God's people, and bring blessing in God's name to many.*

## Final Prayer

Jesus, stand amongst Your people with power and authority. Dispel the powers of darkness that attempt to disrupt the light You would shed on the lives of your servants, and save us from every work of the enemy. This we ask through our Saviour Jesus, who by His death and Resurrection, overcame death and hell. Alleluia! AMEN