

Jesus' Ministry of Healing

📖 Luke 4:38-44

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A few weeks ago we saw in Luke 4:16ff an example of Jesus' ministry of teaching. This occurred in His hometown of Nazareth on Sabbath when meeting in the synagogue. He read from the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-2a and claimed to be fulfilling them on that day. Isa 61:1-3 were understood to be Messianic and so what Jesus was making a claim to being was the Messiah. Now the people had known who Jesus was since He was just a boy, and that He was supposedly the son of Joseph, and they considered His words to be full of grace, but they did not think that He could be the Messiah because He was just the son of a common man. But the real issue was deeper than that, they were jealous because Jesus was rising in fame throughout the Galilee and no prophet is accepted in His hometown. Therefore, they rejected Him and they tried to kill Him. But supernaturally Jesus was able to slip through the crowd and escape. In Luke 4:31 He then traveled 20 miles down to the Sea of Galilee, to the city named of Kefar Nahum. This city was a fishing and agricultural village of less than 1,000 people. Peter, Andrew and other soon to be disciples had re-located to Capernaum to set up their fishing business. The main road from Beth-Shean to Damascus passed through Capernaum, so it was a busy trade route. It was also on the border of the tetrarchies of Herod Antipas and Philip, so Roman soldiers were stationed there to handle customs and collect taxes. But relations between the Jews and Romans were amiable and a Roman soldier even funded the building of the synagogue. In verse 31, as was His custom, Jesus attended synagogue on the Sabbath and in verse 32 they were being overwhelmed by His teaching because He did not base His interpretations on the authority of previous rabbis but on His own authority that which He had received from His Father. This was something novel to the people, something they had never heard. In verse 33 there was a man in the synagogue who was possessed by a demon. This was sheer irony because the Jews believed that demons were prevented from being in spaces where there was Torah reading, especially in the synagogue on Sabbath, when the Shema was recited, and yet here was a demon-possessed man in their midst. In verse 34 the demon cried out with a loud voice something like, "Oh, great...Leave us alone, Jesus of Nazareth." He then asked, "Have you come to destroy us?" A reference to the demon himself and the man he possessed. It was known that when an exorcism took place that the victim was often harmed seriously, and even killed. Lastly the demon proclaimed, "I know who You are—the Holy One of God." The demon was testifying to Jesus' identity in the midst of the entire congregation. But in verse 35, Jesus rebuked the demon, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" For some

reason He did not want the demon to testify of Him. Some think it is because a demon's testimony is not a reliable testimony. Others think it was because the people might hastily proclaim Jesus to be a political Messiah and raise a revolt. But in any case, Jesus did not want the demons to testify of Him. He also commanded the demon to come out of the man. The demon reluctantly came, throwing the man to the ground and causing convulsions. But Luke, a medical doctor, reports that he came out without any lasting harm. This was the other half of the miracle. For the man not to suffer any harm was evidence of a miracle indeed and it authenticated that the demon's words were true, Jesus was "The Holy One of God." So, in verse 36, the people were amazed and they began talking with one another saying, "What is happening? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out." This was something they had never experienced, this was utterly unique. They had seen exorcisms, but never where the victim went unharmed. So they knew that Jesus had power over the entire demonic realm and they wondered what was going on. So, in verse 37, "the report about Him and what was said and what He had done in the synagogue at Capernaum that day was spreading throughout the Galilee."

In verse 38, still at Capernaum, **He got up and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's home.** The impression you get from Luke is that as they went out of one they virtually went into the other. The parallel in Mark 1:29 is even more indicative of the topographical nearness of the two, "And *immediately* after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John." So, we gather from the text that Peter lived very close to the synagogue. In the archaeological search for Capernaum, an American scholar named Robinson visited the site in 1838 and on a second visit correctly identified the site of the synagogue. Later an English archaeologist named Wilson made some investigations in 1866. It was presumed by some to be Capernaum, but it was not agreed upon by all. In time, with further archaeological work, it became clear that the site was Capernaum. The most pronounced archaeological excavations took place uninterrupted from 1968-1991. During this time the two chief archaeologists discovered that the synagogue was from the 4th century A.D and had been built upon the ruins of a prior synagogue that had burned. The evidence of the earlier synagogue is this burned stone layer. They concluded that the burned synagogue was the synagogue Jesus taught in and Simon and Andrew, James and John had attended. These archaeologists also discovered a 5th century octagonal church, 30m from the synagogue, at this location. The aerial photo shows the close proximity. Under the 5th century church they discovered a previous house-church dating from the 4th century and under it a private house from the 1st century. Other archaeological data and literary sources indicate this was the house of Peter. So, if you go there today you can get a great perspective for how near Peter's home was to the synagogue and it gives you a good idea of just how literal the Scripture is when you read something like Mark 1:29, "And *immediately* after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew."

Now when Jesus **entered Simon's home**, it says that **Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him to help her.** This is the first mention of **Simon** in the Gospel of Luke. Apparently Luke felt

there was no need of introduction, since he must have been well-known. Of course, **Simon** is "Peter," and elsewhere he is referred to as "Simon Peter" (e.g. Acts 16:16). The name **Simon** is from "Simeon" and means "to hear with obedience" or "to hearken." He is said in John 1:44 to have been "from Bethsaida," but here his home is in Capernaum. So we conclude that Simon must have grown up in Bethsaida and later moved to Capernaum. This was where he built his fishing business, which was near Tabgha, the best fishing waters in the Sea of Galilee. Also note that Peter had a **mother-in-law**, meaning he was married. 1 Cor 9:5 also indicates that Peter was married and that he took his believing wife along with him when he traveled for ministry. Bock notes that "Tradition says that Peter's wife was actively involved in women's ministry and that Peter had children..." but we have no way of confirming that. The occasion on this day was that Peter's **mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever**. Now when we think of a **high fever** we think of someone having some virus that is causing their temperature to rise to 103-104. But the word translated **suffering** is from *συμῆλω* and means "torment" due to some disease. It was not just an illness that would soon pass. She had some kind of disease. This disease was causing her torment. Most argue that the words **high fever** are a technical medical term for a "high grade fever" that might have been related to dysentery. The disease might have been dysentery and it caused Peter's mother-in-law to run a high grade fever. In the parallels of Matthew and Mark there is no mention of a "high" fever, only a "fever," so we get a little more detail here. She was running a high fever. And at that time Jesus was coming into the house and since He had just cast out a demon, the people **asked Him to help her**. Really what the Greek says they were asking was "about her," as in, what was wrong with her, indicating they did not know and did not know how to treat her, and they expected Him to be able to help.

Now, what Jesus is about to do is another miracle. Bock said, "Now he shows how Jesus ministered. The passage concentrates on miraculous works. Jesus has power over disease and demons, two enemies that grip humankind." True enough, but they indicate more than the fact that Jesus has power over disease and demons. They indicate the nearness of the kingdom of God.

So, in verse 39, Jesus, **standing over her...rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them**. The emphasis is on Jesus' authority over disease and the immediacy of the healing. It was when **He rebuked the fever** that it left her and the evidence of this is that **she immediately got up and waited on them**. She **immediately** started to serve. She didn't wait ten minutes. She didn't wait two hours. She **immediately got up and waited on them**. The parallel in Matthew 8:15 says "He touched her hand" and Mark 1:31 agrees, saying, "He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand." Only Luke adds that **He rebuked the fever**. Obviously, He both rebuked the fever and took her by the hand. The term **rebuked** is often used in exorcism, so the conclusion of some is that this disease was caused by a demon. However, that interpretation is missing the primary element of an exorcism, some description of the demon's departure. So this was not an exorcism. The disease was not caused by a demon. The correct understanding for why the term **rebuked** is used of a disease is that the disease is being personified as the result of sin committed at the fall. Original sin is the ultimate issue behind the presence of all disease in the world. As such, disease can be personified as the result of

sin. When **he rebuked the** disease two things happened. First, **it left her**. Whatever was tormenting her, presumably in her colon, was healed. Second, **she immediately got up and waited on them**. She was no longer plagued by the disease that had crippled her ability to serve. Out of gratitude **she immediately got up and began serving them**. The point is the immediacy of the healing. She had instant and total recovery. And the only explanation is that Jesus has total authority over all disease.

But that's not all that Jesus did that day. In verse 40 He did more miracles. So far He had cast the demon out of the man in the synagogue, healed Simon's mother-in-law from dysentery in a private home and now He will continue to heal others in public that evening. The point is that Jesus has authority over all demons and forms of sickness! In verse 40, **While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them**. This took place, apparently, it says, **while the sun was setting**. The parallel in Mark 1:32 is more specific, it says, "When evening came, after the sun had set," so the sun was down but the sun rays were still visible over the horizon. This means the Sabbath had passed. And note that people who were well brought **any who were sick with various diseases**. There were many **diseases** of all different sorts. They obviously witnessed Jesus' authority over them all. They knew He could heal those **who were sick**. So they **brought them to Him**. And observe how personal Jesus' care of each one. It says **and laying His hands on each one of them**. He healed each one personally, with a touch. The word **healed** is from the Greek word *θεραπευω*, from which we get "therapy," and in the Greek meant "to heal, to restore." He was restoring them to good health, and He was doing it individually, for each one. Now the issue of his **laying His hands on each one** has led some to conclude that some kind of mystical power was involved in the **laying on of hands** and this is paralleled by so-called modern healers. However, Jesus often healed without the **laying on of hands**, but merely a word. So the laying on of hands was not necessary. There was no special formula or pattern Jesus laid down for how He healed. What the laying on of hands signifies is not mystical power but personal concern and compassion for the individual who is suffering under the curse of sin. Jesus recognized that humans suffer under the effects of the fall and His response was one of compassion. A personal touch would convey concern and care for the individual living in the difficult state. And the point of mentioning these healings, sort of as a summary, is simply to say that no matter what **disease** a person had, it was not too difficult for Jesus to heal. He had total authority over all disease. He is the master Physician.

In verse 41, **Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ**. Notice that **demons...were coming out of many**, not all. There were a lot of sick people, who when healed had demons coming out of them, but not all of them were demon-possessed. Some of those who were sick had demons and the demons were the cause, and others were just sick because of the negative effects of the fall. So there is no reason to think that all sickness is due to demons. Sickness has other causes as well. Now as for those whose sickness was caused by demons, when He laid His hands on them, **demons were coming out...shouting, "You are the Son of God!"** And obviously this happened many times. Demons gave testimony many times to the

people of Capernaum that Jesus was **the Son of God**. Now there is debate over what is meant by the term **the Son of God**, and whether that title here signifies Jesus' divinity. In other words, has Luke's progressive revealing of Jesus' identity reached the point where it is understood that Jesus is God. Is that the meaning at this time? I don't know. What I do know is that the end of the verse says that the reason Jesus rebuked these demons and **would not allow them to speak is because they knew Him to be the Messiah**. What that would indicate is that the title **Son of God** is a Messianic title. Did it go so far as to indicate that they understood Him to be divinity? I don't know. But the Jews who heard these demons coming out screaming that Jesus was **the Son of God**, certainly knew that they were testifying that Jesus was the Messiah. And a further thing, the Jews knew that the title **the Son of God** was a regal title, that Messiah was to be King. So, it is my understanding that the demons were proclaiming Jesus to be the Messianic King and they may also have been proclaiming that He was God. And yet He **would not allow them to speak**, even though it was a true testimony. And this is the same thing we saw with the man in the synagogue a few hours before on Sabbath. He wouldn't let that demon keep saying, "You are the Holy One of God." But He stopped them. So why did Jesus not allow them to continue speaking the truth about Him? There are many suggestions. As I mentioned last week, some think that it is simply because demons are not good character witnesses. But on this occasion they seem to be. Why shut them up if they are speaking the truth? Others think Jesus did not want the Jews to prematurely enthrone Him as a political king. And that may have an element of truth. But I think the best answer is Jesus' own answer at the end of verse 41, He wouldn't let them speak **because they knew Him to be the Christ**. They already knew. And Jesus didn't want people to just be told who He was; He wanted them to recognize Him for who He was. He wanted them to recognize through His teachings and through His miracles that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel. He wanted them to come to that by considering what He was saying and what He was doing.

In verse 42, **When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them**. So the next **day**, when the sun came up, the reference here to **day** is to the daylight portion of the day, a period of less than 24 hours. At that time, **Jesus left and went to a secluded place**. He often does this, usually to pray, but no mention of prayer is here. But the parallel in Mark 1:35 says that Jesus "was praying there." So He got away from the crowds, but look at what the crowds were doing. They **were searching for Him**. And eventually they found Him because it says they **came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them**. Now isn't this a very different response from Nazareth? At Nazareth they tried to throw Him off a cliff. At Capernaum they tried to get Him to stay. The point is to show there would be a mixed response to Jesus throughout Israel. Here they **tried to keep Him from going away**. They supposedly had others who needed to be healed or wanted to investigate further.

But in verse 43, **He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."** Jesus' said He **must preach the kingdom of God to other** Jewish cities. The word **must** in the Greek is $\delta\epsilon\iota$, a verb of necessity. It was His mission. So, He could not simply stay in Capernaum and keep healing

the people there and preaching the kingdom message. He had to go **to other cities** and **preach the kingdom of God** as well. Now this word **preach** means “bring good news.” The good news at the time was that **the kingdom of God** was near. Luke doesn't record that the **kingdom** was near in this verse, but he does later in 10:9 and this is the unanimous testimony of the parallels in Matthew and Mark. Jesus was proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God was near. Now, the concept of the kingdom is derived from the OT. The kingdom of God was born out of Egypt at the Exodus and God became the King at Mt Sinai and He was leading them to the Land over which He would rule them. Thus, there are three aspects to the definition of **the kingdom of God**; 1) a ruler or king, 2) a realm of rule, and 3) the exercise of rule. All three of these elements were not present at this time, only some of them, and so the kingdom was only “near.” It's the progressive dispensationalists and some inconsistent dispensationalists and covenant theologians who say that when it says the kingdom was “near” it really means “here.” But the reason it was not here was because all three of these things have to be in place before the kingdom is here. The first thing, the ruler or king, was here. Jesus is the King. He was present. The second thing was the realm or rule, which is the Land of Israel. And here it is expressed that He must go to other cities of the Land of Israel and preach the kingdom message. So the realm of rule had not yet come under His authority. And the third thing, the exercise of rule, this was only being exerted in part through the miracles. It was not complete. It's these miracles that are important. Why Jesus was doing miracles was to demonstrate to the people of Israel that He was the King and that He had the authority to exercise kingdom rule over the land of Israel by establishing kingdom conditions in the land. What exactly are these kingdom conditions? The kingdom conditions are described by the OT prophets. For example, Isaiah 35:5ff says that the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. Jesus' ability to heal the blind, deaf, lame and mute demonstrated that He could establish the kingdom. Another example is Isaiah 24:21, where it says that when the King comes to establish the kingdom the Lord will punish the host of heaven on high...and they will be confined to prison and after many days they will be punished. The host of heaven are the fallen angels and Jesus' casting out of demons illustrated that He was the King and had authority to establish kingdom conditions on earth. He needed to demonstrate this authority throughout Israel so that they would recognize Him as the demons had recognized Him, as the very Son of God. Therefore, He needed to go **to the other cities also** and to teach the word, heal the sick and cast out demons. Then they should know that He was the King-Messiah and crown Him as their King.

So, in verse 44, **He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea**. He went to Bethsaida, Chorazin, and other cities... preaching that the kingdom of God was near. Now it's interesting that he said **of Judea**, because He was at Capernaum in the Galilee, the northern part of Israel, and **Judea** was in the southern part of Israel. So why does it say **he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea?** when we would expect it to say “He kept on preaching in the synagogues of the Galilee,” especially when Luke 5:1 says that He was “standing by the lake of Gennesaret,” which is the Sea of Galilee. On one hand we might suppose that He left the Galilee and went to Judea between 4:44 and 5:1. However, the real answer lies in the two meanings of **Judea**. The first meaning is

the southern part of Israel, distinct from the Galilee. This is the most common usage. And if that was the intended meaning then He left the Galilee and went south for some time and returned by 5:1. But the second meaning of **Judea** is the broad region occupied by the people of Israel, including both Judea proper and the Galilee. In support of this second meaning is Luke 1:5 which stated that Herod the Great was king of Judea. His realm included all the land of the Jews, both Judea and the Galilee, so Judea had a much broader usage. It is also testified in Luke 23:5 where Jesus' enemies "kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place," which was Jerusalem. So it is clear that Luke customarily employed the term Judea to refer to both the Galilee and Judea proper and therefore we are to understand Luke to be saying that Jesus continued His mission of preaching the kingdom of God to the people of Israel throughout the land of Israel. And one thing we must conclude then, is that Jesus' mission at the time was to Israel only and not to the Gentiles. This is in accordance with Jesus' teaching in Matt 10:5-7 when He commissioned His twelve apostles, saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Israel was to have their opportunity first. Then they would have the opportunity to witness to the world and then the kingdom would come. But as it turned out, the offer of the kingdom was only accepted by a few, the kingdom offer would be rejected, the kingdom itself would be postponed and the Jews who did respond would then become the nucleus of the Church that took the gospel to the Gentiles under an enlarged commission, the great commission.

What this section is teaching, beginning in 4:16 and extending to 4:44, is the core and substance of Jesus' ministry. He taught the word in such a way that had never been taught before, with His own authority, and not as the rabbis. This overwhelmed the people because it was not like anything they had ever heard before. It was not dull commentary, but personally addressed to the human heart in such a way that it moved the will to action. He also cast out demons without harm to the demon possessed, demonstrating full authority over the demonic realm. And finally He healed those who were sick and had disease, demonstrating full authority over the effects of the sin upon the world. And all together these things indicated that He was the King-Messiah who could bring in kingdom conditions on earth if the people would receive Him, but there was a mixed response.

In summary, in 4:38 Jesus got up and left the synagogue and immediately entered Simon's home, which was only 30m from the synagogue. When he came in Simon's mother-in-law was suffering a disease that was likely dysentery that caused a high grade fever, and those who saw Him cast out the demon asked Him to help her. In verse 39, He stood over her and rebuked the fever, other Gospel writer's record that He touched her to raise her up and the high grade fever and disease left her and the evidence is that she immediately got up and waited on them. In verse 40, while the sun was setting, Mark says at evening when the sun had gone down, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He showed compassion for those living under the fall, laying His hands personally on each one of them, healing each one. He had authority over all disease and sickness. In verse 41, demons were coming out of many of these, not all, but those who did have

demons possessing them were coming out and shouting His true identity, "You are the Son of God." But Jesus rebuked them and would not permit them to speak because they knew Him to be the Messiah, but He wanted the people to come to that conclusion themselves. So in verse 42, when day came, Jesus left Capernaum and went to a secluded place, Mark says to pray, and the crowds were searching for Him and apparently found Him, and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But in verse 43 He said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God, that it is near, to other cities throughout the land of Israel, for I was sent for this purpose. He had a mission and He was determined to fulfill the mission. So, verse 44, He kept on preaching that the kingdom was near in all the synagogues throughout the land of Israel.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, that Jesus has authority over sickness. He could heal a fever, He could heal cancer, He could heal AIDS, He could heal any disease, inherited or acquired. There is nothing too hard for Him to heal because He has absolute authority over every molecule in the universe. Second, that Jesus has authority over demons. He could cast out and lock away any demon, including Satan Himself because He has absolute authority over every demon in the universe. Third, not all sickness is caused by demons, but some is. Sickness can be an effect of the fall, it can be an effect of putting something bad in your body, or it can be a demon. In most cases a doctor could not know that a sickness was due to a demon or not, but if the person is an unbeliever, it is possible that the illness or disease is due to a demon. At least Christian medical doctors ought to be aware that some sickness is caused by demons. The only way for the person to be healed of that is for the demon to come out of them. This requires exorcism. But what is the mode of exorcism today? The mode of exorcism today is belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. When a person believes in Him the Spirit of God comes to indwell the person and the demon must leave. Fourth, it is important to note that Jesus did these miracles for people without faith. Faith was not required during Jesus' early ministry to be healed because the point was to demonstrate that He was the King-Messiah. His mission was to convince them that He was the Messiah. Later, after He is rejected, He will require faith to be healed.