

028: Near-Death Experience

(based on Sermon #23 in the Life of Christ Series)

Did you know that Jesus had a near-death experience?

- Of course, it was not of the type that we so often hear about nowadays —
- a mystical, out-of-body experience accompanied by bright lights and heavenly visions and levitation.
- Nevertheless, it was a close brush with death:
- Luke 4:28-30 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Jesus comes close to death, humanly speaking, according to Dr. Luke's account.

- Of course, we know that in the sovereign will of God, Jesus could never die in this fashion.
- He did not come to Earth to die by falling from a great height.
- No, He came to die on a cross, and that form of death is consistent with Old Testament prophecies and sends a completely different picture than death by falling.
- What would cause a group of Jews at synagogue to get so infuriated that they would push Jesus to the brink of a cliff at the edge of town, fully intending to push him over to His certain death on the rocks below?
- To answer that question, it is necessary to rewind to events that happen earlier in the chapter.

Luke 4:14-22

- 14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.
- 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.
- 16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.
- 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:
- 18-19 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."
- 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.
- 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
- 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

What a change of events between the beginning of the passage and the ending!

- The audience initially marvels at Christ's gracious words but later becomes filled with wrath because of something He says — even to the point of attempting to murder Him.
- What does He say that stirs up so much vehemence in their hearts?

- After turning the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, His first miracle, Jesus travels to Jerusalem for the Passover.
- Multitudes of Jews are there for the feast celebration from all over Israel, including many Galileans.
- While in Jerusalem, He drives the moneychangers out of the temple, performs many miracles, and speaks with Nicodemus about the necessity of being brought forth from above for inheritance in the kingdom.
- From there He travels to Samaria and remains two days, speaking with the woman at the well and others in the city about the fountain of water springing up to life.
- Then Jesus returns to Galilee, His native region.
- Because His fame is now widely known, He is received well — at least initially — because the Galileans have seen Him perform miracles in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration.
- Returning to Cana once again, Jesus heals the nobleman’s son.

Luke specifically points out that Jesus returns “in the power of the Spirit.” What does this mean?

- Undoubtedly, Jesus never needed to be saved since He was without sin.
- That being the case, since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and lived without sin, He was therefore indwelt by, and filled with, the Holy Spirit from the very time of His birth, even from the point of conception.
- The way He lived demonstrates this.
- But something additional happened at His baptism, which launched His ministry around the age of thirty.
- When He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and the Father in heaven said audibly, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

- What was that all about?
- Acts 10:38 states that, at His baptism, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

I believe that, in the context of Christ’s coming ministry, this was an endowment with power for carrying out His earthly ministry.

- The Scriptures are very clear that although Jesus was fully God, and never ceased to be God, He deliberately chose to lay aside the use of His divine attributes when He came to Earth.
- In other words, He chose to live as a man on Earth and not as God.
- For carrying out His ministry, therefore, He needed the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, as we do.
- Thus, Jesus was a model for us as to how to serve the Lord and minister to others by drawing upon the Spirit’s power.
- After His baptism, He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.
- Then in the power of the Spirit He turned the water into wine.

He ministered to Nicodemus and the woman at the well in the power of the Spirit.

- Then He returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee after His time in Judea (Luke 4:14) and healed the nobleman’s son in the power of the Spirit.
- Everything Jesus did in His ministry was in the power of the Holy Spirit. What an example for us to follow!
- The indwelling of the Spirit occurs at the point of salvation.

- Spirit-filling occurs whenever we surrender to the Holy Spirit in obedience so that we are characterized by walking in the Spirit.
- That should be our daily experience.
- But the enduement of power is for giving bread to hungry people — whether they are unbelievers who need to be saved (regenerated) or believers who need to be edified in the Word.
- God gives Spirit-empowering during those times when we ask Him for it in faith (see Luke 11:13).

To whom did Jesus come to minister?

- He made the answer to that question crystal clear.
- Matt. 15:24 He said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
- When He sent out His twelve disciples to start their ministry, He first endued them with “power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Matt. 10:1).
- Then He sent them out and commanded them, saying:
- Matt. 10:5-8: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.”

We must never lose sight of the fact that Jesus and His disciples came, first and foremost, to reach the Jewish people with a particular message that is summed up in Matt. 4:17.

- Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

- The common mistake made by most evangelicals, I believe, is interpreting this verse as referring to initial salvation (regeneration) and therefore meaning that when anyone repents they get a ticket to Heaven.
- I hear that all the time from preachers and read it frequently in commentaries.
- But that is *not* what Jesus and His disciples preached to the first century Jews.
- As emphasized earlier in these studies, it is critical to interpret the Gospels in the historical context of the first century Jews and what they were thinking.
- The first century Jewish people were predominantly Old Testament believers, who were awaiting the coming of Messiah.

When they heard the word *repent*, they were not thinking:

- “Oh, that’s the opposite side of the coin of faith,” as some modern theologians describe it (which, by the way, is a man-made explanation, having no biblical basis).
- Rather, they thought: “I must get right with God in the spirit of 2 Chron. 7:14.
- As a national Israelite, God wants me to humble myself and pray and seek God’s face and turn from my wicked ways.”
- Christ’s call for the Jews of His day to *repent* had nothing to do with salvation (regeneration).
- Rather, it was a message of sanctification, being set apart as Israelites for fulfilling the mission God had for His nation amongst the nations of the world.
- Israel had failed in that mission and had turned away from Jehovah, and one of the consequences was domination by Gentile enemies.

Thus, as the time of Christ's arrival on Earth, Israel was under Roman rule.

- That was a specific judgment of God for Israel's unfaithfulness
- John the Baptist and Jesus and the twelve disciples appear on the scene and begin preaching:
- "Repent! Get right with Jehovah, Jewish people!
- An offer is being made to you — the kingdom of the heavens is at hand."
- As noted earlier, the *kingdom of the heavens* is not Heaven, the place of God's dwelling.
- It is the ruling realm of the kingdom, New Jerusalem, where Jesus will dwell throughout the Millennium, along with His bride and co-regent.

Numerous Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah, had promised Israel rulership over the nations of Earth in the Messianic kingdom.

- That promise is irrevocable and will one day be fulfilled.
- But it was a promise of an *earthly* kingdom, not an *heavenly* one.
- Thus, Israel is guaranteed, as a very minimum, an earthly kingdom.
- But Jesus came to offer something much grander — inclusion in the *heavenly* realm of His Messianic kingdom, the Garden of Eden-like ruling realm known as New Jerusalem.
- Jesus told Nathanael — "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" —
- that he would be included in that realm, a place where the angels of heaven descend and ascend between the heavenly and earthly realms.
- Presumably, this is the same imagery that Jacob saw in his dream of the stairway to heaven.

To be included in that realm, one must qualify, and to qualify, one must repent — turn from sin and return to fellowship with Jehovah God.

- Then, from the expanded teachings of Jesus, we learn that one must go forward obeying the Lord in faithfulness.
- A good summary of the qualifications for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens can be found in the Sermon on the Mount.
- To summarize, Christ came to offer the Jews inclusion in the heavenly realm of the Messianic kingdom if the nation would repent and go forward living in obedience and faithfulness.
- He performed miracles to confirm His authority as the Messiah, the Son of God, and to signify the kingdom was at hand.

One of the primary forums Jesus utilized for proclaiming this message was the synagogue.

- Luke puts a magnifying glass for us on one of those occasions where Jesus taught in the synagogue at Nazareth.
- Luke 4:15-16 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.
- Perhaps we could put it this way: Jesus attended corporate worship service on a regular basis.
- Do you have a regular habit of attending church on Sunday?

Warren Wiersbe said:

- *It was our Lord's custom to attend public worship, a custom His followers should imitate today (Heb. 10:24-25). He might have argued that the "religious system" was corrupt, or that He didn't need the instruction; but instead, He made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer.*
- Charles Ryrie said
- *From the start of His public ministry, the Lord made a habit of attending the synagogue worship (Luke 4:16), and he continued that practice to the end of his earthly life. His example speaks to individuals who excuse themselves from attending corporate worship because they "get nothing out of the service." No defender of public worship should ever try to make his case on the basis of the ability of the preacher. We worship to meet God.*

Not only did Jesus attend the synagogue worship, He also participated in the services.

In v. 17, the synagogue ruler or rabbi (essentially, the pastor of the congregation) calls on Jesus to read the Scriptures, and He is handed the Isaiah scroll.

Jesus turns to the passage we know as Isa. 61:1-2.

- John 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."
- Curiously, Isa. 61:2 continues with the phrase, "and the day of vengeance of our God."

But Jesus does not read that phrase.

- We will discover why in just a moment.

- But first, notice v. 21 in the text:
- 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
- Jesus applies the Isa. 61 text to Himself, as if to say:
- "I am the Messiah, and this Scripture is prophetic of Me."
- Jesus claims the Spirit of Jehovah is upon Him (Luke 4:18).
- Luke, inspired in his writing by the Holy Spirit, says the same thing of Jesus in v. 14:
- "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee." Luke is tying Jesus to the fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah, and Jesus does the same.

Notice the claims Jesus makes by applying this prophecy to Himself.

- The Lord has anointed (ordained) Him to preach the gospel to the poor.
- The common tendency when reading the word *gospel* in the Scriptures is to think of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, as Paul describes it in 1 Cor. 15:3-4.
- But that is not how the word is being used here.
- The term in its simplest sense means "good news," and that is how it is used in both Isa. 61 and Luke 4.
- Jesus came to bring good news to those who are poor.
- And we know from His broader teachings, He is not merely referring to an economic status.
- He is referring to those who are poor in spirit.
- Poverty of spirit is humility.
- It is realizing who God is and who you are and, therefore, understanding your rightful place before Him.

Jesus didn't come to preach to the haughty and arrogant who refused to listen.

- He came to preach to the humble-spirited, those who were willing to listen.
- Think of the arrogant Pharisee who said, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men — I am so much better.”
- In contrast, the tax collector hung his head and cried out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!”
- Do you see the difference in spirit?
- Jesus came to proclaim good news about the kingdom to those who are poor in spirit.
- Although there is certainly a spiritual application to salvation in this statement, for no one can be saved apart from humbly accepting God’s grace by faith, that is not really what Jesus is saying.
- In this context, Jesus came to preach good news to humble Jews who are already Old Testament believers.

The nature of the good news is described in v. 19 as, “the acceptable year of the Lord” which, to the Jews, was the Year of Jubilee which came every fiftieth year.

- It was a year of great joy and celebration in Israel.
- The brokenhearted rejoiced. The captives were set free.
- Those who were oppressed with debt were released from their debts.
- All normal work ceased and national Israel enjoyed a time of perpetual celebration.
- The Year of Jubilee was truly a time of rejoicing.
- In the context of Christ’s mission, it symbolizes Messiah’s kingdom.
- The good news is that Messiah has come, and He will ultimately usher in His kingdom and, with it, many benefits that will bring joy to all.
- Again, this can have a spiritual application to salvation, but that is not what the Jews of the first century are

thinking, and in this context, it is not Christ’s intended meaning.

Jesus also came to give sight to the blind.

- In the song *Amazing Grace*, John Newton used recovery of sight as a spiritual metaphor for salvation (regeneration):
- “I ... was blind, but now I see.”
- Though there may be spiritual applications to salvation, that is *not* how Jesus is using the term.
- In the Jewish mind, when Messiah comes, He will make all things clear.
- All questions will be resolved; all error will be corrected; all wrongs will be righted; truth will prevail in the culture.
- In this sense, those who are blind will see again
- While this phrase could possibly also be a reference to the miracles Jesus performed as Messiah — giving sight to the blind, in this case — even if it is, it is with a view to the Messianic kingdom when there will be no more blindness to truth.
- Revelation will then be complete.

Something is missing from Christ’s reading of Isa. 61:1-2.

- He does not quote all of v. 2.
- He leaves off the latter half of the verse, the phrase: “and the day of vengeance of our God.”
- Why is it excluded?
- One reason is because it is not good news.
- *The day of vengeance of our God* is a reference to the tribulation which is yet future.
- The second reason Jesus does not quote this phrase is because it is not the purpose for His first coming.
- It will be fulfilled at His second coming.

- But Old Testament believers would have been oblivious to that fact.
- Many Old Testament prophecies have both a near-term fulfillment and a more distant, long-term fulfillment.
- But there is no indication of that in the text itself.
- Bible scholars refer to this as prophetic foreshortening, which can be likened to a mountain range.
- From a distance, the range appears to be a single mountain, having one peak.

What cannot be seen is that a gap or valley is behind the mountain peak with yet another peak behind it.

- Thus, the Old Testament reader cannot see the gap of time between the two fulfillments of the prophecy.
- Hindsight is necessary, which we are privileged to have, given our historical vantage point.
- The point is, Jesus knows it is not appropriate to read the phrase, “and the day of vengeance of our God,” because it does not apply to His first coming.
- Nor does it fit the nature of His mission to the Jewish people — urging them to repent and become qualified to inherit the kingdom of the heavens, which is a joyful theme.
- Luke 4:18-19 are, therefore, a beautiful summation of Christ’s first century mission to Israel.
- Did the people receive Him and embrace His ministry?
- Sadly, they did not.

Luke 4:20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

- After reading from Isaiah 61, Jesus closes the scroll, returns it to the pastor, and sits down.
- All eyes are glued on Jesus.

- The power of the Spirit upon Him has impressed them greatly.
- Then amidst their “deer-in-the-headlights” glaring, Jesus says in v. 21, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
- What is their response?
- Luke 4:22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

All marvel at the words of grace that proceed from His mouth.

- How encouraging! How profound!
- They wonder, “Isn’t this Joseph the carpenter’s son?”
- He’s different! What happened to Him? We knew Him as a mere boy growing up in our community.
- But now there’s something profound about Him!”
- Ah, but the positive reception changes dramatically.
- In vs. 23-27 Jesus essentially prophecies that Israel will reject His kingdom offer, but the Gentiles will accept it.
- Luke 4:23 He said to them, “You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.’”

“Physician, heal yourself!” was a saying common in the first century, even in the secular culture.

- Generally speaking, the proverb means that one should solve His own problems before trying to solve the problems of others.
- In the immediate context, the Jews of Nazareth are jealous that Jesus has healed the nobleman’s son (who was from Capernaum).

- They want Jesus to work miracles in His hometown of Nazareth.
- Rather than receiving Christ's kingdom offer, they want to be razzle-dazzled by spectacular phenomena, which they view as nothing more than circus acts.
- Interestingly, Jesus implies the Jews will surely use that phrase against Him in the future.

Indeed, this was fulfilled as He was hanging on the cross.

- Matt. 27:39-42 Those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."
- As if to say, "Physician, heal Yourself!
- If you are truly who you claim to be, then solve your own dilemma and come down from that cross!"
- Jesus knows they will make these charges, because they will not believe Him, not will they accept His mission or His offer.
- He will, therefore, take the offer from Israel and give it to the Gentiles.

Luke 4:24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

- Jesus knows that even His own countrymen — the people of Galilee, and Nazareth in particular — will not accept His offer.
- Commentator Thomas Constable says:
- *The Greek word dektos, translated welcome or accepted, is the same one that occurs in v. 19 ("to proclaim the*

acceptable year of the Lord"). Perhaps Jesus used this word in v. 24, to indicate that even though God wanted to accept the people, they would not accept the Prophet whom He had sent to tell them of His grace. Prophets were not welcome in their "hometown," because hometown folks hardly ever fully trust one of their own, who leaves town, becomes famous, and then returns home.

Christ's statement is yet another indication of their rejection of His offer and the reason He makes the same offer to the Gentiles.

- Luke 4:25-26 "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.
- 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

Jesus shares two well-known miracles performed in the Old Testament — one by Elijah and the other by Elisha — during the divided monarchy in Israel.

- Two common bonds tie together these miracles.
- First, both miracles occurred during the divided monarchy, when Israel was apostate, having turned from Jehovah in sinful idolatry.
- In other words, the nation was living sinfully, needing repentance.
- Keep in mind that miracles were only used during three eras in Israel's history, intended to get the nation's attention with respect to the kingdom.

- The first era was when the theocracy was forming under Moses and Joshua.
- The second era was after the kingdom had divided and the nation was turning away from Jehovah.
- The third era was during the time of Christ, because He was offering inheritance in the kingdom of the heavens.

Christ is referring to two miracles that had been done in the second era, during the times of Elijah and Elisha.

- The second common bond between these two miracles is that Gentiles are the recipients of the miraculous intervention in both cases.
- First is the widow at Zarephath, whose son was raised from the dead by Elijah.
- She was a Gentile from Phoenicia.
- This miracle of the widow's son being raised signifies the Gentiles' acceptance of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and the eternal life He offers.
- The other miracle is when Naaman, the Syrian general, is healed by Elisha of leprosy by washing seven times in the Jordan River.
- Seven is God's number of perfection and, in the Scriptures, represents God's seventh day of rest and the seventh period of a thousand years, or the millennial reign of Christ.

Washing seven times seems to symbolize Christ's offer to Gentile believers that they will be included in New Jerusalem, the heavenly realm of the kingdom, if they will repent and be cleansed of sins.

- Gentiles must qualify to rule with Jesus in His city of reward, just as the Jews.
- We must live obediently and faithfully to the Lord if we want to be His bride and co-regent.

- That message was largely rejected by the Jews.
- Thus Christ has not only extended eternal life and salvation to the Gentiles, He has extended the offer of reward to the Gentiles as well.

Upon hearing of these miracles for Gentiles, the Jews in the synagogue become furious.

- They do not like Christ's insinuation that the Jews will reject His offer and that the Gentiles will receive it.
- Full of rage, they lead Jesus to the precipice at the edge of town and fully intend to cast Him off.
- This is no mere grassy knoll. Mt Precipice in Nazareth is more than a thousand-foot drop.
- They would have murdered Jesus had He not providentially escaped from their midst.
- This episode clearly demonstrates the Jews' rejection of His offer and presages His coming crucifixion.
- Remarkably, in this recounting of Christ's near-death experience, Luke gives — in a matter of a few verses — a complete overview of Christ's ministry:
 - His mission to the Jews — vs. 18-19
 - His rejection by the Jews — vs. 23-24, 28-30
 - His reception by the Gentiles — vs. 25-27

Today, the church of Jesus Christ is predominantly Gentile.

- Jesus offers His church, and you in particular, the privilege of ruling together with Him.
- But it's not automatic, as is widely taught in evangelical Christianity.
- Satan must love that, for it leads saints to believe they don't need to prepare.
- Your judgment seat verdict determines your place in His coming kingdom.

- Are you preparing to meet Jesus and give a good account?
- Or do you live in disbelief, ready to throw Him off a cliff, so to speak?