

Christ at Capernaum

Luke 4:31-44

Capernaum was a collection of khaki colored cubes, clustered on the Sea of Galilee's north shore. It was a crossroads community. On its way from a port on the Mediterranean, a Roman road dipped by before plunging up into the mountains to Damascus.

The city harbor was busy. Cargo boats drifted in from other lakeside ports. Fishing boats bobbed on little waves that slapped against their hulls. And dockside markets were crowded with shoppers.

But this day, the shops were all shuttered, and the streets were silent. It was the Sabbath. So the only activity was behind the limestone pillars of the city synagogue.

Nazareth will forever be known as Jesus' boyhood home. But Capernaum could boast it was Christ's adult home.

Rejected at Nazareth, the Master moved in with some local fisherman. Peter and Andrew lived in a modest home not far from the fishing piers. Of course, Jesus spent most of His time on the road, traveling from village to village. But He always returned to the little house in Capernaum. And for a few golden days, it was home.

This Sabbath the Savior was invited to speak at Capernaum's synagogue. So, just as they did in Nazareth, Jews packed the pews to listen.

John chronicled Jesus' early ministry in Judea. But this is the first glimpse Luke gives us of our Lord's life in Galilee. And in it, Luke shows us more than what Jesus did.

He also shows us why Christ came to earth.

The Master's Mercy

Our Redeemer's reputation radiated out from Him in all directions. Reports and rumors of His powers were on everyone's lips.

And the report about Him was spreading into every locality in the surrounding district. Verse 37

The Sabbath sun was inching down to hide itself behind the high green hills of the western ridge. That meant the Sabbath was ending.

The people of Capernaum stood on their porches or watched out of windows. And as soon as the last sliver of sun was gone, they spilled out into the streets.

It was a pitiful, pathetic scene. Luke was a physician by trade. So he described it like a doctor.

While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; Verse 40

The language Luke used described more than mere injuries or sicknesses. The people carried by friends or family members down the cobbled streets to Peter's home suffered from chronic, incurable diseases.

Mothers carried little boys who trembled with palsy. Fathers carried little girls with swollen stomachs and legs like matchsticks. Others carried litters that held people who were paralyzed. Still others helped friends hobble down the street whose every waking moment was filled with excruciating, screaming pain.

Most doctors were more magicians than physicians. And there were no hospitals. So the people were utterly without hope.

At least they were before that Sabbath began. But when they heard Jesus was back in town, a light of hope sparked in their eyes. He healed others. Perhaps He would heal them, too.

At Peter's house the healing had already begun. Peter and his wife cared for the fisherman's sick mother-in-law.

He got up and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's home. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, Verse 38

Once again Luke's language was that of a physician. He described her fever as both severe and chronic. It was much more than a flu fever.

No, the old woman had a terrible problem. Perhaps it was a dangerous infection or a sickness she could not seem to throw off.

Peter was not yet a full-fledged disciple. But he had followed Jesus in Judea and Jerusalem, Cana and Nazareth.

So he knew what Christ could do. More than that, he had looked into the Master's eyes. And he knew Jesus not only could help the old woman; he also knew He would.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him to help her. And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them. Verses 38-39

Peter had learned what the Master's mother knew. At Cana, a family friend was embarrassed by his poverty. The man's daughter was being married. But he was a man of limited means. So he could not afford all the wine he needed.

When the man realized the wine he had spent his savings to purchase was all gone, not one knew what to do. No one but Mary.

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." John 2:3

Years of living with the Son of God had taught Mary how to handle problems. Whatever they were, she simply brought them to her Son.

That is what Peter and his wife did. They had grieved to watch the old woman suffer. So they asked Jesus to help her.

Of course, Christ could have healed the woman before Sabbath services or even days earlier. After all, He had been living with Peter for some time.

That woman's sickness was not soothed until the afternoon of that Sabbath for the same reason many of our problems are not solved. No one had bothered to ask for Jesus' help. And James wrote that is always a path to poverty and pain.

You do not have because you do not ask. James 4:2

The people of Capernaum did not know Jesus as well as Peter did. But they had looked into the Lord's eyes. So they never questioned His willingness to help them.

They had seen tears well up in His eyes when He saw a man with cloudy gray eyes tapping down the street with begging cup. So they never doubted that Jesus cared for them.

That is not the real reason our Redeemer came to this earth. But it is an wonderful and inevitable result of His coming

Over the years, mankind's concept of God had gotten twisted and warped. And somehow they missed the marvelous message that the Lord of the universe is a God of love.

Since Moses met the Lord on the mountain, God had told men about His great love. But while God's people read the scriptures, they still did not see Him clearly.

...the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; Exodus 34:6

So God came and lived among men as a Man. Then no one could doubt that He loved and cared for them. They could see it in His eyes.

Even our Lord's enemies knew He cared for people drowning in pain or problems. So when they tried to set a trap for Him they always baited it with some person in trouble: a man with a limp, paralyzed arm or a fallen woman sprawled in the dust.

Neither Peter nor the people who came to Jesus that Sabbath in Capernaum were disappointed. Peter's mother was healed instantly and absolutely. And so were each and every one of the frail and feeble folk who came to Him in the last gray light of dusk.

...all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them. Verse 40

As always, Luke was very specific. Jesus did not heal the people all at once. They came to Him one-by-one. And that is how He healed them.

Our loving Lord took the time to help each person individually. And if we come to Him with our problems, we will find just what the people of Capernaum found.

Jesus is a God of both pity and power.

The Master's Mission

Yes, it is true that one of the results our Redeemer came and walked the footpaths and donkey trails of Palestine was a delightful, definitive demonstration of God's love. But that is not why He came.

In the synagogue that same morning, we see the Master's main mission in action.

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, Verse 33

It might be surprising to us. But sitting calmly among the worshipers in Sabbath services was a man who was both plagued and possessed by one of the devil's demons.

The man was not always crazed and out of his head. Much of the time he was appeared perfectly normal. But the very presence of the Lord of all creation so tormented and terrorized the demon, it cried out in anger and agony.

"Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" Verse 34

That was not an isolated incident, either. After the lamps were lit at Peter's house that evening, the same thing happened.

Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" Verse 41

The demons knew their time was limited. They knew one day soon they will be utterly and absolutely destroyed: destroyed by the same Savior who stood before them.

So they could not simply sleep deep within the people they possessed and hope to hide from His all-seeing eye. They had no doubt. Jesus knew they were there. And they knew who He was. The Lord of all the Universe.

That is what the demons shouted out. But Jesus did not allow them to proclaim His purity or His power. He never does.

But to the wicked God says, “What right have you to tell of My statutes and to take My covenant in your mouth?” Psalm 50:16

Telling people about God’s great love, Christ’s compassion, and the Savior’s sacrifice is much more than a duty. It is a marvelous, matchless privilege God grants to those who have chosen to love and trust Him. And only to them.

Paul did not allow a demon-possessed young woman to proclaim that he was God’s messenger and missionary. And Jesus never allowed demons to proclaim His divine purity.

Still, the demons could not stay silent. And when our Savior spoke, they were powerless to remain within the people they tormented.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people, he came out of him without doing him any harm. Verse 35

Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ. Verse 41

Jesus did not merely wage war against Satan’s demonic forces. He destroyed their power whenever and wherever He encountered them. That was His mission here on earth.

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8

Since the dark day in Eden when man first sinned, Satan has ruled this earth with an icy, iron hand. And the source of his power was and always has been sin.

So the only way to destroy the devil’s works was to destroy sin. To do that, Jesus started by perfectly kept God’s righteous Law. That broke the curse that comes to those who disobey God.

Then, He gave His body and His blood on a Roman cross as the pure and perfect sacrifice for sin. And that clenched it.

With His last breath on the cross, Christ cried out, “It is finished!” The price had been fully paid. And sin was finally and forever finished. His mission on earth was complete.

That mission continues as Christ’s Holy Spirit works in the lives of men and women today. His Spirit woos and wins the hearts of men that God might destroy the power of Satan in their lives.

That is also why our righteous Redeemer demands that those who choose to trust in Him repent and turn away from the sin they have sought and the sin they have savored.

Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. 2 Timothy 2:19 (NIV)

There is a marvelous message of hope in Paul’s clear command. We do not have to struggle with sin and wage war with all alone an evil and overpowering enemy. We can be free from the power of Satan in our lives. Indeed, we must.

Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan. And if we allow Him to, He not only can destroy the devil’s power in our lives. He will.

The Master’s Means

The people who dressed in their finest clothes for Sabbath services that morning thought they would hear another dry sermon. They had no notion they would see a raging demoniac set free.

The deliverance would not come from the elaborate rituals and ceremonies charlatans used when they pretended to free demoniacs, either. The man would be freed by words alone.

And amazement came upon them all, and they began talking with one another saying, “What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out.” Verse 36

The people who were actually there and witnessed the demoniac’s deliverance instantly saw the source of the Master’s miracle. It was what He said that worked the wonder.

In fact, it was Christ’s teaching that so alarmed and enraged the demon within the man that he cried out. When the rabbis spoke, the message was not only dry; it was also distant. More than that it was clouded and confused.

Rabbis quoted endless lists of ancient Jewish teachers. And none of them ever seemed to agree. So the shopkeepers and civil servants, the farmers and the fishermen who sat and listened to them left Sabbath services more confused than when they had come.

But there was no equivocation when Jesus spoke. He spoke with power and authority. The Master’s message was focused squarely upon what God’s Holy Word said.

And He presented the scriptures as plain and pure. God said what He meant and meant what He said. The words in the ancient scrolls of Moses, the Psalms and the prophets were divinely inspired and infallibly true. And they still are today.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 2 Timothy 3:16

...no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:21

...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12-13

A sliver of silver moon was sailing a sea of stars by the time Jesus finished healing those who came to Him. So He laid down to sleep for a few hours. Then when dawn was still hours away, He silently slipped out of the house.

When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. Verse 42

High up in the hills outside of town, God’s Son spent precious hours with His Holy Father. Meanwhile, down in Capernaum, the people awoke and realized the wonder working Rabbi was gone.

And they could not imagine life without Him. So they scoured every street and house, every hill and valley until they found Him. Then with tears and pleading, they begged Him not to leave them. But Jesus refused.

But He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” So He kept on preaching in the synagogues... Verses 43-44

There is no conflict. Jesus did come to destroy the works of the devil. But to that He had to proclaim the rich truths of God’s Word.

The book of Revelation previews Satan’s final defeat. And it reveals that only three weapons are powerful enough to defeat the devil.

...they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Revelation 11:12 (NKJV)

Paul used the armor Roman soldiers wore to illustrate believers’ battle with Satan. And while we have a number of defenses, we have only one weapon. It is the same sword our Savior will use to slay the armies of the Antichrist.

The Word of God!

