

## **“WHY DID JESUS COME?”**

### ***“To Proclaim Freedom for Prisoners”***

**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, knew himself what was his destiny. He knew it was clearly prophesised in **Isaiah, 61:1-3**. He revealed this God-ordained mission first in the synagogue at Nazareth, his hometown. Unlike the (political and other) 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 HE 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 have been 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 Sabbath 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 Advent Series, we will seek to answer this question. Jesus came...

## **“TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS”**

***‘Jesus found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me... He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...” He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’***

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

Tens of thousands of criminals will be freed early as part of government efforts to ease the burgeoning overcrowding crisis in prisons, it was announced in June 2007. Offenders including burglars, drug dealers, and conmen serving terms of between four weeks and four years will be eligible for release up to eighteen days early. This ‘emergency measure’, unveiled by Lord Falconer, the Justice Secretary, came as the prison population topped 81,000 for the first time, with police cells and court cells both being used to accommodate the ‘overspill’.

Lord Falconer told the House of Lords that the new guidance for jail governors would only allow individuals to be let out on licence. “Releasing people on licence means their sentence continues”, he told the House of Lords. “The criteria exclude offenders convicted of serious sexual or violent crimes, those who have broken the terms of temporary release in the past and foreign national prisoners who would be subject to deportation at the end of their sentence.”

Ministers had, until this announcement, been reluctant to introduce any form of early release, fearing this would damage public confidence in the justice system. In the hope of reassuring the public, offenders would be risk-assessed by prison staff ahead of release. They would be subject to some form of supervision, and could be recalled to prison if they breach the terms of their release licence.

(Source: **Brendan Carlin, The Daily Telegraph, [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)**)

Within the first month of the scheme, criminals released early from prison because of the overcrowding crisis committed 56 offences, the Ministry of Justice announced. Eight offences were committed in the first week alone, and a further 48 crimes were committed by 35 parolees by the end of July 2007.

(Source: **Haroon Siddique, The Guardian, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)**)

The total number of prisoners released by 30 October, 2007, was 11,132. Of those released, the largest single group was people convicted of theft-related offences – some 2,522 people. Around one-fifth (2,039) of those released were people convicted of lower-level violent

offences, while another 1,400 were inside for breaking motoring laws. The majority of those released were serving jail sentences of six months or less.

The figures show that 385 of those released under the scheme have been recalled to jail, including 118 people accused of committing 180 offences whilst out under licence. However, the most common reason for recall is because someone has failed to keep an appointment with a probation officer. While the vast majority of those recalled have been put back behind bars, the figures show that 75 remain at large – less than 1% of all those in the scheme.

(Source: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

Whatever you feel about the Governments decision to allow early release from prison, we cannot escape the truth that Jesus came **‘TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS’**...

*‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.’*

**Galatians, 5:1, 13, NIV**

**How does Christ not only proclaim, but also actually bring freedom for prisoners?**

There are a number of prisoners that Jesus himself came to release...

*‘Jesus found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me... He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...”’. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’*

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

## 1. THE PRISONERS OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE

**John, 2:12-25** describes the second occasion when Jesus cleared the money-traders out of the Temple in Jerusalem...

It seems that Jesus cleansed the Temple at both the beginning and the end of his earthly ministry. The Temple courts were full of dishonesty and unrighteousness, and Jesus complained about it twice during his ministry. When Jesus entered the Temple area itself he began driving out those who were selling animals.

*“‘It is written”, he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers’”.’*

**Luke, 19:45-46, NIV**

**The Jews had become prisoners of social injustice.**

Why did Jesus, who is the very incarnation of love, act with such violence to the money changers and the sellers of animals in the Temple Courts?

William Barclay, in his **“DAILY STUDY BIBLE”** helps gives us some insight...

## THE MONEY CHANGERS

**Every male Jew had to pay a Temple Tax every year of half a shekel.**

That was equal to nearly three days pay for an average working man.

A month before the Passover Feasts, booths were set up in all the towns and villages in Judea so the tax could be paid there; but by far the pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Passover, chose to pay it in the capital.

In Palestine all kinds of currencies were in circulation, and, for ordinary purposes, they were all – Greek, Roman Tyrian, Syrian, Egyptian – equally valid. But the Temple Tax had to be paid either in exact half shekels of the sanctuary or in ordinary Galilean shekels, and that is where the money changers came in. To change a coin of exact value they charged one ma’ah, which was equal to one days pay. If a larger coin was tendered a charge of one ma’ah was made for the requisite half shekel and another ma’ah for the giving of change!

*It has been computed that these money changers made astonishing profits every year – sometimes about 15 times the pay of a working man! The acts and practices of the money changers were an imposition on the poor people, who could least of all afford it.*

## THE ANIMAL SELLERS

**Almost every visit to the Temple involved a sacrifice.**

Potential sacrificial victims could be bought outside at very reasonable prices; but these animals were frequently rejected. The Old Testament scriptures dictate that a sacrificial animal must be ‘WITHOUT SPOT, BLEMISH, OR DEFECT’. The Temple authorities employed inspectors to ensure that each sacrifice met this very strict criteria. Therefore, it was far easier and safer to buy sacrificial animals from the booths officially set up in the Temple.

**Obviously buyers paid a large premium for such sacrificial animals.**

For example, there were times when a suitable pair of doves would cost as much as fifteen times more inside the Temple, than they could be purchased for outside. Again these practices resulted in a deliberately planned victimization of the pilgrims; it was nothing more or less than legalized robbery.

*Worse still, these Temple shops were known as ‘THE BOOTHS OF ANNAS’ and were the property of the family of the High Priest. That is why Jesus was brought first before Annas when he was arrested. Annas was delighted to gloat over the man who had struck such a blow at his evil monopoly.*

Jesus cleansed the Temple with such violence because its practices were being used to exploit helpless men and women. It was not simply that the buying and selling interfered with the dignity and solemnity of worship. It was that the very worship in ‘THE HOUSE OF GOD’ was being used to exploit the worshippers.

*It was a passion for social justice which burned in Jesus’ heart when he took this drastic step...*

*'Jesus had damaged business in the temple by driving the merchants out. In addition, he was preaching against injustice, and his teachings often favoured the poor over the rich. The temple tax had to be paid in local currency, so foreigners had to have their money changed. However, the moneychangers often would charge exorbitant exchange rates. The people also were required to make sacrifices for sins. Because of the long journey, many could not bring their own animals. Some who brought animals would have them rejected for imperfections. So animal merchants would do a flourishing business in the temple courtyard. The price of sacrificial animals was much higher in the temple area than elsewhere. Jesus was angry at the dishonest, greedy practices of the moneychangers and merchants, and he particularly disliked their presence on the temple grounds. They were making a mockery of God's house of worship.'*

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

*'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild...'*

**Jesus cleared the Temple in a show of 'righteous' anger.**

*What are the kinds of things that make your blood boil? What gets you really angry?*

**The Salvation Army UKT Vision Statement declares:**

*'We will be a Spirit-filled, radical, growing movement with a burning desire to lead people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, actively serve the community and fight for social justice.'*

## **2. THE PRISONERS OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS**

**The Jews had become their own worse enemies.**

They had misused the Law of Moses. Instead of it becoming a blessing to them, it became an unacceptable burden. For example, you could lift an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath, but you could not heal someone!

**The Sabbath Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai.**

*'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.'*

**Exodus, 20:8-11, NIV**

**As it is prohibited specifically to 'work', then 'work' had to be clearly defined.**

Even today, modern Jews go to extraordinary lengths not to work on the Sabbath. The 39 categories of work are defined as: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing wool, beating wool, dyeing wool, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing stitches, tearing, trapping, slaughtering, flaying, tanning,

scraping hide, marking hides, cutting hide to shape, writing two or more letters, erasing two or more letters, building, demolishing, extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, putting the finishing touch on an object and transporting an object between the private domain and the public domain, or for a distance of 4 cubits within the public domain.

**Each on of these definitions of work goes farther than you might realize.**

For example, as 'BUILDING' is prohibited, it is not permissible to turn a light switch on – as this would mean that an electrical circuit would be completed, i.e. 'built'. It is not permissible to turn electrical devices off because this is classed as 'DEMOLISHING'. It is not permissible to filter drinking water because it is classed as 'WINNOWER' – the separation of debris from grain! Many observant Jews avoid the prohibition of 'CARRYING' by making their keys into a tie bar, or part of a belt buckle or brooch. The key thereby becomes a legitimate article of clothing or jewellery, which may be worn, rather than carried on the Sabbath. They even have elevators (lifts) that stop at every floor because pressing the button is classed as 'WORK'!

*'Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.'*

**Colossians, 2:20-23, NIV**

**Jesus came not to break the Law, not to abolish it, not to ignore it, but to fulfil it.**

*'Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them".'*

**Matthew, 5:17, NIV**

**Jesus promised a different way of life from that offered by the Pharisees.**

*'Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls".'*

**Matthew, 11:28, NIV**

*'A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox or oxen. It is attached to a piece of equipment the oxen are to pull. A person may be carrying heavy burdens of sin, excessive demands of religious leaders, oppression and persecution, or weariness in the search for God. Jesus frees people from all these burdens. The rest that Jesus promises is love, healing, and peace with God, not the end of all labour. A relationship with God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into spiritual productivity and purpose.'*

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

## **3. THE PRISONERS OF SATAN'S DOMINATION**

**There is a big difference between affliction and oppression.**

**God afflicts us.** It is a means to an end, a preparation. It is divinely designed to motivate us.  
**Satan oppresses us.** It is the end. It binds us. We feel as though we are down and out.

**An affliction can be physical or mental distress...** It can be bodily pain. Sickness. Mental anguish. Financial worries. Emotional problems. Family concerns. Fear of the future. When God withholds vindication...

**An affliction can be spiritual suffering...** In other words, when God hides his face.

*‘Jesus said, “If you hold my teaching, you really are my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free”.’*

**John, 8:31, NIV**

#### **JESUS BRINGS US FREEDOM FROM FEAR**

The man who is a disciple never again has to walk alone. He walks for ever in the company of Jesus, and in that company fear is gone.

#### **JESUS BRINGS US FREEDOM FROM SELF**

Many a man fully recognizes that his greatest handicap is his own self. And he may in despair cry out: “I CANNOT CHANGE MYSELF. I HAVE TRIED, BUT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE”. But the power and presence of Jesus can re-create a man until he is altogether new.

#### **JESUS BRINGS US FREEDOM FROM OTHER PEOPLE**

There are many whose lives are dominated by the fear of what other people may think and say. **H G Wells** once said that the voice of our neighbours sound louder in our ears than the voice of God. The disciple is the man who has ceased to care what people say, because he thinks and is concerned only of what God says.

#### **JESUS BRINGS US FREEDOM FROM SIN**

Many a man has come to the stage when he sins, not because he wants to, but because he cannot help it. His sins have so mastered him that, try as he will, he cannot break away from them. Discipleship breaks the chains which bind us to them and enables us to be the persons we know we ought to be.

**The reality is that Jesus came to help us break free from sin's domination.**

*‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?  
Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.’*

**Romans, 7:24-25; 8:1, NIV**

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.*

*Born thy people to deliver; born a child and yet a King;  
Born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious Kingdom bring.*

**Charles Wesley, SASB 79:1, 3**