

✠ Luke 4:31-44 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

I suppose if I came down out of this pulpit and laid my hands on a few of you who are sick and healed you, this church would soon be busting at the seams with people filling the pews. It is most probable that if I cast out a few demons and rebuked a few evil spirits then our coffers would be full and our attendance through the roof. I'm sure that if I were to cleanse the leper's flesh and make whole the invalid's mind, then I would be greatly sought after; I would gather to myself a great following for I would be the desire of all men. This, after all, is what the likes of Benny Hinn and other faith healers do, and look at their success and wealth. They promise healing and miracles, power and satisfaction, and they attain to massive followings and mega-churches. They give the people what the people want, of course they're followed.

Joel Olsteen, down in Houston, Texas, will never have an empty center as long as there are those who think that his words will bring them fulfillment and satisfaction to their petty and often superficial desires. They will flock to find out how the miracle of just the right amount of faith will heal their bank accounts, drive out the demons of low income, bad jobs, meaningless relationships, and forsaken lives. Never mind salvation and eternal life in the presence of God, you can always achieve that: no, Mr. Olsteen promises you your best life now. And so tens of thousands pack his coliseum weekly and buy his books just to discover whether or not this modern-day miracle man can grant them their miracle. They want their miracle. And you can be sure that if one day Mr. Olsteen stood on his grand stage and announced that he was no longer in the business of helping to heal lives, there would be a mass exodus.

If Benny Hinn and his faith healing cohorts announced one day that they were no longer able to heal they would lose their crowds. After all, what good is a leader if he can't give the people what they want? What good is an inspirational speaker if he ceases to inspire? And what, quite frankly, is the good of following Jesus if He won't do for me what He has done for those in Capernaum?

The world does not and cannot understand what good Christianity is if it doesn't solve your everyday problems, or at least help to solve them. And there are those wolves in sheep's clothing that will capitalize on this and claim to be able to heal in the name of Jesus, to cast out sickness and disease in the name of Jesus, and even to cast out demons and stave off death all in the name of Jesus. As if that phrase, "in the name of Jesus," were some miracle incantation such as "Abracadabra." Perhaps many would do well to be reminded of the poor saps in Acts 19, who called on the name of Jesus without knowing Him, and on whom the demons turned and brutalized so that they ran naked down the streets. Perhaps this story would instill the fear of God into many would-be faith healers and prosperity doctrine liars.

Never focus on the miracle; it is never the end of the story.

Jesus went to Capernaum to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God just as He had done at Nazareth. And what is the good news of the kingdom of God? It is that Jesus has come to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Those in Nazareth did not believe Jesus, and in their unbelief and hard-heartedness, they tried to kill Him by throwing Him off a steep cliff. How often we do the same by quoting the

father of lies, asking the eternally damned question, “Did God really say?” And so Jesus walked through their midst and left them in their unbelief. He left them and went on to Capernaum, where He preached as He had in His hometown; proclaiming liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, liberating those who are oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor.

And those in Capernaum did not seem to be so bad as those in Nazareth. In fact, they did what should be expected of them, what we ourselves should wish to do. They bid the Lord Jesus to stay with them. In Capernaum our Lord testified to His own words by casting out demons and healing the sick and infirm. He gained a following that did not want Him to leave. How much better it is than wanting to murder Him. How good this is. “Lord, we believe that you have the power to heal and to strengthen. Stay with us. Do not leave us,” they begged of Him, “stay and heal our sick and cast out our demons.”

We too, beg of Jesus to stay and cure our infirmities and cast out our demons – our sickness of body and mind, and our demons of relationships. “Lord Jesus,” we pray, “would you that I were healed of what ails me: my cancer, my heart disease, my arthritis, my kidney stones, my infections, my blemishes. Would you that I could bear children; would you that I could marry. Would you that my spouse would love me. Would you that I were saved from my addictions; would you that my finances would be reigned in; would you that I could be thinner, more attractive, less awkward; would you that I should get good grades, get that girl or guy; Lord Jesus would you heal my aunt, my grandmother, my mother, my child. Jesus do not leave me in my hour of weakness, but stay, do for me as you did for those in Capernaum.”

Surely there is no better work than to heal a sick child, or give children to a deserving couple. Surely there is no better work than to rid you of your diseases and ailments, your addictions and demons. What better work is there than to make us whole, to take away our suffering and our afflictions? Surely our Lord looks on us in pity as He did on those in Capernaum, feeling our aches and pains, desiring our well-being and comfort. Yes, indeed He does, for He has born our sicknesses.

Yet He desires more the healing of our sin-torn souls. He desires more that we be counted as among the righteous. And so He answers us as He answered those in Capernaum: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God, for that is why I have been sent.”

It was no doubt very confusing to those in Capernaum that this man who had the power and compassion to heal would choose instead to leave them and go about preaching. But what our Lord knew that Capernaum did not know is that if they had succeeded in keeping our Lord from going on it would have been the same as if Nazareth had succeeded in dashing Him upon the stones below. He would not have gone on to Calvary to fulfill the will of the Father, to fulfill the ultimate purpose for which He was sent: to pay for their sins and yours.

The miracles performed in Capernaum were not the reason Jesus was sent, they merely gave witness that He indeed does have the authority His words claim for Him. He healed the sick and cast out demons so that those who heard His words would believe Him and attain to the salvation He was sent to accomplish.

So often we are troubled and confused as to why our Lord does not heal our lives from all manner of infirmities and maladies. Why doesn’t He do what we know He can do? We marvel at the miracles performed by our Lord and we selfishly want our miracles, our healings, and our exorcisms. And we justify ourselves by asking, “Is this wrong? Should we not desire these things? Should we not desire to be healed?” Of course it is not wrong. Neither was it wrong

that those in Capernaum wanted to be healed; wanted to be made whole; wanted to be freed from demon possession.

But our Lord knows what is best for us, though we do not like to hear it; our Lord knows what healing we truly need, though we often think we do not. We are like Nazareth. We rant and rave when the words of our Lord convict us so that we would if we were able to throw His Word over the cliff and be done with it. How dare the Word of God call us all sinners and misfits; murderers and thieves; adulterers and fornicators? With what audacity does the Word preached compel us to confess our sins and mend our wicked ways? Never mind that this is exactly the remedy for our sin-begotten illness of death and damnation. Repent, for the Lord's desire is a broken and contrite heart.

So, too, are we like Capernaum. We want our miracles, our Benny Hinns and Joel Olsteens, we want our lives put in order and our maladies taken care of. But our Father in heaven looks upon us and gives us what we truly need: His Son, who will not waver from His purpose, but step by bloody step traverse the blood stained stone that He may hang upon the cursed tree and win our salvation for us. Should He bend to our will then He would never save our souls, for we always bid Him to better us now, when He desires to better us for eternity.

Do not make the miracle the source of your happiness and thereby reject the gift of salvation won for you on the cross of Christ. That is the mistake of Capernaum; that is the mistake of the likes of Benny Hinn and Joel Olsteen. They do not desire our Lord stay in order that they may hear His words of life, but so that they might benefit from His miracles. Yet He rebukes them, saying, "I was not sent to perform miracles and exorcisms; I was sent to proclaim the kingdom of heaven." So among you today, O Christians,

JESUS IS HERE PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

He has been sent to proclaim liberty to you who are bound by sin and guilt; He has come to give you who are blind sight that you may see the face of God; He has come to free you who are oppressed by the powers of death and the devil. He has come to proclaim to you the year of the Lord's favor; the day of salvation.

His words are not devoid of power, but they bring with them the life-giving word of forgiveness and life eternal. As proof of this, Capernaum was given healings and exorcisms, though they would again fall sick, and devils would again attack them, but we, we are truly a blessed generation, for we have received the greatest of all signs and wonders: the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been baptized by Jesus into His death and resurrection, and are thereby adopted into the family of God for we bear God's name. We are heirs with Jesus of eternal life because He has risen from the dead and gives that eternal life to us.

We have received the ongoing pledge from God that our sins are forgiven us in the words of Jesus: "This is my body and my blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

Capernaum thought they had the culmination of God's divine mercy when this Rabbi went about healing their sick and ridding them of demons, but they were wrong. It is not in the miracles that Jesus is to be found, but in His Word; for thus was He sent.

And I bid you now, listen to His words: "I baptize you in my name; you are mine. I give to you my Body to eat and my Blood to drink so that you may have my life in you." Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Amen.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.
✠ AMEN ✠