

More than a Healer

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[0 : 00] Now, it's very easy for us to be distracted by the dramatic. I'm not referring to my T-shirt here or my shirt. Instead, take for instance, just before Christmas, some of you might have read this, Elon Musk's SpaceX launched a rocket in California.

And actually, many people witnessed this spectacular sight. I think it was early evening when the sky was dark, including some in cars along the highway. So I'm going to show you a video clip of what it means to be distracted.

Please excuse the driver's language. You might want to turn up the volume. Oh, look at that, look at that. Is that a rocket? Just shut up, a rocket. Wow, look at that thing.

That's a rocket, man. It's glowing like... Video it, video it right now. Video it, video it right now.

People are noticing it too.

Fucking this guy is... Is this guy is an idiot or what? Wow, look at that rocket, man. Oh, look at that. It stopped from between?

[1 : 16] Wow, what is that? It's a rocket. No, but the thing is, it broke. Wow. It broke. Oh, shit.

Oh, shit. This guy is not paying attention, man. Damn. Damn. Thank God. Look at that, oh. She keep videoing. Can you please pay attention to somebody?

I'm not paying attention. I'm paying attention to the guy, no? Don't you like it that he's saying, I'm not paying attention. He's not paying attention. Anyway, you can see how it's very easy to be distracted by the dramatic.

And in our passage tonight, or this evening, I think it's easy for us to be distracted by the dramatic in this story, or the two stories. For here we have two very dramatic healings, which grabs our attention and our fascination.

And the danger is we become distracted and then fail to see the real reason why Luke is telling them to us. But having said that, let's first get ourselves acquainted with these healings, because they're actually quite dramatic.

[2 : 26] The first relates to a centurion and his servant. And here, what's noteworthy is that the centurion is not a Jew. He's rather a Roman soldier and a commander of a hundred soldiers.

But this Roman soldier has also taken an interest in Jewish affairs, and he's heard of Jesus' fame. Further, he's been good to the Jews, as we read.

For when the delegation of elders come to Jesus, they actually say that he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. Now, it's not uncommon for high-ranking officials to do that.

Normally, they do it to try and keep the locals happy and maintain the peace. But the elders' praise actually goes further than that. For in verse 4, the Jews actually say that this man deserves to have you do this.

In other words, they're convinced that his kindness is genuine. And so, Jesus decides to help him by going on his way to his house.

[3 : 27] But as he does that, another delegation comes to meet him. And so, we pick up the story on verse 6. Jesus was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me.

I tell this one, go, and he goes. And that one come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it. And so, Jesus, after hearing this, does exactly that.

Healing the servant from afar and not bothering to go to the house. He does that just by the power of his words. And true enough, when the friends return, they actually find that this dying servant has been healed.

It's pretty amazing, don't you think? Long before we have Jedi Masters in Star Wars movies, moving lightsabers and sort of X-wing fighters with their force, Jesus was already saving people by the force of his words, healing them from afar.

[4 : 49] Now, the second healing, verse 11 to 17, is, I think, even more dramatic because it's done in the public and it's not a healing so much as a raising of someone from the dead.

In this case, it was a widow's son. Now, we also know that he was her only son. And so, while she's not an outsider to Israel like the centurion, she's still someone who's cut off without any more loved ones.

And so, Jesus is moved by compassion for her and says to her in verse 13, don't cry. It's not a rebuke on his part, on her grief, but rather he's trying to assure her that very soon, you'll have no reason to be crying.

In verse 14, he goes up to the bier, which I had to Google to find out what it was. It's actually the frame on which the corpse or the coffin rests.

He touches the bier and stops the barriers from moving. And then, in a commanding voice, says, Young men, I say to you, get up. And immediately, the son sits up and begins to talk and Jesus returns him to his mother.

[5 : 58] And so, the response of the people sort of says it all, don't they? They were amazed and filled with awe for God. Now, it's tempting when we hear these stories simply to focus on these dramatic events and then perhaps to ask questions like, can these miracles really happen?

To which the short answer is, if Jesus is God, yes. Or to ask, if they happen then, then why aren't they happening more often today? But as I said at the start, merely to focus on the dramatic healings will distract us from what's really important in this story.

And to work that out, we need to work out why Luke is telling these miracles to us in the first place and why at this point of the Gospel. And that second question is actually the key to answering the first.

Because I want you to notice where Luke actually puts these miracles is right after Jesus has finished his sermon on the plain in chapter 6. So, you read there in verse 1, when Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

And if you just look a few verses earlier, notice what Jesus says at the very end of the sermon. Let me read it to you from verse 47. He says, As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like.

[7 : 31] They are like a man building a house who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it because it was well built.

But the one who hears my voice and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

And so you see, Luke has put these miracles here to show us that Jesus' words ought to be obeyed because they are powerful. That's the first amazing truth in this passage.

And we're on point two and sub-bullet point A. Dramatic as the healings may be, there are merely signs pointing to the power of God's words or Jesus' words.

Jesus is more than a healer. He's a great prophet whose words should be heard and then heeded. Now of course, in the next few weeks, we'll see that Jesus is more than a great prophet as well.

[8 : 39] But for now, Luke wants us to focus not simply on what his words can achieve, that of healing and bringing people to life. He wants us also to see the power of all of Jesus' words.

Everything he says, not just the commands that he gives to heal. And if you've been reading the initial chapters of Luke, carefully, would notice that Jesus has been saying this as well.

He's been repeatedly telling people his purpose is to speak and preach the good news of the kingdom. That was the true power that he wants to use to truly free people from bondage.

And that's why he's made it plain at the very end of the sermon, the result of putting his words into practice. That if we hear and put into practice, anyone who does that will find life and peace and security.

And conversely, there are dire consequences for not doing so. But even as we look at our passage tonight, we see that this very point is made by the insights of the centurion.

[9 : 45] He may not be a Jew, but he actually understood the power of words and how they carry the authority of the speaker. So again, let's look at verse 6. He says, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for

I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me.

I tell this one, go, and he goes, and the other one comes, and he comes. Say to my servant, do this, and he does it. Do you see how he understands the connection between Jesus' words and Jesus' authority?

Just say the word. Because if you're someone in authority, then those under your authority will heed your words. And for Jesus, any distance in time and space doesn't and shouldn't matter.

Now, I think this principle ought to work today as well. So if our boss has left us instructions to do certain work, then it shouldn't really matter whether he's there or not.

[10:58] Right? His instructions should still be followed. Same with the teacher. If she steps out of a class for a few minutes, you'd still want the students, she would still want the students to be getting on with the task that she set them.

Right? Now, sadly, that's not always the case because people slack off. But when they do that, they're actually undermining the authority of the boss or the teacher, aren't they?

But if you belong to the army, this whole principle of chain of command is something that soldiers are drilled in from day one.

So a general may be hundreds of miles away from the battlefield in a command center, but if the command comes from him to attack an enemy position, then the sergeant that relies it onto his platoon, when he does that, every soldier needs to obey.

There should be no room for second guessing or delay or hesitation because the success of the mission depends on everyone carrying out that order. And so perhaps that's why the centurion of all people sees clearly the power of Jesus' words.

[12:10] He knows that if Jesus really has authority over illness, then it doesn't matter where Jesus was. The chain of command, that command coming directly from God who is master over creation in nature and exercised now by Jesus can be done anywhere over and it will have an impact, a healing impact on the servant and his disease.

Likewise, when we look at the second healing, I think a similar point is also being made here although in a different way. Now notice with me in verse 16 near the end how the people praise God in seeing Jesus' miracle.

So they look at Jesus as God's agent but actually they then turn and praise God. They see that Jesus is God's agent being sent to rescue or help them by God.

But notice too that despite this being a miracle, Jesus isn't being praised as a great healer, is he? If you look at that, what is he being praised? He's being praised as a great prophet.

It's the power of his words as God's messenger that they're praising, not so much the effects of those words. Of course, the two things are related but it's not the dramatic effect that they're focusing on.

[13:32] Rather, they're remembering or looking at the powerful source from which those words came from. And in fact, I think as Luke writes this, he's probably drawing a connection between this miracle and the miracle that we read in the first reading, the one that Elijah did.

I think the people here are being reminded of Elijah, that great prophet of Israel in that first miracle. And actually, if we look at it a bit more, there are actually quite a few similarities between these two miracles.

So firstly, the woman that Elijah goes to in Zarephath, she was also a widow who has a son and most likely her only one as well.

He dies as well and then is raised to life again by Elijah. And what is, I think, the most telling detail, after Elijah raises him to life, he carries him into the house from downstairs and then on the slide, if you've got verse 23, Emma?

Yeah, just right down at the end. We see that what he does is he gives him back to his mother. And if you look at the story in Luke, that's exactly what Jesus does as well with the widow's son.

[14:53] And so we see the two responses between the widow's response and the people's response actually being very similar. What the widow says in 1 Kings in verse 24 is this, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.

In other words, she's recognizing Elijah as God's prophet. And Jesus too, in Luke, is being recognized as the great prophet who does the same thing.

The word of the Lord is also in his mouth and he's speaking the truth. And so I think both these miracles actually point to the power of Jesus' words even though the dramatic in the story are the healings.

Now I said last week that over January what we're going to do is going to do something different is that we're going to have some time to split up into groups for a little discussion. So that's exactly what we're going to do now.

If you look at your outline or on the screen you'll see two discussions for questions. And so I'd like for us to just go into groups of about four or five. You can spread out if you want.

[16:01] There's a lot of space down the front. If you feel you want to be having a discussion with your sibling or your spouse you can move to another group. So the first question really requires us to have our Bibles open because I want us to find examples in the Gospel of Luke of the power of God's or Jesus' words.

And then with the second I'd like you to share your own experiences with God's word. Alright. And then at the end we're going to get Harry's got a roving mic. I'd actually like for us to share what we've discussed.

And so we're going to get a mic and just hear from some of you. Alright. So let's take a few minutes. You don't have to move very far. But have a go at those questions.

Yeah. Okay. So authority in Jesus' teaching as well.

Power because people see amazing amazed by his teaching. About demons, healing, forgiving sins. The one about the fish and the gnats.

[17:07] I didn't get that one. But there are also aspects of which when he calls disciples follow. And that I see is powerful. So Levi and then the first disciples and then eventually all twelve and other disciples as well.

And then more generally his words are powerful because they reveal truth and spiritual reality. So sermon on the plane things like that. The thing to see is that the power is not just seen in the healing is it?

It's seen in a variety and every time Jesus speaks it's powerful words. and what struck me as I was talking to Harry at the front is that Jesus, unlike Elijah, he doesn't pray to God to heal the person. He just says be clean or come out or get up. In other words, he's speaking as God. And that's the source of he is God.

That's why his words are powerful. Okay, let's move on to the second one which is a bit more personal. Anyone has experiences of God's the power of God's words in your very own lives.

[18:13] But I think many of us would have had a personal experience of really hearing God's word and going you know, the power of it being yes, these are just not words coming straight off the page written by someone 2,000 years ago.

No, these are living words. Words that I know to be from God. And for me, I remember it and still remember it when I was in my first or second year of university I was friendless at uni so I decided to go to an empty room and read the Bible which, you know, maybe that was God's blessing to me to have no friends at uni.

But I read God's word and for me the sense of which this is God's word was palpable. it was as though I knew that this is God and it wasn't, you know, reading God's word wasn't boring or whatever.

It was actually like it says in Hebrews like a double-edged sword cutting through to my very innermost thoughts. Things that I was wrestling with as I read God's word it was so clear that God was speaking to me.

But of course throughout my life as well God's word has been powerful to, you know, do a lot of other things like comfort me when I've been discouraged and more importantly to rebuke me and expose my selfish thoughts and my pride at other times.

[19:42] And then God's word has also been powerful in the way that he's helped me to understand this world to shed light on what's going on in this world. So whether it's global conflict or political unrest or closer to home conflicts in relationship or at church God's word has been a wise wisdom for me and wise for my salvation.

It's opened my eyes to what's actually really going on. It's helped me then to relate with others and most importantly to know what changes I need to make in my own life.

So I'm hoping and I'm trusting that many of you would have had the same experience with God's word and Jesus' words in particular. But let me just conclude with my final bullet point because the other amazing truth is that even though Jesus' words in particular and God's word in general are powerful and by that I mean it's earth-shaking nature-altering powerful I don't I can't you know there are more superlatives I could use to say that God has amazingly given to humans the choice of rejecting it or more positively he's placed on humans the need for faith.

Now normally when you want to resist something powerful you put something more powerful in its place don't you? So if you want to withstand a bullet you wear a bulletproof vest if you want to protect yourself from hurricanes you go into a building that's stronger than the winds that blow on it or if you want to stop cars running into pedestrians you put up bollards to stop the cars.

Tonight we've just witnessed the awesome power of Jesus' words. All nature of creation actually submits to his bidding. Just think about that.

[21 : 34] By his mere word disease and death is overcome. When we get to chapter 8 we'll see that even the winds and the waves obey him. In other words nothing can resist Jesus' words.

And yet amazingly God has not done this with us. This is not his approach with us. He's actually given us a choice either to receive Jesus' words by faith or to reject them through unbelief and disobedience.

And you've got to ask the question who are we that God has given us this privilege to do that? Who are we that we even deserve this? Because if Jesus just spoke nothing you know if he just chose to do that we would not be able to withstand God's word.

If he could raise someone from the dead life and death is in his mere word then so with life as in death he could say the word and someone will die.

Not that he does it but that's the power of Jesus' word and yet he gives us the choice to actually reject that word. But I think with this great privilege and we'll see that next week with this great privilege also comes this huge responsibility on us.

[23 : 02] That is if we believe that God's word is powerful and I do then the result of rejecting his word must be just as grave correct? If life and death literally hangs on Jesus' words then if we choose to reject it then we must also accept the consequence of it.

And so the centurion I think is one of those who gets it right because Jesus in verse 9 commends his faith. Jesus is not easily amazed. He's seen everything and yet the words of the centurion actually amaze him.

That's what he says. Jesus was amazed and he commends his faith to the crowd. He says I tell you I have not seen such great faith even in Israel. Even among believing Jews who have God's word I've not seen such faith.

And friends the centurion's faith is commended not simply because he understood the power of Jesus' words but because he humbly submitted himself to it by faith.

He counts himself unworthy of Jesus and responds in as a consequence. And it's his humility before Jesus that is what Jesus commends.

[24 : 20] It's quite ironic that the elders actually say oh you know Jesus this man deserves for you to do this. And then what does the centurion himself say? No he says I know I'm not worthy of your kindness Jesus.

And yet if you but say the word if you show me mercy I know you can just so easily heal my servant even from where you are. And so this is the attitude that I think Jesus commends and he requires of us.

The kind of faith that Jesus is looking for in all of us. And so friends as we head into 2018 the year is only young.

One of the things I would love to see for us as a church is this. Firstly if you're someone who has not put your trust in Jesus yet then I hope you accept my challenge for you tonight to carefully consider Jesus' word this year.

Jesus' powerful words and make a choice whether you will submit to him or not. Will you put your faith in him and give your life to him? If for instance you've been part of this church for a while it's great that you've been here but you're neither in nor out then can I say to you it's time to stop being in two camps.

[25 : 33] Make a commitment one way or another. Choose to submit to God's word and believe in Jesus and I don't even want to contemplate the alternative. But if you're already committed to following Jesus then what I hope we'll do as a church this year is to be intentional in speaking God's

word to each other.

If we truly believe in the power of God's word then let's use it to encourage one another as often as we can and see God's spirit work through it in a mighty way transforming us breaking down I don't know bad habits that we've had stubborn sins freeing us from the grip of fear and anxiety and I know that we've been doing this for many years already many of us have been doing it but I want to encourage you again let's maintain our discipline in it.

If you don't belong to a growth group as yet then join one come speak to me and make a commitment to be regular so that you can sit week in week out with your brothers and sisters and allow God's powerful word to work in your life.

And if we believe that God's word is truly powerful then let's be bold in speaking it with our family and friends because that's how they will come to meet the living God. That's how God will use his words to change them.

Jesus' words were not limited because of distance on that day with the centurion servant and neither are they limited now even though we're separated from it as it were physically from 2,000 years of time.

[27 : 10] God may have spoken to Jesus 2,000 years ago but by his spirit it's been written down for us in the Bible so that God in Christ still speaks to us today just as powerfully as when it was first spoken.

So let's really believe and then grab hold of and use God's words to be a powerful blessing in our lives this year.

Why don't you join me in prayer as we ask God to help us make this a reality in 2018. Let's pray. Father we praise you for your powerful enduring and unfailing word written for us in your Bible and spoken through your son Jesus.

Help us not to simply affirm that truth intellectually but help us to receive it by faith. Help us to trust that it is true when we hear it and to apply it to our lives even when we cannot see its effect immediately.

Give us the humility to confess our wrongdoing and to change when your word brings to light things in our lives that are opposite to what you want of us. Enable us to submit to it and grow in Christ likeness and therefore to experience the joy and peace and freedom that comes from trusting in your word.

[28 : 29] We ask this in name of your son Jesus. Amen.