

1 Quinquagesima – Luke 18

When the king of Syria was planning raids on Israel, God revealed these plans to his prophet, Elisha. Elisha warned the king of Israel, which then ruined Syria's plans. When the king of Syria found out that Elisha was listening to his plans, he sent a big army with chariots and horses to capture Elisha. When the big army, with chariots and horses, arrived at his home, Elisha's servant was terrified. But Elisha comforted his servant. He said, "Don't be afraid, because those who are with us are more than those who are with them." The prophet Elisha then prayed, "LORD, please open his eyes and let him see." Then the LORD opened his eyes, and Elisha's servant could see that the mountain was full of fiery horses and chariots all around.

This account from 2 Kings chapter 6 is very powerful. It teaches us that God's army is much greater than any earthly army. The spiritual realm is hidden from mortal eyes. It's because of our sin that we can't see the full power and glory of God. It's because of our fallen nature that our eyes can't discern the angels of God fighting against the forces of Satan. It's because of our dying bodies that we can't yet see Jesus, the Son of God, in his full glory. But this account of the prophet Elisha teaches us that just because we can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there. As Psalm 32 says, the Angel of the LORD sets his camp around those who fear him. Christ is with his church, surrounded by angels and arch angels and all the company of heaven. What no human eye on earth can see is most certainly there. We can't see Christ's body and blood in the bread and the wine. But as surely as the crucified and risen Lord says it and cannot lie, our lips truly touch what our eyes can't discern. St. Peter, who saw Jesus with his own eyes, gives this special assurance to those who haven't yet seen him. He writes in his first epistle:

You never saw Him, but you love Him. You don't see Him now, but you believe in Him. And a joy, unspeakable and wonderful, fills you with delight as you receive by faith what you're looking for – your salvation. (1 Pet 1:8-9)

When Jesus was coming near Jericho, there was a blind man sitting by the road, begging. He couldn't see, but he could hear. He heard that Jesus from Nazareth was passing by. This is what the people told him. They saw a man from Nazareth named Jesus. But the blind man recognized him as Jesus, the Son of David. They saw him as a man with a reputation of working miracles. But the blind man trusted in the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ, the promised Descendant of David. Though he could not see him, he believed in him. So he called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

He trusted in Jesus. This is why he called out. With the heart he believed and was righteous before God. With the mouth he confessed, hoping in the salvation his Savior came to bring. And this faith in Jesus also produced a love for Jesus. To trust in Jesus means that you turn to Jesus for mercy and salvation. To love Jesus means that you don't stop confessing his name no matter how much it might aggravate others around you. So even though the people walking ahead of him urged him to be quiet, this blind man called out even louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!"

He did not see him, but he loved him and believed in him. Joy, unspeakable and wonderful, filled him with delight as he received by faith what he was looking for. This is why Jesus would tell him, "Your faith has saved you." The faith, which was unwavering, could see better than any human eyes.

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Jesus was heading toward Jerusalem. There he would be handed over to the Romans to be mocked and insulted, spit upon, whipped, and put to death. On the third day he would rise again. He had his eyes set on Jerusalem. His coming death and resurrection were fully in view. His cross occupied his heart and mind completely. It was how he would rescue sinners from condemnation. Hidden under his suffering and death was what no mortal eye could see. It was his glory and power to save sinners. It was the wrath of God against sinners being satisfied. But when he told his disciples about it, they couldn't understand what he was saying. It was a mystery, hidden from their hearts and minds.

Throughout Jesus' suffering and death, there was a great spiritual battle, which no eye could see. Judas didn't just betray Jesus on the outside. The devil himself entered his heart. Peter's denial of Jesus wasn't merely an outward show. Jesus told him that the devil wanted to sift him like wheat. The only reason Peter didn't completely fall away was because Jesus prayed for him. Underneath the betrayal, the mocking and insults, the spiting, the whipping, and the death was the great spiritual reality, which no eye can see. Underneath it all lay the great corruption of sin, the great love of God being reconciled to the sinful world, and the devil's power being destroyed.

We should learn from this. Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 6 that our battle is not against flesh and blood. It is against the spiritual forces of darkness. The reality of sin is much darker than what our eyes can see. It begins in the heart. It begins with that sinful desire we are all born with. And once we give it the opportunity, it just takes more and more. First Jesus was betrayed. Then he was mocked and insulted. Then he was spit upon. Then he was whipped. Then he was crucified. And that betrayal began once Judas let the devil in. It begins when you let your anger toward your brother fester, and you begin to justify your hatred toward him. It begins when you want the world to like you more than you want to uphold God's Word. It begins when you value money and pleasure more than faith and godliness. And it grows. Anger turns into insults. Wanting the world's approval turns into mocking God. And love for money is the root of all kinds of evil. With our natural eyes, we can't see how evil sin truly is.

It is only when God opens the eyes of our hearts and minds. Then we can see this true, spiritual reality. He exposes our sins for what they are, but he also gives us faith to trust in the only solution to sin. Because of God's grace, we can recognize the forces of the devil fighting against our faith. But even more than this, we can grasp the great power of Christ against all evil foes. Now, until Jesus appears in his glory, we see this great spiritual reality only through faith. As Paul says, we see a blurred image in a mirror. But when Jesus returns, we will see him face to face. In the meantime, we walk by faith and not yet by sight.

Faith grasps Jesus and beholds his grace. It receives in full the salvation he has won. If you have faith, then you lack nothing. But at the same time, while your faith possesses the whole package of salvation, you still long to see it with your eyes. You love your Lord Jesus, and you trust in him, even though you can't see him. Yet, you still want to see him. You hope in him, longing for the day when you will see him face to face. Your eyes are weak because of sin. But Jesus doesn't put you to shame. He knows you want to see him. He knows that you long to behold him his face. He will not disappoint you.

3 Quinquagesima – Luke 18

Let's return to the example of that blind man. He cried out to Jesus for mercy, recognizing him as the Christ, the Son of David, the promised Savior. Jesus went to him and asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Why would he ask him this if he didn't care about what he wanted? He knew what that poor blind man wanted. He wanted to see. So Jesus made him see.

And so he knows what you want, dear Christian. He knows you want to see his face. He knows how long you live in anguish, yearning for him to appear. He won't leave you in the dark. Right now, he gives you faith to trust his Word. Through your afflictions, he increases your hope in his return. And he teaches you to love as he loves. But you will behold him. And your joy will be complete.

When the blind man saw Jesus, his eyes beheld what everyone else could see – Jesus, the man from Nazareth, heading toward Jerusalem. Still, Jesus hadn't fully revealed his glory. It was still by faith that the man beheld his Savior. Though he could now see with his eyes, he still only saw in part. But he followed Jesus to Jerusalem, praising God and telling everyone what Jesus had done. And this is our life today. We follow Jesus on his road to the cross, trusting in his Word of life, hoping in his appearing, and loving him to the end. And when the end comes, we will see clearly that he has been with us the whole time. Let us pray:

I am flesh and must return
unto dust, whence I am taken;
but by faith I now discern
that from death I shall awaken
with my Savior to abide
in his glory, at his side.

Glorified, I shall anew
with this flesh then be enshrouded;
in this body I shall view
God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded;
in this flesh I then shall see
Jesus Christ eternally. Amen.