

Luke 4:38-44 — Jesus Heals Many People

(Matthew 8:14–17; Mark 1:29–39)

38 After Jesus had left the synagogue, he went to the home of Simon, whose mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. So they appealed to Jesus on her behalf, 39 and he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and began to serve them.

40 At sunset, all who were ill with various diseases were brought to Jesus, and laying His hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Demons also came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked the demons and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place, and the crowds were looking for him. They came to him and tried to keep him from leaving. 43 But Jesus told them, “I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns as well, because that is why I was sent.”

44 And he continued to preach in the synagogues of Galilee.

Footnotes:

44 Some mss read “Judea”

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Having astonished the crowd at synagogue – with his teaching and setting free the man oppressed by a demon – Jesus walked with his disciples over to Simon’s house. We should note that Simon, like Philip and Andrew, was from Bethsaida, which lay about six miles from Capernaum¹ at the spot where the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee.² Although Simon would have been able to work as a fisherman from Capernaum as easily as from Bethsaida, it might seem a bit odd for a man to leave his home village. Consider the fact Jesus taught that, in marriage, “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.” (Matthew 19:5) Consider also that Simon’s mother-in-law lived in Capernaum and seemed to suffer from a persistent fever that kept her bedridden. (Utley, Barclay)

Perhaps it is not at all odd, then, that Simon felt it prudent to move to Capernaum so his wife could care for her invalid mother.

v.38

“They appealed to Jesus” – Knowing that Jesus had just driven out a demon with just a word, the members of Simon’s household thought Jesus also would be able to set Simon’s *penthera* (S3994) free of her debilitating affliction. Here we see, by Luke’s account, the first intercessory pleading with Christ.

As a sidenote, we must understand that not all sickness is inherently evil. While illness is a result of the Fall, in many cases a person experiences physical affliction “so that the works of God would be displayed”. (John 9:3) In addition, affliction itself can be a blessing as it can turn a person toward Christ or refine a disciple’s character and strengthen faith. Robertson recalls “God speaking to Job out of the whirlwind and saying: ‘In the sunshine and the warmth you cannot meet me; but in the hurricane and the darkness, when wave after wave has swept down and across the soul, you shall see my Form, and hear my Voice, and know that your Redeemer liveth.’”

v.39

“Rebuked the fever” — It builds our faith that Luke’s recording of the first intercessory pleading with Christ was followed by a miraculous healing. Just as Jesus had demonstrated his divine authority by rebuking the demon, he rebuked this stubborn fever and it left her. Then God-in-the-Flesh – by whom all creation had come into being – reached out his hand to this suffering soul and raised her from the sick bed. (Mark 1:31)

“Got up at once” — Gill observes that people who have been ill for a considerable time generally continue to experience weakness even after the sickness has departed. Luke’s *penthera*, however, immediately rose from her bed and began to serve her guests. Edgar sees here an important connection between spiritual health and ministry: “There is nothing so wonderful as the way in which we regain spiritual health at the throne of grace. But let us see to it that it leads to ministrations. He gives us back our health that we may use it for his glory and the benefit of those about us.”

Another sidenote: As impaired drivers struggle to keep their vehicles on the pavement, some Christian teachers too readily slide into a ditch when it comes to the subject of demons and illness. Listen to Utley: “The Gospels make a distinction between Jesus exorcizing demons and healing sickness. This literary personification of a physical problem does not make this an exorcism. Demons can cause physical problems, but not all physical problems are demonic. Be careful of the extremes!” [No demons vs. demons cause everything.]

v.40

“At sunset” — We now witness the turning point in Jesus’ ministry. Many in Capernaum had heard of Jesus’ driving out the demon in Nazareth a week earlier. Now word has spread that Jesus’ had just healed a woman in Simon’s family who had long suffered an inescapable fever. As the sun went down, people throughout the community brought their own sick family members and friends to Jesus.

Everything changes here. Jesus’ public ministry to the multitudes has begun.

Why did people wait until sunset? Because it was still the Sabbath. Jews counted the day from one twilight to the next (Utley). And the religious experts had decreed the sun must go down and three stars appear as a proof the Sabbath had ended. (Gill) Carrying a sick person was regarded by the scribes and Pharisees as work – forbidden on the Sabbath – and offending them was a fate wisely avoided.

And so, in the twilight, a crowd assembled outside Simon’s house. Jesus moved among the sick and suffering with a word and touch of healing. (Cambridge) He did not heal *en masse*, but one by one, tender sympathy flowing from him to each individual. (Expositor’s Greek) He served them until all who came had been cured.

The scene brings to Clarkson’s mind an observation and a question for all who would follow Jesus:

It was not absolutely necessary that he should touch them; he could "speak the word only," and the patient would be healed. But he preferred to do so; it brought him, the Healer, into close and loving contact with those whom he was healing. We, too, in our way, are healers after Christ. We aspire to move through life,

dispensing health and happiness to them that are sick and sad of soul. If we fail in part to do this, may it not be because we do not get into close enough contact with those whom we are endeavoring to bless?

v.41

“Demons also came out” — As with any crowd (then or now), no one should be surprised that a certain number of people would be oppressed by demons. Utley offers a counter-intuitive reading of the verse that leads him to think “it seems that Jesus healed all of those with physical ailments, but only some of those with demons.” That seems to over-complicate the plain reading of the Text. Many people were oppressed by demons; Jesus set them free.

“Would not allow them to speak” — As in other dispossessions, Jesus forbade the demons to speak because they knew he was the Messiah. The Expositor’s Commentary suggests he sought to prevent the premature revelation of his identity and offers three reasons: (1) to prevent a misinterpretation that would draw to him revolutionary-minded dissidents seeking a leader against Rome; (2) to allow his messianic works themselves to establish his authority among true believers; and (3) possibly to avoid an inappropriate self-proclamation as Messiah (same comment on 4:35).

v.42

“At daybreak ... a solitary place” — If the healing of Simon’s *penthera* brought all Capernaum to Jesus’ doorstep, imagine what would happen when word of those doorstep miracles spread to neighboring communities! And so, as weary as he must have been from the Sabbath evening’s ministry, Jesus got out of bed very early, before dawn, and looked for a solitary place where he could pray. He didn’t have to travel far because, as densely populated as Capernaum was, many nearby hill ravines offered solitude where he could commune with the Father without being spotted by the multitudes. (Cambridge)

Most of us don’t need to escape crowds flooding in from nearby towns to see us, but we do need solitude where we can spend a few moments in communion with our Father. The Lord’s instructions were unequivocal about this: “When [... not ‘if’] you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door.” (Matthew 6:6) If the Son of

Man needed communion with the Father and re-energizing from the Holy Spirit, how much more the sons of man? Edgar says, “If Jesus felt the need of prayer, how presumptuous in minor minds to excuse themselves from it!”

At some point, Simon and the others went to look for Jesus and when they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you!” (Mark 1:36-37) Perhaps those in Simon’s house had been awakened by a new crowd gathering outside the house. In any case, the multitude also tracked down the Lord and tried to convince him to stay at Capernaum. Gill writes: “Perhaps this was not so much from love to Christ’s person and presence, or any regard to his ministry, and the good and welfare of their immortal souls, as on account of the miracles he wrought, and the corporal benefits he bestowed on them.”

vv.43-44

“I must proclaim the Good News” — For most people, a large, adoring crowd, imploring them to not leave, would be easily interpreted as “a sign from God” that they ought to stay. Not so with Jesus. He knew Almighty God had sent him for a purpose, and he knew precisely what that purpose was. (4:18-19) His focus was singular, and he was not to be deterred from the mission the Father had given him — even though adoring crowds tempted him otherwise. Because the Father had sent him for a specific purpose, Jesus told the crowd he “must” leave. God’s clear instructions obliged the “beloved Son” to obey.

The vast majority of contemporary English translations render the Greek word *euangelisasthail* (S2097) as ‘preach,’ just as they do in v.44 an entirely different word (*kēryssōn*, S2784, herald). Many believers stumble over the word ‘preach’ because they identify it with the stylized “preacher” performance they see in the pulpit on Sunday. We would do better to disciple our people to understand “preaching the Gospel” is simply “proclaiming” of “heralding” the good news that God has done something radical so we can be reconciled to him and live in the light of his love, abundantly, now and forever.

“The Good News” — The message Jesus proclaimed — and sent his disciples out to preach — was simple, profound, and thrilling: “The time of Messiah, long promised by God, has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near! Entrust your lives to this Good News and be transformed by its power!” (Mark 1:15 paraphrased)

After his death and resurrection, of course, the depth and extent of this Good News would become more apparent. From that point on, Jesus' "Good News" (*euangeliō*, S2098) would be translated as the Church's "gospel."

"The Kingdom of God" — Jesus' Good News was "The Kingdom of God is near!" This was an especially thrilling announcement for the Jews of that era, because their Old Testament understanding "focused only on one coming of God's Messiah — a military, judgmental, glorious coming. ... The two Jewish ages, the age of wickedness and the new age of righteousness, overlap." (Utley)

A New Testament understanding of the Kingdom, however, recognizes that Messiah came as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. The Jewish followers of Jesus — including the apostles — were confused when Messiah was murdered. Their Good News was revealed to them in the Lord's resurrection. When Jesus told them, "I will come again" (John 14:3), they began to comprehend the two-dimensional nature of the Kingdom. He taught them to pray that the Kingdom would come and God's will would be done "on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

So the Christians of all ages have lived with the tension of an "already, but not yet" Kingdom. "Jesus currently reigns in the hearts of believers, but will one day reign over all creation." (Utley) The Kingdom of God today "is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God's authority."³ Yet a time will come, "immediately after the tribulation of those days," when all the earth's peoples "will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" to gather his elect to himself. (Matthew 24:29-31)

"That is why I was sent" — Jesus knew he had not been sent to find a receptive city, gather a large following, and launch a mega-synagogue. He had come to be a kernel of wheat that would fall into the ground, die, and bear much fruit. (John 12:24) He had come to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) He had been sent to make disciples who would make disciples of all peoples. (Matthew 28:19)

And lest we miss the point, Jesus told those who would be his disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you." (John 20:21)

“In the synagogues of Galilee” — This verse presents a minor point of confusion. Jesus has been in Galilee, yet in some New Testament manuscripts, v.44 says “he continued to preach in the synagogues of Judea.” How can Jesus “continue to preach” in Judea’s synagogues when he has been in Galilee? Experts offer rationales for keeping ‘Judea,’ but others follow Mark 1:39 and Matthew 4:23 in saying ‘Galilee.’ We choose to conform to those manuscripts for the simple reason that Jesus’ continuing to preach in an area requires him to still be in the area where he has been preaching – and that was Galilee.

1 <https://bible-history.com/map-jesus/new-testament-cities-distances-in-ancient-israel>

2 <https://bibleatlas.org/full/bethsaida.htm>

3 <https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-of-God.html>