

CAPERNAUM:

“A City Highly Exalted”

Intro: Following up on our Thanksgiving message last Sunday morning, I would like to look at Capernaum, a city highly exalted by God. Did you know that Capernaum experienced unprecedented blessings from God. It's prominence in the Gospels is second only to the city of Jerusalem. As we shall see, the city of Capernaum enjoyed tremendous blessings and privilege because Christ chose Capernaum as His base of operation.

*** Background On Capernaum**

Capernaum was a very prosperous city in New Testament times. It was located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which provided a flourishing fishing industry. In addition, the fertile plain lying to the southwest of Capernaum along the shore of the Sea of Galilee provided agricultural wealth as well. In addition, Capernaum was located on a major highway connecting Damascus to the Mediterranean Sea coast. Because it was the northern port of entry into Israel, the Romans made Capernaum a tax-station, as well as an administrative and military seat of power. All of these factors made Capernaum a leading commercial center, and provided the Jewish people with immeasurable prosperity and opportunity.

But the true greatness of Capernaum resided in the fact that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, chose Capernaum as His earthly residence. This was a fulfillment of a prediction by the prophet Isaiah. Turn with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 4. I am reading from **Matthew 4, verse 12,**

12 Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through 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 WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND TO THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”

Jesus' choosing to reside in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali was to fulfill Isaiah's prediction. You see, this very location where the people of Israel had experienced so much darkness and death at the hands of invading armies, would one day experience a great light. That light my friends was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He said in **John 8, verse 12**, **"I Am the Light of the world."**

Matthew is telling his readers that when Jesus moved from His hometown of Nazareth and came and settled in Capernaum, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. From this point on Capernaum becomes the most blessed and privileged city in all Israel. It was from this city that Jesus chose six of His twelve disciples. It was here that He performed some of His greatest miracles, and taught some of His greatest sermons. Capernaum was truly a city highly exalted. It was uniquely blessed by God.

The first thing we learn about Capernaum is that six of Christ's disciples were from Capernaum.

I. Jesus Calls Six Of His Disciples From Capernaum

A. The call of Simon Peter and Andrew (Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18)

Matthew 4:18-20—And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He, Jesus, saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.

We learn from Mark's account, in Mark 1:21, that Peter and Andrew were from Capernaum. In Mark's account, following Jesus' calling Peter and Andrew to follow Him, they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. Mark makes it clear that Peter and Andrew lived in Capernaum. Drop down to verse 29 of Mark chapter 1—"And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon Peter and Andrew. Peter's house was right across the street from the synagogue. **Show picture.** Shortly after calling Peter and his brother Andrew, Christ next calls the sons of Zebedee, James and his brother John.

B. The call of James and John (Matthew 4:21-22)

Matthew 4:21 And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him. James and John also lived in Capernaum. We learn from Luke 5:10 that James and John were partners with Peter and Andrew in the fishing business. They all lived in the same town, Capernaum, and fished together.

That's four disciples, Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John. The next disciple Jesus calls is Philip. Turn to John 1:44

C. The call of Philip (John 1:43-44)

John 1:43—The next day Jesus found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.

John tells us that Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter, called here Bethsaida. **Stick with me**, and I will show you that Bethsaida and Capernaum are the same town. Bethsaida means “the house of fishing.” Many New Testament scholars are of the opinion that Bethsaida referred to the fishing district of the larger city of Capernaum. This causes confusion because there was a large city of the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee called Bethsaida, Julius.

We read in Luke 9:10 that Jesus withdrew with His disciples to a city called Bethsaida. As you read on you will discover this is where Jesus taught large crowds about the Kingdom of God, healed multitudes, and fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children. These events all took place in a desert place called Bethsaida, Julius. Most scholars are convinced this is a different Bethsaida, located on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

One further support for this view that there were two different Bethsайдa's is found in Mark chapter 6, verse 45—And immediately after feeding the 5,000 Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida on the northwestern shore of the lake to Capernaum.

Again, just to be clear, Jesus fed the 5,000 in Bethsaida Julius on the north-eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee. He sent His disciples away in a boat to the other side of the lake to Bethsaida in Capernaum. John makes this clear in his Gospel. Turn over with me to John chapter 6, verse 17—After the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus disciples “getting into a boat, started to cross the sea to Capernaum.”

Whereas Mark says Jesus’ disciples crossed over to Bethsaida, John says they crossed over to Capernaum. What we learn from this is that Bethsaida, “fish town” was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and was part of Capernaum—It has been described as the “fishing district” of Capernaum.

Illustration: As a boy, I grew up in San Diego, California. I actually grew up in Point Loma, also known as “Tunaville.” San Diego, was home to many Portuguese immigrants, who founded the American Tuna Fishing Industry. The majority of these tuna fishing families lived in Tunaville.

I hope this helps you understand that there were two different Bethsaida’s in the New Testament. In order to determine which one is being referred to you must pay close attention to the context, and study the other Gospel records of the same account.

This is important because we learn from this that Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Philip all came from Capernaum. That makes 5 disciples from Capernaum. Now, there is one more disciple from Capernaum, Matthew, the tax-collector. Turn over to **Mark chapter 2, verses 13 and 14**

D. The call of Matthew, the tax-collector (Mark 2:13-14)

Mark 2:13-14—And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. 14 And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he rose and followed Him.

Levi the son of Alphaeus is Matthew. All three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, place the call of Matthew immediately after Jesus heals the paralytic lowered down through the roof by his four friends, which according to Mark 2:1, took place at Capernaum.

It is truly amazing that Christ chose six of His twelve disciples from Capernaum. Several of these men were uneducated fishermen, and yet they went on to found and to lead the Jerusalem church. Capernaum was truly a blessed and privileged city.

Capernaum is also remembered for many famous miracles that Jesus performed here. In fact, our Lord performed more miracles here than in any other place. Look with me at nine specific miracles Jesus performed here in Capernaum, in the order in which He performed them. The first miracle was a healing actually performed long distance, but the miracle took place in Capernaum. The miracle is recorded in John chapter 4, and concerns the healing of the royal official's son.

II. Jesus Performs Great Miracles In Capernaum

1. The healing of the royal official's son (John 4:46-53)

We read in **John 4:46** that Jesus had just returned to Cana of Galilee, where He had changed the water into wine. And He was approached by a certain royal official, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When this royal official, most likely a high ranking government official in King Herod's court, heard that Jesus had come back north from Judah into Galilee, he traveled the twenty miles from Capernaum down to Cana to ask Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son; for he was at the point of death. **v. 49** the royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

Jesus moved with compassion for this man, said to him in **v. 50** "Go your way; your son lives." Jesus healed this man's sick son without ever leaving Cana. The royal official *believed the word that Jesus spoke to him*, and headed back to Capernaum. **v. 51** As he traveled home to Capernaum, the royal official was met the next day by several of his slaves, who were coming to tell him that his son was living. He inquired of his servants concerning the hour his son began to get better, and they said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour." **v. 53** So the father knew that it was at the very time that Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and the royal official believed and his whole household.

I find it utterly amazing that one of Jesus' first miracles was done for a high ranking official of King Herod. This is actually Jesus' second recorded

miracle following His first, in which He turned water to wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

2. The healing of a demon possessed man (Luke 4:31-37)

The next miracle is recorded in **Luke chapter 4**. We read in **verse 31** that He, Jesus, came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath. **v. 32** the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching, for He taught with authority. The people are really astonished over what Jesus does next. **v. 33** There was present in the synagogue a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon. The demon cried out of with a loud voice identifying Jesus as "the Holy One of God." **v. 35** Jesus rebuked and silenced the demon, and cast him out of the man. **v. 36** And amazement gripped them all, and they began discussing with one another concerning the authority and power Jesus exhibited.

Here we have the religious crowd in Capernaum, who gathered together at the synagogue on the Sabbath day, are utterly amazed by Jesus' teaching, and astonished over the authority He had over the spirit world.

3. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-44)

The next miracle occurs immediately after Jesus cast the demon out of the man in the synagogue. **Look at Luke 4, verse 38**. Jesus left the synagogue and entered Simon's, that is Peter's, house. The synagogue was actually just across the street from Peter's home. **MAP** Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever; and they asked Jesus to heal her. **v. 39**—And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately arose and waited on them.

Not only did Peter's mother-in-law get healed, she immediately went to work, and waited on the Lord and His disciples.

4. The healing of every one (Luke 4:40-41)

v. 40—And while the sun was setting, all who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on every one of them, He was healing them. **41** And demons also were coming out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Son of God!" And rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ.

Let me say it again, the people of Capernaum were a blessed and privileged people. The Lord Jesus healed every one of them, and cast the demons out of all those who were possessed. Jesus' healing and delivering power was being felt by every person in Capernaum.

5. The healing of a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26; Mark 2:1)

The next mighty miracle Jesus performs is the healing of a paralytic in **Luke 5:17-26**. Mark tells us this miracle took place in Capernaum (Mark 2:1). This miracle is a favorite of many, myself included. Four men come carrying their paralytic friend to be healed by Jesus, but because of the crowds, they can't get into the house where Jesus was teaching. So, they carried their friend up on the roof, dug a hole through the roof tiles, and lowered him down on his stretcher right in front of Jesus. Jesus commends these four men for their fantastic faith, **v. 20**—“And seeing the faith of the man's four friends, Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

Jesus was making a bold claim to Deity here, for only God can forgive sins. **v. 21**—The scribes and the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy, “for no one can forgive sins, but God alone.” Jesus knowing their thoughts said to them, **v. 23**—“Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? **24** “But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” — He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home.” **25** And at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. Look at the reaction of the people in **v. 26**

26 And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.” The people of Capernaum were a blessed and privileged people. They had met God's Son, who had come to forgive and restore lost sinners to God. The evidence was overwhelming. Christ supported His message of forgiveness and restoration by healing the sick and delivering the demon-possessed.

6. The healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10)

According to **Luke 7, verse 1**, following His teaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus returned to Capernaum. This time He is met by a request by a

Roman centurion, whose slave is sick and at the point of death. Now, as many of you know, a centurion was a Roman officer who commanded a company of Roman soldiers, here, in Capernaum. Well, this centurion's servant, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and near death. **v. 3**— When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come and save the life of his slave. The Jewish elders inform Jesus that this man was worthy for Jesus to grant his request because he loved the Jewish people, and he was responsible for building the synagogue in Capernaum.

By the way, if you ever make a trip to the Holy Land, you can visit the ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum today. This is not the same synagogue that was in existence in Jesus' day. But archeologists assure us that it was built on the very ruins of the synagogue of Jesus' day. **PICTURE**

Here again, the Divine power of Jesus Christ touches yet another segment of Capernium society, the Roman military quarter. Do you see how God was reaching out to every segment of society in Capernaum. We have seen the Lord reach out to the government quarter, the crowds, to His disciples, to the religious leaders, and the military.

The next miracle that took place in Capernaum was the raising of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8.

7. The raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56)

Jesus had just returned to Capernaum following His deliverance of the demoniac in Gadara, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. **MAP** Now, while it doesn't say this miracle took place in Capernaum, many NT scholars believe it did. Mark 5:21 says, "Following His deliverance of the demoniac Jesus crossed over again in the boat to the other side=Capernaum.

I am reading in **Luke 8, verse 41**—And behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to entreat Him to come to his house; 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. This is amazing, for the synagogue official, Jairus, came and fell at Jesus' feet and implored His to come to his house and heal his daughter who was dying.

Jesus, graciously consents, and raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. This was a spectacular miracle. Jesus only raise two other people from the dead.

The widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus. Another segment of Capernium society experienced the miraculous power of Jesus Christ. The ruler of the synagogue received his little girl back from the dead.

8. The healing of the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43-49)

By the way, the Lord Jesus performed another tremendous miracle as He was heading for Jairus' home. He healed a woman who had been suffering from an issue of blood for twelve years (Luke 8:43-49).

9. The coin in the fishes' mouth (Matthew 17:24-27)

While I am not going to turn to it, Jesus performed one other miracle here in Capernaum. When questioned about paying the annual temple tax, Jesus sent Peter to the Sea of Galilee, where he threw in a hook and caught a fish, which yielded a coin that paid both Jesus and Peter's temple tax (Matthew 17:27).

Let me say it again, Capernaum was a blessed and privileged city. The Lord Jesus called six of His twelve disciples in Capernaum, He performed mighty miracles, cast out demons, and raised the dead in Capernaum. These people saw the mighty works of God perhaps more than any other people in human history, except perhaps the Exodus generation.

Capernaum is also remembered as the city in which Jesus taught some of His greatest sermons. These people not only saw the divine power of God in operation, they also heard divine wisdom proclaimed by the Lord of glory!

III. Jesus Teaches Great Sermons In Capernaum

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Now, let me just say that while the Bible doesn't clearly say that Jesus preached this sermon in Capernaum, most Bible scholars are convinced that He preached it on a hill-side next to Capernaum. Traditionally this is the site where Jesus preached His famous Sermon on the Mount. If this tradition is accurate, then these people in Capernaum heard perhaps the most famous sermon Jesus ever preached. The Sermon on the Mount contains some of the greatest spiritual truths ever revealed to man. This

sermon is the most extensively studied, loved, and written about of all times. The people of Capernaum heard it first. They were a blessed and privileged people.

2. The Bread of Life Sermon (John 6:24-40)

Following the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus taught one of the most powerful evangelistic messages ever taught. It is recorded for us in John chapter 6. If sermons had titles this would be called the Bread of Life Sermon. What is of particular importance here is the location where Jesus preached this great sermon. Turn with me to John 6:24

John 6:24—When the multitude therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25 And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

Following the feeding of the 5,000 in Bethsaida, Julius on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sent His disciples on by boat to the other side of the lake, to Capernaum. It is here that Jesus preached this great sermon, in which He claimed to be the bread of life come down from heaven.

It was the people of Capernaum who heard Jesus’ claim to be the true bread of God, which comes down out of heaven to give life to all who believe on His name (vv. 32-33).

v. 35—Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” He continues in **verse 40**—“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Look down at **verse 59**—These things He said in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

These people had every opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ, but the sad truth is they rejected Him. We read in verse 66 that many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. The people of

Capernaum enjoyed tremendous blessings and privilege because Christ chose Capernaum as His base of operation, and yet they rejected Him.

Conclusion: As Americans we too have enjoyed unprecedented blessings and privilege because we were founded as a Christian nation. Over 30% of Americans claim to be Christians. I am not sure they are, but at least they claim to be. The Christian church has sent out and supported more foreign missionaries than any other country in History. America has been a staunch ally and supporter of Israel. You and I have been blessed and privileged as a people. Don't be like the people of Capernaum, who rejected Christ and lived to regret it.

As noted last week, our founding fathers attributed our success as a free people to the providence and blessing of Almighty God. May God be pleased to help us to continue preaching and sharing the Gospel, the good news that God loves us and has made a way for us to be forgiven of our sin and reconciled, made right with God, through the sacrifice of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are here this morning and have heard God speak to your heart concerning your need to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, would you be willing to accept Him this morning as I close in prayer? Christian, do you need God's Spirit to touch your heart this morning? Have you lost your way in your Christian walk? We have been created to serve God and bring Him glory forevermore. Ask God to cleanse and renew you this morning and He will.

We learn a very important lesson here. Revelation demands responsibility. As the Scripture says, "*...From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked*" (Lk. 12:48). We will all give an account for the revelation we have received. It is probably for this reason that teachers will be judged more severely than others (Jas. 3:1).

Jesus, the Son of God, came to live in Capernaum, and it brought great judgment upon that unresponsive city. Conversely, it brought great salvation for those who heard and heeded His message. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, now lives in each believer's heart. We can draw out the astounding implications of that fact for ourselves.

Capernaum illustrates for us that we live on a visited planet. He who is called “...*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*” (Isa. 9:6), came to live with us for a short season at Capernaum. He was a bright and shining light in a dark place. Because of his shining, the Galilee will never be the same – nor will the world for that matter.