

THE



OF JESUS

*in Luke's Gospel*

PART 1

WRITTEN BY DR. STEVE JONES

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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# LESSON 1 | POWER AND FAITH

## NO MIRACLES IN NAZARETH LUKE 4:14-30

In 1969, Paul Newman and Robert Redford starred in the award-winning western titled, “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.” The movie tells the tell of the two characters named in the title, who are a pair of train robbers in the American West at the turn of the 19th century. The focus of the movie is how this famed duo has robbed one train too many and are subsequently chased from their familiar hunting grounds all the way to Bolivia where their past catches up to them and they fall back into similar habits. The turn of the movie happens when they are in the process of robbing a train. Instead of finding a bank car, the two are confronted with a car loaded with a posse of lawmen. Thinking this is just another of the long line of local lawmen that they have outrun, they flee, expecting to get away. Over the course of the pursuit, though, none of their usual tricks work in shaking this new group of lawmen from their tail. The duo becomes exasperated and bewildered as to the identity of their pursuers. After each failed attempt to shake them from their tail, they exclaim in frustration to one another, “Who are those guys?” They slowly figure out that this is no ordinary local posse made up of farmers and shopkeepers but rather a handpicked group of elite lawmen hired specifically to hunt them down.

The question that Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid continually pose back and forth to each other is a good one: “Who are those guys?” A similar line of questioning occurred in the lives of those who encountered Jesus during His earthly ministry: “Who is this guy?” Everyone from his followers to his enemies wondered at what they saw. We know people asked this question, because Jesus asked his disciples in Luke 9:18, “Who do the people say that I am?” After they gave him several differing answers, Jesus asks them in verse 20, “But who do you say that I am?”

Wherever Jesus went, two aspects of his ministry were continually causing confusing as to his identity. First, he taught with authority. Instead of quoting other rabbis and authorities, He taught as if His words carried their own authority and were the final word on things. Second, he performed miracles.

Over the next several weeks we are going to look closely at the miracles of Jesus that Luke recounts in his gospel. The miracles of Jesus are more than spectacular events or isolated bits of magic to show off. Jesus performed miracles as a way of revealing His identity. The miracles reveal the power of God. They announce the coming of the kingdom of God. They show us what God is like and what life in is like in His kingdom.

As we study the miracles, hopefully we will gain a deeper understanding, just as the disciples did, as to who Jesus really is.

We are going to start our study of miracles by looking at a place where he didn't perform any: his hometown of Nazareth. Nazareth is the first place that fulfills John 1:11, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." This story shows us that an important ingredient to the miracles is faith. Jesus healed in response to people's faith. It didn't take perfect faith. But it did require an openness and willingness to believe that Jesus could do what He was being asked to do. He didn't perform for those who were hard-hearted. Today we are going to look at people who rejected Jesus and hopefully learn how we can keep from responding in similar ways.

### **JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH (V14-21)**

After Jesus is baptized by John in Luke 3, and tempted by the devil in Luke 4, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. Luke 4:1 tells us Jesus went into the wilderness "full of the Holy Spirit." Verse 14 says that he came out of his temptations "in the power of the Spirit." He went throughout Galilee preaching and teaching. Eventually He comes to his hometown of Nazareth to teach. We aren't sure how much time has elapsed. Mark 6:1-6 and Matthew 13:54-58 tell similar stories of Jesus's return and rejection in Nazareth, but they place it after a more detailed description of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee.

Synagogues in Jesus' day would often welcome traveling teachers. Jesus was gaining a reputation as a teacher, so he goes to the synagogue in his hometown. They evidently asked him to teach. They hand him the scroll of Isaiah and he reads Isaiah 61:1, which tells of the Messiah's ministry. He mixes in some material from Isaiah 58:6 as well. After reading the passage, he sat down, which is the way Jewish rabbis taught. Imagine their surprise when he says in verse 21, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

### **JESUS IS REJECTED IN NAZARETH (V22-27)**

A lot can be said about the content of Jesus's message, but for our study it is only necessary to notice that Jesus is claiming to be the one that was prophesied by Isaiah and for whom they have been waiting. Notice how the Nazarenes responded.

Their response starts in verse 22: "And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" The people of Nazareth are blown away by his words. They respond favorably at first. His words are hopeful, and they receive them graciously.

The turn happens in the third thing Luke says they did. They ask bewilderingly, "Is this not Joseph's son?" This statement is a little ironic because we know something they don't. We have read the first part of Luke's gospel and know that Jesus is not Joseph's son. But

also, this is the audience pointing out the incongruity between the Jesus they remember growing up with their children and the man before them who is claiming to be the Messiah. There is a little bit of hometown pride like seeing someone you grew up with make it to the big leagues. But, in reality, their question has more of criticism than praise.

The rest of the Nazarene response comes from the mouth of Jesus. The response Jesus gives in verse 23 reveals the negative turn of their question: “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ ”

Notice the phrase that Jesus uses: “what we have heard you did at Capernaum,” instead of “what you did.” The Nazarenes refuse to believe the reports of His great deeds, unless He performs similar things for them. The Nazarenes aren’t expressing reasonable, humble, convincible doubt. They weren’t eager to believe but hesitant because of lingering doubts. This isn’t the cry of the father in Mark 9:24, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” The Nazarenes are hard-hearted, stubborn, skeptical. They refuse to believe.

Jesus continues his rebuke of the Nazarenes by highlighting stories from the lives of two Old Testament prophets: Elijah and Elisha. First, He tells the story from 1 Kings 17:8-24 about Elijah’s miraculous provision for a gentile widow in Zarephath during a drought. He then tells story from 2 Kings 5:1-19 about Elisha healing the Syrian general Naaman.

### **JESUS IS RUN OUT OF NAZARETH (V28-30)**

The last word out of Jesus’s mouth was too much for the Nazarenes. Syrians and Galileans were mortal enemies. That fact that Jesus highlighted God showing love and compassion to their foes was too much for them the Nazarenes. They chase their hometown hero out of town and to the brow of a cliff in an attempt to throw him off.

The rejection in Nazareth is a foreshadowing of His final rejection in Jerusalem. They are offended at his teaching. They demand a sign. They drive him from the city. They attempt to kill him. In Jerusalem, they will eventually succeed. But here in Nazareth, they fail. Verse 30 says, “But passing through their midst, He went His way.”

### **APPLICATION**

What was it that made the Nazarenes so resistant to Jesus’s message and Jesus so resistant to perform miracles in his hometown? One of the things promised by Jesus was sight to the blind. The Nazarenes were blind to several things and because of that they were not able to receive what Jesus came to give.

1. They were blind to who they were – They had heard Jesus performed miracles and they wanted to see him do one, but they didn’t think they needed anything from him. They

wanted a performance, a show, but they didn't think they needed healing. They are self-deceived like the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:17, to whom Jesus says, "you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." They don't see their own need, so they don't want what He was offering.

2. They were blind to who He is. They think they know who he is. Familiarity has bred in them contempt. He tells them he is the Messiah. They aren't open to him being any more than they have always known him to be. They have put him in a box of their own creation and determined the limits of who he is and what he is able to do.

3. They were blind to why He came –They become enraged when Jesus mentions the prophets going to the Gentiles. This shows us that they believed they wanted God to fight their battles and fix their problems. They weren't open to the idea that God wanted to bring freedom and restoration to the entire world, to welcome all people into His family, to bless the whole earth through the children of Abraham. They wanted privilege and special treatment. They wanted honor and reputation. They wanted the Messiah to do what they wanted. They weren't open to God's kingdom being bigger than their own.

This forces us to ask important questions of ourselves. Are we willing to ask, "Who is this guy?" in a way that is open to receiving an answer that is more than we could ask or think? Or do we ask it like the Nazarenes, thinking we already know, closing the book on him, leaving Him in the box we've created for him. The choice is between hard-hearted skepticism and soft-hearted faith. It is also the difference between a life of cold sterility and a life open to the possibility the intervention of God in our world.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the difference between honest, sincere, doubt and the hard-hearted skeptical doubt of the Nazarenes? Why do you think Jesus refuses to do miracles for people like the Nazarenes?
2. How can we express our doubts and grow our faith without falling into the mindset of the Nazarenes?
3. How were the Nazarenes blind to who they are? How are we sometimes blind in the same way?
4. How were the Nazarenes blind to who Jesus really is? How are we sometimes blind in the same way?
5. How were the Nazarenes blind to why Jesus came? How are we sometimes blind in the same way?

## LESSON 2 | POWER OVER SPIRITS

### JESUS CASTS OUT A DEMON LUKE 4:31-37

In 1942, C.S. Lewis published a book entitled *The Screwtape Letters*. It is a satire written in the form of a series of letters by a senior demon named Screwtape to a junior demon named Wormwood, who has just been assigned as a tempter to his first human. Though a work of fiction, it addresses some pretty serious topic that Christians deal with. In the preface, C.S. Lewis mentions “two equal and opposite errors” into which people tend to fall when thinking about demons: The ditch on one side of the road is the materialist ditch where the existence of demons is denied all together. The ditch on the other side of the road is the magician ditch, where there is an excessive and unhealthy fascination with the spiritual world.

We live in a society that is firmly in the materialist ditch. Perhaps we have as a part of our cultural memory a time when the people found demons under every corner and used demonic possession as a diagnosis for what we know now are real medical issues.

For whatever reason, even Christians are uncomfortable talking about demons. You sound like an extremist if you use words like “spiritual warfare” even in church. We have to find a way out of the materialist ditch without falling into the magician ditch. We have to realize that there is a spiritual dimension to the world God created. We also have to realize that God has a spiritual foe in the world. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:11-12, “11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” There is a devil. He has schemes. He is at war with the people of God. If we are followers of Jesus, that means us.

Such facts should not cause us fear or fascination but should drive us to lean more on God and be strengthened by him. Strength can be found in passages like the one we are looking at today. Jesus comes to a synagogue in Capernaum. While teaching, a demon-possessed man confronts him. The encounter gives the people of Capernaum a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and just how different he is than any other teacher they have encountered. Perhaps as we look, we will also realize more clearly just how different Jesus is in so many important ways

### **THE DIFFERENCE OF HIS AUTHORITY (V31-32)**

After the attempted murder in Nazareth, you would have expected Jesus to alter His routine. But that is not what happens. Jesus follows His usual pattern. He comes to Capernaum, a town which will become his new base of operations. In fact, Capernaum will become so identified with Jesus and His ministry in Galilee that to this day the cities of Nazareth and Capernaum fight over which town should be called Jesus's "hometown." It is the Sabbath, so Jesus does what he always does: goes and teaches in the synagogue.

But Jesus doesn't teach like other rabbis and Torah scholars of the day. Verse 32 says, "they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority." The teachers of Jesus' day based their teachings on past precedent. They would recite long lists of what previous rabbis had said in order to support their opinions. Such an approach to teaching made the teacher look very learned because he could quote so much previous scholarship, but it was ultimately dull and dry. Jesus astonished them. He was a simple craftsman, not a trained rabbi. But he taught like he didn't need the support of learned predecessors to justify his opinion. He talked like he had the final say and his word was enough.

The response of the people in Capernaum was similar to Nazareth on the surface, but radically different in an important way. The teaching of Jesus astonished them, like it did the people of Jesus' hometown. But Nazareth was astonished to hear their hometown boy talk with authority and closed their minds to the possibility. The astonishment of Capernaum was different. They were amazed. Nazareth didn't want to hear any more. Capernaum couldn't get enough. Nazareth closed their minds. Capernaum opened their hearts.

### **THE DIFFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS (V33-34)**

While Jesus was teaching, he is confronted by a man in the synagogue whom Luke says was "possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon." Here is the part that makes many modern readers uncomfortable. The Bible teaches that there is a spiritual dimension to reality and that God has a spiritual foe. People want to explain it away. Some people think that Luke's reference to the demon being "unclean" simply means that this person was poor, disheveled, and perhaps suffering from mental illness. Many, even within the church, consider belief in the existence and activity of demons offensive. Some, even within the church, consider accounts of demon possession as examples of mental illness. One of the reasons for this is because many in the past and present have made the mistake of dismissing mental illnesses completely. We shouldn't be shocked to see demonic oppression cause physical manifestations, nor should be quick to identify mental illness with demonic possession.

We also shouldn't be shocked that when Jesus begins his ministry, He is met with spiritual opposition. He is announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Obviously, all that oppose Him will try to thwart it.

That is what is happening here. The reference to the "unclean spirit" is probably to distinguish the spirit of this man from the Spirit that has been filling and guiding Jesus.

The more important thing to note in these verses is what the demon says to Jesus. First, it wants to be left alone. Second it acknowledges there is nothing in common between them and Jesus. Third, it recognizes that Jesus has power and that his power exists to destroy them. Finally, it identifies Jesus as "the Holy One of God."

So many times we present the idea of God's holiness like God is a theological germaphobe. He can't have one speck of sin in his presence, so he nitpicks us over every little thing in our life. This episode reminds us that God's Holiness is His superpower. It destroys sin. This demon acknowledges that Holiness is found in the presence of Jesus and fears it will destroy him.

This passage also illustrates the error in thinking that if only people knew who Jesus really was they would follow Him. James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." Demons have a clear understanding of who God is, and want nothing to do with Him. The same is true of individuals.

### **THE DIFFERENCE OF HIS BENEVOLENCE (V35)**

Jesus responds by silencing the demon. This is a pattern that happens throughout the gospel. Jesus continually prohibits the revelation of His identity as the Messiah. He does so for a variety of reasons. First, the Jews of Jesus' day had a very specific view of what they wanted the Messiah to do. Jesus didn't come to fulfill those expectations. When the Jews found out, they killed him for it. Jesus didn't want to be identified with those flawed expectations, so he tried to keep his messiahship under wraps, at least initially. He also wanted his teaching and his works to draw true believers in the kind of Messiah he came to be.

More important than the silence that Jesus commands is the care and concern Jesus demonstrates for the man. Look at the previous verse, the demon used the plural pronoun: Have you come to destroy "us." It is only one demon, so the demon is referring to the demon and the man. The demon is threatening Jesus and the man he is possessing saying the equivalent of "You can't destroy me without destroying him." That is the lie that sin tells us: that we can't live without it, that we will be destroyed in the process of removing it, that it is better and safer to just continue to tolerate its presence in our lives.

Jesus commands the spirit to come out of the man. Luke, the physician, makes sure to record the result: "when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people, he

came out of him without doing him any harm.” Notice the last phrase: “Without doing him any harm.”

The lie sin tells us about God is that God hates us, is mad at us, and wants to punish us. This passage shows us that Jesus is a friend of sinners. We don't know what, if anything, this man did to become possessed by a demon. What we do see is Jesus demonstrated his love and protection towards him by not allows the demon to harm him further. Jesus didn't come to punish. He came to give us freedom from sin and the abundant life that comes as a result.

### **THE DIFFERENCE OF HIS POWER (V36)**

Seeing all of this happen, the people in the synagogue, who had already been amazed at his words, are astonished even further. In verse 32 they were startled by his teaching “with authority.” Verse 36 records them saying to one another, “What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out.” They are amazing not just at his teaching with authority, but at his power.

Their cry of “What is this message?” is different than the Nazarenes. The Nazarene's responded to Jesus with “who does this guy think he is?” The people of Capernaum responded, “What is going on here?” It reveals that they are open to Jesus being more than they thought because they seen Jesus do more than they could have asked or thought.

Jesus is an authoritative teacher, but he is more than that. He reveals his holiness, his benevolence to men, and his power. Jesus has power and that power means deliverance to all who come to him. The Capernaum cry of “What is this message?” is the bewildered but excited cry of a people who are starting to realize that the full implications of what they have seen is bigger than they could expect.

### **CONCLUSION**

May we be startled like the people of Capernaum into realizing that Jesus is more than we expect. May we acknowledge his authority by receiving his teaching. May we embrace his holiness by seeking it ourselves. May we rest in His benevolence grace and love for us. May we expect his powerful activity in our lives as well.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why does the idea of talking about demons make people uncomfortable? How can we embrace the truth of it without falling into error?
2. What does it mean that Jesus taught with authority? How was this different? What does it reveal about Jesus? How do we sometimes resist his authoritative teaching?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is holy? How is it revealed in this story? What does it mean for us?
4. What does it mean that Jesus is benevolent? How do we sometimes misunderstand the character of God when it comes to sin?
5. What does it mean that Jesus has power?

## LESSON 3 | POWER OVER SICKNESS

### JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW LUKE 4:38-39

Have you noticed there seems to be a national day for everything? Almost every time I turn on the news or social media, people are declaring today “National Taco Day” or “National Donut Day,” or something like that. Some of them are important, like Memorial Day. Some create awareness, like World Water Day. Some are for niche activities like “Popcorn lovers’ day.” And some are borderline silly, like “Take a walk in the park day.” My favorite, though, is Middle Child Day. I saw a poster one time that said, “Happy Middle Child Day! Oh, you didn’t notice it was Middle Child Day? Of course not, no one ever does.” I even saw a card one time that said, “Sorry we couldn’t be with you on Middle Child Day...We are having dinner you’re your siblings.” These jokes poke fun at the so-called “middle child” syndrome, where in a family of three the middle child feels overlooked. The oldest is still the oldest, but the middle child used to be the baby, and has now been replaced. So middle children stereotypically feel overlooked and like no one cares about them. In order to get attention, according to this phenomenon, middle children act out, get in trouble, become class clown -- anything to get attention. Because of this, it leads to another poster I saw that says, “Oldest child: I make the rules. Middle Child: I am the reason we have rules. Youngest Child: The rules don’t apply to me.”

As a middle child, I like to joke about these things. But the truth is that nobody likes to feel overlooked. It is something that happens far too easily in the crowded societies we live in. It is so easy to feel anonymous -- like you are a face in the crowd, like you are insignificant. It can even happen at church. We long to be known and included. One of the biggest reasons people leave churches is because they feel like no one cares they were there.

Sometimes this attitude can translate to our relationship with God as well. It is easy to think of God in heaven with more important things to do that to bother about me. It is actually how the idea of praying to the saints developed in the Middle Ages. People thought of God like the emperor ruling from a far-off capital. He didn’t know who you were and couldn’t be bothered about your concerns. If you needed help, you better have someone closer at hand who had influence and power.

The truth is that God is both bigger than we think He is and closer than we think He is. Scripture is full of examples of God reassuring people that He is close to them and that He cares. That is what we are going to look at today. Jesus is going to perform a miracle that demonstrates his power over sickness. But more importantly, He performs a miracle in a

very personal way. He does it privately. He isn't trying to draw attention or a crowd. He is demonstrating his care for this one individual. Hopefully, as we see this miracle unfold, we will gain an appreciation for the care and the concern that Jesus has for each of us.

### **JESUS HEALS PRIVATELY (V38)**

One of the reasons miracles make us uncomfortable is because they seem performative and designed to coerce and manipulate us. Such attitudes are well-founded when you look at all the hucksters and charlatans that have taken advantage of the unsuspecting, the desperate, and the naïve. But the miracles of Jesus do not fit that paradigm. Many times, Jesus seems to consciously downplay the event in such a way as not to draw attention to himself. Take for instance Jesus turning water into wine in John 2. Most people at the wedding didn't know a miracle had happened. But the disciples knew and had their faith strengthened.

The same happens here. Jesus is done teaching at the synagogue and comes to Simon's home, probably to eat and spend the night. Though there were inns in ancient times, they were normally places of ill-repute. It would have been customary for Jews to lodge with other Jews, either family or friends. In the same way, it was also customary for extended families to live in the same house. So, Simon's mother-in-law is also at home. By the way, this passage is proof that Simon Peter was married, which some Christian traditions deny.

Simon's mother-in-law is sick, and they ask Jesus to help her. I wonder if they were worried he wouldn't do it. I wonder if they tried not to bother the teacher who had already had a long day. I wonder if they were worried he would say something like "Come on, I am off the clock here." Jesus does none of those things. Instead, he helps. In spite of exhaustion, he places her needs before His own and addresses the problem even though no one would know he had done it. He heals this woman privately. This isn't about Jesus; it is about restoring her to health.

### **JESUS HEALS PERSONALLY (V39a)**

Luke says that Jesus stood over her and rebuked the fever. It seems like a minor detail, but it underscores the fact that Jesus wasn't just casting anonymous magic into the world to fix whatever problem was keeping him from getting dinner. He goes to her. He sees her. He deals with her problems personally. He isn't afraid of contracting whatever she has. He draws close to her.

Sometimes we unintentionally conceive of Jesus forgiving our sins or helping us in hard times like he is helping us a part of a group project. We think he is involved in blanket blessings or an economy of scale, like he is doing the theological equivalent of one of the trucks that drives through neighborhoods spraying for mosquitos. The truck isn't aiming

for any specific mosquito, it is trying get as many mosquitos as possible. If the service happens to benefit you specifically, good. But the goal is broader.

However, Jesus heals personally. He restores personally. Simon Peter's mother-in-law is not an afterthought, and neither are you. He heals, restores, and forgives each of us individually. You aren't invited into the kingdom of God because someone had an extra ticket they already paid for. You are individually chosen, valued, and included. Jesus sees you personally.

### **JESUS HEALS PERFECTLY (V39b)**

Jesus rebukes the fever and it left her. Luke's use of the words "rebuke" and "left" make this healing sound similar to Jesus casting out a demon. It has led many to speculate if this fever was caused by evil spirits. This is not the case. The reason for the similarity in language is that Luke is connecting the two types of miracles as demonstrations of Jesus's power. In the same way that Jesus has power over demons, he also has power over the sickness.

The more important thing to notice is the immediacy and completeness of the cure. She doesn't convalesce slowly. She doesn't take a few days to get back on her feet. She immediately gets up and starts working.

There are a few times when Jesus does heal in stages, but most of the time the change is instantaneous and overwhelming. It is hard, however, to see what application such healing can have in our lives; where even if we experience restoration, it frequently takes time and may be incomplete. It can be frustrating when we pray for healing and, unlike Peter's mother-in-law, we don't experience it. What hope can we draw from this passage, especially when we hear "no" from God, when God tells us, like he told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you." Sometimes God's plan is for us to be healed. Sometimes it's for us to learn to lean on him to sustain us. Healings like this demonstrate that God is powerful over the brokenness of the world. He is at work to undo it. He wants us to see, as he says in Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I am making all things new." What healings like this demonstrate is God's desire for us to be fully restored. The world is broken by sin, and we experience that brokenness on a regular basis. But God is at work restoring it. And his restoration is perfect

### **JESUS HEALS PURPOSEFULLY (V39c)**

The final part of this miracle sometimes strikes people as odd. Jesus heals the woman and then she gets up and makes dinner. Did Jesus heal her because he was hungry and wanted someone to make him a sandwich?

The reason for final description of her serving them is first to demonstrate how complete her cure was. She could get up and serve them. It also shows the woman's gratitude. Instead of wondering, like those in the synagogue had done, she demonstrates her

amazement by responding with hospitality. She wants to serve Jesus.

Most importantly, Jesus restores her to the role she was called to play. We might look down on the work she does as menial labor. But in the ancient world, hospitality was an incredibly important aspect of society. Hosting people was an honor and a joy. Because of her sickness, she couldn't do it. Jesus restored her ability to host this group. He restored her to a place of honor and purpose.

Interestingly, the Greek word used to describe her service (diakoneō) is the same word that gives us the word "deacon." It is also the same word used after the temptations of Jesus in Mark 1:13 where "the angels were ministering to Him." Whatever Simon's mother-in-law is doing in response to Jesus' healing is similar to what angels did for Jesus after his temptation.

Jesus heals purposefully. He heals to show his power -- in this case, his power over sickness. He also heals to restore each of us to the place and purpose for which we were created. God has a plan for our lives. Ephesians 2:10 says, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." He has put good works in front of us to walk in. He restores us purposefully so that we can walk in the good works He prepared for us to walk in, so that we can become the people we were created to be. Simon's mother-in-law experienced that restoration and immediately started doing the good works she saw before her.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our world makes it very easy for us to feel anonymous, isolated, and insignificant. One hope of the Gospel is that we are uniquely seen and individually loved by God. Jesus demonstrates that in his healing of Simon's mother-in-law. He heals her privately: making it about her not Him. He heals her personally: seeing the individual needs and addressing them. He heals her perfectly: causing an immediate reversal. He heals her purposefully: freeing her to do the work she was called to do. As we read this story, may we realize that Jesus sees and knows our private, personal, concerns; that He is at work to undo the brokenness of the world; and that He has a purpose for our lives he desires to free us up to pursue.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are some ways this world makes us feel anonymous, insignificant, or isolated? How do people respond to this feeling?
2. What is the significance of Jesus healing privately?
3. How does Jesus heal personally? How does this apply to us?
4. What does it mean that Jesus heals perfectly? What does this mean for those of us who haven't experienced God's healing?
5. How does the woman serving Jesus strike you? What does this show us about Jesus healing purposefully?

## LESSON 4 | POWER THROUGH PREACHING

### JESUS HEALS MANY IN CAPERNAMUM LUKE 4:40-44

I love baseball. My favorite team is the Houston Astros. But I wasn't raised an Astros fan. I grew up an Atlanta Braves fan. The reason for this was because my father was in the military, so we frequently lived in places without baseball teams. The only baseball teams I could watch on TV were the Chicago Cubs on WGN and the Atlanta Braves on TBS. But I hated the Cubs. The reason was that when I was a kid, the Cubs still didn't have stadium lights, so they played all their games during the day. I loved baseball but not as much as I loved afterschool cartoons, and WGN was my favorite source for cartoons...except on days the Cubs were playing. So, I learned to dislike the Cubs and the Braves became my favorite team.

Fast forward to my early adulthood. I am living in Texas, and I travel to see the Braves any time they come to Texas to play either the Astros or the Rangers. One time I am in Arlington, and I get there early enough to possibly get a ball signed by favorite player: 3rd Baseman Chipper Jones. I take my ball and a pen and head to the stadium. When I get there, I look, and Chipper is standing on my side of the field signing autographs. I head over and try to muscle my way to the front. I get pretty close and thrust my hand with ball and pen in it towards Chipper. He reaches for my ball and is about to grab it when someone in the dugout called out his name. He turned his head, withdrew his hand, and ran away. I think about that moment often. I wasn't the only person who didn't get their ball signed that day. But I was the first person who didn't get his ball signed. I was next in line. I almost got my ball signed but didn't. The reason is because Chipper hadn't come to sign autographs, he had come to play baseball, and it was time for him to start doing that.

Something similar to this must have happened during Jesus' ministry. Jesus didn't heal everyone. His miracles pointed to His identity. It revealed his power. But there was someone in a town that was the first person not to be healed by Jesus. Someone that went to see if Jesus was there and discovered he was gone. The reason was because His mission was more than performing miracles. That is what we are looking at today. As we look at this encounter, perhaps we will see how we have narrowed our view of Jesus and perhaps we will see Him for who He is.

## **JESUS RESTORES (V40)**

Verse 40 says, “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.”

Jesus has had a long day. He has taught in the synagogue, cast out a demon, and healed the mother-in-law of one of his disciples. Imagine having that kind of day, and you finally sat down to eat something and relax. Then there is a knock on the door. The sun is setting. That means the Sabbath is over. People who have been waiting patiently at home now venture out in the last few minutes of daylight.

Luke emphasizes that it isn't sick people coming to Jesus, it is people who were caring for sick people who brought them to Jesus. Perhaps they had tried other avenues seeking a cure. Then they heard about what this man did in the synagogue. Now they realize he is the answer to their problem. So, they bring their sick family member to Jesus.

Luke says the people brought Him those who were sick with “various diseases.” The Greek word that gets translated as “various” is the same exact word that is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe Joseph's “coat of many colors” in the book of Genesis. These were disease of all sorts. And Jesus was healing them. There wasn't a disease that Jesus didn't have power over.

Additionally, like He did with Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus demonstrates his personal care for each person. Luke says he touched each person. This is no mass healing. This is also not about Jesus having a magic healing touch. There will be instances where Jesus heals without touching anybody or even being near the sick person. But here, Jesus touching everyone is about Jesus dealing with each person individually and restoring them not just physically but also socially. Many sicknesses in Jesus' day carries social stigmas. They made a person religiously unclean or socially outcast. Some might not have experienced physical touch for a great deal of time. In touching them, Jesus demonstrates he isn't afraid of them, he isn't scared of their sicknesses, and they aren't outcast any longer. He heals them physically and restores them socially back to their families and communities.

## **JESUS REBUKES (V41)**

In addition to diseases, there were people in the group who were possessed by demons. Jesus heals them as well. As in the synagogue back in verse 34, the demons acknowledge Jesus' power and his identity. And, as He did in the synagogue, Jesus rebuked the demon and silenced them. Verse 41 says, “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.”

In the same way that the people's view of Jesus was expanding to include his power over

every kind of sickness, the demons that are cast out reveals deeper knowledge, too. Luke says not only the demons know that Jesus is the Christ, which is the Greek translation of the Jewish word “Messiah.” The demons were also shouting “You are the Son of God.” We, who know the full story of Jesus and have the full revelation Scripture, might just read over the words the demons shout without noticing them. But what they say is huge. They know he is the Christ and this time they use the phrase “Son of God.”

The Jews expected the Messiah to be a mighty man of God endowed by his power, but they didn’t expect him to be anything more than that. Looking back through the lens of Jesus and the New Testament, we can see hints through the Old Testament that God promised to send His son, but this was not part of the Messianic expectation of Jesus’ day. The demons, however, knew clearly and completely who he was. Jesus silences the demons because He didn’t want people to get the wrong idea of the kind of Messiah he came to be. He also probably didn’t want a messianic endorsement from a demon.

### **JESUS RETREATS (V24a)**

A long day had turned into a full night. When day came, Jesus took a break. Verse 42 says, “When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place.” Mark’s version (Mark 1:35) says, “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.” This will become a pattern for Jesus. After performing miracles or teaching, He will withdraw to pray and recharge.

There are a couple of things worth noting here. First, Jesus got up while it was dark. That means Jesus valued prayer over sleep. He recognized his spiritual needs as well as his physical needs. So many times, we give priority to our physical needs and neglect the spiritual side of our life. Jesus doesn’t. He recharges his body and spirit. Second, this also reminds us that Jesus, though the Son of God, is also fully man. He gets tired. He needs times of refreshment. He realizes that his power comes from the Father. He demonstrates what he will tell his disciples is essential to following God: learning to abide. Jesus never tries to operate on his own power.

In this way, Jesus gives us a power reminder to not operate under our own strength, to acknowledge our own limits, and to stay connected to the Father. If Jesus needed to retreat, so do we.

### **JESUS REVEALS (42b-44)**

Imagine being a resident of Capernaum on that Sabbath. A lot has happened. You have seen amazing things. You wake up the next morning and wonder what is going to happen next. Then you discover the man who did all this is nowhere to be found. The rest of verse 42 says, the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them.” They went looking for him. They found him. They didn’t want

him to leave. There is an amazing lesson there. Do we seek for Jesus as earnestly as the people of Capernaum?

But what Jesus says to them is just as startling. In verse 43, Jesus tells them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” It is time for him to go, because he has a mission to carry out: “preach the good news” or “proclaim the good news.” The Greek word Luke uses is the verb form of the noun “good news.” It would be easy to translate that word simply as “to evangelize.” Or we could translate it humorously as “to good-news-ify.” It means “to bring good news.”

Jesus reminds the people of Capernaum that he isn’t primarily a healer. The miracles were a sign. They were designed to confirm his message and point to his real identity. But His mission is a message. The message that was rejected by the people of Nazareth, which was received by the people of Capernaum. The message is about the fact that the Kingdom of God is arriving through Him. As the passage from Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth says: The Spirit of the Lord is present in Jesus, and He is here announcing that the time of God’s favor is now. That is good news...and other people need to hear it too.

So, verse 44 concludes with: “So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.”

## **CONCLUSION**

In Capernaum Jesus demonstrates his compassionate concern for people. He also confirms his amazing message through signs and wonders. We are reminded that Jesus is more than a healer. He has come with a message about God’s good invasion. May we hear the words of Jesus to the people of Capernaum. May we see in his miracles a powerful picture of his individual concern for each of us. But may we resist the urge to try to get Jesus simply to solve our physical needs. May we see in his retreat to pray while it is dark a reminder that our spiritual life is the realest part of us. If Jesus took his spiritual health seriously, we should too. May all of this remind us that the gospel is good news about God coming near to show his favor and fix this broken world. May that realization drive us to continue his mission of announcing it to whoever needs to hear.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does Jesus healing reveal about his power? What sort of ailments does Jesus heal? How does he heal?
2. What do the demons reveal about Jesus' identity? Why does Jesus silence them?
3. What can we learn about Jesus retreating? Why do you think Jesus did so? What can we do to follow His example?
4. Why does Jesus refuse to stay in Capernaum? What is his mission? How can we focus on his preaching without downplaying or deemphasizing his miracles?
5. How can we be people who continue his mission of announcing the coming of his kingdom?

# LESSON 5 | POWER OVER UNDERSTANDING

## WONDROUS CATCH OF FISH LUKE 5:1-11

When I was learning to drive, my parents bought me a manual transmission car: you know, the kind with a clutch and a stick-shift. They still exist, though they are getting increasingly hard to find. Getting a manual transmission car going out of first gear is incredibly difficult to get the hang of. You have to release the brake pedal, push in the clutch, put the car in gear, let out the clutch and give it some gas, all without stalling the car, or peeling out. The matter is complicated by the fact that if you are on any sort of hill, you have to do this incredibly quick, or you will roll backwards into the car behind you. Well, I thought I had figured out the perfect solution to this difficulty. When I stopped at a traffic light, I would pull the emergency brake, which would keep me from rolling backwards. I just had to pop the clutch and let the emergency brake out while gunning in the engine. Let's just say the first time my father saw me do it, he was less than impressed. He told me I needed to stop doing it that way. I told him it worked for me and helped me deal with a difficulty I was having. He told me that it might work for a little while, but eventually I was going to destroy both the brake and the transmission.

That story of me and my manual transmission is a microcosm for our lives. We all think we have found a way to avoid living the way God or other people tell us. We console ourselves with the idea that it works and helps us deal with our current situation. But like me and my transmission, the longer we live that way, the more likely we are to break our lives.

The Bible is full of warnings that what feels "natural" to us can be dangerous. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." It is also full of reminders that God loves us and sends his word to guide us to life. The best example of this is found in Proverbs 4:5-6, which says, "5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." This passage doesn't say that we shouldn't have understanding; it just says that we shouldn't lean on it, shouldn't make it our foundation. There will be times when God's word doesn't make sense to us. In those moments, we should choose to lean into God's word and not our own understanding. When we do so, we place ourselves in a position to experience the blessing and purpose God has for us. Today we are looking at a miracle of Jesus where Peter has an opportunity to do just that. He has a choice to make between his own understanding and the words of Jesus. Peter is standing on the verge of a change in his fortunes, his vocation, and even his name.

The path to all of it starts the moment he decides to trust Jesus more than himself. May we learn the same thing and open ourselves up to the same possibility. As we study, hopefully we will see that Jesus is not calling us to jettison our reason, just to choose to submit it to his authority when he calls us to do something that might not make sense to our understanding.

### **JESUS TEACHES (V1-3)**

Jesus continues his mission of announcing the Kingdom by teaching alongside the Sea of Galilee. Luke, however, refers to it as “the lake of Gennesaret.” Though we, and other gospel writers refer to it as a “sea,” the Sea of Galilee is really a freshwater lake. One of the things people are startled by when they see it for the first time is just how small it is: 7 miles wide and 13 miles long. You can see across it looking east-west. So, Luke always refers to it as a lake not a sea. It is also 700 feet below sea level. But why does he use Gennesaret instead of Galilee? Probably because in the previous verse, Luke said that Jesus continued to preach in the “synagogues of Judea.” Luke means more than the specific Roman province of Judea, which did not include Galilee. He uses Judea with its broader meaning: “the land of the Jews.” The mission of Jesus is first to announce to the Jews that their long-awaited Messiah is here. To avoid confusion, Luke uses an alternate but equally well-known name for the body of water: Gennesaret.

Verse 1 says the people were “pressing around Him and listening to the word of God.” This is Luke’s first use of the phrase “word of God.” Realization of who Jesus is keeps growing. First, they were amazed that he taught with authority (Luke 4:32). Then when his message was confirmed by miracles, they acknowledge his message contained both “authority and power (Luke 4:36).” Now they are trying to get as close to him as possible because they realize that He is speaking the “words of God.”

In order to get a little space, Jesus enlists the help of some fishermen who had just come back from a night of fishing and were on the shore cleaning their tackle. It seems odd that they were “washing their nets.” Weren’t the nets just in the water? Didn’t the lake wash them? More about this later.

Jesus gets into one of the boats that belongs to Simon and has him put out to sea just a little bit so that the boat becomes a floating stage. As I mentioned earlier, the Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level. Its surrounded by hills. Standing on the deck of a boat speaking to people on the shore, which sloped down to the sea, would be similar to speaking in a natural amphitheater.

## **JESUS COMMANDS (V4-7)**

After Jesus is finished teaching, He turns to Simon and tells him: “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” The first part of verse 5 reveals Simon’s rational response: “we worked hard all night and caught nothing.” There are a couple of things going on here. First, Simon tells Jesus that they have already been fishing here. They tried already. They didn’t catch anything. This isn’t where the fish are. But there is more. Remember the nets that needed washing? Well, this is probably a reference to a specific type of net called a trammel. Trammel nets are made of linen layers that have to be washed after use to clear debris. Because trammel nets are made of linen, they are also visible to fish. So, they are usually used only when it’s dark. Hence Simon’s reference to their previous night’s work. So, Simon is saying more than just, “we tried, there aren’t any fish here.” He is also saying, “the tools we have won’t work now.” His reason and experience is telling him in multiple ways that the command of Jesus won’t work.

After voicing his reservations, Peter says something amazing, “but I will do as You say let down the nets.” The Greek says, “but upon your words, I will let down the nets.” He doesn’t reject his reason; he submits his reason to the authority of Jesus. He knows how to fish. It would have been easy for him to say, “Look, stay in your lane. I am not going to listen to a carpenter or even a Rabbi tell me how to fish.” But he doesn’t say that. He says I know what the reality of the situation is, but because you said so. This is Simon realizing what it means that Jesus speaks the words of God. It means God knows more, sees more, and can guide better.

The result is a catch of fish so large that their nets began to break, and when they signaled to another boat for help, both began to sink under the weight of the number of fish.

## **JESUS CALLS (V8-11)**

When Simon sees the catch of fish combined with the words he heard Jesus speak and the healing he saw Jesus perform, it is all too much for him. Verse 8 says, “when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”

Something subtle but important has happened in this verse. Up to this point, Luke has called him Simon. Now he uses the name “Simon Peter.” Later in Luke 6:14, we learn Jesus named him Peter. Evidently it happened here. This is the place Simon became Peter. We know it means “Rock.” This is the place where he showed why. Not because of who he was, but because he made the decision to trust Jesus more than himself.

When Peter asked Jesus to depart from him, I don’t think he meant it literally. When confronted with Jesus’s power and majesty, he couldn’t do anything except acknowledge his own inadequacy and recognize his own unworthiness. Peter’s experience is similar to Isaiah’s in Isaiah 6:4. Isaiah sees the glory of God (6:1-4a) and declares “Woe is me, for I

am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” This seems like a necessary step in the commission of anyone for God’s service: recognition that God is everything and we are nothing.

Jesus responds by picking Peter up, reassuring him, and reassigning him. Verse 10 says, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” Jesus has changed Peter’s name. He now changes his vocation. He will become a fisher of men. Some people object to this analogy because of what people do with fish after they catch them (namely cook and eat them). But surely this is an example of not pushing an analogy too far. Fishing for people means rescuing people out of the sea of sin and death.

Verse 11 concludes with, “they left everything and followed Him.” James and John, as well as Peter, left everything that day and followed Jesus. They turned their back on the biggest catch they probably ever made because they realized something they were in the presence of something greater and it was calling them to something more.

### **JESUS CALLS (V8-11)**

May we, like Peter, hear the words of Jesus as the very word of God. May we lean on them when it seems to conflict with our own reason, experience, and understanding. As we submit to Jesus and His word, may that open opportunities for service and ministry as Jesus uses us to “catch people” to add to His kingdom.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the difference between seeing the teaching of Jesus as authoritative (as having authority and power), and being the word of God?
2. Why does the command of Jesus not make sense to Peter? What does Peter choose to do instead? Why?
3. What commands of God do we sometimes kick against because they don’t make sense to us? How can we learn to trust God and not our own understanding?
4. How does Peter respond to the miraculous catch of fish? How is this similar to Isaiah 6?
5. What does it mean to “catch people?”

## LESSON 6 | POWER OVER ISOLATION

### JESUS CLEANSSES A MAN WITH LEPROSY LUKE 5:12-16

The COVID pandemic affected society in ways that we will be studying for years to come. One detrimental aspect that was obvious from the start was the negative impact that enforced isolation had on everyone. People's mental health deteriorated. Some people became angry; others depressed. Some were willing to engage in what some in society considered risky or foolish behaviors simply to satisfy their need for human contact. I remember coming to church once people started feeling comfortable gathering again. One event stands out in my mind as particularly illustrative. After teaching one evening, a member of the church I hadn't seen since before the lockdown approached me and tentatively reached out for a hug. I found out later that this was the first human contact this person had had in over a year.

Though critics at the time called such behavior foolish, the truth is that God created us for community. It is part of the image of God in us. Not even God lives in isolation. The Trinity is proof that there is community even in the godhead. When you read the stories of creation in Genesis, the first aspect of God's creation that God comments on as "not good" is the isolation of Adam. Genesis 2:18 says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." So God created us to be in relationship not just with Him but with others.

Today we are going to look at a miracle that Jesus performs that shows him not just healing one of the most feared diseases in the ancient world, but also overcoming the boundaries of isolation that were imposed by it. He heals a man with leprosy, but more than that, He restores a person to his family and community. As we study this passage, may we look at how we isolate ourselves and others, and understand how Jesus calls us to be restored to Him and to each other.

#### **A DESPERATE DECISION (V12)**

The story starts with Jesus being approached by a man with leprosy. Verse 12 says, "While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'"

Leprosy was the general term used for a variety of skin diseases. In its worst form, it disfigured the individual and ultimately ended in death. There was no known cure except

quarantine: either the person would recover or die. That fact that this man was “covered with leprosy” means he had an advanced case.

Further proof of his desperation is found in the fact that the encounter happens in a city. People with leprosy were prohibited from being around people. They had to stay several yards away from others, couldn’t come into cities, and had to shout “unclean” whenever they came into proximity to people. The penalty for breaking that prohibition could be death. This man had evidently heard of Jesus and searches for Jesus even at the risk of his own life.

You can see how low the disease has brought the man by looking closely at what he asks Jesus. First, he says, “If you are willing...” The man doesn’t question whether Jesus is able to heal him, only whether Jesus would want to. The disease has made him feel worthless. He doesn’t feel he merits the attention or assistance of Jesus. Second, he says, “you can make me clean.” He doesn’t ask just to be healed of the skin ailments. He wants to be restored not just to physical health but to social acceptance. He wants to be able to rejoin society.

### **A LOVING LORD (V13)**

Jesus responds to the man in way that reveals the love and compassion that Jesus has for Him.

Verse 13 starts by saying, “He stretched out His hand and touched him...” Jesus doesn’t allow himself to be touched. He initiates the contact. The fact that he stretched out his hand may indicate that the man was keeping his distance from Jesus. Jesus reaches out for him. Jesus touches him. One wonders how long it has been since someone had touched him.

When Mark tells this story he includes a mention of Jesus’s emotional response. Mark 1:41 says, “Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him.” If you look closely at the notes in your Bible, you might see a footnote that says something like “some manuscripts say, ‘being angry.’” Its true, some manuscripts of Mark’s gospel say that Jesus got mad rather than had compassion. What on earth could this mean? Who is right? It seems like a pretty significant difference.

The answer is that Jesus wasn’t expressing his anger at the man but at the situation. He had compassion for the man, and the situation the man found himself in broke his heart. The man was physically ruined, emotionally exhausted, socially ostracized, and psychologically demoralized. The disease had so broken this man’s spirit that he did even think Jesus would want to heal him.

So when Jesus says to the man, “I am willing,” and stretches out his hand, one wonders if He grabbed the man, lifted him up, look him in the eyes and said it in a way that meant, “Of course I am willing...”

### **A TOUCHING TESTIMONY (V13b-15)**

The rest of verse 13 records Jesus saying, “Be cleansed.” Jesus didn’t just heal the man, he restored him to a state of purity in keeping with Jewish law. Verse 14 says first that “He ordered him to tell no one.” This would make sense. Before anything else, he needed to certify that he had actually been cured. The rest of verse 14 contains Jesus’s command to “go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

The man is supposed to be certified as clean by a priest. He is also supposed to make an offering, as prescribed by the law but also as an act of gratitude. Jesus tells him to give the glory to God for what has happened to him.

All of this, Jesus says, is supposed to be done “as a testimony to them.” Yes, this was supposed to be done as a testimony to the community that he was purified of disease. But further than that, it was a testimony that the messianic age had dawned. Jews believed that the true messiah would announce his arrival through the performance of appropriate messianic works that would lead to public acknowledgment of his identity. This seems more likely what Jesus means. This healing is further testimony that what Jesus said in Nazareth, and evidently in all the other synagogues as well, was true: the Messiah is here, the kingdom of God has arrived.

This is the testimony that Jesus wanted. This is the kind of Messiah he wanted people to realize He was. He came to be a restorer, not of the political power of Israel but of the brokenness of the world. He came to restore people to each other and to God.

That is what happens here. Hopefully, Jesus’s command to be silent was limited to until he could be certified as having been healed. Because after that it would have been impossible to keep it quiet. It is interesting, though, that the one command people are always eager to disobey is to keep quiet about what Jesus has done for them. We know Jesus meant it when he spoke it to the demons. One wonders if his words to those he healed was said more tongue in cheek, like a dare, “try to keep this to yourself...I dare you.” Because he knew they couldn’t.

### **A TOUCHING TESTIMONY (V13b-15)**

This story is about the power of Jesus over a terrible disease. It is also the story about the power of Jesus over the destruction the disease caused in his life. Sickness and disease can make a person feel worthless and alone. Though few struggle with leprosy these

days, the effects of isolation are still stamped on our world. Sin is a disease of the soul that makes a person feel worthless and ashamed. It drives a person to think they will never be understood, never be embraced, never be welcomed back. This story is proof that God calls us out of isolation. He takes the steps necessary in helping us over it. This healing of leprosy points to a fuller healing that he accomplishes on the cross through which he enables all people to be reconciled to God and to be restored to each other.

May we be willing to bring our brokenness to Jesus and ask him to intervene in our lives. May we trust in the unshakeable love of Jesus, who won't turn away from us, who embraces us, and who leads us to freedom. May our lives be fitting testimonies to the world of the transforming power of the gospel. May our lives be so transformed by the love of Jesus that we look for those who are trapped in isolation or fear. May we look for ways to be the hand of Jesus reaching for them and drawing them back to God and back into the community that we were all made for.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How does isolation effect people? How can isolation be dangerous and harmful?
2. What about this man's actions reveals the desperate nature of his situation? How do people in our own world respond desperately to hard situations?
3. What does Jesus do that is so controversial? How can we act with similar boldness?
4. What is the testimony this man is supposed to give? Besides the priests, to whom is he supposed to give the testimony?
5. Why do you think people don't obey Jesus's command to keep quiet? How can we be similarly "disobedient?"



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