

## **“WHY DID JESUS COME?”**

### ***“To Preach Good News to the Poor”***

**Scripture Reading – Luke, 4:14-21**

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.*

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is 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 proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’.*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.*

***‘Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”.’***

***John, 10:10, NIV***

#### **Why did Jesus come into the world? What was his manifesto? His mission?**

Jesus, a truly great man, with authority and conviction, himself knew what was his destiny. He knew it was clearly prophesised in **Isaiah, 61:1-3**. He revealed his God-ordained mission first in the synagogue at Nazareth, his hometown. Unlike the (political) leaders of today, Jesus would actually live up to his commitment. He was, and remains, the only person who could truthfully say, **“I ALWAYS DO WHAT PLEASES MY FATHER”** (see **John, 8:29**).

#### **Notice that ‘ON THE SABBATH DAY JESUS WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM’.**

Although he was the perfect Son of God, and his local synagogue probably left much to be desired, Jesus attended services every week. There must have been many things with which he radically disagreed and which ‘grated’ on him – yet still he went. The worship in the synagogue might be far from perfect, but Jesus never allowed it to prevent him from joining with God’s people to worship God on God’s day.

#### **On this particular day, the residents of his home town were in for a surprise.**

Having read from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus claimed, **“TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING”**. I like the NLT because it says, **“THIS SCRIPTURE HAS COME TRUE TODAY BEFORE**

**YOUR VERY EYES”!** The people were amazed. Here was Jesus, the carpenter’s son, whom they had seen grow up from childhood, actually claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ. Could it really be true of him?

**‘WHY DID JESUS COME?’** *In this series for Advent, we will seek to answer this question...*

#### **“TO PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR”**

***‘Jesus found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor”. He said to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’***

***Luke, 4:18a, 21b, NIV***

#### **Over recent years the great slogan has been ‘MAKE POVERTY HISTORY’.**

We are all aware that the gap between the world’s rich and poor is wider than ever. Global injustices such as poverty, aids, malnutrition, conflict, and illiteracy are rife. In parts of Africa poverty, hunger, and sickness are endemic. Consequently we have come to see poverty itself as a great evil, to be eliminated at all costs from every society on earth. Few Christians would disagree with that agenda.

#### **Contrast this to the example of Saint Francis of Assisi.**

The founder of the Franciscan Order did not seem to think of poverty as a burden or evil to be eliminated, but as a gift and grace to be gladly accepted. His friars, following his own example, lived lives of genuine poverty. He himself lived in a hovel a few miles outside the city. For Francis, the real evil was wealth and possessions, and to be rid of them was to be set free to serve Christ and others without hindrance.

#### **Is there a contradiction between ‘MAKE POVERTY HISTORY’ and Saint Francis?**

I suspect not, and the verse above, words of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, may help to clarify the position. The **‘GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR’** that Jesus proclaimed was the affirmation that being poor was not a sign of sin or failure (as many people believed). The poor, too, were candidates for the kingdom of heaven and all its riches. It is a rebuttal of the notion, widely held then and not entirely absent sometimes from church life now, that the powerful and wealthy have preferential rights to God’s favour, when in fact they have the fearful burden of their power and riches to deal with first.

*These words of Jesus, and the preaching of Francis of Assisi, were not a political manifesto but a declaration that all – poor or rich – are equally valuable to God. But of course if they are, the love of God constrains us to do something to redress the suffering of the needy – and to challenge the self-sufficiency of the rich.*

#### **The Bible tells us that Jesus himself sought to redress the suffering of the needy.**

***‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.’***

***II Corinthians, 8:9, NIV***

**There are a number of ways that Jesus brought 'GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR'...**

**YOU CANNOT BUY A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

**Although, I sometimes wonder what would happen if I could sell tickets to Heaven!**

Would they be more popular than tickets for the Olympics, the Football World Cup, a Spice Girls Concert, or even Walt Disney World?

**The reality is that you cannot ever purchase an 'entry ticket' into the Kingdom.**

A place in the Kingdom of God does not need to be purchased by you, because it rests upon God's mercy, upon his grace. Therefore, you just have to receive it.

*'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'*

**Ephesians, 2:8-10, NIV**

When someone gives you a gift, do you say, "THAT'S VERY NICE – NOW HOW MUCH DO I OWE YOU?" No, the appropriate response to a gift is, "THANK YOU". Yet how often Christians, even after they have been given the gift of salvation, feel obligated to try to work their way to God. Because our salvation and even our faith are gifts, we should respond simply with gratitude, praise, and joy.

**Jesus gave his life so that we can enter into the Kingdom of God.**

*'For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.'*

**1 Peter, 1:18-19, NIV**

Over the years, I have even heard of Salvation Army Soldiers who have threatened to take their Corps Officers to court at the mere suggestion that their names should be removed from 'THE SOLDIERS ROLL'. I wonder why? Perhaps they are worried that it means their names are also simultaneously removed from 'THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE'! The Good News is that you do not need to be on 'THE SOLDIERS ROLL', or 'THE ADHERENT'S ROLL', or any other church membership roll for that matter to have a place prepared for you in heaven! I suspect that many who do have their names on church rolls may not have their names written down where it really matters.

**You cannot buy a place in heaven, no matter how rich you are!**

**The Lord gives it, whilst we must simply receive the invitation for ourselves!**

**RICHES CAN BE A BARRIER TO ENTRY INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

I would suppose that this statement is not really 'GOOD NEWS' for the rich!

**Consider the story of 'THE RICH YOUNG RULER' (see Mark, 10:17-31).**

Ever since he was a child, this young man had faithfully obeyed the Ten Commandments. Nonetheless, his obedience had not brought him what he desired. Therefore, he came to Jesus to ask, "WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?". Jesus quickly identified the one thing that was lacking in his life. The man had to sell up everything he had and give the money to the poor. Although Jesus promised that this would guarantee the ruler riches in heaven, the cost was just too great for him.

**We are mistaken if we believe this command is true for all of us.**

The Lord's directions to the Rich Young Ruler are not to be applied to everyone who wants to become a disciple, because Jesus was addressing the specific needs of this young man. The man was rich, so Jesus told him to liquidate his estate and give the money to the poor. The man was a ruler, so Jesus told him to take up a cross and follow him – which would be a humbling experience. Jesus offered this man the gift of eternal life, but he turned it down. It is difficult to receive a gift when your fist is clenched around money and the things money can buy. The Greek word translated 'GRIEVED' gives the picture of 'STORM CLOUDS GATHERING'. The man walked out of the sunshine and into a storm! He wanted to get salvation on his terms, and he was disappointed.

*Leighton Farrell was the minister of Highland Park Church in Dallas for many years. He tells of a man in the church who once made a covenant with a former pastor to tithe ten percent of their income every year. They were both young and neither of them had much money. But things changed. The layman tithed one thousand dollars the year he earned ten thousand, ten thousand dollars the year he earned one-hundred thousand, and one-hundred thousand dollars the year he earned one million. But the year he earned six million dollars he just could not bring himself to write out that check for six-hundred thousand dollars to the Church.*

*He telephoned the minister, long since having moved to another church, and asked to see him. Walking into the pastor's office the man begged to be let out of the covenant, saying, "This tithing business has to stop. It was fine when my tithe was one thousand dollars, but I just cannot afford six-hundred thousand dollars. You've got to do something, Reverend!" The pastor knelt on the floor and prayed silently for a long time. Eventually the man said, "What are you doing? Are you praying that God will let me out of the covenant to tithe?" "No", said the minister. "I am praying for God to reduce your income back to the level where one thousand dollars will be your tithe!"*

*'Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!". The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God".'*

**Mark, 10:23-25, NIV**

The disciples were shocked at the Lord's declaration about wealth.

Most Jews thought that the possession of great wealth was the evidence of God's special blessing. Many people today still cling to this error, in spite of THE BOOK OF JOB, the example of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and the clear teaching of the New Testament. In the case of this young man, his wealth robbed him of God's greatest blessing, eternal life. Today, wealth continues to make rich people poor and the first last.

*'Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord".'*

**I Corinthians, 1:26-31, NIV**

#### **Money is a marvellous servant but a terrible master.**

If you possess money, be grateful and use it for God's glory; but if money possesses you, beware! It is good to have the things that money can buy, provided that you do not lose the things that money cannot buy. The deceitfulness of riches had so choked the soil of this young man's heart that he was unable to receive the good seed of the Word and be saved. What a bitter harvest he would reap one day!

*'This is true because the rich, with most of their basic physical needs met, often become self-reliant. When they feel empty, they can buy something new to dull the pain that was meant to drive them towards God. Their abundance and self-sufficiency become their deficiency. The person who has everything on earth can still lack what is most important – eternal life. The disciples were amazed. Was not wealth a blessing from God, a reward for being good? This misconception is still common today. Although many believers enjoy material prosperity, many others live in hardship. Wealth is not a sign of faith or of partiality on God's part.'*

**"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes**

*A tent or a cottage, why should I care,  
They're building a palace for me over there;  
Though exiled from home, yet still I may sing:  
All glory to God, I'm the child of a King.*

**Harriet Eugenia Peck Buell, SASB 354:4**

#### **GOD MEASURES THE HEART, NOT THE WALLET**

*If you've got pots of money, or you're stony broke,  
On the dole or redundant, praise God! Praise God!  
Like a toff or in tatters, there's just one thing that matters,*

*If your heart's all right, you'll do, you'll do.*

*If your heart's all right, you'll do.*

**John Gowans, SFJ 223:3**

King David's legacy is recorded twice in Scripture: 'A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART' (see I Samuel, 13:14 and Acts, 13:22). I wonder, do we really measure up to that statement?

*O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free,  
A heart that always feels the blood so freely spilt for me...  
Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart, come quickly from above;  
Write thy new name upon my heart, thy new best name of love.*  
**Charles Wesley, SASB 444:1a, 5a**

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*'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'*

**II Corinthians, 8:9, NIV**

Jesus left a home filled with heavenly riches, and came down to a humble stable to be born. He then lived in a modest home as his earthly father was a lowly carpenter. Also, when Jesus started his earthly ministry, he had to eat off the fat of the land, borrow food, water, and even a donkey to ride into Jerusalem on. When he was hanging on the cross, Jesus was stripped of his clothes – what a humiliation! When he died, Jesus was even put inside a borrowed tomb, with borrowed clothes. This was all done so that 'THE RICH SON OF GOD BECAME THE POOR SON OF MAN, SO THAT THE POOR SONS OF MEN COULD BECOME THE RICH SONS OF GOD'!

*'There is no evidence that Jesus was any poorer than most first-century Palestinians; rather, Jesus became poor by giving up his rights as God and becoming human. In his incarnation, God voluntarily became man – the whole human person, Jesus of Nazareth. As a man, Jesus was subject to place, time and other human limitations. He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and rights. In response to the Father's will, he limited his power and knowledge. Christ became 'poor' because he set aside so much. Yet by doing so, he made us 'rich' because we received salvation and eternal life.'*

**"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes**

*He came down to earth from Heaven, who is God and Lord of all,  
And his shelter was a stable and his cradle was a stall;  
With the poor and mean and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy.*  
**Cecil Frances Alexander, SASB 87:2**

**'THE RICH SON OF GOD BECAME THE POOR SON OF MAN,  
SO THAT THE POOR SONS OF MEN COULD BECOME THE RICH SONS OF GOD'**

**"WHAT CAN I GIVE HIM, POOR AS I AM?"**