

## The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi

### Session 3: Capernaum

Recommended Reading: Chapter 11

#### Opening Discussion

- Please share something you learned about scripture, or yourself, over the past week.
- What images, feelings, or thoughts come to mind when you hear the word Capernaum?

#### Watch Video

- What caught your attention most as you viewed the video?
- It was said that forgiveness is the key to freedom, for us, and for all. What might this freedom look like in our lives today?
- What do you think Jesus' habit of driving out demons told the people of Capernaum about the kingdom of God?

#### Read Mark 1:14-39 as a group

- How is Jesus like, and different from, other rabbis of His day?
- After John's arrest, Jesus went about declaring the good news. What do you think Jesus meant when he said the good news is "the kingdom of God has come near"?

#### Read Matt 13:1-53 as a group

- Draw a picture that describes the forgiveness found in one of 7 parables of Matt 13
- Share your drawings with the group and the story they tell

#### Closing Discussion

A large portion of the town of Capernaum, the central point of Jesus' Galilean ministry, has been excavated giving people today insight into the living conditions of first century Israel. At the center of the town, stands the remains of a third century synagogue, built over the ruins of its first-century predecessor. From its entrance, one looks toward the Sea of Galilee and the shoreline from which Jesus calls his first disciples. Assuming Jesus sat in the inner and outer narthex of the synagogue, watching people come and go, what do you think he saw, what might you see if you were able to stand in those places today?

#### Staying Connected

Day 1: Read Matthew 6:11-12

- In these passages from the Lord's Prayer, Jesus ties together bread and forgiveness as both necessary and in reach. Both meet a need we all have. What would life be like without one or the other, or both?

Day 2: Reflection

- Is there someone whom you find it difficult to forgive? Read Matt 18:21-22 and 35. What does Jesus say about holding grudges for wrongs done to us? Why do you think he says we must let go of the anger within us?

Day 3: Read Matthew 8:5-13

- What about this touching story of faith do you think would have most inflamed religious authorities? Is there anyone (person or people) you think is unworthy of God's love, grace, or mercy? If God can extend an olive branch, how might we do the same?

Day 4: Reflection

- In what areas of life do you need the humility and faith of the centurion?

Day 5: Read Colossians 3:13

- How might knowing God's forgiveness enable you to forgive others?

Day 6: Prayer

- Spend some time in prayer today, reflecting on what you have learned from scripture and about yourself. Ask God to help you discern what role you may have in helping others to know what you have learned.

Day 7: A Day of rest.

# Capernaum

Written by Phil Hoppersberger

The fishing village of Capernaum is on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee and it was a common stop on the famous Via Maris highway (Latin for Way of the Sea), an ancient trade route to Egypt from Damascus. It dates back over 4,000 years and was the road to Egypt used by Abraham, Isaac, and probably Joseph's brothers after selling their brother to the Midianite traders (Genesis 37:25, 36).

As such an important road, the Romans had a strong presence here for collecting taxes, as was Matthew's profession (Matthew 9:9-10). Four other disciples also came from this village (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) and all 12 of them stayed here with Jesus (Mark 9:33-37). Capernaum was a small "seed," but planted along an important route for the word to spread about Jesus' miracles.

Among the many miracles done here, one of the most famous is in Luke 7:1-10 when the Centurion who built their synagogue (it was a poor fishing village) had his servant healed by Jesus. In that miracle he had his great faith commended when Jesus said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."

That synagogue stands at the center of this small town and is quite extraordinary, not in and of itself, although it is very impressive, but for its foundation that dates back to Jesus' day. The ruins of the synagogue are made of "white" stone from the 4th century and sit atop a "black" foundation of local basalt stones (coins found in the mortar helped identify the age of it). The white synagogue was re-built on top of the very stone structure where Jesus worshipped and taught His disciples (John 6:59). All along the outside you can see this black stone base run the full length of the synagogue. It's one of the most interesting things you'll see in Israel—His hometown synagogue!

Another jaw-dropper is just across the street where Jesus stayed in Peter's house, and healed his mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). Peter's household ruins are one of many excavated homes in the small neighborhood and easily identified as a modern Franciscan church is built right over the top of his house! Thankfully, it was wisely built with a raised octagonal base over it so you can easily see the walls of Peter's home. There is also a glass floor inside the church that allows you to look down into Peter's living room from above.

Be sure to see the millstones in the square, made from the same synagogue foundation basalt rock indigenous to the area (Mark 9:42). There is also an olive press, a wine press, and a flourmill, as well as the Roman Garrison's ruins (probably where the Centurion whose faith Jesus commended stayed with his troops). Take your time and lots of pictures. This is a top five spot where lingering is encouraged—and be sure to visit the shoreline.

It's a chilling sensation to stroll along the very shores of Galilee where Jesus chose Simon Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:16-16), and then selected John and James (v. 19-20) to witness His miracles (v.21-17). Thanks to this busy roadway, merchants and travelers spread word about Jesus throughout Israel and into other countries. Eventually word about the Galilean reached you too...and here you stand, where He stood. Amazed and impressed by Jesus' hometown!

• Matthew 8:5-17, 11:20-24; Mark 2:1-12, 8:14; Luke 17:2; John 2:12, 4:46-54, 6:22-25, 35-59)

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