

## STUDY 10

### Lord of Death and Disease

- 1. As the gospel story develops, we learn more about the character of Jesus. As well as having power over death and disease, what else do we learn about His character and the way He used His authority?**

There are many different things that could be said here. One aspect of Jesus' character that comes out in this section is His concern for individuals, even those He had not actually seen. He had great compassion on Jairus' daughter whom He had not met. He had great compassion on the woman with whom He did not speak until after she had been healed.

Jesus used His authority over death and disease to help others. He did not use it to protect and benefit himself. This is a marked contrast to how people with political authority have often acted. In some parts of the world rulers have been overthrown because they were using their authority to serve their own interests, often with great corruption and exploitation. Sadly, the newcomers to power often repeat the same pattern and use their newly seized power to serve their own interests. So unfortunately, nothing really changes for ordinary people.

With Jesus, things are very different. Firstly, He did not seize authority. As the only begotten Son of God, He was given it by the Father. Secondly, He used His authority to fulfil the will of the Father to demonstrate His great love. Thirdly, Jesus was indeed the King, but He was a servant king.

Those who model their use of authority in their own sphere on Jesus will do well. Parents, teachers, employers, even the military and law enforcers can look to Jesus as a pattern for how to use their authority.

- 2. Jesus did not seek to publicise His miracles because it was what they were pointing to that was the most important thing. Explain.**

The miracles of Jesus were, of course, a huge blessing to those who received His help. But they were so much more. They were visual aids to help people understand what life in the Kingdom is like and how things would be in the future when the kingdom was fully present. In one sense they were a first instalment and a foretaste of the life to come.

In particular, they were a demonstration of Jesus' kingship. He was indeed the anointed Messiah. They were a confirmation of His message. Back in chapter 2, Jesus pronounced that the man lowered through the roof was forgiven. The Pharisees concluded that these were words that only God could speak and took great offence. They should, in fact, have stopped to think that perhaps there was more to this person than they first thought. When they saw the miracle, they should have changed their minds and concluded that Jesus, at the very least, was from God and acting for God. This was the response of another Pharisee called Nicodemus, mentioned in John's gospel.

Jesus' miracles also gave a message. When He healed a leper, the message was about cleansing from sin and defilement. When He fed the 5000 the message was about God's provision. When He healed the blind man, the message was about spiritual sight.

Jesus did not seek to publicise His miracles in themselves. He did not promote Himself as a divine healer. Of course, He loved to bring God's help into people's lives, but He wanted them to see beyond them to their meaning and significance.

**3. The risen Lord Jesus continued to work miracles through His followers in the Book of Acts and indeed He does so today. Do you think the same danger of focussing on the mighty works of power still applies in our generation?**

The answer to this is yes! The miracles need to be understood in the context of the whole message of the kingdom. This includes God's mighty power to relieve suffering, but it also includes restoring human relationships through forgiveness, receiving and expressing the love of God, social justice, care and compassion for the needy and vulnerable, and lives lived under the ruler of God, looking forward to the return of the King in glory. All these things put together constitute a total expression of the kingdom.

Sometimes, the most powerful miracles that God performs, happen away from the public eye. Jesus does not want people to take away an unbalanced message from the mighty things He does.

It is sometimes said that seeing miracles produces faith. Experience shows that whilst that may be true on occasions, in most cases it does not. It takes faith to see that the mighty work is a mighty work of God. The Pharisees and religious leaders mostly responded with unbelief and hostility. Nicodemus was an exception. But for those with a willingness to see, they do demonstrate powerfully what God is like, and they provide a basis for hope and expectation for the future.

It might be a useful exercise to ask members of the study group to share accounts of the miraculous things they have seen, the responses of those who saw or heard and the message people took away from them.

**4. When Jesus says that the girl is only 'sleeping' this is not meant to be taken literally. She did actually die and Jesus did raise her back to life. But why do you think Jesus used metaphorical language here? Can you think of examples of metaphorical language that we use today and other occasions when Jesus used this way of speaking?**

There is room for a variety of opinions here. There is probably more than one correct answer.

Perhaps Jesus wanted to convey His great authority and power. Yes, to the family, friends and crowd, the girl was certainly dead; but to Him, death was not final and for Him it was reversible. So, to Jesus she was simply sleeping.

Perhaps He was trying to avoid a wave of excitement leading to unhelpful publicity and people attempting to promote the arrival of the wrong kind of Messiah.

Perhaps He was making the point that for God's Kingdom people, death is not so final. There will be a waking from sleep – the resurrection of the dead. This is certainly something that is helpful in a pastoral context for those who have been bereaved. The apostle Paul wrote that death had '*lost its sting*' and gave its victory (*1 Corinthians 15:55-58*).

Metaphorical language can be used for a variety of purposes.