

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Luke's Gospel: The revealed light, Jesus' family and the storm (Luke 8:16-25)

This talk resumes our series in our study of Luke's Gospel. The three passages we are going to look at seem unconnected. But I want to suggest that we find within them three themes. These are:

1. The light of God's word (Luke 8:16-18);
2. The challenge of God's word (Luke 8:19-21); and
3. The power of God's word (Luke 8:22-25)

1. The light of God's word

First of all let's look at Luke 8:16-18, *"No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."*

Jesus uses a simple illustration from the home to set the scene. An ordinary lamp is lit in order to provide light in a room. The light was needed so people could see clearly in dark surroundings. It wouldn't make sense to light a lamp to dispel darkness then cover it with something or hide it under the bed! The sensible thing to do was to place the lamp on a lampstand in a prominent position so everyone could get the benefit of its light.

So what was Jesus teaching? It seems he was using light as a picture of God's word and our response to it. Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12, John 9:5) and he was shining the word of God into the hearts of people. Many were rejecting this light but a significant number were responding to it. The problem was that when they responded positively to Jesus they encountered opposition from those with religious and political power. As a result they hid the light which had shone into their hearts. This situation has parallels in our world in what is being described as a post-Christian society.

But why should we think the light in this passage illustrated the word of God? The basis of this interpretation starts in the Old Testament, and the Book of Psalms particularly helps us to understand the metaphor Jesus used. Let's look at a number of examples:

In Psalm 18:28, God is spoken of as One who enlightens His people: *"For You will light my lamp; The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness."*

In Psalm 27:1, God is described as light: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?"*

In Psalm 36:9, God's light enables us to see the light: *"For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light."*

In Psalm 43:3, God's light is associated with God's truth and how it leads us closer to Him: *"Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle."*

In Psalm 78:14, there is a reference back to the way God provided light and protection against the Egyptians: *"In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire."*

In Psalm 119:105 and Psalm 119:130 we have a clear reference to the word of God providing light in the sense of spiritual understanding. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ... The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple."*

In the New Testament, Jesus also makes it clear that the light He gives should not be hidden away but should shine in our lives. He conveys this thought in Matthew 5:16 when He says, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Paul uses the thought of light to describe the Gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In 2 Corinthians 4:6, the same chapter, he writes, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

John writes in his first epistle, "God is light" (1 John 1:5).

This theme of God's light and its effects runs through the whole of the Bible beginning in Genesis 1:3, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" and continuing to the Book of Revelation, "There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light" (Revelation 22:5).

Through Christ, God has shone into our hearts bringing salvation and power to live for God; the power to shine, "that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

In Luke 8:17 Jesus says, "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light."

We know that the word of God reveals the wonders of the whole counsel of God but it also looks into the hearts and minds of people as well. This is brought home to us in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Then in Luke 8:18, Jesus says, "Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Jesus explains that we need to carefully listen to and respond to God's word and assimilate it into our lives. In doing so we discover the outpouring of God's blessing. But he also speaks of the loss incurred when we hide from the word of God.

2. The challenge of God's word (Luke 8:19-21)

Next we come to the challenge of God's word. "Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.' But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it'" (Luke 8:19-21)

In this brief passage Jesus' family wanted to see him, but couldn't get through the crowd. Jesus was not being discourteous to His family, but simply using a real situation to describe the depth of fellowship experienced between the Lord Jesus and His people when they hear and obey the word of God.

When we trust Christ we receive spiritual life in him. Once we are "made alive" (see Ephesians 2:1, 5) we are part of the family of God. Sadly today that family is practically divided for so many reasons. But in God's sight there is one church, sometimes described as the flock of God, and every true believer in Christ belongs to it. Now being in a family doesn't necessarily mean we are enjoying close relationships. Not all Christians live as God wants them to live but have distant relationships with Him. They are saved but there is little evidence of the life they possess. The Lord wants a close relationship with us. He wants us to "abide in Him" (see John 15:1-10) through daily communion and to witness by our words and actions. In other words, by hearing and obeying the word of God. So Jesus explains that those who live that kind of life are those with which He has the closest relationship. This is the challenge of God's word, do we want a real or a superficial relationship with Christ? It's our choice.

3. The power of God's word (Luke 8:22-25)

The final passage in our study is Luke 8:22-25, "Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.' And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, 'Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!'"

This incident is the first of four occasions in which is demonstrated the power of Jesus.

- a. When Jesus stills the storm we see his power over disaster (Luke 8:22-25);
- b. When Jesus frees Legion we see his power over devil (Luke 8:26-39);
- c. When Jesus heals the women we see his power over disease (Luke 8:43-48); and
- d. When Jesus raises Jairus' daughter we see his power over death (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56)

We will look at the last three events over the coming weeks.

In our chapter today the story begins when Jesus gets into a boat with His disciples to travel to the country of the Gadarenes. In the account in Mark 4:35-41, we are told that the disciples took Jesus *"just as He was"* (Mark 4:36). It seemed that the Lord Jesus, exhausted from His ministry that day, was helped by His disciples into the boat. He soon fell fast asleep. It is remarkable to think that in the Old Testament God is described as the One who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 12:1:4). Yet as Son of God on earth Jesus experiences the limitations of humanity. Jesus sleeps to recover from the labour of the day. It is a vivid picture of "Immanuel", God truly with us (see Matthew 1:23). And Mark describes Christ's lowliness as the introduction to an explosion of incredible power in the events that follow.

It is whilst Jesus is sleeping that a windstorm came down on the lake. I remember visiting Galilee some years ago; It was a beautiful day and the water was like a millpond. The storm the boats encountered was anything but a millpond! A violent wind rushed across the surface of the water and then turned the lake into a maelstrom. The disciples, some of whom were seasoned fishermen, were overwhelmed by the power of the storm and the fact that the boat was taking in water. They appeared to be in serious danger and genuinely felt their lives were at risk. Yet Jesus slept soundly through the storm in spite of the chaos it was causing.

It is difficult to understand the enormity of God's power in the vastness of creation. And the Bible teaches us that the Son of God was central to this creation. John writes of Jesus, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"* (John 1:1-5).

Paul writes further of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-17, *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."*

The Bible witnesses to the Godhead's creatorial power. Alongside this we see the Son of God stepping into the very world he created as a lowly man yet still God. The story of the storm (Luke 8:22-25) illustrates the profoundness of this journey in the simplicity of sleeping through a storm (Luke 8:23). That Jesus slept witnesses to His true humanity and that he was not disturbed by the storm witnesses to His deity. There was nothing that all the dangers in this world be they natural, human or spiritual that had the power to disturb or endanger the Person of Christ. Even the storm of suffering culminating at Calvary could not take from Jesus His life - He laid it down voluntarily: *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:17-18).

The disciples instinctively turned to Jesus. Earlier in Luke 5 we read about the doubts Peter had in following the advice of Jesus about fishing, *"When He had stopped speaking, [Jesus] said to Simon, 'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' But Simon answered and said to Him, 'Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.' And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'"* (Luke 5:4-9).

Peter learnt that day something about the greatness of the Person of Christ. And in the boat the disciples instinctively turn to a sleeping Jesus for help in dangerous circumstances.

Some commentators have suggested that the storm was instigated by Satan in an attempt to prevent Jesus reaching the Land of the Gadarenes to heal Legion. This thinking is based on the story of the great wind in Job 1:18-22. It is an interesting comment but we are not told.

Mark records that the disciples woke Jesus with the words, *"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"* (Mark 4:38).

Peter was to later write those wonderful words, *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:6-7).

We must be assured of the Saviour's care for us even in our darkest days. When trouble comes our prayers become simpler; "Teacher don't you care," "Lord save me!" All we want is for the Lord to take the problems, difficulties and dangers away. And that's what Jesus did.

Again, Mark 4:39 gives us a fuller account of what Jesus did, "*Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.*"

This is interesting because Jesus rebukes the wind, which was the cause of the problem. And he calms what was troubled; the sea. External things often come into our lives to disturb our peace and more than this to cause havoc. Jesus does have the power to remove the difficulty and restore the peace we so much need and this is what he did on this occasion.

But what Jesus asked next is very important, "*Where is your faith?*" (Luke 8:25).

Jesus demonstrated Who He was by the power of the word of God. He simply spoke and immediately the wind ceased and the sea was calm. But His question implies the disciples could have experienced another remarkable deliverance. They could have had the faith to simply believe that whilst Jesus was with them they were safe. Instead of struggling to overcome powers greater than themselves they could have rested in the greatest power of all the presence of Christ. Jesus was saying to them, "Where is your faith in Me."

The question left them afraid and confused, "*And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, 'Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!'*" (Luke 8:25).

The disciples only understood the power of real faith after the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 12:2 Herod had James executed. Afterwards he had Peter arrested so he could also execute him (Acts 12:3-4). It seemed powers greater than himself had Peter's life in their hands. He was at the centre of a storm of persecution. Was he fearful? Was he crying, "*Lord save me?*" Was he saying, "*Lord don't you care that I am perishing?*" No! He was fast asleep (Acts 12:6). That night the greatest power of all intervened and delivered Peter from execution (see Acts 12:5-19). Peter had learned to trust in power of God's word not only to still the storm to trust him to take him safely through it.

May God give us the grace:

- To allow the light of God's word to shine in us and through us;
- To allow the challenge of God's word to keep us in communion with our Saviour; and
- To allow the power of God's word's to create in us a complete trust in Jesus.

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