

## **“WHY DID JESUS COME?”**

# ***“To Release the Oppressed”***

## **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 claim, **‘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 RELEASE THE OPPRESSED”**

***‘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 release the oppressed”. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’***

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

*He looked so pitiful, standing there in his little vest and nappy. His face was red and tear-stained from all his crying, but when Jeffy saw his grandpa, his face lit up in a way that touched the old man’s heart. He immediately reached up his chubby little hands in supplication, “Out Papa, out”.*

*What grandpa could resist such a plea? Not this one for sure! He walked over to the playpen and reached down to lift his little buddy out of captivity and distress. Just then, someone else walked into the room. Jeffy’s mother had walked in out of the kitchen, dishtowel in hand, and spoke sternly, “No, Jeffy! You have been very naughty. You are being punished. Leave him right there, Dad”.*

*Now what is a grandpa to do? He didn’t want to interfere with a mother’s discipline, but his grandson’s tears and reaching hands tugged mightily at his heart. He couldn’t just turn around and walk out of the door. Since grandpa could not take little Jeffy out of the playpen, he climbed right in with him. “If you’re in the pen, buddy, I’m in the pen too! What’s your sentence? How long are you in for?”. And finding his big jolly grandpa suddenly filling his little prison cell, little Jeffy found comfort even in his captivity.*

### **The Children of Israel were oppressed when they were slaves in Egypt.**

Originally they were welcomed as heroes when they first entered into the region of Goshen. Joseph, who became the Prime Minister of Egypt, had enabled both the Egyptians and his own people survive the horrors of a seven year famine. He moved his family into his adopted homeland and life was good for them all in the Nile Delta. After many years, a Pharaoh was crowned who did not know what Joseph had done, and fearing the large number of people in the north of his country, he set the Israelites to work as slaves, and threw their young males to the Nile crocodiles.

### **During his trial before the Sanhedrin Council, Stephen outlined Israel’s history.**

***‘Stephen said to the Sanhedrin Council, “As the time drew near for God to fulfil his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them***

*to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child...’.*

**Acts, 7:17-20, NIV**

The Bible tells us that God sent Moses to rescue his oppressed people.

*‘The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey... The cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”.’*

**Exodus, 3:7-8a, 9-10, NIV**

Later, God sent Jesus to bring us release from the oppression of Satan.

*I want you to notice three similarities between the coming of Moses and the coming of Jesus:*

<u>GOD TOOK THE INITIATIVE</u>	Because he loves us ‘WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS’ (see <b>Romans, 5:8</b> ).
<u>GOD COMES DOWN TO US</u>	‘IMMANUEL, WHICH MEANS, GOD WITH US’ (see <b>Matthew, 1:23</b> ). As the chorus states, ‘HE CAME RIGHT DOWN TO ME’.
<u>GOD SAVES US/HIS PEOPLE</u>	Moses led the Children of Egypt out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, a land of plenty. Jesus was so named, for ‘HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS’ (see <b>Matthew, 1:21</b> ).

**We have already seen how Jesus came ‘TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS’.**

SOCIAL INJUSTICE	Jesus cleansed the Temple of corrupt religious practices.
SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS	The Law became a trap, so Jesus offered an easy ‘YOKE’.
SATAN’S DOMINATION	Only Jesus can rescue us from our ‘BODY OF DEATH’.

**How does Jesus Christ release those who are oppressed?**

*‘TO OPPRESS’ means ‘to dominate harshly: to subject a person or a people to a harsh or cruel form of domination’ (Microsoft Encarta)...*

## 1. PEOPLE IN PERSECUTION

*‘Jesus taught saying, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”.’*

**Matthew, 5:10-12, NIV**

**For the first Christians, persecution was an horrific prospect.**

*‘All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero, the infamous Roman Emperor, wrapped the Christians in*

*pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.’*

**“THE DAILY STUDY BIBLE”, William Barclay**

**The Church was built with the promise of overcoming persecution.**

*‘Jesus said, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”.’*

**Matthew, 16:18, NIV**

**Although persecution is rare in the UK today, it was not always the case.**

*‘Thomas Cranmer was a godly man, well read, a gifted liturgist, and had a superb command of English. He was sensitive and brave, cautious and slow to decide in a period of transition bedevilled by turbulence and treachery. He preferred reformation by gentle persuasion, rather than by force. The driving force of Cranmer’s life was to restore to the church the catholic faith it had so long lost. When the Church of Rome refused to be reformed, Cranmer took it upon himself to reform his own province of Canterbury (where he was Archbishop). At the end he experienced a long solitary confinement, and was brainwashed into recanting. Nevertheless, at his trial in 1556 he put up a magnificent defence, and died bravely at the stake. He first thrust into the flames the hand that had once written the recantations. The Martyr’s Memorial at Oxford commemorates his death, together with those of Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, whose deaths he had witnessed from prison a year earlier.’*

**“THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY” (A Lion Handbook), Tim Dowley**

According to THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION, more people died in the twentieth century because of circumstances relating to their faith than in all the wars waged during those years.

The WORLD MISSION DIGEST reports that there were over 100 million martyrs killed during the last 100 years alone – a number far greater than all those in the preceding 1,900 years since Jesus walked on earth.

*Today Christians in the South-east Asian country of Laos are asked to sign their names to a simple document which reads: ‘I RECOGNISE MY BELIEFS ARE INCORRECT. I WILL NOT SHARE MY FAITH WITH OTHERS. I WILL NOT INTERACT WITH MY CHURCH, AND I WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY HELP FROM CHRISTIANS’. This statement of denial is then used as a weapon in a government sanctioned ‘War Against Christianity’. When enough Christians in a village are coerced into signing such declarations, the Laos Government confiscates the local church building. Christians can lose their jobs just for confessing Jesus Christ and public rallies are held to falsely accuse Christians of wrongdoing. Yet no matter what tactics the oppressive communist government employs, the Christian Church in Laos continues to grow!*

Travelling at night, preaching and speaking during the day, Chinese house church pastors work in one of the world's most dangerous vineyards. They endure the possibility of arrest by a hostile government, yet they give their lives willingly in order to strengthen and build up the Body of Christ. Holding a house meeting of Christian believers is illegal. Those who are caught are often tortured in order to force confessions of loyalty to the Communist government. Many who are arrested are sent to prison labour camps, where they are often denied food and water and are shocked with electric probes. Amazingly, people still come to these house fellowships, where they can hear the Word of God proclaimed and share with other believers.

**As they worship the Saviour in secrecy, songs tell of their commitment...**

From the time the early Church appeared on the Day of Pentecost,  
The followers of the Lord all willingly sacrificed themselves.  
Tens of thousands have sacrificed their lives that the Gospel might prosper,  
As such they have obtained the Crown of Life.

Those apostles who loved the Lord Jesus to the end,  
Willingly followed Christ down the path of suffering:  
John was exiled to the lonely Isle of Patmos,  
Stephen was crushed to death with stones by the crowd.

Matthew was cut to death in Persia by the people,  
Mark died as his two legs were pulled apart by horses,  
Doctor Luke was cruelly hanged,  
Peter, Phillip and Simon were crucified on a cross.

Bartholomew was skinned alive by the heathen,  
Thomas died in India as five horses pulled apart his body,  
The apostle James was beheaded by King Herod,  
Little James was cut up by a sharp saw.

James, the brother of the Lord, was stoned to death,  
Judas was bound to a pillar, and died by arrows,  
Matthias had his head cut off in Jerusalem,  
Paul was a martyr under Emperor Nero.

I am willing to take up the cross and go forward,  
To follow the apostles down the road of sacrifice.  
That tens of thousands of precious souls can be saved,  
I am willing to leave all, and be a martyr for the Lord.

**To be a martyr for the Lord, to be a martyr for the Lord,  
I am willing to die gloriously for the Lord.**

***'You know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience,  
love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in  
Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me***

***from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will  
be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving  
and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have  
become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how  
from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise  
for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.'***

***II Timothy, 3:10-15, NIV***

## **2. CHRISTIANS IN CAPTIVITY**

***'By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on  
the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our  
tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?'***

***Psalms, 137:1-4, NIV***

**Let me give you the background to this psalm (which became a hit for Boney-M!).**

God had been good to his people Israel. He gave them a Land, a Law, and a Lord – himself. However, the people defiled the Land; they defied the Law; and, they denied the Lord. Because of their disobedience, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, a cruel pagan king, with his army, to carry the people away from their home. The people became captives in Babylon, and during their exile, this Psalm was written (possibly, although not certainly, by the prophet Jeremiah).

*There was a man who had three sons. All of the family were regular church goers until a disagreement caused them to stop attending. Although the minister and various church members called upon them, and visited them, they were adamant that they would never return. Never. Then one day, the youngest son was working in the field when he was bitten by a rattlesnake. He was gravely ill, but the doctor could not help him. "I've done all that I can do", he said, "It's in the hands of God now".*

*The old man knew what he should do; he called the minister and asked him to gather the Church so they could pray for his dying son. He went to the house and prayed a prayer that no one was expecting: "All wise and righteous Father, we thank you that in your wisdom you have sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He has not been inside Church for years and it is doubtful that in all that time he has felt the need to pray. Now we trust that this will be a valuable lesson to him and it will lead him to genuine repentance. And now, Father, will you send another snake to bite his brother Sam, and another to bite his brother Jim, and a specially big one to bite the old man? We have been doing everything we knew for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seems that all our combined efforts could not do what this snake has done. Therefore, the only thing that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, please send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. Amen!"*

*Nebuchadnezzar was God's 'rattlesnake' that brought the people into captivity and allowed them to truly consider their sinfulness and the deliverance and joy only God could bring...*

## THE LANGUISHING MISERY OF THE CAPTIVES

### **The captives sat down by the rivers of Babylon.**

Instead of enjoying the pleasures and joys of Jerusalem, the Children of Israel were sat down and weeping in Babylon. Why were they weeping? They were God's people, and they were not meant to be in bondage. God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people that their sins would not go unpunished. Because of their sinfulness, because of their idolatry, they were taken into a strange foreign land, where they sat down and wept for all they had lost.

*'Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem: "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you. But you did not listen to me", declares the LORD, "and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves".'*

**Jeremiah, 25:2, 5-7, NIV**

### **The captives wept as they remembered Zion.**

They were sad as they remembered Jerusalem – the place of the holy temple, the place of glad song, the place of sacrifice for sin. Jerusalem, the City of Peace, was where God had manifested himself to them. It was the place where God was real. It was here they had enjoyed freedom and liberty and deliverance. Now it was all lost, and so they wept.

## THE LINGERING MEMORY OF THE CAPTIVES

### **Of course, there were those in Babylon who did not weep.**

Those who had never met with God did not weep. Because they never met the Lord, they never knew the Lord, and they were never saved. The Children of Israel could never be happy in Babylon because they had a memory, a very precious memory – they remembered what home was like and how God had been gracious to them in the past.

### **You could not be happy in Babylon if you had glorious memories.**

Undoubtedly, there was a time when Jesus seemed really close to you. A time when you were truly experiencing 'LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS'. A time when you felt as though you could reach out and actually touch him. Do you have memories of when God seemed to answer your prayers with supernatural power? Do you recall occasions when you were glad to praise his name with singing and rejoicing? It may have been a memory, but it should also be a present reality in your life today. Nonetheless, we thank God for the memories of his graciousness in the past – they help us get through the sometimes difficult experiences of the present.

*I sigh to think of happier days, when thou, O Lord, wast nigh,  
When every heart was tuned to praise, and none more blest than I.  
Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady, SASB 557:3*

## THE LAUGHING MOCKERY OF THE CAPTIVES

### **The Babylonians mocked and ridiculed the Israelites.**

They called out for the believers to sing 'ONE OF THE SONGS OF ZION' and they demanded that they sing 'SONGS OF JOY'. They sneered and they laughed as God's people mourned. You can hear them today: "YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE A HAPPY PEOPLE... YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE A SPIRITUAL PEOPLE... SING US A SONG ABOUT YOUR GOD...".

How the hoards of hell mock and ridicule those who claim to be Christians but are not living for Jesus. The devil delights in an officer, or a local officer, or a bandsman, or a songster, or anybody else for that matter, who once knew the Lord to be taken captive by self, or sin, or Satan. The world loves it when they successfully bring together Babylon and Zion. But 'HOW CAN WE SING THE SONGS OF THE LORD WHILE IN A FOREIGN LAND?' (see **Psalms, 137:4**).

### **At this time of the year, more than ever, it is what the world wants.**

They want to get around a little manger scene and sing 'AWAY IN A MANGER' and 'SILENT NIGHT' and all those wonderful Christmas Carols. Of course, many, if not most, do not recognise or realise that the sweet little baby is the Sovereign Lord, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The little child is 'WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE' (see **Isaiah, 9:6**). The same giddy crowd, one week later with bleary eyes and alcohol breath will be singing 'AULD LANG SYNE' at some New Year's party, with scant regard to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## THE LACKING MELODY OF THE CAPTIVES

### **They could not sing 'THE SONGS OF THE LORD' as they are 'SONGS OF DELIVERANCE'.**

The first recorded song in the Bible directed to the Lord is found in **Exodus, 15:1-21**. Moses and Miriam led the freed captives from Egypt in a glorious song of deliverance. What a song it must have been! 600,000 men in the male chorus while 600,000 women sang the refrain as they gave God praise because he had set them free. All of 'THE SONGS OF THE LORD' are 'SONGS OF DELIVERANCE' because they celebrate the fact that we have been set free.

*'You are my hiding-place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.'*

**Psalms 32:7, NIV**

*'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**

*O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.*