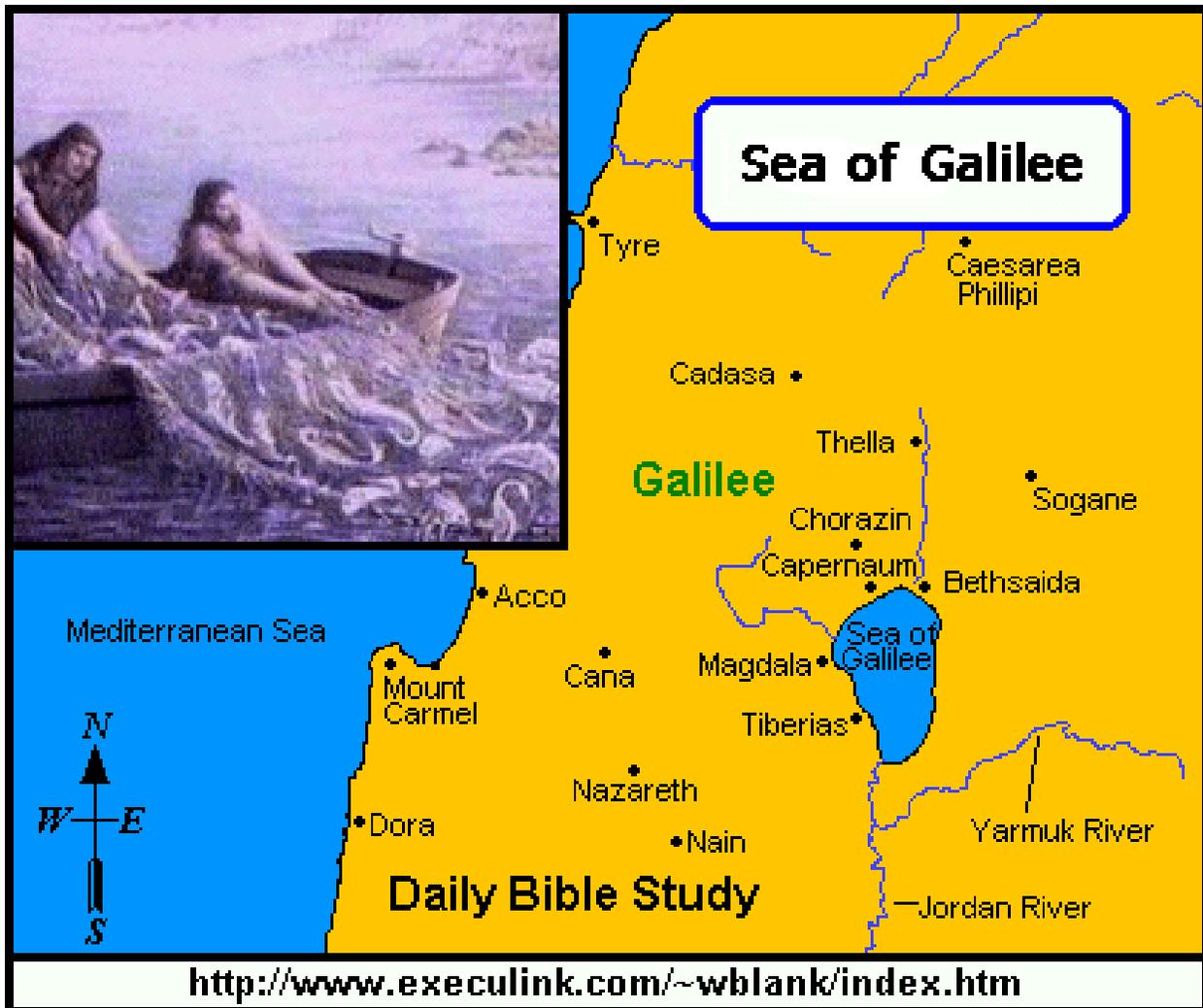


Sessions 5 and 6: Important touchpoints in Jesus' life

- This week we continue to explore introductory and background issues related to the four Gospels, beginning with information about Capernaum, Jesus Galilean headquarters.
- Capernaum, the home of some of Jesus' disciples, served as the Lord's headquarters during a sizable portion of His public ministry. It was a fishing village built on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.
- Capernaum hosted a Roman garrison that maintained peace in the region. Major highways crisscrossed at Capernaum, making it militarily strategic.
- Because of its fishing and trading industries, the city was something of a melting pot of Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures.
- Visitors to the site today can see the remains of an early Christian church believed to have been constructed on the site of Peter's home.
- We next consider the Sea of Galilee. This body of water is located in what was northern Palestine during the first century.
- The Sea of Galilee was known by at least three other names: the Sea of Kinnereth (Josh. 11:2), the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), and the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1).
- At its farthest distances, the lake is 13 miles long and 7.5 miles wide. In places it reaches a depth of 160 feet. The lowness of the lake surface, 685 feet below sea level, contributes to the almost tropical character of the weather.
- The lake's setting is beautiful. The lake itself abounds with freshwater fish.
- Beyond the shoreline of pebbles and shells, wildflowers grow. High green hills ring most of the lake, and the surrounding land is exceptionally fertile for growing crops.
- It was commonplace for severe storms to take place on Sea of Galilee. This was due, in part, to the location of the lake and its low elevation compared to the Mediterranean Sea.
- Another factor were the steep hills encircling the body of water, particularly near its eastern slopes.
- The preceding topography came into play when cool air descended on the lake from such elevated regions as Mount Hermon, which towers at 9,232 feet above sea level.
- When chilly winds encountered the warmer air rising up from the lake's lower elevations, a temperature inversion layer was created.
- In turn, severe windstorms materialized on the lake. Much of that energy was transferred to the surrounding water and caused it to agitate in a violent, uncontrollable manner.



An opportunity for Qu & A

- In Jesus' day, the catching and selling of fish using watercraft was a major industry in the towns surrounding the Sea of Galilee.
- The Greek noun rendered "boat" (Matt. 8:23, NIV) was a wooden floating vessel used by fishermen in Jesus' day. The remains of such a "ship" (KJV) from the first century A.D. was about 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet deep.
- The watercraft was made from cedar planks and oak frames. The vessel also had a centrally-located mast and sails, along with oars that passengers used in the absence of any wind to propel and maneuver the boat.
- The relatively small size of the vessel made it well-suited for transporting a sizeable catch of fish to shore. As many as 10 to 12 individuals could ride in a watercraft at one time.
- Vessels such as these were also used to transit people between cities on the Sea of Galilee, as well as to conduct trade (John 6:17-24).
- The daily life of fishermen in first century A.D. Palestine was characterized by long hours and demanding labor.

- There were times when fishermen would work throughout the night, which was a favored time to fish in the ancient Mediterranean world (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). Afterward, the fishermen would return to shore to wash, mend, and stretch their nets (Luke 5:2).
- Two methods of fishing were commonly used. The first approach involved several men standing on the shore of the lake, casting out their small, circular nets, and then dragging in whatever fish they caught (Matt. 4:18).
- The second method required the use of modest-sized sailing vessels outrigged with larger, weighted nets.
- The fishermen would put these in the water on one side of their boat and keep the craft stable by placing floats on the other side. Then, as the vessel moved through the water back to shore, the nets accumulated fish (Matt. 13:47-48; John 21:6).

An opportunity for Q & A

- Many of the accounts in the Gospels feature not only Jesus and a crowd of onlookers, but also (just as importantly) the itinerant rabbi's closest followers. This observation brings up the important topic of discipleship.
- For instance, the preceding theme dominates the literary landscape of Matthew 8. This emphasis is particularly evident in verses 18-22.
- Jesus' response to several would-be followers indicates that being His disciple was a serious commitment (more on this point below). It is one that many would forsake when the demands of following Jesus proved to be too great for them to accept.
- Aside from Judas Iscariot, who eventually betrayed Jesus, the rest of the Twelve maintained a fledgling commitment to Him.
- During the time they spent with Jesus, His disciples learned about the importance of obeying Him, along with ordering their priorities to align with His will.
- Furthermore, these early followers of Jesus regarded Him as their Lord and sought to conform their thoughts and actions to His priorities.
- Once Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, His disciples went beyond imitating His life and circulating His teachings.
- The Holy Spirit transformed every aspect of the disciples' lives. Others, in turn, could see that the Son of God truly dwelt within His followers.
- The Gospels present only two occasions when Jesus called people to discipleship during His Galilean ministry (Mark 1:16-20; 2:13, 14): His call to the fishing partners—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—and Jesus' call to Matthew, the customs official.
- The Messiah summoned these individuals for one primary reason—to urge the lost to trust in Him.
- Jesus did not expect His disciples to follow Him blindly. During innumerable episodes involving the performance of miracles, Jesus demonstrated to them that He was a competent and knowledgeable leader.
- It is unclear whether Jesus personally called all His disciples. It is likely that He did, and the instances recorded in Scripture serve as examples of other unrecorded incidents.
- We learn from the accounts recorded in the Gospels that being a true follower of the Son is demanding. Jesus' disciples agree not only to obey Him in all He has said, but also to order their priorities for His sake.

- Jesus' disciples seek to serve Him as a slave would a master. The followers of the Son want to be like Him in their thoughts and actions. Furthermore, their desire is to abide in His words and heed His commands.
- The disciples of the Messiah do not merely perpetuate His teachings, transmit His sayings, or imitate His life. They bear witness in their own words and actions that their Lord dwells within them.
- So, Jesus is much more than a mere teacher or guru to His followers. For them He is the indwelling presence of God.

An opportunity for Q & A

- We next turn our attention to Jesus' concern for women. In first-century Palestine, women were held in low esteem.
- Many men would not speak to a woman on the street, especially if her character was questionable. Men would actually thank God that they had not been born female.
- In contrast, Jesus talked openly with women (John 4:7-26). He ministered to their needs and involved them in the work He was doing (Luke 7:11-15; 8:1-3; 10:38-42).
- In that culture, older people were revered. Also, while parents loved their children, the parents often considered children to be of lesser value than adults. Some might even consider daughters a disadvantage.
- In contrast, Jesus welcomed children. He healed and blessed them, and cited their trustfulness as an example for adults.
- Given what has been noted above, it should come as no surprise that women played a major part in Jesus' life and work. After all, it was a woman or women who . . .
 - nurtured Him as He grew up (Luke 2:51);
 - traveled with Him and helped finance His ministry (8:1-3);
 - listened to Him teach (10:39);
 - were featured in His parables (Matt. 13:33; 24:41);
 - shared the good news that He was the Messiah (John 4:28-30); and,
 - offered hospitality to Him and His companions (Mark 1:29-31).
- Moreover, it was a woman or women who . . .
 - were treated by Jesus with respect and compassion (John 4:5-27; 11:32-33);
 - were healed by Him (Matt. 9:20-22; Luke 13:10-17);
 - were praised by Him for their faith (Mark 7:24-30);
 - were commended by Him for their generosity (12:41-44);
 - worshiped Him and prepared His body for burial before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:6-13);
 - stood by Him at the cross (Matt. 27:55; John 19:25);
 - assisted in His burial (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55—24:1);
 - first saw Him resurrected (John 20:16); and,
 - went to tell the rest of His followers that He was risen from the dead (20:18).

An opportunity for Q & A

- It would be incorrect to conclude from examining the Gospels that Jesus' life and ministry were free from conflict. The opposite circumstance was the case.

- For instance, as recounted in Luke 5:17-26, on one occasion, Jesus encountered a paralytic, whose sins He forgave.
- Jesus' enemies interpreted His words as a claim to be God and thus blasphemous (in other words, showing utter contempt or irreverence for God). Jesus verified His claim by discerning their thoughts and by healing the man.
- According to John 5:1-47, later, during a visit to Jerusalem, Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath. The religious leaders again accused Him of blasphemy.
- Jesus asserted that God was Jesus' Father and that Jesus did whatever the Father willed.
- The authorities understood Jesus' words to mean that He had a personal relationship with God that the elitists did not have and that Jesus was equal with God.
- Rather than try to placate these antagonists, Jesus described the nature of His relationship with the Father and cited witnesses who supported His claim.
- The authorities were critical of Jesus' works and teachings because they often clashed with the oral, rabbinical traditions of the Pharisees and scribes (Matt. 9:9-13; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 5:33-39; John 5:1-16).
- The religious leaders had come to regard their oral and written traditions as being equally inspired and authoritative as the Mosaic Law.
- In fact, the elitists considered their traditions to be more binding and important than the Hebrew Scriptures. They even gave their traditions a superior status in the performance of daily rituals.
- Jesus spoke out against placing human traditions above God's Word (Mark 7:6-9). Jesus also ignored the interpretations of the Pharisees and scribes when these stood in the way of doing the Father's will (John 5:16-17).
- Jesus was careful, however, not to violate or depreciate the importance of the Mosaic Law, which God had given the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Matt. 5:17).

An opportunity for Q & A

- Over the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Pharisees and scribes grew increasingly opposed to Him. They envied His popularity, resented His challenges to their traditions, and hated His exposure of their hypocrisy.
- Undoubtedly, the elitists wondered whether Jesus had political aspirations and worried about how His increasing influence would affect their control over the people.
- Tragically, the Pharisees and scribes allowed their petty concerns to blind them to the truth that Jesus was their Messiah.
- In summarizing the Gospels' harsh critique of the religious leadership in Jesus' day, it is important for us to avoid the specter of antisemitism that has plagued the church (including Lutheranism) at times during its history.
- Specifically, the focus here is not on the general population of Judah, many of whom were on the receiving end of a corrupt civil and religious ruling class. Instead, this is an intra-Jewish rebuke.
- Put differently, the Gospels candidly report what one ethnic Jew—Jesus of Nazareth—said about His religious peers. It is not a circumstance in which Gentiles were censuring Jews.

- Incidentally, during the period of Second Temple Judaism, the intra-Jewish wrangling was even more intense. For instance, members of the Qumran community castigated the Pharisees, and even Sadducees and Pharisees were caustic toward one another.
- Often, these disputes centered on understanding and applying the Mosaic Law.
- The law, as given to Moses, was designed to guide the Hebrew people into proper relationships. When they obeyed the law, they enjoyed fellowship with God and their fellow Hebrews (or Israelites).
- Yet, over time, God's revelation through Moses became obscured and distorted by the traditions and interpretations of religious authorities.
- The Pharisees, in particular, were unwilling to allow God to speak for Himself. Their oral and written interpretations of His law implied that it needed constant clarification.
- These religious authorities went to great lengths to lay unbearable burdens on the shoulders of the same people they were supposed to help. They even used the authority of their positions as religious leaders to enforce their own decrees.
- It was into the above context of intense legalism that Jesus came with a message of love and kindness.

An opportunity for Q & A

- On some occasions, Jesus confronted His opponents with direct statements of divine truth. Yet, on other occasions, Jesus took a more indirect approach, as seen in His use of parables.
- Indeed, Jesus deployed parables as a favorite teaching technique. The parables were effective because they appealed to the entire person, touching the emotions, challenging the mind, and igniting the imagination.
- The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record 40 parables told by Jesus. They are short stories and sayings drawn from familiar events of daily life. Yet, Jesus used these stories to communicate spiritual truths that may have been unfamiliar to His audience.
- Jesus would start by commenting on something in the physical world and then compare it to something in the spiritual world.
- Jesus' parables usually emphasized one primary concept that could be applied in a variety of ways.
- Not all the details of a parable necessarily had significance. This serves as a caution against reading too much into a parable.
- The parables motivated interested listeners (such as Jesus' disciples) to find out more about what was being taught. At the same time, the parables hid the truth from disinterested listeners (such as haughty religious leaders).
- Jesus' confrontation with His antagonists frequently centered around His decision to intervene in the lives of others in miraculously, merciful ways.
- Jesus performed many miracles during His earthly ministry, some of which are not recorded in the Gospels (John 20:30; 21:25).
- Jesus' miracles were extraordinary expressions of God's power.
- When Jesus performed a miracle, the Lord directly altered, superseded, or counteracted some established pattern in the natural order.
- Jesus' miracles did the following:

- confirmed His claim to be the Messiah;
- validated His assertion that He was sent by God and represented Him;
- substantiated the credibility of the truths Jesus' declared to the people of Israel;
- encouraged the doubtful to put their trust in Him; and,
- demonstrated that the One who is love was willing to reach out to people with compassion and grace.

An opportunity for Q & A

- Along with the three Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel also records various miraculous signs Jesus performed during His earthly ministry.
- John carefully selected for discussion seven wondrous events out of the many Jesus produced (21:25). These key, miraculous signs conclusively demonstrated that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah of Israel.
 - The *first* miracle is recorded in John 2:1-11 and took place at Cana of Galilee.
 - The *second* miracle is recorded in John 4:46-54 and also took place in Cana of Galilee.
 - The *third* miracle is recorded in John 5:1-16 and took place at Jerusalem, during one of the Jewish festivals.
 - The *fourth* miracle is recorded in John 6:1-13 and relates that Jesus had withdrawn to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.
 - The *fifth* miracle is recorded in John 6:16-21 and occurred on the Sea of Galilee.
 - The *sixth* miracle is recorded in John 9:1-7 and concerned a man who had been blind from birth.
 - The *seventh* miracle is recorded in John 11:1-44 and concerns the restoration of Lazarus to life.
- What are some of the truths that we can glean from these wondrous events produced by Jesus?
 - The *first* miracle reveals that the Messiah is characterized by majesty, power, and compassion.
 - The *second* and *third* miracles reveal that Jesus is the giver of life. In a spiritual sense, the gospel brings spiritual restoration and strength.
 - The *fourth* miracle emphasizes that Jesus is the Bread of life. Only in Him can a person find enduring satisfaction.
 - The *fifth* miracle reveals that Jesus has power over the elements and that He can transform fear into faith.
 - The *sixth* miracle reminds us that Jesus can overcome darkness and bring light to a sin-darkened world.
 - The *seventh* miracle teaches that Jesus is truly the Lord of life and death. Through the preaching of the gospel, people are brought from spiritual death to eternal life.

An opportunity for Q & A

- The Gospel of John provides readers with unparalleled insights into the Lord Jesus.
- For example, it is only in this account that we learn about the marriage feast at Cana (2:1-11), the Lord's discussion with Nicodemus (3:1-21), the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44),

Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet (13:1-17), and the great "I am" declarations (6:35; 8:12, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:5).

- John also gave memorable glimpses of Thomas (11:16; 14:5; 20:24-29), Andrew (1:40, 41; 6:8, 9; 12:22), and Philip (6:5-7; 14:8, 9).
- Furthermore, there is an explicit preexistence Christology that advances the arc of the Fourth Gospel's redemptive storyline, as seen in the following seven statements:
 - John 1:1a, 2—the Evangelist revealed that, in the beginning, the divine Logos already existed.
 - John 1:15, 30—John the Baptizer testifies that Jesus, though coming after John, already existed before him.
 - John 6:62—Jesus, in dialogue with some skeptical disciples, announces the future ascent of the Son of Man to back His eternal home in heaven.
 - John 8:58—Jesus provokes His dialogue partners by telling them that even before the famed patriarch, Abraham, was born Jesus eternally existed.
 - John 17:5—in the farewell prayer, Jesus asks the Father to bring the Son into the glory they shared before the world existed.
 - John 17:24—Jesus prays for all the believers to be with the Son and see His glory, which He has from the Father, because the Father loved the Son before the creation of the world.
- A representative list of titles the Evangelist used to refer to Jesus would include the following:
 - the Word (1:1, 14);
 - the one and only Son (1:18; 3:16, 18);
 - God's Chosen One (1:34);
 - Son of God (1:49; 10:36; 11:27);
 - the Son (3:17, 36; 5:19–27);
 - Son of Man (1:51);
 - Rabbi (1:49; cf. 20:16);
 - a teacher who has come from God (3:2);
 - a prophet (4:19; 9:17);
 - the Prophet who is to come into the world (6:14; cf. 7:40);
 - the one whom the Father sent into the world (3:16–17, 34; 5:30; 7:16–18; 10:36);
 - he who comes in the name of the Lord (12:13);
 - the Messiah (1:41; 4:29; 11:27);
 - the King of Israel (1:49; cf. 6:15; 12:13; 18:33–37);
 - the King of the Jews (19:19–22);
 - the Holy One of God (6:69);
 - the Lamb of God (1:29, 36);
 - the man (19:5);
 - I am (8:24, 28, 58);
 - the Bread of Life, chap. 6;
 - the Good Shepherd, chap. 10;
 - the Resurrection and the Life, 11:25;
 - the Way, the Truth, and the Life, 14:6;
 - the true Vine, 15:1–10);
 - an Advocate (14:16);

- the Lord (20:18; 21:7; cf. 6:68); and,
- my Lord and my God (20:28; see 1:1).

An opportunity for Q & A

- As Jesus lived with and taught His disciples, a probing question concerning His true identity remained unresolved in their minds (Matt. 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21).
- After leaving Bethsaida Julias, Jesus and His followers traveled north into the region of Caesarea Philippi.
- One day, when the cohort was alone, Jesus asked the Twelve who they thought He was. Peter, perhaps speaking for the majority of the group, asserted that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of the living God.
- Pleased with this response, Jesus made three observations that related to Peter's future apostolic work (Matt. 16:17-19).
- First, Jesus noted that Peter gave his answer by divine revelation. This anticipated all that the apostles would declare or write about Jesus under divine inspiration (John 16:12-15).
- Second, the Lord announced His intention of building His church. This was a work in which the apostles were to become heavily involved.
- Third, the Lord spoke about keys and about binding and loosing, both of which were symbols of authority.
- While the apostles would exercise pastoral authority through the means of grace (Matt. 19:28), Jesus also gave them authority to act and speak in His name (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23).
- The question about Jesus' identity was situated against the backdrop of first-century A.D., Jewish messianic expectations.
- God had chosen David to be the first of many successive kings of Israel (2 Sam. 7:8-16). Yet, the dynastic rule was broken when Jehoiakim died and his son, Jehoiachin, was carried away in exile to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15; 25:27-29; Jer. 36:30).
- Later, the prophets said that God would one day restore David's dynasty (Ezek. 37:24-25; Amos 9:11).
- By the second century B.C., there began to develop among the Jews a growing expectation for a future anointed leader.
- The Jewish group that wrote what are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls recorded on some of the documents their belief that three prominent figures would come instead of one—the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; a priestly figure named the “Messiah of Aaron”; and a kingly Davidic figure called the “Messiah of Israel.”
- In the first century B.C., the Jews longed for an anointed, righteous king who would liberate God's people from their unpopular leaders. Some Jewish writings from this period linked this expected heavenly figure with the day of judgment.
- By the first century A.D., the Jews wanted freedom from Rome. Expectations ran high that God would raise up a warrior-prince who would throw off the yoke of Gentile rule and usher in a Jewish kingdom of worldwide proportions.
- John 6:15 and Acts 1:6 show traces of this hope among the people.

- The above observation explains why Jesus was careful not to give false impressions about the exact nature of His messiahship (John 18:33-37).
- Jesus saw His destiny in terms of service to God and sacrificial suffering (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 24:45-46).

An opportunity for Q & A