

Prayer

Lord God, Your capacity to help us knows no bounds, but our ability to receive Your help is limited. Forgive us for those times when we fail to hear You or accept the help of Your providential care. We try to do things our own way and then realise we should have talked to You first, in prayer. If we have become deaf, then unblock our ears and enable us to hear, so that we may hear Your voice, loud and clear! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Find ten minutes in the course of the day to stop and pray about a personal issue of concern to you

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the security of the world** *The exact nature of many dangers today are hard to pinpoint, but ask the Lord to guide your prayers*
- *Pray for the Yemen and efforts there to deal with terrorism*
- *Give thanks to God for aid and relief workers throughout the world*

Meditation

(A reflection on Isaiah 40:12-23)

To whom can you compare the Lord our God?

A craftsman who works with exquisite beauty and skill ...
A parent who rears a child with great care and tender love ...
An engineer who knows the finest details of how things work ...
A young person who is full of potential, energy and drive ...
A great leader who has the humility to love and serve ...
A child who challenges us with truth and perception ...
A professional who knows the business thoroughly ...
A man or woman of age, who has the wisdom of years ...
A farmer who gives all to the work that must be done ...

To whom can you compare the Lord our God?

Have you not heard? Have you not known?

He was there from the beginning, and made the whole world:

He is greater than all things; He is in everything He has made.

Bible passage - Luke 4:38-44

³⁸ Jesus got up and left the synagogue, and He went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. ³⁹ So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and she got up at once and began to serve their needs.

⁴⁰ When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus any who were sick with various illnesses, and laying His hands on each one of them, He healed them. ⁴¹ Now, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah.

⁴² When day came, Jesus left, and went somewhere by Himself. The crowds were looking for Him and when they found Him, they held Him back so that He could not leave them; ⁴³ so He said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for this is why I was sent.' ⁴⁴ He therefore continued to preach in the synagogues of Judea.

Bible Study

Review

Luke 4 comes to an end with these three reports, each of them revealing something of the ministry Jesus embarked on in Galilee. After His baptism (3:21,22) and the temptations (4:1-13), Jesus came to Capernaum having had a rough reception in His home town of Nazareth (4:14-30). The people of Capernaum received Him differently, and they were amazed when he demonstrated authority over demons (4:35,36). People soon began to know about Jesus in the region of Galilee around about (4:37).

Our reading contains three short glimpses of Jesus at work in these early days of His ministry. To begin with, Jesus went to the house of someone called Simon (4:38) at the end of a Sabbath day; and while there, healed his mother-in-law (4:38,39). It is rather strange to read this, because we assume that Simon is Peter, but we have not yet met him in the Gospel, and his 'call' does in fact come next in Luke! In addition, the same story in Matthew (8:14f.) has the name 'Peter', not 'Simon', and both Matthew and Mark (Mark 1:29f.) tell the story only after Simon has been called. Did Jesus then know Simon before he was called?

Uncertainties such as this can make us lose sight of the true purpose of Luke's Gospel. People of those times were not as concerned about chronological sequence as we are, and Luke knew that his readers would know that Simon was Peter. Nevertheless, he used the story as Matthew and Mark had done, to describe the compassion of Jesus, who cut across social barriers in order to help people. In those days, the idea of a man going into a woman's room (4:39) was scandalous, and yet it did not stand in the way of Jesus' healing ministry. Jesus stood over her and rebuked the fever so that it left her, and her healing enabled her to return to her accustomed place within the family, and 'serve'. From that day onwards, this story has challenged God's people to ensure that healing ministry is not just about curing illnesses, but helping people return to fullness of life.

Jesus then healed more people who came to Him at sundown (see Mark 1:32f. and Matt 8:16f.). To us, the picture of the crowd gathered with their sick at the end of the day is poetic, but this was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath ended at sundown. This was the first opportunity people had since Jesus appearance at the synagogue for them to bring (or 'carry') their sick to him; carrying people was not permitted on the Sabbath! Luke emphasises that Jesus gave individual attention, laying His hands 'on each one of them' (4:40). He was also able to discern the presence of demons and deal with them; in those days, people readily understood such things and His ministry was welcomed.

After this, as if the day had not held enough drama, Luke records that Jesus sought solace (see Mark 1:35f., where it says he prayed), but was overtaken by a crowd. We presume they wanted Him to heal more people, but Luke does not say why the crowds harassed Jesus. When they reached the point of preventing Him from leaving, Luke reports that Jesus argued with them, He said, '*I must preach ... the Kingdom of God in other towns as well ...*' (4:43). Jesus' ministry and the Kingdom of God was bigger than the demands of one group of local people.

The last sentence of this passage hints that Jesus' ministry was perhaps more extensive than we thought, reaching as far as Judea, which is the general region around Jerusalem. This should not surprise us, because in those days, people were used to walking considerable distances and we already know that through His mother, Jesus had relatives who lived in Judea (see 1:39), and his father came originally from Bethlehem (in the south). So although most of the early stories of Jesus tell us about His activity around Galilee, there is every reason for us to believe that from early on, He exercised a wider ministry than just in the region of Galilee.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does the healing of Simon's mother-in-law tell us about Jesus' early ministry (4:38,39)?
- What does the late evening healing and deliverance tell us about Jesus' ministry (4:40,41)?
- What does the search for solace and argument with the crowd tell us about Jesus (42-44)?

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V38 '*in the grip of a high fever*'

The interesting phrase here is *'in the grip of'*. You will find that most translations have *'suffered from'*, or *'was ill with'*, and these translations are reasonable. However, the Greek word has a wide range of meaning around the idea of being encircled or bound in. In different circumstances, it can mean *'controlled, help prisoner, occupied or seized'*. In this way, the Greek captures a sense of being held bound by an illness, or as I have translated *'in the grip of'*.

Significant phrases

V42 'left and went somewhere by Himself'

Other translations:

'went out to a solitary place' (NIV)

'departed and went into a deserted place' (NRSV)

The Greek uses a typically Hebrew expression *'to get up and go ...'*, but then has two words, usually translated *'deserted place'* (*'solitary place'* – NIV). The first being the word for *'wilderness or desert'* used when Jesus went into the *'desert'* to be tempted by the devil. However, the words also has the meaning of *'being deserted'*, and alone, and because Jesus was in the region of Galilee, this can hardly mean that Jesus travelled the long distance back to the Judean deserts. The story line makes it clear that Jesus just went somewhere to be alone, and for this reason, I have used a more colloquial but appropriate modern expression, *'somewhere by Himself'*.

V42 'they held Him back so that He could not leave them'

Other translations:

'they tried to keep Him from leaving them' (NIV)

'they wanted to prevent Him from leaving them' (NRSV)

Most translators try to give a version of this sentence that does not give the impression that the crowds physically restrained Jesus, because of the previous incident in Luke 4, where Jesus showed the ability to *'walk through a crowd'* (4:30). However, my translation is pretty close to the original Greek here, and it does imply physical restraint. Perhaps we have the impression that Jesus was always able to stand back from the crowds only because translators have given us Bible versions that suggest this, where the original text does not? This is an important issue.

V43 'so He said to them ...'

Other translations:

'But He said ...' (NIV)

'But He said to them ...' (NRSV)

Following on from the previous verse, some other translators imply that the next sentence is new information, telling us about Jesus' *'policy'*. However, it looks to me as if this is the report of what he was arguing with the crowd about. They wanted Him to stay, and He said *'I must go ...'* (see notes).

Problems with the ancient Greek/Hebrew text

V44 'in the synagogues of Judea'

Other translations:

'in the synagogues of Galilee' (Authorised version)

About half of the most important ancient manuscripts of the New Testament conclude the sentence *'of Judea'* and the rest say *'of Galilee'*, and there is a scholarly debate about which is Luke's original. Jesus is described as going to Galilee in Luke 4:14, so it would seem appropriate to finish the sentence like this. On the one hand, why would anyone make a mistake and write *'Judea'* in place of *'Galilee'*? On the other hand, someone might read *'Judea'*, and think it should read *'Galilee'* because of the earlier reference in 4:14! Such is the nature of the debate. Personally, I take the view that *'Judea'* is more likely to be the original.

Going Deeper

What does the healing of Simon's mother-in-law tell us about Jesus' early ministry (4:38,39)?

So far, we have found that Jesus would not allow cultural barriers to stand in the way of His healing ministry, and secondly, that the result of His healing ministry was to return social stability to those who suffered. To

some extent, these two features of Jesus' ministry may seem to conflict. In the first place, it seems that Jesus ignores social convention and in the second, he accepts them as important! As we read further in Luke, we will find out that Jesus proclaimed and established the Kingdom of God, so earthly social norms could not be as important for Jesus and His disciples as others. Social custom was to be subject to the moral and spiritual standards of the Kingdom, so barriers such as those between women and men were to be challenged, but not the routines of life. Today, we might feel that God has now led us to a point where the idea of women 'serving' in the home is unacceptable; but such attitudes are relative, and how we react to the notion of the service of Simon's mother-in-law is a matter of what we read into the text rather than what it says. In truth, no 'sexist' point is being made here in the Gospel, for in the Kingdom, the place of all people in the home is to serve each other (see John 13).

We do not know what fever Peter's mother-in-law had, but it is interesting that Luke, of all the evangelists mentions it as a 'high' fever; something he would have he was a doctor. In those days, any number of diseases could cause serious fever, yet despite the possible seriousness of her condition, no-one brought her to Jesus. She could have had 'Malta fever', which combined weakness and anaemia with fever and sometimes led to death; another possibility was a type of typhoid prevalent at the time, and lastly, she could have had Malaria, which was present around Galilee due to swampy regions around the Lake of Galilee. Without the medicines we take for granted today, these conditions were matters of 'life and death' for those who suffered them, and doctors had no means of effecting a cure; all they could do was alleviate the symptoms and advise people how to manage their conditions to achieve the best chances of survival.

For whatever reason, Jesus perceived something in this situation that made Him respond to it as if it was demonic, for the text says that '*He rebuked the fever*' (4:39), a term we might expect of His confrontation of a demon. Nowhere else do we hear of Jesus 'rebuking' an illness as if it was a personal identity to be confronted, but this is what happens here. The best understanding of what happened is that Jesus saw some evil power behind the situation and dismissed it. He does not say what this evil is, so we must not presume to know, and neither is it wise for us to make rules about how to deal with certain illnesses (such as fever), as if Jesus we should always deal with fever in the same way today. Luke records Jesus coming, weighing up the situation ('*He stood over her ...*' – 4:39), and then acting appropriately (in this case, using a method we associate with deliverance ministry); this is the pattern of ministry we should follow. There is much more for us to learn about healing ministry within later stories, and this incident is specifically intended to be a general example of healing ministry.

What does the late evening healing and deliverance tell us about Jesus' ministry (4:40,41)?

When the people came to Jesus at sundown after the end of the Sabbath (4:40), He gave them individual attention and discerned what was appropriate for them. As a doctor (Col 4:14), Luke would have known much about the usual treatments for people in various conditions, but he would not have been an expert in deliverance, and this is why he tells us about this part of Jesus' ministry. Again, this is the most general of descriptions, so our passage does not tell us about the methods Jesus used, but Luke does tell us something about what happened when He evicted demons; '*He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah.*' (4:41).

Why did Jesus tell the demons to be quiet? It is unlikely that this was a technique for deliverance, but it was what Jesus felt He had to do. He had commanded the demon who confronted Him in the Temple at Capernaum to be quiet, and of course, the demon only said what was on everyone's lips because he knew the truth about Jesus; but why should Jesus prevent His true calling from being broadcast to the world? At this point, we hit on an important piece of spiritual wisdom. People tend to want to hear the truth being spoken out, however, this does not necessarily achieve the desired results; for when heard, people can discuss information, misinterpret it or try to use it in any number of ways, but they will not necessarily accept it. So how does this help us here?

Now Jesus wanted to help people to believe that he was the Messiah, but simply announcing this was not God's way of doing it and it would not be effective, precisely because Jesus did not want the world merely discussing faith and knowing about it, but believing in Him and coming to God! So we find that all the Gospels (perhaps Mark more than the others) tell us that Jesus forbade demons, people, and sometimes the disciples, from telling others about Him. His 'technique' was to help people believe in Him for themselves, and He knew that simply telling them He was the Messiah would create more confusion than faith. Jesus' ministry therefore began through the use of signs and miracles; He proved He was the Messiah by what He did, so that when He did eventually say important things about Himself and about God, people might believe Him because they could trust He was not a fraud. The healing and deliverance ministry of Jesus was a demonstration of the Gospel that led people to God.

What does the search for solace and argument with the crowd tell us about Jesus (42-44)?

The last part of the passage is strange. On the one hand, we read about Jesus going to be by Himself, and countless preachers have referred to this passage (and others) as evidence of Jesus' habit of personal

prayer (as mention in Mark 1:35) and communing with God. On the other hand, Jesus was constantly pursued by the crowds, and this was a great pressure upon Him. Indeed, it was a pressure that eventually spilled over into a difficult situation (4:42,43). Before we leave the issue of Jesus seeking of solace, however, it is worth noting that here, Jesus dug this precious time out of the midst of stressful circumstances. Each Gospel records instances of Jesus being pursued from one place to another as people pressed in on Him to hear Him preach or receive His healing power, but he continued to seek His Father in private. As so many Christians discover on their journey of faith, it is precisely when they cannot find the time for our quiet times that they most need them!

Crowds always know what they want, indeed, crowds form around a common purpose or aim. Sometimes crowds form around conflicting aims, in which one crowd will fight another. Alternatively, a crowd will pursue one aim, and can place in danger the very object of its hopes, as here. The crowd so wanted to receive more of Jesus' ministry they did not realise that they were preventing Him from fulfilling His calling, and He told them so (4:43). Notice that Jesus did not give the crowd an excuse to try and make them release Him; He told them the truth. Indeed, the crowd would not have liked the truth, but Jesus said it nevertheless; He was called to go elsewhere! His aims were not the aims of the crowd.

In the midst of this stressful situation, Jesus first mentions the 'Kingdom of God' here in Luke's Gospel. This is important, and we will find that this theme becomes our constant companion thorough much of the Gospel. Luke does not explain this here, except to make it clear that the Kingdom is far bigger than the hopes and dreams of a group of local people. The Gospel does not revolve around one church, we might say!

Lastly, as we have already noted, Jesus' ministry may well have been far more extensive by this time than Luke has told us, because he tells us that Jesus was preaching '*in the synagogues of Judea*' (4:44). Despite the awkward circumstances that had arisen in each of the synagogues in which Luke records he had taught, this was to be the starting point of His ministry. Jesus began by revealing Himself as Messiah through word and deed to the Jewish people.

Application

We can learn many things from this passage of Scripture, and each section has a wealth of advice for us, as is clear from our study. The first and second tell us about some important perspectives for the Christian healing ministry. It is at least about bringing people healing from the oppression of disease, whether the result of demonic oppression or physical impairment, or as is so often the case, some combination of the two. It is also about overcoming social obstacles and the importance of keeping our eyes on the values of the Kingdom of God.

Healing and deliverance ministry is not done for people's convenience and personal comfort, it is done to help people in real need, and to demonstrate that God cares. In this life, every human being will experience illness and disease, and when the Lord heals us, we are given a wonderful glimpse into the eternal future that the Lord has planned for us in His Kingdom. If we expect healing ministry to deliver healthy Christians who are an example to the world because they are all fit and raring to go, then we are perhaps looking in the wrong direction for our spiritual bearings. Jesus healed out of compassion, and whilst on earth, was unable to heal everyone everywhere, such is the logic of the earthly life we all live. However, Jesus demonstrated that in God's Kingdom, His people are to minister the love and care of the Father to each other, and at all times, to dismiss the evil one.

Lastly, as well as noting the importance of spending time alone with God, as Jesus does, this passage challenges us to be wary of a 'crowd mentality'. When a group of people come together, they can follow each other to some purpose that is commonly agreed, but as here, excludes the interests of others. If we constantly ask the Lord to bless us, then we are perhaps forgetting that His call is for us to be a blessing to others. This was the fundamental mistake made by the Jewish people in Old Testament times; they regarded their relationship with God as exclusive, and they expected God to work for them; and the reality was that God was calling them to witness 'to the nations'. In the light of what Luke records in verses 42 to 44, we should perhaps make sure that our healing ministry does not merely arise from the perceived needs of a church fellowship. Of course, God's people should minister to each other in times of need, but the bigger need is outside the Christian community. There is a world out there that the Lord longs to heal in many ways, quite apart from the many demons that require eviction and evils that need to be addressed.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How does Jesus' healing and deliverance ministry teach us about how this may be done today?
2. Discuss in your group whether it matters that Matthew, Mark and Luke tell this story in different parts of their Gospels, in relationship to the calling of Peter?
3. For what purpose did Jesus try to find solitude in 4:44, and why did the crowd follow Him?

Topics covered by this text

- Jesus' healing ministry
- Jesus' deliverance ministry
- The importance of the establishment of the Kingdom of God

Personal comments by author

I know from experience that thinking about the difficulties with this text compared to Matthew and Mark, have led some people to become doubtful of the Word of God. Some look at what the different Gospels say and conclude that it is irreconcilable. Once started down this road, people quickly become sceptical of the Bible, and I have seen some eventually lose faith. This reaction is not necessary or inevitable. All it needs is for us to have a broader vision of Jesus' work, and accept that the Gospels represent samples of what He actually did. Together, the Gospels give us a rounded picture of who Jesus is, though He did much more than is recorded here. We should not study the Gospels as if their truth depends on whether they agree in detail.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Look carefully at the issue of where this story occurs in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Look up the Bible references, and decide for yourself why Luke chose to talk about Simon before he had been officially 'introduced' in the Gospel, through his call. Does answering this question make you look at the Gospels in a different way?*
- *In what ways do you help God's people perform their task of 'healing'. Think carefully about it and pray about it. There are many things to be done by which to help people and bring peace and restoration; but where do you fit in?*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You for the wonderful grace You showed in healing people and showing that You cared for them. Whatever we feel about the Church's 'healing ministry' today, help us play our part in caring for other people and therefore bringing true healing to those who desperately need it, both those who are near to us and those who are far away. AMEN
