

Healing

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a seven-part series

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Luke 4:16–23, 38–39 (CEB)

¹⁶ Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. ¹⁷ The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.*

*He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,*

¹⁹ *and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. ²¹ He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

²² Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?"

²³ Then Jesus said to them, "Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum.'"

³⁸ After leaving the synagogue, Jesus went home with Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and the family asked Jesus to help her. ³⁹ He bent over her and spoke harshly to the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and served them.

Luke 8:43–48 (CEB)

⁴³ A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent her entire livelihood on doctors, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the hem of his clothes, and at once her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When everyone denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are surrounding you and pressing in on you!"

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷ When the woman saw that she couldn't escape notice, she came trembling and fell before Jesus. In front of everyone, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

⁴⁸ "Daughter, your faith has healed you," Jesus said. "Go in peace."

Enacting the kingdom of God, Jesus healed – simple as that.

Today, Nazareth is a bustling city of 80,000 in Galilee, a couple of hours north of Jerusalem. It is about 70% Muslim and has a Muslim mayor, which probably surprises you. Loudspeakers dot the city, shouting out the Muslim call to prayer five times a day. But in the city center also stands the majestic Church of the Annunciation. It is of recent design and construction and sits atop the ruins of the ancient village of Nazareth. Underneath the soaring sanctuary is a cave-like structure remembered as the house Jesus grew up in. Sometimes when I've been there, Mass is being held. There are paintings, murals, and mosaics from around the world, all devoted to the adoration of the Christ-child.

When Jesus had grown to adulthood, he chose Nazareth, his hometown, as the place to announce publicly his vocation. It was a typical Saturday in Nazareth. The sun was up early. It was warm. Since no work could be done on the Sabbath, many of the villagers slept a bit later. It was the day set aside to rest, as God had rested after creating the cosmos. After morning prayers and a morning meal, the villagers made their way to the small synagogue where they would hear and then discuss passages from the Torah

and from the Prophets. One man would read from the Hebrew while another translated it into Aramaic, as many of the villagers neither read nor spoke Hebrew.

On this particular day, Jesus, the middle-aged son of Joseph and Mary, rose to read from the Prophets. He asked that the scroll of Isaiah be brought to him. Jesus unrolled it to the desired section and began to read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. . . .” All eyes in the synagogue were on their neighbor as he read. A stunned silence fell across the room as Jesus proclaimed that God’s great promises were being fulfilled on that quiet Saturday morning – in and through him.

Of course, you can well imagine the reaction of the villagers to Jesus’ pronouncement. It took a few minutes for his words to sink and then, sadly, they reacted with great fury. Jesus had grown up among them. They had changed his soiled clothes when he was an infant. They had helped to school the boy and teach him a trade. God’s anointed? Ridiculous! Blasphemous! As the confrontation worsened, Jesus’ neighbors chased him to a nearby cliff, intent on throwing him over the side. But he escaped and headed for Capernaum, a larger village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee that would serve as Jesus’ “headquarters” for his Galilean ministry.

There, Jesus taught in the synagogue and the crowds began to grow. He cast a demon out of a man, demonstrating Jesus’ authority and power to the crowd (Luke 4:36-37). Then Luke gives us a brief but fascinating story.

After casting the demon out of them, Jesus headed over to the home of Simon (Peter) whose mother-in-law had been terribly ill. Jesus simply stood over the woman, told the fever to leave, and it did. Upon which she gets up and makes dinner for everyone. What?! The first thing to note is that, at this point in Luke’s gospel, Jesus has not called any of his disciples. Thus, perhaps the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law is Jesus’ way to prepare Simon for Jesus’ call to discipleship.

Nazareth in the First Century¹

In the first century AD, Nazareth occupied only the ridge and did not extend into the Jezreel Valley 350 meters below (Reed, *Archaeology*, 115–16). The village’s 40,000 square meters could have accommodated a population as high as 2,000 (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 56), but current estimates allow a population of only 200–500 at the time of Jesus. All evidence supports the view that Nazareth’s primary industry was agriculture, including the production of wine and olive oil. The slopes supported the growing of wheat and barley. The soil to the south permitted the cultivating of vegetables. The village, like many throughout the ancient Mediterranean, was likely self-sufficient, though poor. The lack of remains from the period suggests that houses were constructed of local uncut stones and mud with thatch roofing. The town receives no mention in non-Christian sources from the Roman Period. It likely was known only at the local level, and perhaps enjoyed little esteem even there (John 1:46).

Throughout much of the 20th century, it was believed that Galilee was to a great extent isolated until the time of Hadrian. Improved archaeology of the region, however, has revealed an extensive network of pre-Hadrian trade routes, of which Sepphoris was a hub (Strange, “First Century Galilee,” 40). Nazareth lay only 5 kilometers south of Sepphoris, and though the ascent of the Nazareth ridge was significant, it was not insurmountable (Reed, *Archaeology*, 115). Nazareth would not have been far from major trade routes (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 27, 43). Since the 1920s, Nazareth’s proximity to Sepphoris has inspired much discussion, especially concerning the possibility that Jesus spent much time in that city (see Reed, *Archaeology*, 103–14). Archaeology demonstrates that Sepphoris was built into an impressive city under Antipas early in Jesus’ life (Reed, *Archaeology*, 117).

¹ Ian W.K. Koiter, “Nazareth,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Sadly, Simon's mother-in-law is not named, as was so often the case in the patriarchy of the ancient world. Nonetheless, "she serves as a pattern for all who would subsequently be delivered by Jesus' word and then express their gratitude through serving."¹ There may be only a few sentences devoted to her story, but she is an example to us all.

Another woman

Sometime later, Jesus has returned from the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and is approached by Jairus, a synagogue leader (named, of course) whose daughter has fallen deathly ill. He begs Jesus to save his daughter and Jesus heads for Jairus's home.

But on the way, a woman (unnamed, of course) presses through the crowds. Because the woman was ritualistically unclean and untouchable, you can almost picture some people in the crowd struggling to avoid her touch as she surges toward Jesus. Coming up from behind, she touches Jesus' clothing, believing, as did her contemporaries, that Jesus' power would be carried even in his clothing. Though the woman trusted that by

Description of Capernaum¹

Capernaum is a first-century AD settlement located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; the epicenter of Jesus' ministry and location of many of His miracles. Capernaum is one of the oldest Christian settlements in Palestine and the site of an ancient synagogue and church.

Like many settlements around the Sea of Galilee, the people in Capernaum were fishermen by trade, evidenced by fish hooks found under the floor of a room in the building known as the house of Peter (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 60). Presses, ovens, and grinding stones found in the courtyard of a domestic complex at Capernaum provides further insight into the trade activities of Capernaum's inhabitants (Reed, *Archaeology*, 157). Capernaum was not a wealthy town. Its residents could not afford imported pottery or expensive oils and relied upon agricultural subsistence for their resources (Reed, *Archaeology*, 164).

Literary sources provide limited reliable information on Capernaum's population, and archaeological estimates vary. Based on housing areas, Meyers and Strange estimate that there were approximately 12,000–15,000 people living in Capernaum during the time of Christ (Reed, *Archaeology*, 149). They suggest that Capernaum was smaller than the neighboring Galilean cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris but was larger than nearby villages like Nazareth (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 58).

Alternatively, Reed argues that Capernaum in Jesus' time likely had only 600–1,500 people. He notes that livestock often inhabited areas of the house, leaving less space for people than assumed by Meyer and Strange's estimate (Reed, *Archaeology*, 152). He further argues that the site's lack of civic buildings—like theatres, basilicas, an agora or fortification walls—suggests it may have been a village rather than a city (Reed, *Archaeology*, 153–54). Despite these arguments, Reed maintains that Capernaum was one of the larger settlements in Galilee (Reed, *Archaeology*, 152).

Material evidence suggests that Capernaum had a mostly Jewish population, though some of the public monuments show varying degrees of Greek influence (Reed, *Archaeology*, 65). The site eventually was home to Christian residents as well, as attested by the presence of an octagonal church at the site (Meyers and White, "Jews and Christians," 29).

In general, there is little evidence of Christian habitations in Palestine prior to the third century AD. It is possible that Christians of this period moved elsewhere due to regional conflict. However, Lawler suggests the lack of evidence reflects early Christians' tendency to assemble in house-churches to avoid attracting persecution (Lawler, "First Churches," 48).

¹ Amanda Cookson Carver, "Capernaum, Archaeological Overview," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 111.

touching Jesus' clothing she would be healed, in what must have been a moment of overwhelming joy, she is healed instantly and feels the overwhelming power of that healing. Jesus senses the woman's touch, turns to her, and affirms that her faith has made her well. Fred Craddock notes:

“ . . . the relationship of the woman to Jesus is not private. True, the crowd did not know she had touched Jesus and been healed, but Jesus would not let it remain a case of one person in a crowd receiving God's blessing and it remaining her own secret. Jesus calls the woman out, in front of all the people she tells what happened, and there before them Jesus affirms her faith and blesses her. She has not only witnessed to the people but now the people have to deal with her story and with her. After the prescribed ritual (Lev. 15:25–30) she will be restored to that community, and now after twelve years they will have to accept her. . . . Faith is indeed personal, but it certainly is not private.²

Indeed, there is more to Jesus' act of kindness than meets the eye. The woman's healing is more than physical. No longer will she be unclean. She will be taken back into the community. She will find wholeness and salvation. Her steadfast faith in the power of Jesus will enable her to begin rebuilding right relationships with her neighbors and loved ones. She had seen for herself that the kingdom of God was arriving in and through Jesus. But she would have no idea of the price he would pay.

Daily Bible Readings

More on Jesus' healings – all from a few chapters in Luke's gospel

Monday, Luke 5:12-16 Jesus heals a leper

Tuesday, Luke 5:17-26 Jesus heals a paralytic

Wednesday, Luke 6:6-11 Jesus heals a man with a withered hand

Thursday, Luke 7:1-10 Jesus heals a centurion's son

Friday, Luke 7:11-17 Jesus raises a widow's son

Saturday, Luke 8:26-39 Jesus heals a man possessed by demons

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We have begun Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is a great time to join us!

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

This week, a special guest: Stephen Bridge, Director of the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy

² Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 119–120.