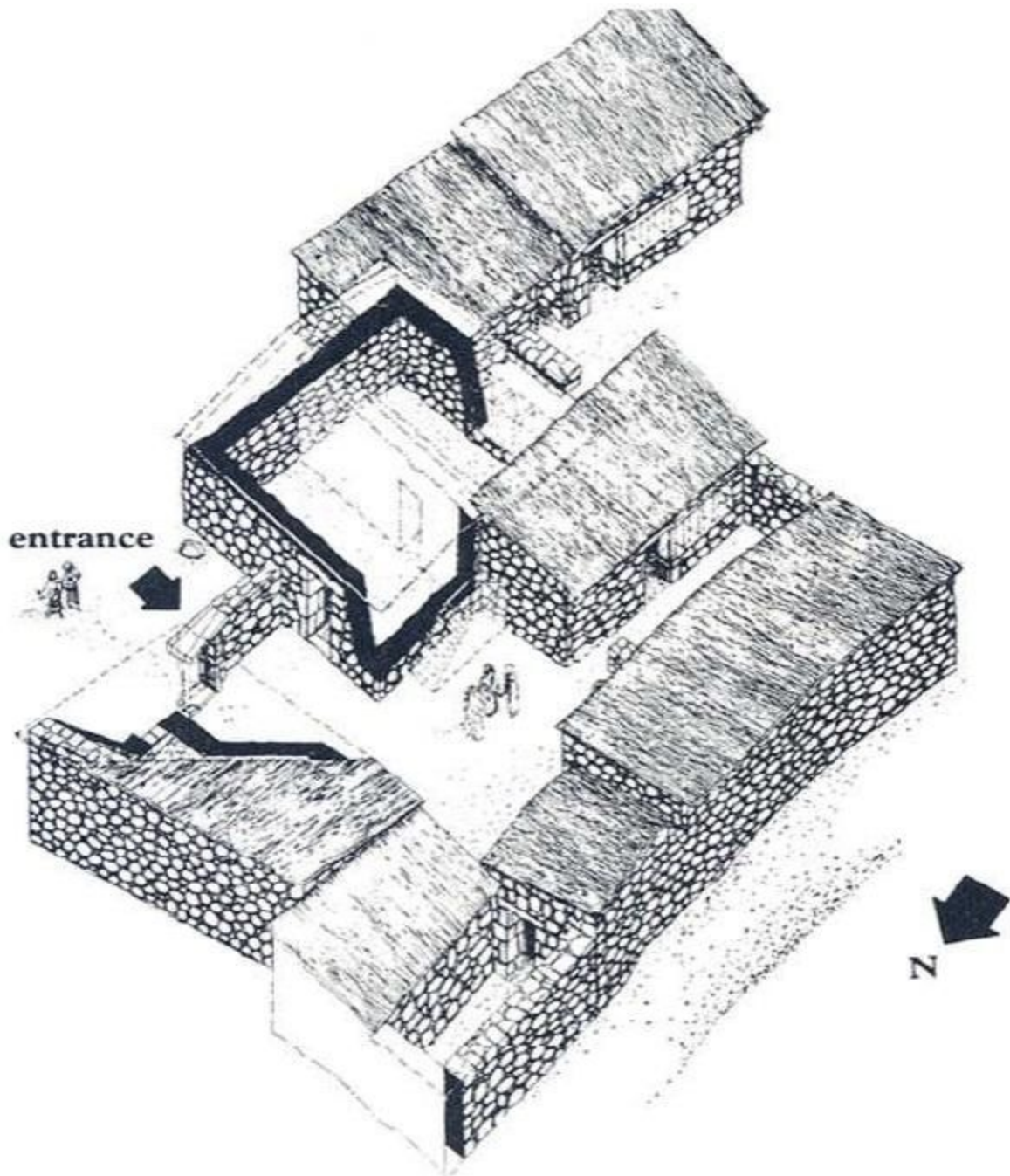


## Mark 1:32-34, Spiritual Blindness

**32** "That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered together at the door. **34** And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."

### *SIMON AND ANDREW'S HOUSE IN CAPERNAUM (RECONSTRUCTED)*



I. Capernaum's "Come-to Jesus Moment" - In our last couple of lessons we saw Jesus casting out a demon in the synagogue and healing Simon's mother-in-law at his house. Though the latter event was private, word evidently spread that he was a gifted healer, for the townspeople brought their sick and demon-oppressed to the house where Jesus was staying.

A. The Time: The people waited until sundown because of Sabbath laws.

1. No healing - As we learned in the last lesson, some of the Jewish sects, notably the Pharisees, forbade healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2; Luke 13:14).

Jesus, on the other hand, argued that the Sabbath was the appropriate day for setting people free from sickness and demonic oppression (Luke 13:16).

2. No burden-bearing - If there was no objection to Sabbath healing *per se*, others would have stumbled at the prospect of carrying a sick person on the Sabbath. A man was stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath in Num. 15:32-36. Jeremiah 17:19-27 seems on the surface to make Sabbath observance, specifically the bearing of burdens, the probation upon which hangs either the utter destruction of Jerusalem or the "restoration of Judah's sovereignty under its own king" (J. A. Thompson<sup>1</sup>).

3. Resurrection Day - Mark may have made such a point of the great number of healings and exorcisms occurring on the day after Sabbath because he "may have felt that it was appropriate for such general healing and blessing to be on the Lord's Day of the Church" (R. Alan Cole<sup>2</sup>).

B. The Motivation - Jesus wanted to awaken faith, but the people simply wanted relief "fer what ails yuh".

1. Of Jesus in Healing - The main purpose of healing is to manifest the kingdom:

**8** "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. **9** Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' **12** I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town." (Luke 10:8-12).

2. Of the People in Seeking - The people do not seem interested in hearing Jesus' words but only in experiencing his power. We know this from the judgment proclaimed later by Jesus upon the city of that generation:

**23** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. **24** But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you." (Matt. 11:23-24).

"It is not adequate to read this narrative as a report of success in the initial phase of the Galilean mission. The people come to Jesus, not because they recognized his dignity and function, but because it is rumored that a miracle worker has come in their midst. Jesus had come to preach repentance and the nearness of the kingdom but the people think only of relief from pain and affliction. They fail to perceive the significance of Jesus' conflict with demonic power. In compassion and grace Jesus extends to them authentic healing, but it is not primarily for this purpose that he has come" (William Lane<sup>3</sup>).

### C. The Place - The House-Church of Peter

On the first page, there is a diagram of what is with good evidence believed to be Simon Peter and Andrew's house in Capernaum. The "house" is actually what is in Latin called an *insula*, a complex of several buildings opening into a central courtyard. Such a roomy dwelling was not beyond the means of a prosperous commercial fishing family.

Access to the courtyard was by a gate on the northeast side of the outer wall. It was there that the people "gathered together". The Greek word here is the same as the word for "synagogue". The people who were in synagogue on the Sabbath were now in synagogue at Peter's house on the Lord's Day. Interestingly, even though there was no sign of spiritual awakening in Capernaum during Jesus' earthly life, archaeological evidence shows that the complex became a Christian house church later in the first century, perhaps before Mark died. It was enlarged in the fourth century. The whole structure was knocked down and buried in the fifth century and an octagonal purpose-built church was erected over the old complex.<sup>(4)</sup>

## II. Jesus Delivers the Goods

A. The Whole City - The population of the city of Capernaum in Jesus' day has been estimated at around 1,500.<sup>(5)</sup> "The whole city" is a synecdoche, in which the whole city is made to represent the part of which is suffering illness and spiritual oppression. Even so, there must have been quite a number of people gathered outside the gate.

When it is said that the people "brought" the sick and demon-oppressed to Jesus, the imperfect tense indicates "case after case arriving at the door, so that finally there was a surging mass of crippled and diseased with their friends" (R. Kent Hughes<sup>6</sup>). More than one scholar suggests translating it, "kept on bringing."<sup>(7)</sup>

### B. Many Sick, Various Diseases, Demons

Note the distinction between sickness and demon-possession. This is important because many critical scholars write off the reality of demons, attributing them to superstition and ignorance concerning medical science. "Both v. 32 and v. 34 distinguish between ordinary illnesses and demon possession--a further indication that primitive, unscientific understanding is not a sufficient explanation of the latter" (James A. Brooks<sup>8</sup>)

The great number of people, and the variety of diseases that were brought to Jesus, serve to underline the unlimited power of Jesus to reverse the curse and establish the kingdom. When the text says that Jesus healed "many" and cast out "many" demons, that should not be interpreted to mean that there were some leftover cases Jesus could not handle: "No distinction should be made between the 'all' of v. 32 and the 'many' of v. 34. The latter is a Semitism that means 'all who were many'" (James A. Brooks<sup>9</sup>). In other words, the purpose is to emphasize the great "many" of the "all" who were healed. Examples of such usage abound in ancient Rabbinical texts.

As in justification, so in healing: Jesus is able to do what the law cannot. "Their religious leaders and teachers could not heal and restore them. All they could do is condemn them for 'working' on the Sabbath. By contrast, Jesus taught his disciples the blessings of the Sabbath (and what a blessing they had found this particular Sabbath to be!). He brought healing where the religious leaders could not bring any" (Sinclair Ferguson<sup>10</sup>).

## III. Who Knew?

A The Demons Believe...and Tremble! - The demons knew who Jesus was, having a supernatural knowledge of their great enemy. But Jesus silenced them, preventing them from revealing his true identity. Why did Jesus pass on the free advertising?

“Once again, the Lord refuses to accept demoniac testimony to His Godhead. All such testimony is non-voluntary, an unwilling recognition of an empirical fact, and thus corresponds to no moral or spiritual transforming discovery. Christ is prepared to await the revelation to be made by God to men that alone will enable them to say with Peter, ‘You are the Messiah’ (see Mk. viii. 29)” (R. Alan Cole<sup>11</sup>).

“[Jesus] said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ **16** Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ **17** And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’” (Matt. 16:15-17)

B The Hidden Savior - In addition to silencing the testimony of demons, Jesus often told people he restored not to tell anyone, and was sometimes evasive when asked directly about his identity. This was not because of any doubt in his mind about his identity. Jesus believed that his words and deeds revealed who he was to anyone with “eyes to see” and “ears to hear”. From the book of Isaiah especially, Jesus knew that the people he was sent to would be spiritually blind and deaf, and that it must be given to them by God to see the truth. The book of Isaiah prophesied that the coming Servant would be concealed, a hidden weapon in the hand of God:

**2** “He made my mouth like a sharp sword;  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow;  
in his quiver he hid me away.” (Isaiah 49:2)

The “hiddenness” would be a judicial blindness imposed because of the sins of the people. They simply would not recognize the Messiah because their hearts would not be attuned to God:

**13** “And the Lord said:  
“Because this people draw near with their mouth  
and honor me with their lips,  
while their hearts are far from me,  
and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,  
**14** therefore, behold, I will again  
do wonderful things with this people,  
with wonder upon wonder;  
and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,  
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.” (Isa. 29:13-14)

The Lord would do “wonder upon wonder” before his people, but only those who loved and feared him would understand the wonders and recognize Jesus as Messiah. This explains Jesus’ cryptic reply to John the Baptist’s disciples when they asked if he was the Messiah:

**2** “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ **4** And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.’” (Matt. 11:2-6)

John would know from the book of Isaiah that the preaching of the gospel and these particular healing signs would accompany the Messiah (Isa. 61:1-2). Jesus’s answer is, “tell John what you hear and see.” If John had eyes to see and ears to hear, that spiritual sight given only by God, he had his answer.

C City of Blindness - Isaiah not only foretold the hiddenness with which the Messiah would be cloaked, but also the blindness of the generation to whom Messiah would come:

**9** And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;

keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

**10** Make the heart of this people dull,

and their ears heavy,

and blind their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

and turn and be healed.” (Isa. 6:9-10)

The blindness would be a judicial act of God, imposed on the people because of their hard hearts. Jesus praised the justice and wisdom of God manifested in both concealing and revealing the Son of God:

**16** “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

**17** “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

**18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

**20** Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. **21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long

ago in sackcloth and ashes. **22** But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. **24** But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

**25** At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; **26** yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." (Matt. 11:16-25)

## Notes

1. Thompson, J. A. The Book of Jeremiah [New International Commentary on the Old Testament], p. 430.
2. Cole, R. Alan. The Gospel According to St. Mark [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries], p. 62.
3. Lane, William L. The Gospel According to Mark [New International Commentary on the New Testament], p. 80.
4. For more information on Capernaum and Peter's house, visit: <http://www.capernaum.custodia.org/>
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum>
6. Hughes, R. Kent - Mark, Volume One: Jesus, Servant and Savior [Preaching the Word], p. 47.
7. Mann, C. S., Mark [Anchor Bible], p. 215; Brooks, James A. Mark [New American Commentary], pp. 53
8. Brooks, James A. Mark [New American Commentary], p. 52-53.
9. Brooks, James A. Mark [New American Commentary], pp. 53.
10. Ferguson, Sinclair B. Let's Study Mark, p. 18.
11. Cole, R. Alan. The Gospel According to St. Mark [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries], p. 62.