



Catalog No. 1908

Luke 4:31-44

8th Message

Brian Morgan

November 25, 2012

# THE FIRST BEACHHEAD

*SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*

Earlier this fall, Bernard Bell and I were privileged to have lunch with Baruch Maoz, an evangelical leader serving in Israel, and Nerses Balabanian, an Armenian pastor who was born in Aleppo, Syria and ministered in Lebanon for more than twenty years. Baruch was born in the U.S. and then immigrated to Israel when he was ten years old, where he was converted to Christ while serving in the Army. It was fascinating listening to the dialogue between these two men, who grew up at opposite ends of the political spectrum in the turbulent Middle East and now met as brothers in Christ. Despite the initial optimism that surrounded the Arab Spring, these brothers understood the vast complexities of political undercurrents and warring agendas that are now at play in the aftermath of “revolution.” Though Muammar Gaddafi is almost gone in Libya and Bashir Assad’s regime is toppling in Syria, they feel there is no moral foundation to sustain the freedom people sacrificed so much to achieve. Already Egypt finds itself being ruled by an individual with dictatorial powers, and the people’s dreams of freedom seem dashed once again. Such is the fate of most revolutions. Promising much, they seldom deliver.

Today, we shall look at Jesus launching his Messianic mission. He was attempting a revolution on an unprecedented scale. He had daring, bold plans to reconstruct an entire nation, and from that new nation launch his disciples out on subversive rescue operations into the entire world. Questions fill the air. Where will he go? What will he do? Who will join him? What kind of opposition will he face? Will he succeed? Last week Jesus laid out his divine mandate in Nazareth.

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

**a to proclaim good news to the poor.**

**b He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
x and recovering of sight to the blind,**

**b’ to set at liberty those who are oppressed,**

**a’ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)**

The message was, and remains, revolutionary. Jesus announced that God was reaching out to all who were marginalized, outside the circle of blessing, and offering them freedom, forgiveness, healing and restoration. It would be nothing less than a new world order. The message was not foreign to Israel, but it was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected, especially those living in Nazareth. As we saw last week, Nazareth was an all-Jewish settlement with intense nationalistic aspirations within “Galilee of the Gentiles.” When Jesus makes it clear that the narrow, nationalistic lens through which they view the kingdom of God is what prevents them from entering the kingdom, they are enraged and try to kill him.

Despite the violent rejection, Jesus remains resolute to God’s mandate, establishing his first beachhead in Capernaum.

## I. Good News in the Synagogue (Luke 4:31-37)

### A. Proclamation of “good news” (vv. 31-32)

**And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee.  
And he was teaching them on the Sabbath,  
and they were astonished at his teaching,  
for his word possessed authority. (Luke 4:31-32 ESV)**

When Jesus arrives in Capernaum, he follows the prescribed order of the divine mandate, making proclamation of the good news his first priority. Jesus chose to announce the arrival of the kingdom within the context of Israel’s established liturgy in the synagogue. After the selected readings from the Law and Prophets the synagogue ruler would call on anyone he considered worthy to deliver the sermon or give a word of exhortation. Jesus had a reputation as one worth hearing, a man with a message, so he was invited to speak. It is important to note that Jesus adopted a stage to teach and preach that was culturally acceptable and spoke with words filled with grace. Though the content of his message was controversial, his methods were not.

Jesus was a revolutionary, but he was not a rebel. He was not pushy, brash or rude; but neither was he shy, for he always took the initiative to expound the Scriptures when the opportunity presented itself. Boldness is required to do evangelism, but it needs to be coupled with cultural sensitivity that gives people dignity and respect, otherwise our audience will not engage with us. And if we are not truly engaging our audience with respectful dialogue, we are probably doing more damage than good.

Compared to what the people normally heard from the rabbis, Jesus’ teaching was a breath of fresh air. The rabbinical method of teaching was similar to our current day legal proceedings, which are not based on absolute “right and wrong,” but on innumerable layers of case law precedents that are sometimes far removed from the real issue of justice. The rabbis based their authority on centuries of oral tradition, quoting one rabbi after another clear back to Moses. You can imagine how difficult it would be to sit through the endless drone of rabbinical interpretations in the hopes of finding some crumb to nourish your soul.

When Jesus speaks he doesn’t quote anybody. As we saw in Nazareth, he starts with a text of Scripture, applies it to himself, and then summons people for a response, today! His authority was grounded in the Scriptures, which came alive in the power of the Spirit. There was something so compelling and authoritative about what he said that people were “astonished.” The verb *ekplēssō* means “to be filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed.” We might say, “shocked out of our senses.” It is found twelve times in the gospels and it is always the result of something Jesus says or does.

And the amazement continues, as the authority Jesus manifests” in his words is matched of his deeds.

**B. Proclaiming release to the captives (vv. 33-35)**

And in the synagogue there was a man  
 who had the spirit of an unclean demon,  
 and he cried out with a loud voice,  
 “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?  
 Have you come to destroy us?  
 I know who you are— the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying,

“Be silent and come out of him!”

And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst,  
 he came out of him, having done him no harm. (v. 33-35)

Living as we do in a scientific age, many people don't believe in demons. They would attribute what the gospel writers describe as “possession by an unclean spirit” as a medical condition people had not yet properly diagnosed. But for those who have traveled broadly into cultures where animism and occult worship is widely practiced (you can speak to several of our missionaries), there is little doubt about the reality of sinister spiritual forces that can not only oppress, but also possess an individual. The reality of “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” also explains how whole populations can be utterly deceived and taken in by the murderous deception of wicked dictators like Hitler (2 Cor 4:4).

The good news of the gospel is that the Messiah has come “to proclaim liberty to the captives,” which means to be “released” from Satan's power. Jesus is the one who enters the “strong man's house,” then “binds the strong man” and “plunders his goods” (Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21-22).

The fact that Jesus has invaded his turf is terrifying to the demon and he cries out in fear. He appeals to Jesus like an abused animal that cowers before its owner. “What have you to do with us” is an idiomatic expression that expresses the fact that two parties have nothing in common so “Why interfere?” or “Why bother me?” He is hoping Jesus will just leave him alone and go on his way, but deep down he fears the inevitable – annihilation. We seldom think of demons as fear-driven creatures. Hollywood never portrays them that way. But the biblical view is that, although no human being can stand against their diabolical power and insidious lies, when faced with the Holiness of Christ and the power of his Spirit, they are truly pitiful creatures. As James writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (Jas 2:19).

Hoping to avoid the inevitable, the demon hides behind his victim – “Have you come to destroy us?” The “us” may be reference to the man. Like a gunman cornered by a SWAT team, he screams, “You want me? Then you'll have to kill the man first!” If that doesn't work the demon has one more card in his hand to play. He has secret knowledge that no one else possesses. “I know who you really are!” In his threat to divulge Jesus' true identity he is hoping to buy some time by enticing Jesus to engage in a dialogue with him. When an evil person says they have knowledge about you that no one else knows, it can be very tempting to negotiate. But Jesus did not come to negotiate with demons; he came to destroy them.

Jesus acts swiftly and decisively. He exercises his authority and rebukes the demon. Like a whipped dog, Jesus muzzles him in *silence*. (The primary meaning of the verb *phimoō* [“be silent”] is “to tie shut” specifically of shutting a mouth with a muzzle<sup>1</sup>). Jesus refuses to engage in dialogue with the demon, let alone negotiate. With just a word the demon is thrown out. Mark gives us more detail adding that the demon attempted to resist, convulsing the man, but quickly succumbed, “crying out with a loud voice” as he

came out of him. Exorcisms are mentioned elsewhere in the gospels and Acts, but what is noteworthy here is that there are no religious incantations, special formulas, holy water or mumbo jumbo. Jesus just speaks a word and the demon was instantly thrown out. And Dr. Luke is careful to note that not only was the demon driven out on demand, but also the patient suffered “no harm.” It was quite a miracle. This same authority was given to the Apostles; after they had been sent out and the 70 returned, Jesus said to them,

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.” (Luke 10:16-19)

**C. The report spreads far and wide (v. 36-37)**

And they were all amazed and said to one another,  
 “What is this word?”

For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits,  
 and they come out!”

And reports about him

went out into every place in the surrounding region. (v. 36-37)

The response by the crowd to Jesus' encounter with the demon was similar to that of his teaching – sheer amazement. No one in Galilee had ever experienced a synagogue service like this before. There was no evidence of faith as yet, but the news spread like wildfire. The word translated “report” is found four times in the New Testament. The three other occurrences denote “the roaring of the sea, a sound from the sky like a violent blast of wind (Acts 2:2), [and] the trumpet-blast (Heb 2:19).”<sup>2</sup> Here it is used metaphorically to dramatize the shocking impact Jesus made in Capernaum that day, as “reports” about Jesus resounded like a sonic boom sending shock waves across the region.

It strikes me that Jesus never had to “market” the good news. When God's spirit is on the move, people's changed lives take care of the advertising; word spreads that something new and vital is happening, and people are amazed. We also never have to create a stage for the gospel or force ourselves into the spotlight. God gifts his people and by his spirit empowers them for the work to which he has called them.

**II. Good News in the Home (Luke 4:38-41)****A. Healing Peter's mother-in-law (vv. 38-39)**

And he arose and left the synagogue  
 and entered Simon's house.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever,  
 and they appealed to him on her behalf.

And he stood over her and rebuked the fever,  
 and it left her,

and immediately she rose and began to serve them. (vv. 38-39)

Jesus left the synagogue and entered Simon's (Peter) house. If you ever get the chance to visit Capernaum, you'll find that the foundations of his house are a mere stone's throw in front of the synagogue next to the shore [of the Sea of Galilee. In October 2009 *Biblical Archaeological Review* listed the discovery of St. Peter's house as one of the Top Ten Discoveries. The article explained how Italian excavators discovered the house in the fisherman's quarter of the village. Though slightly larger than most, the home was a simple structure typical of that period. What impressed the excavators,

however, was how the function of the house changed dramatically in the years immediately following Jesus' death. It seems that the house was renovated to function as a church, with walls plastered from floor to ceiling, an abundance of large storage vessels and oil lamps, and more than a hundred inscriptions of Christian graffiti scratched into the walls with saying things like "Lord Jesus help thy servant" or "Christ have mercy."<sup>3</sup> In recent years a Franciscan church has been built over the house.

When Jesus enters Simon's home, his attention is immediately directed to Simon's mother-in-law, who is suffering from a high fever. The fact that she is living with Peter suggests that she is "a widow without sons of her own (else why would she be living with Peter?)."<sup>4</sup> The seriousness of her condition moves some of the family members to make an appeal to Jesus, knowing that he could do something about it. Here is the first recorded request of Jesus to do what he has been called to do (first prayer – "ask in my name"). The fact that Jesus' action is recorded without even a verbal response indicates how eager he is to restore us. Jesus takes his stance over her (signifying his authority over the fever) and just as he "rebuked" the demon and it went out of the man, so he "rebuked" the fever and it "left her" (*aphiēmi* – "release"). Though no demon is mentioned, Luke's language depicts her healing as another example of Jesus bringing "release to the captives." Francis MacNutt, a leading Catholic theologian, captures the thought well: "I think it is fair to say that every time Jesus met with evil, spiritual or physical, he treated it as an enemy."<sup>5</sup>

The miraculous nature of the healing is heightened by her instantaneous (*parachrēma* – "immediately"<sup>6</sup>) and complete recovery. When Jesus heals, there is no period of convalescence. The person is immediately restored to usefulness. The minute the fever leaves, Peter's mother-in-law rises from her bed and begins to serve (note: she imitates what Jesus did – "just as he rises from the synagogue and enters the house to serve her, so she rises and serves them). As Joel Green notes, "Her response is not one of 'wonder,' as was the case with the synagogue congregation, but is one of hospitality and gratitude."<sup>7</sup> She is healed to serve. And just in time, because as evening rolls around the word about Jesus will have spread throughout the whole region and very soon she is going to have a very large crowd assembled at her door!

This scene falls significantly at the center of the text, challenging Jewish cultural notions of the importance and contribution of women (especially widows), who were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and considered second-class citizens. More than just serving in culturally obligatory ways, Peter's mother-in-law turns his house into a church – a place for spiritual formation and community. We see this dynamic in the book of Acts with Lydia and others, women following Jesus who become benefactors to the ministry and play a central role in creating the stages where evangelism and discipleship can flourish.

#### B. Open doors of hospitality (vv. 40-41)

Now when the sun was setting,  
all those who had any who were sick with various diseases  
brought them to him,  
and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.  
And demons also came out of many, crying,  
"You are the Son of God!"  
But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak,  
because they knew that he was the Christ. (vv. 40-41)

After the sun had set, signaling the completion of the Sabbath, people came in droves, bringing their sick and oppressed family members to be healed by Jesus. The scope of what Jesus had done earlier in the day is multiplied a hundred fold. It's as if Peter's home has become the new synagogue and, unlike the one next door, this place is filled with life and healing. So great was the response that when you open its doors all Israel is there.

In my 40 years of ministry, I have seen time and again that life begins when the meetings are over. When you are walking in the spirit you build into your schedule empty spaces after the official tasks are completed, because that's when life happens.

Despite the massive numbers, Luke records how personal and intimate Jesus was with each one. Though it was the end of a very long day, he received each one who had been brought to him as if he or she were his sole patient. The laying of hands conveys not only Jesus' effective power to heal by the Spirit, but also his compassion to identify with us in our weakness. Touch is a remarkable gift to those whose infirmities have removed them from fellowship and community. In his book *Healing*, Francis MacNutt observes:

In praying for healing the most common phenomenon we experience is the sensation of heat, which we ordinarily associate with human love, with the warmth of friendship. On the contrary, cold is associated with the presence of evil.<sup>8</sup>

It moves me greatly to see that the Son of Man, who is tired and weary, does not wave a magic wand over the crowd to heal *en masse*. Instead, he takes the time to look each of us in the eye, to learn our name and diagnose our problem; then he grips us with his calloused hands and prays to the Father to release the life of the age to come through the Spirit into our broken bodies. That day every soul went out the front door "released" – set free! Did time stand still that day as eternity invaded Capernaum's soil?

How would Jesus have diagnosed you? What would you want healed?

- spiritual sickness, your soul deadened because of sin?
- emotional sickness, anxiety, caused by emotional hurts of the past?
- physical sickness caused by disease or accidents?
- oppression caused by unresolved guilt?

In many cases, Jesus' touch uncovered sinister diabolical forces at the source of the disease. Having lost their cover and control, the doomed demons take one last defiant swipe at their conqueror. Like paparazzi photographers who take pleasure in profaning all that is holy by selling their voyeur secrets to the tabloids, so the demons scream out their little secret no one knows, "You are the Son of God." But Jesus will have none of it. Such intimate secrets of the godhead will be eventually revealed, but only through a long courting process of purity, commitment, and sacrificial love

God is not a pinup to parade on a billboard. He is a holy person. For four years I courted Emily when we were in college. I wrote her a letter, sometimes two, a day for four years. Through that process I got to know her and I discover now I'm still getting to know her but its only when she feels safe with me, when we take time to cultivate our relationship. It reminds me of John 2:24 where Jesus did not open himself up to certain people because he knew their hearts.

I think it is a demonic distraction when people want to engage in theological debate that has nothing to do with God's victory over evil in their lives. We need to be challenging each other on the important

issues – how are we loving our spouses, how are we caring for our neighbors, how is purity being manifested in our lives. Theological controversy is sometimes a smokescreen that keeps us from attending to the vital work of repentance and holiness.

### III. In the Desert to Refocus (Luke 4:42-44)

And when it was day,  
 he departed and went into a desolate place.  
 And the people sought him and came to him,  
 and would have kept him from leaving them,  
 but he said to them,  
 “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God  
 to the other towns as well;  
 for I was sent for this purpose.”  
 And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Luke has given us a vivid look at Jesus during an exhausting Sabbath day of ministry in Capernaum. Jesus began the day teaching in the synagogue; next he cast out a demon; in the afternoon, following his arrival at the home of Peter, the young preacher is called upon to heal Peter's ailing mother-in-law; in the evening, instead of getting much needed rest, he engages multitudes who have invited themselves over, healing more of their sick and casting out demons well into the late hours of the night. Follow Jesus, and I guarantee you, your life will never be boring.

Life in the Spirit can be thrilling, but the adrenalin rush that comes from meeting people's needs can cloud your sensibilities and distract you from your calling. After an exhausting day, Jesus needed physical rest and spiritual nourishment to regain his proper focus. Both require seclusion and silence, something that was not available within the city limits of Capernaum. Rising very early in the morning (Mark tells us it was still dark 1:35), Jesus retreats to a desolate place (*erēmos topos* – “desolate place,” “desert,” “wilderness”) to be alone with his heavenly Father.

Not far from Capernaum is a cave on a hillside, whose heights have been called *eremos* dating back to 385 A.D., when they were identified as the spot of Jesus' retreat. From these heights the entire lake and surrounding villages can be observed. It is quite possible that this was the cave to which Jesus withdrew to pray.

But, as you may have discovered, Jesus' finds that it is extremely difficult to carve out extended time and space for solitude when the rest of the world has its agenda for your life. It wasn't long after daybreak that Jesus' precious time with the Father was interrupted by the townspeople who have searched him out. Mark tells us that it was actually Peter and his companions who hunt him down and exclaim, “Everyone is looking for you!” Most of us would swallow those words like honey. They bespeak the never-ending applause that reassures us we are loved. Encore! It is the cry that moves us like no other.

But Jesus is totally unmoved by that titillating cry. He says with conviction, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” The “must” indicates it is a divine necessity. Prayer has done its work on Jesus. In that dark cave, surrounded by a sea of solitude, Jesus is disconnected from the world's web and is refocused and re-centered on his primary calling. Jesus' primary task is preaching, not healing

or deliverance. As important as these are, neither of them is the main thing. As Green notes,

Jesus' teaching and healing have not yet given rise to persons ready to (re)orient their lives around the divine purpose. The crowds are still potential disciples, but for now they remain intent on securing the gracious activity of Jesus for themselves. They do not understand his mission and, therefore, like the devil before them, function as a force set on waylaying Jesus from his vocation.<sup>9</sup>

#### What is the greatest threat to the divine calling in life?

- It is the pressure you feel from those you have nurtured, helped, supported, taught, cared for or rescued to *continue* to meet their needs.
- It is when the voices of those you have served are louder than the Lord's voice.
- It is when you have no ability to say “no” for fear of disappointing others.

If you follow Jesus, you will always disappoint others. Jesus will not permit you to use him for your agenda, and neither should you ever allow others to use you for their agenda.

In 2008, after decades of faithful ministry, Baruch Maoz retired from the pastorate only to find himself called to a new kingdom agenda. He explained that there is a dearth of theological and exegetical material in Hebrew – very few books to equip pastors, Bible teachers and thoughtful Christians to understand the Bible and the practice of their faith. Apart from his work, no one is presently writing original Christian theological and exegetical material in Hebrew. But in order to follow Jesus' mandate in his life, he and his wife, Bracha, have to be in Israel and thus separated from their three daughters and their grandchildren, who all reside in the U.S. It is incredibly painful, he reports, to be so far away from those he loves so much. Like Jesus, Baruch is a man who refuses to be distracted from his calling.<sup>10</sup>

1. *phimōō* – “muzzle” “to silence,” BDAG 1060.

2. M. J. Harris, *ēchos* – “sound, noise, report,” NIDNTT 3:112.

3. “Issue 200: Ten Top Discoveries.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jul/Aug Sep/Oct 2009, 74-96. <http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=35&Issue=4&ArticleID=15> (accessed 11/21/2012)

4. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 225.

5. Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1976), 62.

6. *Parachrēma* is a favorite word of Luke's, emphasizing the immediacy and completeness of Jesus' ability to heal (Luke 4:39; 5:25; 8:44, 55; 13:13; 18:43; Acts 3:7).

7. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 225.

8. MacNutt, *Healing*, 175.

9. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 226-27.

10. If you would like to learn more about Baruch's ministry in Israel or support their ministry, see their website: <http://www.themaouzweb.com>