

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 23

“ John 2:12 *After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and they continued there not many days.* ^{13a} *And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem . . .*” John 2:12-13a)

HE WENT DOWN TO CAPERNAUM

INTRODUCTION

The ministry of Jesus is now under way. It was not inaugurated in the Temple, a synagogue, the society of the Sanhedrin, or the streets of the city of Jerusalem. The confirming voice from heaven came in a proper surrounding, and at a God-honoring time: when Jesus was baptized by His forerunner, within the context of preaching and repentance. Jesus will not take the pulse of the people to see what they wanted to hear. He will not consult with those following Him to see how they thought He ought to begin His ministry. He was operating according to a heavenly agenda, and at a Divinely appointed time. This is how the ministry of Moses began, as well as that of all the Prophets, and John the Baptist, the appointed harbinger of Jesus. **Times and seasons are always in the hand of the Lord, and are never determined by men.** It remains today as when Jesus said to His inquiring disciples, *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power"* (Acts 1:7). If the times do not seem appropriate for a Divine appointment, God *"changeth the times and the seasons"* to suit His purpose (Dan 2:21). This is why it is essential for men to have some kind of discernment of the times – as when Jesus said to His critics, *"When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"* (Matt 16:2-3). From this perspective, *"the times"* dictate what is to be declared in the name of the Lord. Promises of spiritual grandeur are not announced to those who are wallowing in sin. A sign from heaven is not given to a wicked and adulterous generation (Matt 12:39). How essential it is for those who speak in the name of the Lord to discern what is appropriate for their hearers to know. That is involved in rightly dividing, or handling aright, the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15). What is holy is not intended for dogs, and spiritual pearls are not for swine (Matt 7:6). The truth is hidden from some, while it is revealed to others (Lk 10:21). All of this will be seen with unparalleled clarity in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

THE PREMINENCE OF JESUS

“JOHN 2:12A *After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples . . .*”

AFTER THIS. That is, after turning water into wine – *"the beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, manifesting His glory; and His disciples believed on Him"* (John 2:11). **The work of Jesus is preceded by the manifestation of His glory.** That is, to a significant degree, Jesus must be

known before men can profit from His work. Viewed from another perspective, when Jesus is made known, He will commence to work, doing what His Father has commissioned Him to do. **If Jesus is not known, we should not be surprised if His working is not being made known.** Ordinarily, a Christless environment is **not** one where the Word and works of God are plentiful. It is true that the cities where most of Jesus' miracles were done needed to be upbraided because of the hardness of their hearts (Matt 11:20). Of course, Jesus Himself was in those cities, and worked many wonderful works there – thus, the presence of the Lord was there. In those cities (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum), their hardness of heart was **revealed** by Jesus' presence, while certain of His disciples were called out of those environments (Philip, Andrew, Peter [John 1:44], and Matthew [Matt 9:7,9]). Generally speaking, those areas were unresponsive soils on which the Word of God was dispensed, which confirmed their spiritual condition. That is something revealed by the Lord's presence.

HE WENT DOWN TO CAPERNAUM. This suggests Jesus' relocation after leaving Nazareth. John does not record the occasion that preceded His move to Capernaum. It appears to have been when He had spoken in His home town synagogue, in Nazareth, and the people had rejected His announcement about fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 11:2-5 (Lk 4:17-19). Luke says this took place after Jesus' temptation, and after He had ministered throughout in the region of Galilee (Lk 4:13-16). I do not believe the exact timing can be established. In His Nazareth proclamation, Jesus referred to the historical acceptance of certain Gentiles, namely the Gentile widow to whom Elijah was sent, and Naaman the Syrian leper (Lk 4:25-27). Upon hearing this, *"all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong"* (Luke 4:28-29). Jesus walked through their midst undetected, going His way. It was at this point that He *"came down to Capernaum"* (Lk 4:31), apparently concluding His ministry in Nazareth.

In Capernaum, Jesus ¹ healed the centurion's servant (Matt 7:5), ² healed Peter's wife's mother (Matt 8:14), ³ healed a paralytic (Matt 9:1), ⁴ healed a man afflicted with an unclean spirit (Mk 1:33), and ⁵ healed the son of a nobleman (John 4:46). It was at Capernaum that Jesus taught His disciples about humility by placing a child before them (Mk 9:33-37), and His remarkable discourse on the Bread of life was delivered *"in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum"* (John 6:59), where He frequently taught (Mk 1:29). I gather this was all after the events of our text.

HE, HIS MOTHER, HIS BRETHREN, AND HIS DISCIPLES. Other versions read, *"His mother, His brothers, and His disciples."* ^{NKJV} Jesus brothers were James, Joseph [Josés], Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). Some feel His *"brethren"* were His near-kinsmen. The disciples were probably Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel (Bartholomew). I do not believe this necessarily means the mother, brothers, and disciples of Jesus moved to Capernaum with Him. The text that follows suggests they all went to the Passover feast (John 2:13).

The thing to be seen here is the unity that existed among those mentioned, which consisted of Jesus' mother, brothers, and those who had embraced both His Person and teachings. The group was divided by gender, age, occupation, and understanding – yet they were in accord. Jesus was the foundation upon which they were united. He did not go with them, they went with Him. Further, Jesus was not merely going to visit friends, but was about His Father's business. Ultimately it might be said of this group, *"We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company"* (Psa 55:14).

Every exposure we are given to the Lord Jesus Christ, from the thinking age of twelve, His baptism, and His ministry, finds Him always about His Father's business. He is never presented as being engaged in trivial pursuits. While His neighbors referred to Him as *"the carpenter"* (Mk 6:3),

that is never the manner in which the Holy Spirit presents Him. There is such a consistency in the manner in which the Spirit presents Jesus that it requires a distracted heart to be unaware of it. Yet, in spite of this invariable presentation of Jesus, there remains in men an inveterate tendency to bring Him down to the level of the common. Jesus is, and always has been, "separate from sinners" (Heb 7:26). He is always, and without exception, presented as the "*Righteous One*" (1 John 2:1). He testified of His devotion to the Father: "*I do always those things that please Him*" (John 8:29). Without equivocation He said, "*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*" (John 4:34). Whether they were fully aware of these things or not, this is the One His mother, brothers, and disciples chose to be with.

A DIVINE AGENDA

^{12B} . . . *and they continued there not many days.* "

NOT MANY DAYS. That is, they did not spend many days in Capernaum. Other versions read, "*they did not stay there many days,*" ^{NKJV} "*there they stayed a few days,*" ^{NASB} "*they remained there a few days,*" ^{NRSV} "*they were there not more than two or three days,*" ^{BEB} and "*they made a short stay there.*" ^{WEYMOUTH} This means there was a higher purpose being served, a more lofty objective that was related to what the Father had sent Jesus to do. We do not know what Jesus and those with Him did during this period of time. After John was imprisoned, Jesus "*dwelt in Capernaum . . . That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles*" (Matt 4:14-15; Isa 9:1-2). However, John is not in prison at the time of our text, so this is not the time of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Galilee. Therefore the time spent in Capernaum is brief, having to do with some activity that, according to the will of God, ranked higher.

The people of God do well to note that there are places and activities in which lengthy periods of time should not be spent. No laws can be made in this area, for it is very personal. God has placed the members in Christ's body where it has pleased Him, and their lives are built around those assignments. As one is being directed by the Lord, things will be worked together for the ultimate good of the child of God (Rom 8:28). The objective is to maintain a posture of life in which there is the least amount of distraction, and where holy influences are at an optimum.

DRIVEN BY DIVINE PURPOSE. Throughout the ministry of Jesus He was moved along by Divine purpose. His work was never characterized by casualness or general disinterest. On one occasion, after he observed a man born blind, He said "*I must work **the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work***" (John 9:4). He associated that occasion with the purpose of God, stating that this man was born blind "*that the works of God should be made manifest in him*" (John 9:3). He did not say this of every blind person. This particular man was in the path of Divine purpose.

On another occasion, when He was in Samaria, He said to His disciples, "*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*" (John 4:34). That eventually involved a brief stay in Samaria, which was not one of His stopover points. He remained there for "*two days,*" reaping a harvest of many Samaritans who had come out to hear Him, even beseeching Him to "*tarry with them*" (John 9:40-41). If the disciples had been determining what was done, that harvest would not have been reaped.

On yet another occasion, at the close of His life, He said to Pilate, "*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and **for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.** Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice*" (John 18:37). That cause drove everything Jesus did. If it did not relate to bearing witness to the truth, Jesus would not be found

doing it. This is the ultimate reason He and those with Him did not remain long in Capernaum.

ALERTNESS REQUIRED. Christ's commitment to doing the work of God required alertness. Thus He said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He **seeth** the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will **show Him** greater works than these, that ye may marvel"* (John 5:19-20).

Jesus conducted His life so He was never enveloped with distractions. The landscape of life was kept clear of things that obscured His vision of what the Father was doing, thus enabling Him to immediately see what the Father was showing Him. The Father never had to speak twice to Jesus to get His attention, or show Him something multiple times before He could grasp it. It would be difficult to account for all that has been missed by some believers because they were **not** spiritually alert. Many times, great Kingdom secrets remain unknown, and specific heavenly directives are undetected simply because the person is occupied with lower and unprofitable things. This is intensely personal, and cannot be managed by man-made systems.

DRIVEN BY COMPULSION. Once, when the Pharisees told Jesus Herod would *"kill"* Him, He replied, *"And He said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I **must** walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem"* (Luke 13:32-33). Again He said, *"I **must** work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4).

Jesus was driven from within by His love for the Father and His understanding of His mission from the Father. The pressures of men and the world did not shape His will. In this particular text, whatever drew other people in Capernaum did not draw Jesus. Things that had captured their attention, did not capture His. We know from what Jesus said later to this city that a certain spiritual obtuseness existed there (Matt 11:23-24). However, these corrupting influences had no power over Him.

THE JEWISH AGENDA

¹³ ***"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."***

Jesus' life and work was not performed within a Gentile agenda – not even an agenda suggested by His disciples. We now are exposed to the reason for Jesus going Capernaum. Capernaum was about sixteen miles south of Cana. As such, it was a kind of stopover when going to Judea. Having maintained a rather rigorous schedule, Jesus probably rested here before continuing his journey, which would be eighty-five miles further. The details of that second leg of the trip are not given.

Once again, as during the entirety of Christ's ministry, there is no accent on convenience or ease. It is as though the Spirit consistently presents the work of the Lord was demanding all of man – heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:30):—i.e. spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). Serving the Lord involves *"whatsoever ye do in word or in deed"* (Col 3:17). Spiritual growth up into Christ is to be *"in all things"* (Eph 4:15).

If we wonder what living in this manner entails, we have the life of Christ as our example. Concerning our interpersonal relations, Jesus said to His disciples, *"For I have given you an example, that ye should do **as I have done to you**"* (John 13:15). Again it is written, *"And walk in love, **as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor**"* (Eph 5:2). Again, Peter directed our minds to the conduct of Jesus for our example: *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps**"* (1 Pet 2:21). This makes the record God has given of His

son wholly relevant.

When we read of the priorities of Jesus, we ought to be learning about how to live. All of this is to be done with a keen awareness that we have been purchased, and do not belong to ourselves (1 Cor 6:19-20).

THE JEW'S PASSOVER WAS AT HAND. Here was the real reason for the trip. This is the **first** Passover Jesus observed during His ministry. The **second** Passover occurred shortly after Jesus fed the five thousand (John 6:4). The **third** Passover was the one He observed with His disciples in Jerusalem on the eve of His betrayal (Lk 22:1,15).

In this, Jesus was magnifying the Law and making it honorable (Isa 42:21). What God required, Jesus always did – whether it involved the moral code, the ceremonial Law, or the commandment He had been given to lay down His life, and take it up again (John 10:17-18). In this, He set the example for us all. He is appropriately described as being *“obedient to the point of death”*^{NKJV} (Phil 2:8). He confessed, *“For I came down from heaven, **not** to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 6:38). When, therefore, the time of the Passover was at hand, so far as Jesus was concerned, it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem for that appointed feast.

JESUS WENT UP TO JERUSALEM. Directionally, Jerusalem was south of Cana, Capernaum, and Galilee. Yet, He went *“up to Jerusalem.”* This was speaking of the elevation of Jerusalem, not the direction of this location. No matter where you were directionally, you went *“up to Jerusalem.”* That phrase is mentioned twenty-five times in Scripture – from Gath, which was west (2 Kgs 12:17), Syria, which was northeast (2 Kgs 16:5), Joppa which was west (2 Chron 2:16), Nazareth which was north (Lk 2:42), or Bethany which was east (John 11:18,55). Wherever you went *“from Jerusalem,”* you went *“down from Jerusalem.”* It may be from Jerusalem *“down to Jericho”* (Lk 10:30, northwest), to Gaza (Acts 8:26, west), or to Caesarea (Acts 25:7, north). Geographically, in the land of Canaan, you got your bearings in Jerusalem. **That is where you obtained the proper perspective and developed the right priorities.**

Jerusalem was elevated, located in a high place:—i.e. *“the hill of Jerusalem”* (Isa 10:32). Jerusalem was located in *“the mountain of the Lord”* (Isa 2:3). God referred to *“My holy mountain Jerusalem”* (Isa 66:20). Daniel referred to *“Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain”* (Dan 9:16). Micah spoke of the Temple being located in *“the mountain of the Lord”* (Mic 4:2).

Thus, even the geography of the land of Canaan depicted heavenly realities and priorities. Jerusalem was located in the highest part of the land, and the Temple was located in the highest part of the city – *“Mount Zion.”* The forty-eighth Psalm uses this to develop the true perspective of life. *“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in **the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.** Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is **mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a Refuge**”* (Psa 48:1-3).

The Holy Spirit reminds us that we *“are come unto **mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**”* (Heb 12:24). Our situation spiritually is like Israel's was physically. The place where we have been gathered is a high one. Everything else is down from here, and from every other location we must ascend, or rise, to become aware of this glorious surrounding. Activities that relate to this spiritual location, are like the Passover was to Israel's life. Such activities speak of preference, of advantage, and of pleasing the Lord and realizing true satisfaction.