

Study 7 Luke 8:22-56

Context

Luke 6:27-45

Jesus challenged the religious leaders by transforming religious activity and the opposition towards him grew in its intensity. He claimed that he was concerned with doing something new (Luke 5:38) and shocked them by claiming that he had authority over the Sabbath (Luke 6:5) which led to them plotting his death (Luke 6:11). Following this rejection Jesus withdrew to pray and then afterwards he established the twelve apostles who would go on to be a vital foundation for the 'new' thing Jesus was doing: that is building his church (Ephesians 4:11-12, Revelation 21:14). Having called the twelve Jesus embarked on his teaching ministry afresh, radically deepening the previous understanding of the Law. The standards that Jesus taught show clearly how awful human sinfulness is and how desperate our situation is without Jesus' forgiveness (Luke 6:24-49). In the following chapter there are individuals, often surprising individuals who discover the joy of knowing Jesus whilst others continue to despise him. Jesus calls people to listen. Listening to Jesus means obeying him, the Centurion realised that and understood Jesus' authority (Luke 7:6). Jesus knew that many others would only pay lip service to him but not have roots that would lead to fruitfulness (Luke 8:13-14). Even his own physical family were not automatically part of his kingdom instead he was calling people beyond the usual boundaries of family relationships into his new family (Luke 8:19-21).

Background bits

The Fall

That all is not well with this world is something we all have to face sooner or later. The biblical explanation of this is the fall, first described in Genesis ch.3 but seen in humankind's rebellion throughout the Old Testament. Death entered the world because of our rebellion and so did sickness, decay and despair. Paul describes the creation as groaning, subjected to futility and in bondage to corruption (Romans 8:20-21). Since the curse of God's judgement people have been struggling with the forces of nature, facing sickness and death and tormented by the grip of Satan. However, Satan was told that one day a child would come who would crush his head (Genesis 3:15). Jesus came to reverse this curse, destroy Satan's power and rescue sinners.

Unclean laws– Lev 15:21-31

The woman who had a discharge of blood (Luke 8:43) had experienced a decade of worry, pain, suffering, social and spiritual exclusion. Endless doctors appointments would have led to a cycle of hope and despair, and financial crisis. But her physical and social isolation also had spiritual consequences because of ceremonial laws. In Leviticus strict rules about what it means to be unclean are laid out. This does not mean there was a direct line between her individual circumstances and her personal sin but there is a line between all human suffering and our rebellion against God. These ceremonial laws heighten our awareness of our human condition, no one is right before God, we are all separated from him because of our sin and all of us suffer the impact of living in a fallen world.

Numbers 15:37-40

The woman in Luke touched the fringe of Jesus' garment this was the tassel on the coat that was attached with blue cord. It was to be a reminder to the Jews to remember the Law and obey it. She touched the most religious part of his garment that ought to have shut her out and multiplied her fear. Instead by reaching out to Jesus she was not condemned by the law but cleansed, healed by God's promised rescuer.

Difficult Bits

What is demon possession?

The man called Legion was not mentally ill but under the grip of evil. It is tempting to think that we do not experience this today but in reality however hard we try to get rid of it the grip of evil is evident in humanity, in corporate and individual ways and we cannot solve the problem. There is Satanic influence over cultures, societies and individuals; we are in the grip of the world, the flesh and the devil. Satan's impact is to humiliate us, de-humanise us, isolate us, and render us uncontrollable, anti social, to damage and enslave us and cause us to be self-destructive. This destructive power of evil is personified in Legion. He is uncontrollable, anti-social, de-humanised, isolated, humiliated, enslaved and self-destructive.

The demons recognize Jesus, this recognition is not willing submission but they know Jesus has supreme command, he is the Son of the Most High God, God's anointed ruler of the universe.

What about the pigs?

It does seem harsh that Jesus was prepared to destroy a herd of pigs. It was a gentile region in which the farming of pigs was the norm. In order to understand this we need to realise that Jesus places a higher premium on one person's deliverance from Satan than a herd of pigs. The destruction of the pigs prefigures the ultimate destruction of Satan in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Jesus' concern is to help this man and restore him to his right mind. This is the business of Jesus to restore fallen humanity so like Legion we can sit at the feet of our creator clothed and brought back into the community, freed from evil and slavery. This is our testimony Jesus has settled us, brought us to our senses, brought us into the community, and set free us from the power of evil.

Why do the people in Gerasenes want Jesus to leave?

The townspeople are afraid of Jesus. They were happy to live with this evil under their control but not to experience the power of Jesus. Jesus's power was awesome. People often reject Jesus because they prefer the status quo with evil present than the change with evil banished. Jesus however does not reject them instead he leaves the man to be a witness to others in the area.

Does having faith heal you?

Ultimately the answer to this is yes but the story of the woman who touched Jesus's garment is not written to promise that we can all receive immediate healing if only we have enough faith. This story shows us that Jesus has the power to heal even the most protracted of diseases. Jesus commends her for daring to come to him. The vital element of faith is turning to Jesus no matter how scared one feels. One day we are promised there will be no more sickness or pain for those in Christ Jesus.

Was Jairus's daughter dead or asleep?

The mourners understood that Jairus's daughter was dead and they were not naïve but well used to the reality of death. Jesus' words 'do not weep for she is not dead but sleeping' does not mean she is not physically dead both 1 Corinthians 15:18 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14 show us that death is often described as being asleep.

Jesus was revealing that he is the Resurrection. By calling her dead demonstrates that on the final day he is the one who will call us to the resurrection from the dead; he is the one who will summon the dead to judgement.

He kept this miracle quiet only to be told after his own resurrection when it could be properly understood.

Jesus in the house of the synagogue ruler does something that law and religion are powerless to do, he raised the dead pointing to the ultimate victory he would have over Satan who previously enslaved people by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-16). Jesus can destroy the last enemy.

Reading this with a seeker

Jesus can do the impossible

When reading this with a seeker aim to show them that these stories are part of the climax of Jesus' revelation of Himself as the promised Messiah. In some ways we can miss the magnificence of these accounts because we fail to see them in the light of the Old Testament; the more we understand the Old Testament the bigger our understanding of Jesus. He was bringing in the kingdom with these first signs. These stories show that Jesus can and will defeat the enemies that ruin the world in which we live and breathe today: the destructive power of nature, the hideous activity of Satan, the exhaustion of long protracted illnesses and the agony of death.

‘The healings are signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God – expressions of its reality - in the same way that snowdrops are the signs of Spring. The power and reality which we meet in the snowdrop are the same ones which later – even if far more powerfully – come into prominence.’ H K Neilson

These signs are like the first signs of spring so that we can know for certain one day Jesus will establish the new creation where there will be no more sickness, sorrow or death (Revelation 21:4).

Having read these accounts of Jesus the question cannot be avoided – what do you make of this Jesus who can do all of this?

‘Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him?’
Luke 8:25

Faith scatters fear

Each of these miracles shows us that if you are with Jesus He casts out all fear. Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith because of their fear. However in the face of Jesus’s authority there is a right response of fear because he is awesome. Turning to Jesus and relying on him gives us courage because with Jesus on our side there is nothing left to fear, ‘even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil’ (Psalm 23:4). As we grasp who Jesus is – faith scatters fear (Psalm 56:3-4).