

Luke

Expect a Miracle?

Luke 4:38-44

With Study Questions

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Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. ³⁹ So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them. ⁴⁰ When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking *them*, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. ⁴² Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; ⁴³ but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." ⁴⁴ And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee (Luke 4:38-44).

Introduction

I was a guest on a radio talk show. The subject was "Are you disappointed in God?" The question thrown out to the listening audience was, "Has the Christian faith been presented to you in such a way as to make you think that you are not getting some things that the Bible promises you should get?"

Two of our earliest callers were women who were blind. I asked, "When you became a Christian and started acquainting yourself the gospels, noticing that nearly everybody was healed – including the blind, did you expect that this should happen to you?" They both answered, "No."

Was that a faithless answer or a proper answer? When we read the pages of Scripture and see supernatural things taking place, should we today expect those things to be happening in our lives in the same way we see them in the Bible? Should we, as the bumper sticker indicates, "Expect a Miracle?" Or was there something different going on then and there?

Here we are at the beginning of the ministry of Christ (Luke 3:23). He had been baptized, affirmed by His Father in heaven and anointed by the Holy Spirit. God the Son had entered history and history would never be the same. I've been told that if you fill a room with hydrogen gas and oxygen gas, not much is likely to happen...unless you light a match, then you can plan on an explosion.

In Christ, the light came into the world, and it would be explosive. Isaiah prophetically anticipates that He would be "despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3). In the parable of the Ten Minas, Jesus taught that people "**hated Him**" (Luke 19:14) and in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants that would "**kill Him**" (Luke 20:14). He would come to His own and His own would receive Him not (John 1:11).

The odor of sin had prevailed in the world (1 John 5:19) and God was about to light a match. It would begin with Christ alone as one pleasing aroma, then that aroma would begin to permeate. The "**fragrance of Christ**" (2 Corinthians 2:15) had arrived, but to a sin-laden world it was the "**aroma of death**" (2 Corinthians 2:16). There seemed to be very little in common with the direction of the world and the remedy which Christ would bring.

Although Christ was rapidly gaining fame, "**being glorified by all**" (Luke 4:15), His very first lesson in Luke's first record of His church attendance climaxed with efforts by the congregation to throw "**Him down over a cliff**" (Luke 4:29). In His next visit to church, He found Himself confronted by an "**unclean demon**" (Luke 4:33), which He demonstrates His power and authority over.

This is the environment of the incarnation. The cure for the human race is injected into a familial, religious and politically cancerous world. And the healing begins with a singular woman.

Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. ³⁹ So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them (Luke 4:38, 39).

An Intimate Miracle

Luke will soon bring us to the crowds. But first we see the intimacy of a home and the healing of the mother of a friend. In the hundreds of weddings I have done over the years, a few remain clearly etched in my memory. They

are the intimate ones. Sometimes just the couple, a witness and me. They are memorable because there is no distraction. No processional or recessional. No music. No bridesmaids or groomsmen. No reception. Not that I don't enjoy a large festive wedding with all the joy. But there is something very solemn when it's just the couple and you. They seem to hear every word.

They enter Simon (Peter's) house, and his mother-in-law is "**sick with a high fever,**" which at that time could be fatal. Not to dig too deeply here, but it should not go unnoticed that the supposed first Pope was married (1 Corinthians 9:5). Perhaps they had heard Jesus quote Isaiah, saying that He fulfilled the prophecy to give "**sight to the blind**" (Luke 4:18).

It was commonly understood that the Messiah would have these capabilities. When John the Baptist asked if Jesus was the one, the answer was to tell John that "**blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed...**" (Luke 7:22). It's difficult to tell how sheepish their petition might have been. They didn't go so far as to ask Him to heal her. It simply says, "**they made request of Him concerning her.**" In the Greek it simply reads, *erotesan auton peri autes*, "**they asked Him about her.**"

Yet His answer would be, as is always the case, superior to the request. In a demonstration of pronounced tenderness "**He stood over her.**" Then, in a demonstration of great power, He "**rebuked the fever.**" Rebuke seems an odd choice. We generally associate rebuke with a reproof or censure or something of a more personal nature. When someone is rebuked, they are called out.

This has caused some to conclude that all illness is demon related. An old friend of mine had a family who attended a church who regularly offered of deliverance of illnesses, they believed were related to evil spirits; the demon of post-nasal drip or the dark spirit of ear-infection. I think they go a bit too far in this since we also read of Jesus rebuking a storm (Mark 4:39).

As we'll see in a moment, there is an element of truth to that thinking, but the rebuke is likely more generally related to Jesus' power, authority and word. With a simple sentence she is made well. This portion of the passage ends with what feels like filler, "**immediately she arose and served them.**" Of course there is no filler in the Bible, as if God's editor wanted a longer book.

Now maybe Peter's mother-in-law was a workaholic who could not abide even a brief time to relax and enjoy her recovery. But it is more likely, since the Holy Spirit chose to include this in the record, that there is a lesson of gratitude and servanthood for us to grasp. Later, Luke will record the

healing of the ten lepers, where only one returned, glorified God and gave thanks (Luke 17:11-19).

“She arose and served them.” She served, not merely Jesus, but **“them,”** likely Peter, Andrew, James and John (Mark 1:29) as well. When we find that God has brought us to a place of recovery, health or deliverance, we should recognize that is not designed to accommodate our own lethargy. I am not saying there is not a time to take a breath. In a moment we’ll see Luke record Jesus departing to a **“deserted place.”** But our theme should be gratitude and service.

We are not told specifically how she served them. It appears to be something simple, perhaps a meal. Interesting that there is often no detailed record of the “great” deeds of the apostles (Luke 10:17), yet God found it fitting to place the simple service of a godly woman in His word which fadeth not away (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35). Truly, **“the Lord sees not as man sees”** (1 Samuel 16:7).

When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!” And He, rebuking *them*, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ (Luke 4:40, 41).

A Busy Sabbath

The sabbath (Luke 4:31) is turning into quite a long day for Jesus. And though I don’t think the fatigue of Jesus (being truly man) is a primary point Luke seems to be making, those serving Christ on the Lord’s Day can find it anything but restful. But a day of rest is not synonymous with a day of inactivity. It is a resting from one thing and pursuing another. When God **“rested on the seventh day” (Genesis 2:2)**, He didn’t strike a pose of inactivity. He rested, or ceased, from His work of creation. But to this day, He continue His work of preservation, **“in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).**

Why All the Healing?

Some observations here. First why all the healing? There are many healing ministries throughout the land, that call upon this, and similar, passages to validate their efforts. I do hope it is not with an uncharitable spirit that I suggest you avoid these ministries. I am, at this point, suggesting that God does heal today or that God doesn't respond to our prayers for the sick-even perhaps in an extraordinary way. But something different is happening here.

Most of the people in the world, most of the people in Jerusalem, were not being healed. Even though we see a crowd of people, it is still a relatively small group for a relatively short period of time that we see this type of healing take place. But *this type*, I mean an absolute, authoritative healing by the laying on of hands. What we see with Jesus, and what Jesus conferred upon His apostles, was the authoritative power to heal.

Simply put, we pray for certain things, like healing. God may answer our prayers according to our desires or not. But when Jesus "**laid His hands on**" these people, they were definitively healed. When Peter told the who was "**lame from birth...in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk**" (Acts 3:2, 6), there was no way that man wasn't going to rise up and walk! I might add that Peter didn't even pray. So, what is going on here?

These unique, powerful, supernatural activities we see coming from Jesus, then from the Apostles were designed to attest to the authoritative message that they would give. When someone walks on water or raises the dead or feeds five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, you should listen to what they have to say. We haven't time at this point for a deep dive, but if you begin reading about the miracles in Scriptures, you will see a recurring theme of attestation.

When Jesus heals the paralytic it was designed for people to know that what He had just said (forgiving sins) was true (Matthew 9:1-7). When John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus told them to tell John of His healing power (Matthew 11:2-5). Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was from God because of the signs He performed (John 3:2). When Jesus fed the five thousand those observing knew He was "**the Prophet who is to come into the world**" (John 16:13).

Observe the same theme in John 6:30; 7:31; 11:40-44; Acts 2:22; 2:40-43; 14:1-3; Romans 15: 18, 19; 2 Corinthians 12:11, 12; Hebrews 2:1-4; Exodus 4:1-9. Put simply, Jesus said...

...the very works that I do – bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me (John 5:36).

Second, it would be a mistake to conclude that the miracles were merely a show to grab people's attention. I find myself unimpressed at movies with great special effects that don't seem to go anywhere in terms of a plot. You have my attention, but what is the story here?

The story here is that One has come who overcomes all our greatest enemies. Whether it's nature (the calming of the storm), demons, disease, death. We have a Savior who is not indifferent to our plight, but one who has compassion. Later, Luke will record the death of a widow's son.

When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother (Luke 7:13-15).

By these healings (and other supernatural activities) we see both an attestation to the truth of the message and a message of love, compassion and sympathy from our High Priest (Hebrews 4:15). It's one thing to have power and not care. It's another thing to care but have no power. Jesus has both.

From Miracles to Message

The passage takes a bit of a turn here. The emphasis moves from miracles to message. For some reason the demons start proclaiming, "You are the Christ, the Son of God" and Jesus shushes them. There are all sorts of guesses as to why Jesus would "**not allow them to speak.**" It could have been because there was a timing to the ministry of Christ that was not to be interrupted. There were times when Jesus told people not to speak of Him (Matthew 17:19; Mark 8:30; 9:9).

Another reason, one that would still hold today, is that just because someone knows something to be theologically true, doesn't mean they should assume a role of instructor. Many false religions begin with a false teacher teaching true things. We must all be on guard.

Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22).

Message over miracles continues.

Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; ⁴³ but He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” ⁴⁴ And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee (Luke 4:42-44).

What Jesus Must Do

Mark records that Jesus was to a desolate place to pray (Mark 1:35) but Luke just mentions a deserted place. Maybe it was to emphasize rest or just being away from the crowd. The crowd apparently enjoyed what was going on and didn't want Jesus to stop. But Jesus responds with some very strong verbs, **“I must”** *dei* and for this purpose **“I have been sent”** *epi touto apostalen*.

Jesus here reveals the heart of His ministry, which should be the heart of any true ministry, the preaching of the **“kingdom of God.”** This is a topic that can consume many sermons. Luke records the preaching of the kingdom many times (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 60; 16:16). He writes of entering it (Luke 18:24, 25). He writes of seeking it (Luke 12:31). That it is at hand (Luke 10:9). That it is spiritual (Luke 17:20), but it also has a profound effect upon the things of this world (Matthew 13:31-33).

In its most eternal sense, the kingdom in its full consummation is the new heavens and new earth where we dwell in peace forever (Luke 22:28-30). In its most imminent and current concrete sense it is the church (Matthew 13:47; 16:18, 19). The essence of the kingdom message is that the King has come. And with Him all the attending promises. Not the least of which is deliverance over our enemies of sin and death. This is accomplished by the cross. And this is ever to be the central message coming from His church.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss how the entrance of Jesus into history was explosive. How was He received? Why do you suppose that was (pages 2, 3)?
2. What was the first miracle that Luke records? What are some of the elements of that miracle? What does this mean to you and me (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why do we see so many miracles/healings in the Bible? At what level should we expect these types of things to happen (pages 5-7)?
4. Explain possible reasons that Jesus would silence the demons while they're telling the truth (page 7)?
5. What did Jesus say He must do? What is the lesson there for today's church (page 8)?