

Luke 4:31-44: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 4 verses 31 to 44. And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, Ha! what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent, and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed, and said to one another, What is this word?

For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out. And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. And he arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she rose and began to serve them.

[1 : 0 7] Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him. And he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, You are the Son of God.

But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them.

But he said to them, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose. And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

After Jesus has been rejected by his hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4, he goes to Capernaum, which would be the base for his earliest mission. Accounts of this Sabbath are also found in Matthew and Mark, and the rest of this chapter recounts a series of great works that Jesus performed on this Sabbath morning, afternoon, and evening.

He begins by teaching in the synagogue in a way that is seen as remarkable for its authority. He isn't just delivering an opinion, or expressing some viewpoint, or even just teaching.

[2 : 1 6] He himself is bringing the truth and the claim of God to bear upon people in a way that is remarkable. He demonstrates the authority of his word of teaching, but also demonstrates his powerful word of exorcism.

He casts out the demon who testifies to his true identity as the Holy One of God. Again, this probably has some priestly connotations. He has both authority and power, and that power is seen in the relationship to the evil spirits.

Having faced the devil in the wilderness, he now faces demons in the synagogue. The devil's forces are occupying the heart of Israel's places of worship, threatening to render them a desolate place.

We don't see demons much in the Old Testament. They are largely associated with the wilderness, and abandoned locations in places like Isaiah chapter 13 verse 21, or 34 verse 13 to 14, and then also we see this in Luke chapter 11 verse 24.

Widespread demonic possession is not the norm, but Jesus performs exorcisms wherever he goes. And maybe we could relate this to the story of David and Saul. After David has been anointed by God's spirit, a distressing spirit troubles Saul, and David has to minister to him.

[3 : 27] As Christ is anointed by the spirit, he plays a similar role for Israel. He causes the distressing spirits to depart from the people. And as a result of his work, his fame spreads throughout the region.

But as we go through the gospel, we see that the crowds don't really understand what his mission involves. The synagogue exorcism is followed by the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. And it's interesting that we find a reference to Simon here without any previous introduction.

Luke seems to presume that Simon will already be known to his readers. And at various other points in his gospel, he is presuming some prior knowledge on the part of his reader. Simon's wife is spoken of here, even if only to mention that she has a mother.

As Jesus seems to have stayed in this house, she was probably one of the women who helped support his ministry. Such women were mentioned in Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3. Later on in 1 Corinthians 9.5, we're told that she accompanied Peter as a fellow worker.

Jesus is someone who heals both in public and in private. It's likely that Jesus stayed in the house with Simon and Andrew and their extended family. And it's worth considering the sort of family structure of the society he's ministering within.

[4 : 39] It may help us better to understand the challenge that he presented at certain points. We might have another window into the familial life of the context in the story of Jesus being lost in Jerusalem.

Mary and Joseph go with Jesus, but Jesus can be lost for quite a long time. They presume he's with the others. There is presumably a large extended family and lots of friends and others travelling with them.

And we should presume that Jesus would have spent a lot of time with this extended network of people. And also that many of his disciples seem to have been drawn from such an extended network.

Having relations to Jesus and also to each other. Luke speaks of Simon's mother-in-law's fever as something like a form of possession. It afflicts her. Jesus rebukes it and it leaves her.

And then she begins to serve him. If Jesus, as it seems, made Peter's house in Capernaum a base of his operations, Simon's mother-in-law would probably have been his primary hostess, with all of the honour that that implied.

[5 : 36] Jesus does all these things on the Sabbath and there doesn't seem to be any conflict about this fact at this point. Later on people come to him in the evening as the sun's going down and as the new day is beginning.

And he heals many. He forbids the demons to speak because they know him. Jesus often discourages people from talking about healings and deliverances and also silences demons.

However, there are occasions when Jesus displays his work more openly. The purpose of the secrecy seems to exceed merely a concern to avoid excessive attention from authorities. The disciples and the demons have a knowledge about Jesus' mission and identity for which the time has not yet come for more public disclosure.

Part of the purpose of the secrecy is that it avoids the great openness to misunderstanding that a revelation of his identity before its proper time would allow for.

Prior to his death and resurrection, a revelation of the fact that he is the Son of God, that he is the Messiah, would lead to him being made king or something like that, which would undermine the purpose of his mission, drawing him away from the path of the cross.

[6 : 42] Only when the cross and the resurrection have occurred can it truly be understood what it means that Jesus is the Christ. This chapter ends with Jesus leaving Capernaum secretly to go to a desolate place and continue his mission elsewhere, when he ends up going down to the synagogues of Judea and preaching there too.

A question to consider. How might we get a clearer idea of what Jesus is doing in this passage and elsewhere from his statement in verses 18 to 19 of this chapter?