



# Three Years by the Sea

*The Galilee ministry of Yeshua, told in order*

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Seventeen acts · 57 passages, printed in full

Cana, the cliff at Nazareth, the village of comfort, the calling of the fishermen,  
the sermon on the hill, the storm, the man nobody could chain, the bread,  
the question at the gates of Hades, and breakfast on the shore.

*“Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum,  
which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali,  
that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet.”*

MATTHEW 4:13-14

Amitai (Tai) Elon

Licensed Tour Guide · Havat HaChaim · Natur · Golan Heights

Scripture from the World English Bible

# A Small Lake, and Most of the Gospel

*why the order matters*

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Here is a fact that changes how you read the Gospels. **The Sea of Galilee is small.** Twenty one kilometres long, thirteen wide at the widest, and you can see almost all of it from one hilltop. You could walk right around it in two days. It is not a sea at all, it is a lake, and the Hebrews named it for its shape: **Kinneret**, from kinnor, a harp.

And almost everything happened there.

Count it sometime. The calling of the fishermen, the storm stilled, the walking on water, the feeding of five thousand, the Sermon on the Mount, the paralytic through the roof, Jairus' daughter, the woman with the flow of blood, the man nobody could chain, the two great catches of fish, the Bread of Life sermon, the woes over three towns you can see from a single viewpoint. Matthew says plainly that **most of His mighty works** were done in a little triangle of villages on the northern shore. Three years of ministry, and the largest part of it inside an area you could cover on foot.

So this teaching does what the Jerusalem one did. It tells those three years **in order**, with the **full passages**, and it names the ground: the cliff above Nazareth, the synagogue floor at Capernaum, the grass at Tabgha, the one steep bank at Kursi, the cliffs at Banias where He asked the only question that matters, and the beach where He cooked breakfast for the men who had run away.

It begins with a rejection and it ends with a reinstatement. It begins with a hometown congregation trying to throw Him off a cliff, and it ends on a shoreline with a charcoal fire and a question asked three times. Between those two scenes lies the most documented three years in human history.

And an honest warning, the same as before. **The Gospels are not arranged as a diary.** Mark gives us the clearest running order and I have followed him; Matthew gathers teaching into blocks; Luke rearranges; John keeps his own itinerary. There is a full note at the back that says exactly where they diverge and what I chose. Read it, so that when somebody challenges you, you already knew.

# The Seventeen Acts

*the story in the order it happened*

|      |                                                                                                                       |                                               |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| I    | <b>Water Into Wine</b><br><i>Cana of Galilee</i>                                                                      | the very beginning, before the ministry opens |
| II   | <b>Rejected in His Own Town</b><br><i>Nazareth, and the brow of the hill</i>                                          | the opening of the ministry                   |
| III  | <b>He Moved to the Village of Comfort</b><br><i>Capernaum, on the Via Maris</i>                                       | after Nazareth                                |
| IV   | <b>Follow Me</b><br><i>the shore near Capernaum, and out in the deep</i>                                              | the first days                                |
| V    | <b>One Day in Capernaum</b><br><i>the synagogue, Peter's house, the door at sunset</i>                                | a Sabbath early in the ministry               |
| VI   | <b>The Roof and the Tax Booth</b><br><i>Peter's house, and the customs post on the highway</i>                        | the first year                                |
| VII  | <b>The Twelve, and the Sermon on the Hill</b><br><i>a mountain above the lake</i>                                     | the first year                                |
| VIII | <b>A Roman's Faith, a Widow's Son</b><br><i>Capernaum, and the village of Nain</i>                                    | the first year                                |
| IX   | <b>Parables From a Boat</b><br><i>the shore near Capernaum</i>                                                        | the middle of the ministry                    |
| X    | <b>Four Miracles, One Crossing</b><br><i>the lake, the eastern shore at Kursi, and back</i>                           | one night and the next day                    |
| XI   | <b>Bread for Five Thousand, and Feet on the Water</b><br><i>Tabgha and the northern shore, then the lake at night</i> | the second year, near Passover                |
| XII  | <b>The Hard Saying</b><br><i>the synagogue at Capernaum</i>                                                           | the day after the bread                       |
| XIII | <b>Out to the Nations, and Back</b><br><i>Tyre and Sidon, the Decapolis, Bethsaida</i>                                | the second year                               |
| XIV  | <b>The Question at the Gates</b><br><i>Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon</i>                             | the turning point                             |
| XV   | <b>The Mountain, and the Valley Below It</b><br><i>a high mountain, and the crowd at its foot</i>                     | six days after Caesarea Philippi              |
| XVI  | <b>Woe to the Towns He Loved</b><br><i>Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida</i>                                             | the end of the Galilean years                 |
| XVII | <b>Breakfast on the Shore</b><br><i>the same beach, near Tabgha</i>                                                   | after the resurrection                        |

# Water Into Wine

*Cana of Galilee · the very beginning, before the ministry opens*

Before the crowds, before the synagogues, before a single sermon, He is at a village wedding a few kilometres north of Nazareth, and the wine runs out.

Notice where the first sign happens. Not in the Temple, not on a mountain, not in front of the religious authorities. At a family party, to save a bridegroom from public shame. Heaven's opening move in the Gospel of John is an act of kindness at a village table, and the point of it is not the alcohol. It is that the six stone jars He used were for **ritual purification**, and He filled them to the brim and turned them into joy.

## THE FIRST SIGN

*The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." Now there were six water pots of stone set there after the Jews' way of purifying, containing two or three metretes apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." They filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the ruler of the feast." So they took it. When the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and didn't know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!" This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

JOHN 2:1-11

AND THEN, FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE GOES DOWN TO THE LAKE

*After this, he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they stayed there a few days.*

JOHN 2:12

#### WHERE YOU STAND

Look at the stone jars in the church at Cana. Stone, not clay, because stone does not take on ritual impurity. Six vessels for religious washing, each holding a hundred litres and more. The furniture of the miracle is the sermon.

#### THE HEBREW WORD

**שִׂמְחָה** · **Simcha** — joy, and specifically the joy of a wedding and a feast. The first sign was not a rescue from danger. It was a rescue of joy, and it tells you what kind of Messiah had just arrived.

#### WE PRAY

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*Lord, You saved the joy of a wedding before You ever calmed a storm. Save our joy. Fill the empty jars in our homes to the brim. And when we taste Your goodness late, let us say it out loud: You kept the best wine until now. Amen.*

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## Rejected in His Own Town

*Nazareth, and the brow of the hill · the opening of the ministry*

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Now the ministry begins, and Luke chooses to open it with a disaster.

He goes home. He stands up in the synagogue where He has heard the scrolls read since He was a boy, and He reads seven verses of Isaiah about good news for the poor and liberty for the captives. Then He rolls up the scroll, sits down, and says one word that breaks the room: **today**.

They admire Him for about a minute. Then somebody says, wait, isn't this Joseph's son, and within the hour the same congregation is marching Him to the edge of the hill their town is built on.

### TODAY, IN YOUR HEARING

*He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. He entered, as was his custom, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All testified about him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"*

LUKE 4:16-22

AND THEN THE CLIFF

*He said, "Most certainly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." ... They were all filled with wrath in the synagogue, as they heard these things. They rose up, threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill that their city was built on, that they might throw him off the cliff. But he, passing through the middle of them, went his way.*

LUKE 4:24, 28-30 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

WHERE YOU STAND

Climb to Mount Precipice at the edge of Nazareth and turn slowly. The whole Jezreel Valley lies at your feet: Tabor, Moreh, Gilboa, Carmel, Megiddo, nearly every battlefield of the Hebrew Bible in one panorama. He grew up looking at this view every day. Hidden village, open Bible. And this is the ledge they walked Him to.

THE HEBREW WORD

**נֶצֶר** · **Netzer** — a branch, a green shoot. Nazareth carries the word inside its name, and Isaiah promised a netzer would grow out of the stump of Jesse: a living shoot from a tree that had been cut down. The village's own name whispered the prophecy the whole time nobody was listening.

WE PRAY

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*Lord, You stood up in Your own hometown and read freedom out loud, and they took You to a cliff. Keep us from the blindness of the familiar, so You never have to pass through our midst and go on Your way. Amen.*

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# He Moved to the Village of Comfort

*Capernaum, on the Via Maris · after Nazareth*

Rejected in Nazareth, He does something that looks like retreat and is actually strategy. He moves house, and Matthew tells you it was to fulfil a prophecy.

Understand what Capernaum was. It sat on the **Via Maris**, the international highway that linked Egypt to Mesopotamia, the two superpowers of the ancient world. It was a border and customs town, which is why Matthew had a tax booth there. So when He left the hidden village in the hills and settled in a fishing town on the busiest road on earth, He was not retiring. He was **planting the Gospel at a junction**, so that everything said and done there travelled out with the caravans in four directions.

## THE MOVE, AND THE PROPHECY IT FULFILLED

*Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness saw a great light; to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned." From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."*

MATTHEW 4:12-17

## ISAIAH, SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS EARLIER, NAMING THE DISTRICT

*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined.*

ISAIAH 9:1-2

## WHERE YOU STAND

Stand in the ruins of Capernaum between the synagogue and the octagonal church over Peter's house, and then look for the road. The highway of the ancient world ran right past the front door. Village and superhighway in one glance: that is the strategy of God.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**נְחָמָה** · **Nechama** — comfort, consolation. Kfar Nachum, the Village of Comfort. Before He healed a single person there, the town's own name was already a promise, and He chose it as His base.

## WE PRAY

*Lord, You left the hidden village and moved to the crossroads on purpose. Put us where the traffic is. And make our homes villages of comfort. Amen.*



## Follow Me

*the shore near Capernaum, and out in the deep · the first days*

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The first men He calls are not scholars. They are commercial fishermen, working a night shift on a lake, and He calls them off the water in the middle of a working day.

Read the two accounts together, because they are almost certainly stages of one calling. Mark gives you the bare command on the shore. Luke gives you the scene that broke Peter: a professional fisherman told by a carpenter where to put his nets, after a whole night of catching nothing, and doing it anyway, and needing help to bring the catch in. Peter's response is not gratitude. It is terror, and an accurate self-assessment.

### ON THE SHORE, FOUR MEN AND A SENTENCE

*Passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you into fishers for men." Immediately they left their nets, and followed him. Going on a little further from there, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him.*

MARK 1:16-20

## OUT IN THE DEEP, AND PETER ON HIS KNEES

*Now while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats standing by the lake. The fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets. He entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered him, "Master, we worked all night, and took nothing; but at your word I will let down the net." When he had done this, they caught a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking. They beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. They came, and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord." For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had caught ... Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people alive." When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything, and followed him.*

LUKE 5:1-11 (LIGHTLY ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## WHERE YOU STAND

In the museum at Kibbutz Ginosar rests a first century fishing boat pulled out of the mud in 1986, twenty seven feet of wood, the exact kind of boat these men owned. Stand in front of it and understand what leaving everything cost: this was not a hobby, it was the family business, with hired servants and a father in the boat.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**אַחֲרַי** · **Acharai** — after me. It is still the command an Israeli officer gives, because in this army the officer goes first and the unit follows him. Yeshua's call to those fishermen was exactly that word: not go, but **come after me**, said by somebody already walking.

## WE PRAY

*Lord, You called working men off a boat in the middle of a shift, and they went. Call us like that, and give us the nerve to leave the nets in the water. Amen.*

# One Day in Capernaum

*the synagogue, Peter's house, the door at sunset · a Sabbath early in the ministry*

Mark does something remarkable here. He gives us one complete day, hour by hour, and it may be the most informative day in the Gospels, because it shows you the shape of His ordinary life.

Morning: He teaches in the synagogue and a man with an unclean spirit interrupts. Midday: He walks thirty steps to Peter's house and heals his mother-in-law, who immediately gets up and serves lunch. Sunset, when the Sabbath ends and people are allowed to carry the sick: **the whole town is at the door**. And then, long before dawn the next morning, He gets up and goes out alone to pray, and when they find Him He says it is time to leave.

Teach, heal, be interrupted, be exhausted, get up early and pray, move on. That was the rhythm for three years.

## MORNING, IN THE SYNAGOGUE

*They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. Immediately there was in their synagogue a man who had an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, "Ha! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" The unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" The report of him went out immediately everywhere into all the region of Galilee and its surrounding area.*

MARK 1:21-28

MIDDAY, IN PETER'S HOUSE

*Immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. He came and took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.*

MARK 1:29-31

SUNSET, AND THE WHOLE CITY AT THE DOOR

*At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to him all who were sick, and those who were possessed by demons. All the city was gathered together at the door. He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. He didn't allow the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

MARK 1:32-34

BEFORE DAWN, ALONE

*Early in the morning, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place, and prayed there. Simon and those who were with him followed after him; and they found him, and told him, "Everyone is looking for you." He said to them, "Let's go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because I came out for this reason." He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons.*

MARK 1:35-39

WHERE YOU STAND

You will stand in a synagogue built directly on the black basalt floor of the one where He taught, your feet one metre above stones His feet knew. Peter's house is thirty steps away. That short walk is this whole day: pulpit to kitchen to a crowd at the door.

THE HEBREW WORD

**תפילה** · **Tefilah** — prayer. Notice when He did it. Not instead of the work, and not only when it went badly. Before dawn, on the morning after the most successful evening of His ministry so far, He got up and left the house. Popularity is exactly when a man most needs a deserted place.

WE PRAY

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*Lord, You taught, healed, and were pressed by a whole town at Your door, and then You got up in the dark to pray. Teach us that order.  
Amen.*

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## The Roof and the Tax Booth

*Peter's house, and the customs post on the highway · the first year*

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He comes home to Capernaum and the house fills up so completely that four men carrying a stretcher cannot get in. So they go up on the roof and start digging.

And then, the same chapter, He walks out along the shore, past the customs booth on the international road, and calls the tax collector sitting in it. Understand what that meant. A tax collector was not merely unpopular, he was a collaborator, a man who made his living taking Jewish money for a foreign empire, plus a margin. Yeshua called him with the same two words He used on the fishermen, and then went to dinner at his house with all his friends, which is the part that caused the scandal.

### FOUR FRIENDS AND A HOLE IN THE CEILING

*When he entered again into Capernaum after some days, it was heard that he was in the house. Immediately many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even around the door; and he spoke the word to them. Four people came, carrying a paralytic to him. When they could not come near to him for the crowd, they removed the roof where he was. When they had broken it up, they let down the mat that the paralytic was lying on. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." But there were some of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (he said to the paralytic) "I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house." He arose, and immediately took up the mat, and went out in front of them all; so that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

MARK 2:1-12

#### THE MAN IN THE CUSTOMS BOOTH

*He went out again by the seaside. All the multitude came to him, and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he arose and followed him. He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many, and they followed him. The scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

MARK 2:13-17

#### AND A WORD ABOUT NEW WINE AND OLD SKINS

*No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, or else the patch shrinks and the new tears away from the old, and a worse hole is made. No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine pours out, and the skins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins.*

MARK 2:21-22

#### WHERE YOU STAND

The customs post stood where the road met the lake at the border between two territories. Matthew's booth and Peter's house are a short walk apart. In one small town He recruited both the men who caught fish and the man who taxed them, and then made them travel together for three years.

#### THE HEBREW WORD

**סלח** · **Salach** — to forgive, to pardon. It is a verb used in the Hebrew Bible almost exclusively with God as its subject, which is precisely why the scribes in that room went quiet. They understood the grammar perfectly. That was the claim.

#### WE PRAY

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*Lord, four men dug through a roof and You called it faith. Give us friends like that, and make us friends like that. And thank You for calling the collaborator at the booth. Amen.*

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# The Twelve, and the Sermon on the Hill

*a mountain above the lake · the first year*

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He spends an entire night alone on a hillside praying, and in the morning He chooses twelve men out of the crowd of disciples.

Then, on a slope above the lake, He sits down and delivers the most famous sermon ever preached. And the geography is part of the meaning. Below that hillside runs the Via Maris, the road of the empires, with the traffic of Egypt and Mesopotamia moving along it. On the grass above it, within earshot, a carpenter sat down and announced the constitution of a completely different kingdom.

## A NIGHT OF PRAYER, THEN TWELVE NAMES

*In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and he continued all night in prayer to God. When it was day, he called his disciples, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he also named Peter; Andrew, his brother; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor.*

LUKE 6:12-16

#### THE BEATITUDES

*Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

MATTHEW 5:1-12

#### SALT, LIGHT, AND A CITY ON A HILL

*You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? ... You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to everyone in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

MATTHEW 5:13-16 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

#### AND HOW IT ENDED: TWO BUILDERS

*Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell, and its ruin was great.*

MATTHEW 7:24-27

#### WHERE YOU STAND

The hillside above the northwest corner of the lake is a natural amphitheatre. Sound rolls down the slope toward the water and a voice at the top can be heard a long way below, which you can test with your own group. The land itself was the sound system. Creation cooperated with the sermon.

#### THE HEBREW WORD

**אַשְׁרֵי** · **Ashrei** — blessed, happy, on the right road. It is the word that opens the book of Psalms, and it opens this sermon too. Not a feeling but a **direction**: ashrei is the happiness of a person walking the right way, even uphill.

#### WE PRAY

*Lord, You blessed the mourners before You blessed anyone else. So we bring You ours. Every empty chair, every heavy heart. And let us be doers of this sermon, not admirers of it. Amen.*

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# A Roman's Faith, a Widow's Son

*Capernaum, and the village of Nain · the first year*

Two healings, back to back in Luke, and both of them break a boundary.

The first is for a Roman officer, a man of the occupying army, who sends a message saying do not trouble yourself to come, just say the word, because I understand chains of command. Yeshua stops in the street and says something He says nowhere else: **I have not found faith like this in Israel.**

The second is at the gate of a small village on the Hill of Moreh, where a funeral is walking out as He is walking in. A widow has lost her only son, which in that world meant losing her protector, her income and her future. She does not ask Him for anything. He simply sees her.

## THE CENTURION

*A certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and save his servant. ... When he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. Therefore I didn't even think myself worthy to come to you; but say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude who followed him, "I tell you, I haven't found such great faith, no, not in Israel." Those who were sent, returning, found that the servant who had been sick was well.*

LUKE 7:2-3, 6-10 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

#### THE FUNERAL THAT TURNED AROUND

*Soon afterwards, he went to a city called Nain. Many of his disciples, along with a great multitude, went with him. Now when he came near to the gate of the city, behold, one who was dead was carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. Many people of the city were with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, "Don't cry." He came near and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" He who was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear took hold of all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited his people!"*

LUKE 7:11-16

#### AND THE WOMEN WHO PAID FOR ALL OF IT

*Soon afterwards, he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of God's Kingdom. With him were the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna, the wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others; who served them from their possessions.*

LUKE 8:1-3

#### WHERE YOU STAND

Nain clings to the slope of the Hill of Moreh, and just around the same hill sits Shunem, where Elisha raised another widow's son eight centuries earlier. Two funerals interrupted on one small mountain. The crowd knew their Bible and their neighbourhood, which is why their cry was so precise: a great prophet has arisen among us.

#### THE HEBREW WORD

**רַחֲמִים** · **Rachamim** — compassion, and it is born from rechem, a womb. Hebrew mercy is not a feeling in the chest, it is mother-love in the body, the ache of a womb for its child. When the text says He was moved with compassion for a mother, the language itself is a mother.

#### WE PRAY

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*Lord, You praised the faith of a foreign soldier and stopped a funeral for a woman who asked You for nothing. See the ones who cannot ask. And touch what everyone else is afraid to touch. Amen.*

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## Parables From a Boat

*the shore near Capernaum · the middle of the ministry*

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The crowds get so large that He solves the problem with acoustics. He gets into a boat, pushes out a few metres, and uses the water as an amphitheatre, with the whole multitude standing on the shore.

And there, sitting in a fishing boat, He tells the parable that is really a parable about parables: four kinds of ground. Note carefully how He explains it in private, because the grammar matters. He does not say the soil represents a type of person. He says **these are they**. The soils are the people listening, which means the only honest response to the story is not admiration but an audit.

### FROM THE BOAT

*Again he began to teach by the seaside. A great multitude was gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat in the sea, and sat down. The whole multitude was on the land by the sea. He taught them many things in parables, and told them in his teaching, "Listen! Behold, the farmer went out to sow, and it happened, as he sowed, some seed fell by the road, and the birds came and devoured it. Others fell on the rocky ground, where it had little soil, and immediately it sprang up. When the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. Others fell into the good ground, and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing. Some produced thirty times, some sixty times, and some one hundred times as much." He said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."*

MARK 4:1-9

## AND IN PRIVATE, THE SOILS ARE PEOPLE

*The farmer sows the word. The ones by the road are the ones where the word is sown; and when they have heard, immediately Satan comes, and takes away the word which has been sown in them. These in the same way are those who are sown on the rocky places, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy. They have no root in themselves, but are short-lived. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they stumble. Others are those who are sown among the thorns. These are those who have heard the word, and the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Those which were sown on the good ground are those who hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit, some thirty times, some sixty times, and some one hundred times.*

MARK 4:14-20

## THE SMALLEST SEED

*He said, "How will we liken God's Kingdom? Or with what parable will we illustrate it? It's like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, though it is less than all the seeds that are on the earth, yet when it is sown, grows up, and becomes greater than all the herbs, and puts out great branches, so that the birds of the sky can lodge under its shadow."*

MARK 4:30-32

## AND MEANWHILE HIS OWN FAMILY TRIED TO TAKE HIM HOME

*His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him. A multitude was sitting around him, and they told him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you." He answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Looking around at those who sat around him, he said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."*

MARK 3:31-35

## WHERE YOU STAND

Get into a boat on the lake and have somebody speak from it while you stand on the shore. Water carries sound, and you will hear them easily. He did not have a public address system. He had physics, and He knew the lake better than anyone in the crowd.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**זֶרַע** · **Zera** — seed, and also offspring, descendants. It is the word in God's promise to Abraham about his zera, and the word for what a farmer throws on the ground. In Hebrew, the seed you sow and the children you leave behind are the same word.

## WE PRAY

*Lord, You told a story about four kinds of ground and then said the ground was us. Show us our own soil this year, honestly. And make it good. Amen.*

# Four Miracles, One Crossing

*the lake, the eastern shore at Kursi, and back · one night and the next day*

Now comes the most compressed sequence of power in the Gospels: a storm, a possessed man, a dying girl and a chronically ill woman, all in about twenty four hours, and all connected by one boat trip across the lake and back.

The geography does the first miracle's explaining. The lake lies more than two hundred metres below sea level, a warm bowl of water ringed by cold heights, and the air pours down the Arbel gorges like water through funnels. Storms arrive in minutes, out of nowhere, exactly as the text describes. When four professional fishermen who have worked that water since boyhood say we are dying, the storm is real. Their fear is **expert testimony**.

## THE STORM

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let's go over to the other side." Leaving the multitude, they took him with them, even as he was, in the boat. Other small boats were also with him. A big wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filled. He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up, and told him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are dying?" He awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" They were greatly afraid, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

MARK 4:35-41

## THE OTHER SIDE, AND THE MAN NOBODY COULD CHAIN

*They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. When he had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the tombs. He lived in the tombs. Nobody could bind him any more, not even with chains. Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and bowed down to him. He asked him, "What is your name?" He said to him, "My name is Legion, for we are many." At once Jesus gave them permission. The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea. They came to Jesus, and saw him who had been possessed by demons sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, even him who had the legion; and they were afraid.*

MARK 5:1-5, 9, 13, 15 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## AND THE STRANGEST ASSIGNMENT IN THE GOSPELS: STAY

*As he was entering into the boat, he who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. He didn't allow him, but said to him, "Go to your house, to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you." He went his way, and began to proclaim in Decapolis how Jesus had done great things for him, and everyone marveled.*

MARK 5:18-20

## BACK ACROSS, AND TWO DESPERATE PEOPLE AT ONCE

*When Jesus had crossed back over in the boat to the other side, a great multitude was gathered to him; and he was by the sea. Behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, came; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and begged him much, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Please come and lay your hands on her; that she may be made healthy, and live." He went with him, and a great multitude followed him, and they pressed upon him on all sides. A certain woman, who had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things by many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better, but rather grew worse, having heard the things concerning Jesus, came up behind him in the crowd, and touched his clothes. For she said, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ... He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be cured of your disease."*

MARK 5:21-29, 34 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

#### TALITHA CUMI

*While he was still speaking, people came from the synagogue ruler's house saying, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?" But Jesus, when he heard the message, immediately said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Don't be afraid, only believe." ... Taking the child by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha cumi!" which means, being interpreted, "Girl, I tell you, get up!" Immediately the girl rose up and walked, for she was twelve years old. They were amazed with great amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and commanded that something should be given to her to eat.*

MARK 5:35-36, 41-43 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

#### WHERE YOU STAND

Two things your own eyes can check. Out on the water, watch the Arbel gorges to the west: that is the door the wind comes through. And on the eastern shore, the coastline runs flat, beach after beach, except at one place, Kursi, where the slope drops steeply to the water. The text says the herd rushed down the steep bank. There is exactly one steep bank on that whole shore, and you can stand on it.

#### THE HEBREW WORD

**שלם** · **Shalem** — whole, complete, all the pieces present. It is the root of shalom. The man had been many, \*for we are many\*, and Yeshua made him **one** again: sitting, clothed, in his right mind. Wholeness in Hebrew is when all the scattered pieces of a person come home.

#### WE PRAY

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*Lord, You crossed a stormy sea at night for one broken man on the other side. Speak to the storms over our own boats. Heal what no chains can hold. And send us home to tell it. Amen.*

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## Bread for Five Thousand, and Feet on the Water

*Tabgha and the northern shore, then the lake at night · the second year, near Passover*

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The only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, followed the same night by the one that frightened them most.

Watch the arithmetic. Philip does the maths and reports that it cannot be done. Andrew does something better: he finds a boy with a packed lunch and brings him forward while admitting it makes no sense. Yeshua does not create food out of nothing. He takes what was handed over **whole** and makes it enough, with twelve baskets left over, because He gave an instruction that tells you a great deal about Him: let nothing be lost.

Then He sends them out on the water alone and goes up the hill to pray, and somewhere in the small hours He comes walking out to them. And one man asks to come out too.

### FIVE LOAVES, TWO FISH, MUCH GRASS

*Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may receive a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in that place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those who were sitting down; likewise also of the fish as much as they desired. When they were filled, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the broken pieces which are left over, that nothing be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.*

JOHN 6:5-13



AND THEY TRIED TO MAKE HIM KING, SO HE LEFT

*When therefore the people saw the sign which Jesus did, they said, "This is truly the prophet who comes into the world." Jesus therefore, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

JOHN 6:14-15

ON THE WATER, IN THE FOURTH WATCH

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a ghost!" and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid." Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." He said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!"*

MATTHEW 14:22-33

WHERE YOU STAND

At Tabgha, the Seven Springs, warm water rises and slides into the lake, which draws the fish and drew the fishermen, and the shore is grassy where almost nothing else on that coast is. In the Church of the Multiplication, look at the mosaic by the altar: the basket holds only **four** loaves. The fifth is on the altar, the Byzantine artists' way of saying the miracle is still being distributed.

THE HEBREW WORD

**לֶחֶם** · **Lechem** — bread. The most ordinary word in the language, and the one He chose to multiply. He does not usually make something out of nothing. He makes **enough** out of what is handed to Him.

WE PRAY

*Lord, You asked for the little that was there and it fed everybody. Here is our little. Take it, give thanks over it, make it enough, and let nothing be lost. And when we start to sink, take hold of us. Amen.*

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# The Hard Saying

*the synagogue at Capernaum · the day after the bread*

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This is the crisis of the Galilean ministry, and it is the act most people skip.

The morning after feeding five thousand people, at the height of His popularity, with a crowd that has crossed the lake looking for more bread and would happily crown Him, He stands up in the Capernaum synagogue and preaches a sermon so difficult that most of His followers leave.

He will not be a bread king. He tells them the real bread is His own flesh, He refuses to soften it when they grumble, and John records the result in one devastating sentence: **many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.** Then He turns to the twelve and asks whether they want to go too. Peter's answer is not enthusiasm. It is something better.

## THEY CAME BACK FOR MORE BREAD

*When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Don't work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has sealed him."*

JOHN 6:25-27

## I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

*Jesus therefore said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, it wasn't Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." They said therefore to him, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

JOHN 6:32-35

AND HE WOULD NOT MAKE IT EASIER

*Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. ... He said these things in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.*

JOHN 6:49-51, 59

MANY WALKED AWAY

*Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying! Who can listen to it?" ... At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

JOHN 6:60, 66-69

WHERE YOU STAND

Stand inside the white limestone synagogue at Capernaum, and remember that it sits directly on the black basalt floor of the one He preached this in. Then look around at the space and imagine it emptying. This is the room where His movement got smaller on purpose.

THE HEBREW WORD

מַן · **Man** — manna, and it began as a question. The people looked at the bread on the desert floor and said **man hu**, what is it? So the food of forty years was named What Is It. In the Capernaum synagogue He took that word and applied it to Himself, and the room emptied.

WE PRAY

*Lord, You let the crowd go rather than soften the truth. Keep us when the saying is hard. And give us Peter's answer: Lord, to whom would we go? Amen.*

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# Out to the Nations, and Back

*Tyre and Sidon, the Decapolis, Bethsaida · the second year*

---

He leaves the country. He goes north into pagan territory, into the region of Tyre and Sidon on the Phoenician coast, and there a Gentile mother out-argues Him and He loves it.

Read that conversation carefully, because it is uncomfortable and it is meant to be. He tests her with a hard sentence about children and dogs, and instead of being offended she takes His own image and turns it: **even the dogs under the table get the crumbs**. It is the only time in the Gospels somebody wins an exchange with Him, and He grants her everything on the spot.

Then He comes back through the Decapolis on the eastern side, the pagan cities, and heals a deaf man with an Aramaic word, feeds four thousand more people, and at Bethsaida performs the only healing in the Gospels that happens in **two stages**.

## THE SYROPHOENICIAN MOTHER

*From there he arose, and went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. He entered into a house, and didn't want anyone to know it, but he couldn't escape notice. For a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by race. She begged him that he would cast the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." He said to her, "For this saying, go your way. The demon has gone out of your daughter." She went away to her house, and found the child having been laid on the bed, with the demon gone out.*

MARK 7:24-30

## EPHPHATHA, BE OPENED

*Again he departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the sea of Galilee, through the middle of the region of Decapolis. They brought to him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside from the multitude, privately, and put his fingers into his ears, and spat, and touched his tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was released, and he spoke clearly. ... They were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes even the deaf hear, and the mute speak!"*

MARK 7:31-35, 37 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## FOUR THOUSAND, ON THE OTHER SIDE

*In those days, when there was a very great multitude, and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to himself, and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have stayed with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. If I send them away fasting to their home, they will faint on the way, for some of them have come a long way." ... They ate, and were filled. They took up seven baskets of broken pieces that were left over. Those who had eaten were about four thousand.*

MARK 8:1-3, 8-9 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## NO SIGN BUT JONAH

*The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ... "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of Jonah." He left them, and departed.*

MATTHEW 16:1, 4 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## AND A HEALING IN TWO STAGES, AT BETHSAIDA

*He came to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man to him, and begged him to touch him. He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village. When he had spat on his eyes, and laid his hands on him, he asked him if he saw anything. He looked up, and said, "I see men; for I see them like trees walking." Then again he laid his hands on his eyes. He looked intently, and was restored, and saw everyone clearly.*

MARK 8:22-25

## WHERE YOU STAND

Bethsaida, the house of the fisherman, was the hometown of Peter, Andrew and Philip: three of the twelve out of one village. Stand in its basalt ruins and look for the water. It is not where it used to be. A fishing village that no longer touches the sea, and the two-stage healing happened there. The place itself is a partway story.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**פתח** · **Patach** — to open. The word He used was Aramaic, ethpatach, and Mark kept the sound because he was there when it was said. It is the same root as the Hebrew patach, and it is the prayer of anyone who has stopped being able to hear: **be opened**.

## WE PRAY

*Lord, a foreign mother argued with You and You were delighted. Give us that kind of holy stubbornness. And where we have healed only partway, come back around and lay Your hands on our eyes again. Amen.*

# The Question at the Gates

*Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon · the turning point*

---

Now the hinge of the whole story, and He chose the location deliberately.

He takes them twenty five miles north of the lake, out of Jewish Galilee entirely, to the farthest point He ever took the Twelve. Baniyas, called Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon, where snowmelt bursts out of a cliff face and becomes the Jordan. And that cliff was the loudest pagan shrine in the region: niches carved for idols, temples to Caesar, and a cave they called the **gates of Hades**.

There, standing in front of the competition, at the edge of the land, He asks the safe question first. Who do men say that I am. They answer easily, because reporting other people's opinions costs nothing. Then He moves one word and the room changes forever.

## BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM

*Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 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. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.*

MATTHEW 16:13-20

AND IMMEDIATELY, THE FIRST PREDICTION, AND A REBUKE

*He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke to them openly. Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he, turning around, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you have in mind not the things of God, but the things of men."*

MARK 8:31-33

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

*He called the multitude to himself with his disciples, and said to them, "Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; and whoever will lose his life for my sake and the sake of the Good News will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?"*

MARK 8:34-36

WHERE YOU STAND

Stand facing the cliff at Banias. The niches carved for idols are still in the rock, empty. The cave is still there, silent. The spring still pours out and becomes the Jordan. Every god worshipped at that cliff is gone, and the One confessed there by one fisherman is worshipped this morning on every continent. Your eyes are looking at the scoreboard. And from this point He turns and sets His face south.

THE HEBREW WORD

**צור** · **Tsur** — rock. The Psalms call God my Tsur. He stands in front of a literal cliff of dead gods and says He will build His community on a different kind of rock: a person who says the truth out loud.

WE PRAY

*Lord, You asked the crowd question first and then You asked the real one. Ask us the real one. And when we answer, give us the courage to carry what the answer costs. Amen.*

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# The Mountain, and the Valley Below It

*a high mountain, and the crowd at its foot · six days after Caesarea Philippi*

Six days later He takes three of them up a high mountain, and for one night they see Him as He is.

Moses and Elijah are there, the Law and the Prophets in person, both men who once met God on a mountain, and they are discussing, Luke says, His **exodus**, His departure, which He is about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Peter, half asleep and completely overwhelmed, suggests construction: let us build three shelters. He wants to freeze the moment. The cloud interrupts the building permit and a voice gives one command: **listen to him**.

And then they walk straight back down into a mess. A father with an afflicted son, disciples who could not help, and the most honest prayer in the Bible.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

*About eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter, John, and James, and went up onto the mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became white and dazzling. Behold, two men were talking with him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory, and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men who stood with him. As they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let's make three tents: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not knowing what he said. While he said these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered into the cloud. A voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" When the voice came, Jesus was found alone.*

LUKE 9:28-36 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)



AND AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

*One of the multitude answered, "Teacher, I brought to you my son, who has a mute spirit ... I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they weren't able." ... Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe. Help my unbelief!" ... Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" ... He took him by the hand, and raised him up; and he arose.*

MARK 9:17-18, 23-25, 27 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

AND THE SECOND PREDICTION, WHICH THEY STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND

*They went out from there, and passed through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know it. For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is being handed over to the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, on the third day he will rise again." But they didn't understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

MARK 9:30-32

WHERE YOU STAND

Two mountains claim this night. **Tabor** has the ancient tradition and the churches, a perfect green dome standing alone above the Jezreel Valley. **Hermon** has the geography, because they were at its foot at Caesarea Philippi six days earlier and it is the only genuinely high mountain in the region. I take groups to both and tell them the truth: the Gospels say only a high mountain, and either way, what they saw up there was His face.

THE HEBREW WORD

**אור** · **Or** — light. It is the first thing God ever commanded into existence, \*yehi or\*, let there be light. On that mountain, for one night, the light was not something shining on Him. It was coming out of Him.

WE PRAY

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*Lord, You let three fishermen see the glory for one night and then walked them back down into a valley full of need. Change our faces on the way. And we pray the father's prayer: we believe, help our unbelief. Amen.*

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## Woe to the Towns He Loved

Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida · the end of the Galilean years

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The Galilean ministry closes on a sad note, and it is one of the most sobering passages in the Gospels.

Stand at Chorazin, on the basalt heights just above Capernaum, and you can see the third corner of the triangle at Bethsaida. Three villages, all within sight of each other. And Matthew says that **most of His mighty works** were done in those three towns. Stop and hear that. The Gospels record around three dozen miracles. This verse says most of them happened in that little triangle and **were never written down**.

So He pronounces a woe over them, and the word is not the shout of an angry judge. It is the **oy** of a grieving heart, the sound a man makes at a funeral. The opposite of faith in those towns was not hatred. It was politeness.

### THE WOES

*Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn't repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until today. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you."*

MATTHEW 11:20-24

A COIN IN A FISH, AND THE LAST QUIET SCENE AT HOME

*When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the didrachma coins came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachma?" He said, "Yes." ... "But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater coin. Take that, and give it to them for me and you."*

MATTHEW 17:24-25, 27 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

AND AN ARGUMENT ON THE ROAD, SETTLED WITH A CHILD

*He came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing among yourselves on the way?" But they were silent, for they had disputed with one another on the way about who was the greatest. He sat down, and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." He took a little child, and set him in the middle of them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me, and whoever receives me, doesn't receive me, but him who sent me."*

MARK 9:33-37

THEN HE LEFT THE GALILEE

*It came to pass, when the days were near that he should be taken up, he intently set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

LUKE 9:51

WHERE YOU STAND

At Chorazin the excavators found a stone chair carved from basalt, the Seat of Moses, the very kind of seat Yeshua mentions in Matthew 23. It sits in the ruins. You can look at the seat of the teachers in the town that heard the greatest Teacher and did not move. And from these heights you can see all three of the towns He wept over in one turn of the head.

THE HEBREW WORD

**אוי** · **Oy** — woe. Not a curse word but a **grief** word, the sound of mourning. When He says oy over a town He is not slamming a door. He is weeping at one that would not open.

WE PRAY

*Lord, keep us from the politeness of Chorazin. We have seen Your works in our own lives, more than were ever written down. Let none of them be wasted on us. Turn us while the light is still on our streets. Amen.*

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## Breakfast on the Shore

*the same beach, near Tabgha · after the resurrection*

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And now the ending, which is really a returning.

After Jerusalem, after the cross and the empty tomb, the disciples go home to the lake, and Peter says the saddest sentence in the Gospels: **I am going fishing**. Back to the boat, back to the nets, back to the only thing he was ever any good at, because three years had ended with him warming his hands at the wrong fire.

They catch nothing all night, which is exactly how this whole story began. Then a man on the beach tells them which side to cast on, and there is a **charcoal fire** burning on the sand, and John notices the detail because the last charcoal fire in his story was in a courtyard on Mount Zion.

Three denials by a fire. Three questions by a fire. And a job given back, three times over. The ministry ends exactly where it started, on this shore, with these men, and a breakfast nobody deserved.

### I AM GOING FISHING

*After these things, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias. ... Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing." They told him, "We are also coming with you." They immediately went out, and entered into the boat. That night, they caught nothing. But when day had already come, Jesus stood on the beach, yet the disciples didn't know that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore said to them, "Children, have you anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." They cast it therefore, and now they weren't able to draw it in for the multitude of fish. That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!"*

JOHN 21:1, 3-7 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## THE FIRE, AND THE BREAD

*So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. ... Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of one hundred fifty-three great fish. Even though there were so many, the net wasn't torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast!" ... This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples, after he had risen from the dead.*

JOHN 21:9, 11-12, 14 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## DO YOU LOVE ME

*So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."*

JOHN 21:15-17

## AND ON A MOUNTAIN IN THE GALILEE, THE COMMISSION

*But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. When they saw him, they bowed down to him; but some doubted. Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

MATTHEW 28:16-20

## WHERE YOU STAND

Go down to the black basalt rock at the water's edge inside the little Chapel of the Primacy at Tabgha. They call it Mensa Christi, the table of Christ, the traditional place of that charcoal fire. Thirty steps up the slope is the church where five thousand were fed. Bread multiplied on one side, a man restored on the other, on the same shoreline. That is the Sea of Galilee in one sentence.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**אהבה** · **Ahavah** — love. And notice what is happening in the Greek underneath: Yeshua asks with one word for love and Peter answers with another, gentler one, three times, and Yeshua finally comes down to Peter's word. He met the broken man where he could actually stand. That is the whole Gospel in a change of vocabulary.

## WE PRAY

*Lord, You cooked breakfast for the friend who denied You, and asked him only whether he loved You. Do that with us. Take what we have, and give us our work back. Feed Your sheep through us. Amen.*

# An Honest Note on the Chronology

*where the Gospels differ, and what I have done about it*

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Now the honest note, and if you teach this material you will need it.

**The Gospels are not diaries, and they do not claim to be.** They are four portraits, written to persuade, each arranged with purpose. So a chronology of the Galilean years is a **reconstruction**, and here are the five places where it is genuinely contested, along with what I chose and why.

**One. How long was the ministry?** The three synoptic Gospels, read on their own, could be describing a single intense year. The reason we all say three years is **John**, who marks off at least three separate Passovers, and possibly a fourth. So the number three comes from John's calendar, not from Mark's. It is a good inference and it is an inference.

**Two. Two rejections at Nazareth, or one?** Luke puts a Nazareth rejection at the very opening of the ministry, complete with the attempt on the cliff. Mark and Matthew put one much later, without the cliff. Either He was rejected there twice, which is very likely for a hometown, or one writer has moved a single event to where it explains the most. I have followed Luke and opened with it, because Tai asked for it there and because Luke clearly intends it as the keynote of everything that follows.

**Three. The call of the fishermen.** John has Andrew and Peter meeting Him near the Jordan, at the very beginning. Mark has a bare call on the shore. Luke has the great catch and Peter on his knees. Rather than force these into one moment, I read them as **stages of one calling**, which is how most callings actually work: an introduction, an invitation, and then the day the net breaks and you understand who you are dealing with.

**Four. Which mountain was the transfiguration?** The tradition since the early centuries is **Tabor**, and there are churches on it. The geography argues for **Hermon**, because six days earlier they were standing at its foot in Caesarea Philippi, and Tabor is more than fifty miles away and only some five hundred metres high, while the text says a high mountain. I have printed the passage and named both, and I take groups to both. The Gospels do not name it, and I am not going to name it for them.

**Five. The order of the middle sections.** Matthew gathers teaching into five great blocks, which means his sequence is thematic rather than temporal, and Luke has a long section with its own arrangement. **Mark is the one who keeps saying immediately, and again, and on that day**, so Mark is the backbone here, with John's lake material set where it fits and Luke's unique scenes placed where he places them. Where I have had to choose, I have followed Mark.

None of that touches the load-bearing walls. He was rejected at Nazareth and made a fishing town His base. He called working men off boats. He taught, healed, fed, and stilled that lake. He asked one question at the foot of Hermon that split the story in two, and from that moment He walked south. And after it was finished, He came back to the same beach and gave a broken man his work back over breakfast. **That** is the Galilee, and it stands.

# He Came Back to the Beach

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It began with a hometown congregation walking Him to a cliff, and it ended on a shoreline with a charcoal fire and a question asked three times. Between them lies the most documented three years in human history, almost all of it within sight of one small lake.

*“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?”*

*“Feed my sheep.”*

JOHN 21:17

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