

Capernaum – The Hub of Jesus’ Ministry

Growing Our Faith in the Midst of Religious Darkness



Today, we find Capernaum a beautiful, peaceful village. Yet, it was not always that way. Capernaum is the combination of two Hebrew words: Kfar Nahum, meaning “village of Nahum.” In Hebrew, *Nahum* means “the comforter,” and in this ancient seaside village where Jesus most assuredly walked, we will hear and understand how He became the manifestation of the Comforter in a dark, oppressed region.

After the Assyrian exile, the Galilee area was inhabited by pagan people under the rule of foreign powers. Across the Sea of Galilee were 10 Greek cities known as the Decapolis and characterized by idols and altars to hundreds of Greek gods. In the 1st century BC when Jews began returning to the Galilee area, they lived in the midst of ever-present pagan worship. Sadly, evidence suggests that many Jewish people fell to the temptations of paganism and began to follow the traditions, customs and worship of foreign gods.

Thus, tension arose. Living under pagan influence, yet prodded by scribes and Pharisees demanding a very strict lifestyle, and driven by the perceived need to “prove” their Jewishness, the people of Capernaum and the surrounding area found nothing but spiritual darkness. Religion, oppression and tradition suffocated them and many succumbed to the temptation to worship other deities. They were in desperate need of a Light to cast away the darkness.

*¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth, He came and **dwelt in Capernaum**, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:*

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles:

¹⁶ The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,

And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death

Light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:12-17, quote: Isaiah 9:1-2, emphasis mine)

Isaiah spoke those words and, 800 years later, Jesus fulfilled it when He came to Capernaum! As prophecy declared, He came to a Gentile village by way of the sea and beyond the Jordan, to a people in utter darkness. Mercifully, His light shone as a beacon of hope, and miracles were commonplace. Capernaum became the hub of Jesus’ ministry. The Living Word spoke the Word, and Scripture says that if every miracle was recorded, no book could contain them all.

Having grown up in nearby Nazareth, Jesus was a Galilean. He knew the customs and how to speak to them, and He certainly understood the pressure of being Jewish. He came to a people in search of a Guiding Light and He delivered a message of grace, love and repentance without condemnation.

Every day Jesus moved and ministered among the sick, tormented, and impaired. He never turned anyone down or sent them away. A woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment and was healed, a lame man was let down through a thatched roof to be touched by the Great Physician, and even Peter's mother was healed. The wonder-working, miraculous power of Jesus was at work.

I wonder...did the people of Capernaum become dull and insensitive to miracles? Was it so commonplace that they became complacent? Is it just the opposite for us as believers? Do we have the faith to believe God still does miracles? Either way leaves us a bound-up mess. Are we ready to break off the shackles of faithless religion and expect God to do what only He can?

The people of Capernaum lived in very simple homes, but built elaborate décor for the synagogue. Not all bad, assuming the Light of the World remained the focus and not a spotlight on fancy buildings. God is not interested in fancy buildings and amazing special effects. He is interested in faith.

Despite all the miracles enacted in Capernaum, faith did not take root there and thus, neither did repentance.

²⁰ Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:... ²³ And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.” (Matthew 11:20, 23-24)

Today's beautiful, peaceful village of Capernaum is a town in ruins. In a harsh rebuke, Jesus deemed the place worse than Sodom. Why? Because they lacked faith in Jesus. Faith leads to repentance, but instead, the people relied upon miracles rather than the Miracle Worker.

It is tempting to say, "If I only lived at the time of Jesus, I would believe." Yet, the Bible says faith is the evidence of things not seen. What we see is only capable of reinforcing what we believe and put our faith in! Just as the synagogue in Capernaum was dressed up on the outside, but void of faith on the inside, so we too might look good on the outside, yet lack faith on the inside. The same religious spirit that plagued Capernaum can invade us.

The Light who came into our darkness is looking for faith so that He might impart His righteousness!

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus came to a dark, oppressed area and the Light dawned. Those who followed by faith saw the Light. Those who spent their time looking for miracles or dressing up the outside became victim to a religious spirit.

Are we religious people living in our own Capernaum? Or has faith unlocked the gift of righteousness?

*²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, **through faith in Jesus Christ**, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom*

God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Jesus' miracles still happen to those who trust Him by faith! After all, being justified and putting on His righteousness through the gift of salvation is the greatest miracle of all.