

MARK 1:21-34

CAPERNAUM:

LIVING IN THE TOWN OF JESUS

Sitting beside the loveliest lake in the world, is the Town of Jesus.
Sitting beside the greatest road of the ancient world, is the Town of Jesus.
Witness to the greatest sermons ever preached, is the Town of Jesus.
Witness to the greatest miracles ever performed, is the Town of Jesus.

Welcome to Capernaum, the Town of Jesus. No city or town on earth was ever called the Town of Jesus. No spot on earth was graced with more sermons, more signs, or more miracles than the Town of Jesus, Capernaum. Why do we call it that? Listen to Matthew 9:1 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Capernaum was the town of Jesus. Why did He pick this small town in Galilee as His home base?

Galilee¹ was one of the great road centers of the ancient world. It has been said that, "Judea is on the way to nowhere; Galilee is on the way to everywhere." Palestine was the land bridge between Europe and Africa; all land traffic must go through her. The great Road of the Sea led from Damascus, by way of Galilee, through Capernaum, down past Carmel, along the Plain of Sharon, through Gaza and on to Egypt! It was one of the great roads of the world. Another road led from Acre on the coast away across the Jordan out to Arabia and the frontiers of the empire, a road that was trodden by the regiments and the caravans. And where those roads crossed in Galilee was a town, a town named Capernaum, the town of Jesus.

This morning we are going to read a page from a day in the life of Capernaum, the Town of Jesus. I hope the wonders of Jesus, and this privileged town, will never be the same to you again!

Mark 1:21-34 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.²³ Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,²⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying,

¹ Barclay, Mark, p. 52-55.

“Be quiet, and come out of him!”²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.²⁷ Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”²⁸ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee. ²⁹ Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.³⁰ But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once.³¹ So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. ³² At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed.³³ And the whole city was gathered together at the door.³⁴ Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Capernaum, at the loveliest spot on earth by a lake in a land called Galilee. Capernaum² is second only to Jerusalem, as one of the places most frequently mentioned in the Gospels. Jesus went there, on the borders of the territories of Zebulon and Naphtali, from Nazareth (Matt. 4:13) and there found his first disciples, Peter, Andrew and the two sons of Zebedee (Matt. 4:18–22). He taught there in the synagogue (John 6:24–59) and directed Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish with which to pay the tax-gatherers (Matt. 17:24–7). He also lodged there in Peter’s house, healing the sick and teaching (Mark 1:29–34; 2:1–12; Luke 4:38–44). But as Jesus left Capernaum he condemned it along with other cities for their spiritual indifference. They could take Him or leave Him, they were ho hum about Jesus. They had not heeded His calls to repentance (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15).

What did those who lived in the town of Jesus fail to do? They failed to respond to God in their midst. They were not antagonistic, they were merely indifferent. They did not deny Him, they merely quietly ignored Him. They did not rebel against Him, they merely had other things that were more important than paying attention to God.

What did the town of Jesus, Capernaum ignore? So many changed lives all around them!

Capernaum as we will see in a few weeks was a place where Jesus declared failure was no barrier to His love. This was clearly proclaimed at Capernaum when Jesus called Matthew. Matthew³ served King Herod Antipas in Capernaum of Galilee collecting tariffs on goods passing on the road from Damascus to the Mediterranean Sea. To function in this capacity Matthew would have been an

² G.G. The Jerusalem, *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, (New York: Prentice Hall Press) 1990

³ Douglas, J. D., Comfort, Philip W. & Mitchell, Donald, Editors, *Who's Who in Christian History*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

educated man, acquainted with the Greek language as well as the native Aramaic, thus qualifying him to write the Gospel of Matthew. As a tax collector Matthew may have been a man of wealth, but this occupation also caused him to be despised by the Jews and considered among the lowest of people. The Pharisees consistently spoke of tax collectors in the same breath with sinners (Matt. 11:19; Mark 2:16; Luke 7:34; 15:1).

And what was it like to have lived in the town of Jesus? In their presence⁴, as they watched Jesus, they had seen blind men received their sight, lame men made to walk, lepers were cleansed, the deaf recovered hearing, dead persons were raised to life again.

As you read the Gospels you find that the performance of such wonderful works was for a time **Christ's daily occupation!** He went about in Galilee and other districts, "doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil."

The "miracles" recorded in detail by the Gospels in and near Capernaum give no idea whatever of the extent to which these wondrous operations were carried on.

- ✓ The leper cleansed on the descent from the mountain, when the great sermon was preached,
- ✓ the palsied servant of the Roman centurion restored to health and strength,
- ✓ Peter's mother-in-law cured of a fever,
- ✓ the demoniac dispossessed in the synagogue of Capernaum,
- ✓ the widow's son brought back to life while he was being carried out to burial,

—these, and the like, are but a few samples selected out of an innumerable multitude of deeds not less remarkable, whether regarded as mere miracles or as acts of kindness.

The truth of this statement appears in the last 3 verses of our text (v. 32-34), as Mark is rehearsing Peter's account of the works done by Jesus at the close of a busy day:

"And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils; and all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils."

This was what happened on a single Sabbath evening in Capernaum, shortly after the Sermon on the Mount was preached; and such scenes appear to have been common at this time: for we read a little farther on in the same Gospel (Mark 3:9), that

"Jesus spake unto His disciples, that a small ship should wait on Him because of the multitude, lest they should throng Him; for He had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as many as had plagues."

⁴ These next few paragraphs adapted from Bruce, Alexander Balman, *The Training of the Twelve*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995

And yet again Mark tells how “they went into an house, and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.”

Capernaum was witness to more of Christ's miracles than any other spot on earth. Jesus made His headquarters in this beautiful, prosperous fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He performed more miracles and preached more sermons in and around Capernaum than at any other place during His entire ministry. It was there that He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead and healed the nobleman's son. It was here that He healed the demoniac, Peter's mother-in-law, the woman with the hemorrhage, the two blind men, the centurion's servant, the dumb demoniac, and the paralytic who was lowered through the roof by his friends.

Have you ever traced the size of Capernaum on Christ's ministry calendar. Would you do that with me this morning? Get your Bible and notebook ready, this will bless your soul, looking at our wonderful Jesus giving Himself to seek and find His sheep.

1. Is rejected by the people of Nazareth, dwells at Capernaum, Matt. 4:13-16; Luke 4:16-31.
2. Chooses Peter, Andrew, James, and John as disciples, miracle of the draught of fishes [Capernaum], Matt. 4:18-22; **Mark 1:16-20**; Luke 5:1-11. Goes on to preach throughout Galilee, Matt. 4:23-25; **Mark 1:35-39**; Luke 4:42-44.
3. Heals a demoniac [Capernaum], **Mark 1:21-28**; Luke 4:31-37.
4. Heals Peter's mother-in-law [Capernaum], Matt. 8:14-17; **Mark 1:29-34**; Luke 4:38-41.
5. Heals a leper in Galilee, Matt. 8:2-4; **Mark 1:40-45**; Luke 5:12-16.
6. Heals a paralytic [Capernaum], Matt. 9:2-8; **Mark 2:1-12**; Luke 5:17-26.
7. Calls Matthew [Capernaum], Matt. 9:9; **Mark 2:13,14**; Luke 5:27,28.
8. Defines the law of the Sabbath on the occasion of his disciples plucking the ears of grain [Capernaum], Matt. 12:1-8; **Mark 2:23-28**; Luke 6:1-5.
9. Heals a man having a withered hand [Capernaum], Matt. 12:9-14; **Mark 3:1-6**; Luke 6:6-11. Withdraws from Capernaum to the Sea of Galilee, where he heals many, Matt. 12:15-21; **Mark 3:7-12**. Goes up into a mountain, and calls and ordains twelve disciples [Galilee], Matt. 10:2-4; **Mark 3:13-19**; Luke 6:12-19. Delivers the "Sermon on the Mount" [Galilee], Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:20-49. and Heals the servant of the centurion [**near Capernaum**], Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10.
10. Anointed by a sinful woman [**Capernaum**], Luke 7:36-50. And then, returns to Capernaum, Matt. 9:1; **Mark 5:21**; Luke 8:40.
11. Eats with tax collectors and sinners, and discourses on fasting [Capernaum], Matt. 9:10-17; **Mark 2:15-22**; Luke 5:29-39.
12. Raises to life the daughter of Jairus, and heals the woman who has the issue of blood [Capernaum], Matt. 9:18-26; **Mark 5:22-43**; Luke 8:41-56.
13. Heals two blind men, and casts out a spirit who causes muteness [**Capernaum**], Matt. 9:27-34.
14. Walks on the sea [Galilee], Matt. 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21.
15. Teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum, John 6:22-65.
16. Disciples forsake him [Capernaum], John 6:66-71. So he departs feeds four thousand, Matt. 15:32-39; **Mark 8:1-9**.
17. Refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees [region of Magdala], Matt. 16:1-4; **Mark 8:10-12**. Cautions his disciples against the leaven of hypocrisy [Sea of Galilee], Matt. 16:4-12; **Mark 8:13-21**. Heals a blind man [Bethsaida], **Mark 8:22-26**.
18. Miracle of tribute money in the fish's mouth, Matt. 17:24-27. Reproves the ambition of his disciples [Capernaum], Matt. 18:1-35; **Mark 9:33-50**; Luke 9:46-50. And then leaves to not ever return to Capernaum again. He teaches in the temple at Jerusalem, at the Feast of Dedication, John 10:22-39. Returns to Bethany, and raises Lazarus from the dead, John 11:1-46. Triumphant entry into Jerusalem, while the people throw palm branches in the way, Matt. 21:1-11; **Mark 11:1-11**; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-195

What happens to Capernaum? For a moment look at Matthew 11:20. All those marvels had little impact on most citizens of Capernaum; and because of their indifference they would not be exalted to heaven as they thought they deserved but would rather descend to Hades. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades. "

5Swanson, James, Editor, *New Nave's Topical Bible*, (Oak Harbor, Washington: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1994.

So Capernaum was Christ's town! Jesus made His headquarters in this beautiful, prosperous fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He performed more miracles and preached more sermons in and around Capernaum than at any other place during His entire ministry. It was there that He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead and healed the nobleman's son. It was here that He healed the demoniac, Peter's mother-in-law, the woman with the hemorrhage, the two blind men, the centurion's servant, the dumb demoniac, and the paralytic who was lowered through the roof by his friends.

Yet those marvels⁶ had little impact on most citizens of Capernaum; and because of their indifference they would not be exalted to heaven as they thought they deserved but would rather descend to Hades.

Although Hades is sometimes used in Scripture to represent the place of all the departed dead, it is often used, as here, to represent hell, the place of eternal punishment for the unsaved.

Jesus said that the miracles He performed in Capernaum were so amazing that, had they occurred in Sodom, ... it would have remained to this day. Its people would have repented of their sin, turned to God, and been spared destruction.

As far as is known, the people of Capernaum had no homosexual problem or any other apparent moral deficiency. Most of them were upright, law-abiding, and decent. Yet because they ignored and rejected the Son of God, their fate on the day of judgment will be worse than that of Sodom.

Capernaum exceeded Chorazin and Bethsaida in privilege, and Sodom exceeded Tyre and Sidon in wickedness. In these striking and sobering contrasts, Jesus makes plain that people who are the most blessed by God will receive the worst punishment if they reject Him. Judgment against the moral abominations of Sodom will be exceeded by judgment against the spiritual indifference of Capernaum. For the respectable and upright unbelievers of Capernaum, Hades will be hotter than for the crude and immoral unbelievers of Sodom. The self-righteous orthodox person is even more repulsive in God's sight than the idolatrous and immoral pagan.

The people of Capernaum never persecuted Jesus, and few of them even criticized Him. They never mocked Him, ridiculed Him, ran Him out of town, or threatened His life. Yet their sin was worse than if they had done those things. Theirs was not the sin of violence or of immorality but of indifference. As G. A. Studdert-Kennedy has written in his poem "Indifference," "They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain."

⁶ The following is from Matthew 11:20 comments by MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

Jesus' teaching perhaps mildly interested them, and His miracles entertained them, but nothing more. His grace never rent their hearts, His truth never changed their minds, His warning about sin never provoked repentance, and His offer of salvation never induced faith. And because of their indifferent unbelief, Jesus said to them, I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.

The eighteenth-century commentator Johann Bengel wrote, "Every hearer of the New Testament truth is either much happier or much more wretched than the men who lived before Christ's coming." Such a hearer is also either more secure or more condemned.⁷

The question to face this morning is, what is your attitude toward Jesus? Are you paying attention or are you indifferent?

Revelation 3:18-20

18 "I counsel you to

- ✓ buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; GIVE
- ✓ and white garments, that you may be clothed; SEEK
- ✓ that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; PLAN
- ✓ and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see; STUDY
- ✓ 19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; LEARN
- ✓ Therefore be zealous and repent; RETURN
- ✓ 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me; COMMUNE

How incredibly Christ loves, even such unbelief and unconcern as these had, even to them he appeals with these:

JESUS SAYS COMMUNE WITH ME DAILY: V. 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me". Holman Hunt the British artist, painted the famous picture of Christ outside knocking. As displayed, a friend quietly pointed out, he had missed a tiny detail, the latch handle on the outside of the door... "No, the latch" Holman said, "is on the inside, we control the opening." But what does it mean that Christ wants to dine with us?

Those who lived in the Ancient world usually had three meals.

- ✓ AKRATISARA = bread dipped in wine/am.
- ✓ ARISTON = a snack eaten noontday at work, or roadside.

⁷ MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

- ✓ This word is DEIPNON, evening meal, the main meal of the day, lingered over after long day's work.

Open the door of your life to Jesus as Lord and He lingers forever as Lord and Savior. But, the handle of salvation is on your side lost friend. The handle of fellowship is on your side, Christian.