

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #7 Jesus Validates His Messiahship

Scripture Luke 4:31-44

Last week we learned that the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth, the town where He lived for most of His earthly life, ended very badly. Jesus' efforts to identify Himself with the Messiah brought on a violent reaction among the people. This was the first of several such episodes during the ministry years of Jesus which are recorded in Luke. The pre-conceived ideas of the Jewish people made it impossible for most of them to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Scripture indicates that the teachings of Jesus were unique because of the authority of His words. Jesus did a lot of teaching during the three plus years of His ministry — in synagogues, on hillsides, on the pathways as he traveled with His disciples, in the temple, in many situations — and His listeners were always amazed at His teaching “because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (*Matthew 7:28-29*).

The main difference between Jesus and the religious leaders was related to their sources of information. The religious leaders based their teachings on their traditions. They used commentaries written by the important rabbis of previous generations as their source of information rather than the Scriptures. They argued over the opinions of others and sought to understand the nuances and positions of their predecessors. In contrast, Jesus spoke directly about God and based His teaching on the Scriptures. He communicated truth, rather than opinions. And of course, Jesus had the backing of the Holy Spirit who applied the teaching to the hearts and minds of individuals, thus making His words compelling and authoritative.

Jesus' teaching evoked both amazement and anger in His listeners. Jesus' words did not fit into the assumptions that most Jews had about the Messiah, and there was often violent disagreement with His statements. This kind of reaction by people has been a frequent occurrence through the centuries. The nature of Jesus as the God/man, and His teachings have been the cause of much debate and dispute during the past 2000 years.

The authority of Jesus was also demonstrated by His miraculous activities. His miracles, like His words, caused curiosity and perplexity. Jesus demonstrated His authority in many ways — over nature, sickness, demons, and even death. In writing this Gospel, Luke put the teachings of Jesus and His miracle activities side by side so that we might gain a thorough understanding of who Jesus was and what He did during his years of ministry.

Last week we thought about what Jesus said. The passage for today contains three quick snapshots of Jesus' miraculous activity. They were the first miracles performed by Jesus mentioned in this Gospel account.

Read Luke 14:31-44

The miracles in these verses happened within a 12 hour period of time. In the morning Jesus taught the Scriptures in the synagogue. When He was interrupted, He healed a demon-possessed man. Later in the day, during His visit in Simon Peter's house, He healed a woman with a high fever. At the end of the day, after sundown, when the Sabbath was over, Jesus healed many sick people and cast out demons from many people.

The first demonstration of supernatural power occurred as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. A man who was possessed by an evil spirit disrupted the meeting. Demons are mentioned twenty-three times in the Gospel of Luke, and Jesus had numerous encounters with them, especially during the months that He was in the region of Galilee.

The powers of demons are described as evil and impure (*unclean*), the opposite of the holiness and purity of God. Demons are identified in the New Testament as the emissaries of Satan, and Satan is named as the "prince of demons" several times (*see Matthew 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15*). Demons are sometimes described as the evil equivalent of godly angels. Some commentators refer to them as "fallen angels" but this is not exactly correct since Scripture makes a distinction between fallen angels and demons (*II Peter 2:4*). Both angels and demons are part of the unseen spiritual realm which exists around us.

People in New Testament could usually distinguish between demon possession and ordinary physical sicknesses. Luke himself makes a distinction between these two afflictions in verses 40-41 (*see also Matthew 4:24; Luke 7:21; 9:1; 13:32*).

In verse 34, the demon asked two questions of Jesus: “What do you want with us?” and “have you come to destroy us?” The fact that demons would be destroyed is not the question. The Jews understood that the Messiah would destroy the works of the devil. The New Testament Scriptures indicate that demons themselves have knowledge of what will happen to them (*see James 2:19*). They understand that they have been eternally banished from the presence of God. Demons cannot tolerate the holiness of God, and because this demon was in the presence of Jesus, he recognized that Jesus was God. This is why the demon was terrified.

I was intrigued by the demon’s questions. Why did the demon use the plural pronoun “us?” Was the man inhabited by more than one demon? This is a possibility since there are examples in Scripture of multiple demons in one person. Another possibility is the fact that the demon had such complete influence over the man that the two of them were inseparably linked together. If this were true, then the demon assumed that Jesus could not destroy him without also destroying the man he possessed.

The significant question was what would happen to the man if the demon was cast out. The answer is in verse 35: the demon was exorcised and the man came through the experience unharmed. Jesus met the challenge and removed the presence of evil from the man without any injury to the man. This was a remarkable display of Jesus' power!

The whole ordeal took very little time, and even the brevity of the event said something about the power of Jesus. Jesus did not use an incantation or follow a prescribed ritual in casting out the demon, which is the stuff of Hollywood. There was more than enough authority in Jesus’ simple command to accomplish all that was necessary. His power was evident to everyone. Everyone was amazed at what had happened, and they asked each other “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out.” They had never before witnessed such an overthrow of the powers of Satan, and reports about the event spread quickly throughout the surrounding area.

Jesus' power was not limited to entities of the spiritual realm. There was a second demonstration of power, this time over disease. This second demonstration occurred in a private setting, in the home of Simon Peter. Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. Luke explains that Jesus "rebuked the fever, and it left her." Previously, Jesus had rebuked the demon, and the demon was powerless to resist the authority of Jesus. Luke implies that Jesus spoke to the fever in the same way He had spoken to the demon. The word of Jesus was very powerful.

Not only did this high fever leave the woman instantly, but the residual effects of the fever were remedied immediately. The lady did not require a time of recuperation from any weaknesses associated with the fever. Luke emphasizes that her healing was instantaneous and complete and she was able to get up and begin to serve the guests who were in the home.

The third demonstration of power occurred in the evening hours. In the Jewish calendar, days commenced with the setting of the sun. Because this particular day was a Sabbath, the citizens of Capernaum had to wait until sunset before they could bring sick and demon-possessed friends and family members to Jesus. According to the law, Jews could not travel very far or carry any burdens on a Sabbath day.

Jesus' miraculous work on this evening involved a combination of the exorcism and physical healings which were described separately in demonstrations one and two. Jesus laid His hands on the sick people who came to Him and they were healed. "Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!'" Jesus did not permit them to speak because He did not want any proclamation of His deity to come through them.

The miracles in Capernaum revealed Jesus' authority over the powers of sin and evil. The healings were not one-time demonstrations of His power. The miracles we have been talking about were only the first of many such miracles that Jesus performed during His three years of public ministry.

I want us to consider the purpose of miracles. First of all, miracles were actions of mercy to those in need — to those who needed relief from pain and suffering, and who needed some way to be free of spiritual oppression. Jesus did His work with compassion toward those who were helpless and could not help themselves.

From another standpoint, Jesus' miracles authenticated His person and teaching, proving to everyone that He was the promised Messiah sent by the Father. From our standpoint, our study of the miracles of Jesus should increase our awe and appreciation for Who He was and what He could do. The miracles were evidence that the promises of God were being fulfilled, and of the grace and mercy which has been made available to all humanity.

The last three verses in our reading give us insight into the priorities which guided Jesus. First, there was the need for prayer. There are several passages in Scripture which explain that Jesus very often got up early in the mornings in order to have time for prayer. Prayer was the most important and essential discipline in Jesus' life. Jesus had left the glories of heaven to live on earth as a man, and as a human, Jesus lived as all men are supposed to live, completely dependent on heaven's resources. Jesus wanted to always follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to say the words and do the works of the Father. Prayer was His personal connecting link to the Father in heaven, just as it should also be ours.

Secondly, there was the priority of preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God. Miracles had a less important role in Jesus' ministry. Preaching was the primary focus of His outreach activity; miracles only reinforced and authenticated His preaching.

The term, "the kingdom of God," is mentioned in Luke's Gospel for the first time in verse 43. It will be one of the major themes in the Gospel from this chapter on. Luke uses the term more than 30 times. The term represents the ruling activity of God over the affairs of humanity. Jesus was sent to earth to reestablish the rule and authority of God on earth, to reclaim territory which had been usurped by Satan through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Jesus' miraculous activities reversed the consequences of sin. The defeating of the powers of Satan were evidence that God was at work accomplishing His purposes.

God expects all the followers of Jesus to have the same purposes in their lives that Jesus did. We are supposed to share God's good news everywhere. We are supposed to let the rule and authority of God be revealed in who we are and in everything we do. We may not have the ability to perform miracles as Jesus did, but we can have God's power flow outward from within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. This will happen only when we are disciplined about prayer. We must have the kind of regular prayer habits that Jesus had. As I said earlier, prayer is our personal connecting link to the Father in heaven. Our prayer must be that God's will "will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus was eager to share God's good news everywhere, and to make known the authority and powers of the heavenly kingdom on earth. As believers we need to have the same eagerness.