

Sunday evening February 3rd 2019 at CBC Sermon outline for Luke 4:38-44

[1] EXTRAORDINARY POWER

We find Jesus in the home of one of his followers, Peter, who was married and whose wife's mother evidently lived with them. (This is one of two references in the NT to Peter being married.) Peter's mother-in-law was ill with a fever.

The Jewish Talmud, a record of Rabbinical teachings, contains what is essentially a magical rite to deal with such a situation. What does Jesus do? *"He rebuked the fever, and it left her."* [4.39] This astonishing power had already been seen in the synagogue at Capernaum where he had released a man from demonic power. And as the news about Jesus spread, it is not surprising that in the evening (when it was cooler) people with all kinds of physical and spiritual ailments came, or were brought, to Jesus seeking his help. He healed them all, whether they were physically ill or demonically afflicted.

Nothing like this had ever been seen before. Yes, the OT records some miracles, but nothing at all compares with the scale of what Jesus was able to do. No-one before or since has been able to use such power on such a scale. It is no wonder that people were still looking for him the following day.

[2] SURPRISING BEHAVIOUR

How did Jesus use his power?

[a] He silenced the demons who would have identified him

One of the striking things about Jesus's interaction with demonised people is that the demonic spirits immediately

voiced their recognition of him and also (see verse 34) their instinctive knowledge that he was their conqueror. It seems the demonic powers already knew who Jesus was – God’s anointed servant, the Messiah. If we ask why Jesus silenced the demons, an obvious answer is that he did not want Satan to have any part in making his name known.

But there is another angle to consider. The demonic spirits were factually accurate in what they shouted. Jesus was indeed the son of God – God in human form. But there is a right route to faith, and a wrong route. As James put it in a challenge to professing believers:

“You believe that there one God? Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” [James 2.19]

His point is that what you believe must lead to how you live, or faith is empty. And the testimony of demons as to the identity of Jesus carries no value. They offer no model of how to come to faith in the son of God. So Jesus silences them.

[b] He reveals a different agenda

But what do we make of the surprising fact that Jesus obviously did not consider his astonishing powers of healing to be principal focus of his work?

Jesus had a different agenda:

“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.’ [Luke 4:43-44]

Imagine how that comment may have been received. Disappointment, even anger? How could Jesus leave people in need? It is very important that we understand this agenda because it can get both overlooked, or, where it is noticed, misunderstood.

[3] ESSENTIAL PRIORITY

[a] Overlooked?

It is possible to overlook these words of Jesus and focus on his actions – and then try to emulate them. So, we notice that Jesus healed people and that, to use a phrase from an older translation [AV], he '*went about doing good.*' So we try to do the same.

Inevitably, it becomes obvious that this power of Jesus is not available on the same scale to anyone else. So 'doing good' in the name of Jesus turns into providing medical care and facilities, bring the wonderful remedies of conventional modern medicine to those who have previously had no access to it, helping to supply clean water and thus improve health, providing training in some kind of skill through which a person may get a job and earn some money. These things are of course good, and they are part of God's common grace (common=for all, regardless of personal allegiance to God) which he gives to our fallen world. But the core of the Christian message lies beyond these things, because they deal only with temporal issues (things in our time and space), not eternal ones.

[b] Misunderstood?

If the words of Jesus can be overlooked, they can also be misunderstood.

Jesus understood that he needed to continue to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

The first Christians understood this, and we can learn from them about how to understand and interpret this account in Luke 4.

See Acts 10:36-43.

What we see here is that Peter is telling his hearers that the healing and spiritual deliverance that Jesus brought to people during his earthly ministry (eg as reported in Luke 4) was intended to demonstrate that he is Lord of all, that he has been appointed the judge of the living and the dead and that forgiveness of sins is available to everyone who believes in him.

CONCLUSION

God is pleased to grant us fallen human beings many temporal blessings (physical blessings in time and space). But the greatest blessing, and the one that is essential is to be at peace with God (*“the good news of peace through Jesus Christ”*) and thus confident about the last day.

May God bring us all to that safe place, and may he enable CBC never to lose sight of the priority of proclaiming that message to this fallen world.