

2.3 The Message: The Kingdom of God

It is almost logical that after the first public proclamation of the message of the coming of the kingdom of God in Nazareth two healing stories follow: the healing of a man possessed by a demon (Lk 4.31-37), and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4.38-41).

The man in the first healing story is possessed by a demon, that is, by a power which holds him captive. The healing is actually an act of release from bondage. The same applies to the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. The fever holds the woman physically in bondage in the same way as the demon held the man mentally in bondage. In both cases the healing is a release from bondage. The act of healing is described in both cases with the same Greek word *epitimaō* – in the first instance Jesus 'rebuked' the demon (4.35), in the second he 'rebuked' the fever (4.39). Both illnesses are attributed to powers which dominate people and thereby keep them in bondage. In both cases Jesus heals through his word.

Before the narrator continues to tell us about Jesus' preaching activity, we find stories which tell us of the effects of Jesus' word in a very physical way, it could be summarized as the proclamation of the message in body language. The healing stories are not something added to Jesus' ministry, they are neither illustrations of the message, nor do they demonstrate or prove that Jesus is acting in the power of the Spirit. But they are 'embodied' message, they are proclamation of the message in concrete ways. They are identical with what e.g. Jesus had been preaching in the synagogue, and will be preaching again and again. The message of the kingdom which is in the process of arriving, and which is present in the presence of this Jesus of Nazareth is proclaimed in words and deeds. The healing stories are the message in action.

Thus when Jesus repeats what he had said in the synagogue in Nazareth when John the Baptist sends his disciples to find out about him – this is no mere coincidence. This is the core of what this is all about: when the kingdom is about to arrive, what has been promised through the words of the prophets (Isa 61.1-2) these things are bound to happen, since the arrival of the kingdom means the confirmation of the promises of God. (cf. Lk 7. 22ff).

The calling of the first disciples Lk 5.1-11 shows a number of characteristics in which Luke's narrative differs from the other synoptic gospels. The calling of the first disciples is said to have happened after Jesus's first public teaching and after the first healing stories (different from Mk and Mt) who both briefly mention the beginning of Jesus' ministry in a brief summary passage and then immediately tell of the call of the first disciples, Simon and Andrew and James and John, whereas Luke in addition to different sequence of events only has Simon, James and John as the first disciples called. Moreover, in Luke's version the calling is introduced by the miracle of the 'big catch' which points towards the new role of those called to be disciples.

The Release from Bondage and the Release of Sins

In the story of the healing of the paralytic (Lk 5.17-26) it is mentioned for the first time that there is a connection between Jesus' healing activity and the forgiving of sins.

At the beginning of the scene the presence of 'Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem' (Lk 5.17) is mentioned. This is the first time that Jesus and Pharisees and Scribes meet, from here onwards they are part of the narrative as critical and at times adversary partners in conversation and debate. It is interesting to note that the issue of forgiveness only is introduced in a context where not only 'the people', and the 'disciples' are present but also others. It is asserted here that the healing activity is inherently intertwined with the release from the power of sin. The power of demons, illness etc and the power of sin are thus all seen as powers which keep people in bondage and thus release from one means release from the power of sin through

forgiveness. The proclamation of the message of the kingdom in words and deeds and the forgiveness of sins are seen as one and the same activity, one and the same ministry. This theme is significant throughout Luke-Acts; it appears not only in a number of scenes and stories but in fundamental statements about Jesus' mission and authority (Lk 4.18 and 5.24). We find them in statements such as Lk 5.32 and 19.10 where Jesus emphasizes that he has come to call or seek the sinners and the lost, as well as parables, especially the parables of the lost (cf. below). Significantly neither in the Gospel nor in Acts is there any reference to an atoning dimension of the death of Jesus. Forgiveness rather has something to do with power of the Spirit in the empowering activity of the proclamation of the message, be it by Jesus or his disciples.

Essential Readings

- ** **2.6** Croatto, J.S. 'Jesus, Prophet like Elijah and Prophet-Teacher Like Moses in Luke-Acts', *JBL* 124/3 2005, pp.451-465

Further Readings

Tannehill, Robert C. ,*Luke*. Nashville, TN: Abdingdon Press 1996, pp. 113-123.