

“WHY DID JESUS COME?”

“The Year of the Lord’s Favour”

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 PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOUR”

‘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 the year of the Lord’s favour”. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.’

Luke, 4:18a, 19, 21, NIV





What has 2007 held for you? Did you experience the Lord’s favour during this year?

Perhaps you might look back upon 2007 and describe it as an ‘ANNUS HORRIBILIS’!

You may remember that Queen Elizabeth II brought this phrase to prominence in a speech to the Guildhall during November, 1992. A speech, marking the 40th anniversary of her Accession to the Throne, in which she described the closing year as an ‘ANNUS HORRIBILIS’.

The Queen said, ‘1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an “ANNUS HORRIBILIS”. I suspect that I am not alone in thinking it so. Indeed, I suspect that there are very few people or institutions unaffected by these last months of worldwide turmoil and uncertainty’.

Why was this particular year so bad for the Queen?

-  In March 1992, it was announced that the Queen’s second son, Andrew, Duke of York, would separate from his wife Sarah. Later in the year, scandalous pictures of a topless Sarah Ferguson being kissed by her friend, John Bryan, were published in the tabloids.
-  In April, the Queen’s daughter, Anne, Princess Royal, divorced her husband Captain Mark Phillips.
-  In November, just four days before the Guildhall speech, one of the Queen’s homes, Windsor Castle, caught fire. The Castle was seriously damaged, and several priceless artefacts were lost. When it was announced that the Government (i.e. the tax payers) would pay the £40 million repair bill there was a public outcry. The monarch then agreed to open up several royal residences to tourists, and use the funds raised to pay for the repairs.
-  In December, the Royal Family faced further difficulties when the separation of Charles, Prince of Wales, and his wife Diana was announced.

If you feel that 2007 has been a bad year for you, remember that...

‘There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere sovereign pleasure of God... This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favour to

some, will doubtless be a day of remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases apace, at such a day as this, if they neglect their souls... God seems now to be hastily gathering in his elect in all parts of the land.'

"SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD", Jonathon Edwards

The Christmas Story reminds us that not every man lives under the favour of the Lord.

'Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests".'

Luke, 2:13-14, NIV

This is 'THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOUR', but there is a definite end date!

Although this is part of the mission, the manifesto, of Jesus, we are now under the year of the Lord's favour. When Jesus does finally come again, he will also bring with him 'THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD' (see Isaiah, 61:2). We are now under God's favour; his wrath is yet to come – and one day it will come! You have been warned!

'As God's fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you". I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.'

II Corinthians, 6:1-2, NIV

With all this in mind, how can we face the New Year without fear?

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you". So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?".'

Hebrews, 13:5-6, NIV

So, with Christ in our hearts, we can look forward to the New Year with confidence...

"A NEW YEAR WITHOUT FEAR"

Some men took voyage on board an old leaky ship. When the sea became rough and stormy, they were fearful for their lives so they went to see the Captain and asked if they were safe. The Captain said, "Well, I will put it this way. The boilers on the ship are very, very weak, and they may explode at any moment... The ship is very old, and she is taking on water, so we may sink... So, to be honest with you, we may have an explosion, or we may sink... We may go up, or we may go down, but either way, we are going on".

And that is true of us as we face 2008 and all that lies ahead. Jesus may come, and we may go up. We may die, and go down, before we go up. Nonetheless, we are going onwards. We are facing a brand new year, and not one of us really knows what that year will bring to us...

When the old map-makers would draw their maps, they would often use pictures of dragons to show the extent of their knowledge. Whilst they may have written: 'BEYOND HERE, THERE BE

DRAGONS', none of them had ever seen a dragon, they just did not know what was out there. But beyond 'here', out there, there were no dragons to be found. There was however, golden beaches, verdant fields, clear flowing rivers, mountains hiding their treasures of gold, silver, and metals, diamonds, and other precious gems.

Their fear of those non-existent dragons kept them back from exploring for generations, but we rush headlong into a New Year, with all that it entails. There are new experiences ahead, new joys to discover, new sorrows to endure, new challenges to overcome, and new obstacles to climb...

1. KNOW THE CONTENTMENT OF HIS PROVISION

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you".'

Hebrews, 13:5, NIV

Discontentment is a disease because it takes away our peace and joy.

The writer of THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS advised us to 'KEEP OUR LIVES FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY'. We are warned to keep free from 'COVETOUSNESS' or 'DISCONTENTMENT'. Although Paul spoke specifically about 'THE LOVE OF MONEY', his words can be applied to 'A LOVE FOR MORE OF ANYTHING'. Covetousness is the desire for more, whether we need it or not.

A little boy loved pancakes, and he especially looked forward to Shrove Tuesday. One year, his mother decided to cook her son all the pancakes he wanted. She served the first batch to him and he delightedly ate them before he asked for more. His mother obliged again and again. Finally she asked him, "Johnny, do you want another pancake?". He said, "No more, mum. I'm not sure I want all the ones I've already had".

Someone asked the millionaire financier, and advisor to American Presidents' Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D Roosevelt, **Bernard M Baruch**, "HOW MUCH MONEY DOES IT TAKE FOR A RICH MAN TO BE SATISFIED?". Baruch reportedly replied, "JUST A MILLION MORE THAN HE ALREADY HAS"!

But what is 'CONTENTMENT'?

'IT IS A FEELING OF CALM SATISFACTION; A CIRCUMSTANCE, OR A FEATURE, OR A CHARACTERISTIC OF SOMETHING, THAT GIVES RISE TO SATISFACTION' (Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary).

Contentment is not getting what you want; it is wanting what you already have!

Sometimes we get everything mixed up. We want things we do not need; and we need things we do not want. Therefore, we often get life's necessities and luxuries all mixed up. But true contentment makes a poor man rich; whilst discontentment makes a rich man poor! The truth is that if you are discontented with whatever you have – even if you have riches untold – then you really are poor! But if you are the poorest person in the world, materially speaking, and you are content with what you have, then you are the richest!

Contentment cannot come from material things, for they can never satisfy the heart.

Only God can do that! Jesus said, “WATCH OUT! BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED; A MAN’S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS POSSESSIONS” (see Luke, 12:15). When we have God, we have all that we need. The material things of life can decay or they can be stolen, but we have a treasure that is far greater than these. God will never leave us or forsake us!

How can we learn to be satisfied with what we have?

Surely this happens when we strive to live with less rather than desiring more; when we give away out of our abundance rather than accumulating more; when we relish what we have rather than resent what we are missing. When we see God’s love expressed in what he has provided, and remember that money and possessions will all pass away, we will be satisfied.

How do we learn to be content with what we have?

We become content when we realise God’s sufficiency for our needs. Christians who become materialistic are saying by their actions that God can not take care of them – or at least that he will not take care of them the way they want. Insecurity can lead to the love of possessions, whether we are rich or poor. The only antidote is to trust God to meet all our needs.

‘But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.’

1 Timothy, 6:6-8, NIV

You are rich if you know the Lord and are content.

If you have a roof over your head, something on your back, something to eat, and if you have Jesus Christ in your heart, then despite what others may think when they look at you and consider your earthly possessions, you really are blessed! Contented Christians are people with proper priorities, and material things are not high on their priority lists!

Even from within a prison cell, the apostle Paul was able to write:

‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’

Philippians, 4:12-13, NIV

We are hearing a lot of talk today about the ‘R’ word – ‘RECESSION’.

Back in the 1930’s when the Stock Market on Wall Street crashed, there were men who committed suicide by jumping off skyscrapers. Why would they do that? Because they had lost all of the things that they sought to satisfy their heart with. They had lost all their security and they could not live with themselves any longer. That is why it is better to have your security and your sufficiency and your satisfaction in something that cannot be tampered with.

‘The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.’

Psalms, 23:1-3, NIV

2. KNOW THE COMPANIONSHIP OF HIS PRESENCE

‘Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”. So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”.’

Hebrews, 13:5-6, NIV

I do not know what I am going to face in 2008, but I will not face it alone.

Perhaps this verse is one of the most encouraging words in the whole Bible. The promise of his comforting and precious presence in every aspect of our lives. If Satan knocks at the door of my heart in the New Year, I need not fear, I could just ask Jesus to open the door for me!

Scholars of New Testament Greek tell us that the sentence: ‘**NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU; NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU**’ actually has five negatives in it! We say that a double negative is bad English, but evidently five negatives is not bad Greek. What Paul is literally saying is: ‘I WILL NEVER, NO NOT EVER, NO NEVER LEAVE YOU, NOR FORSAKE YOU’.

The reality of the promise is that God will never abandon you.

The literal meaning is that ‘I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU AS A HELPLESS ORPHAN’. God promises that you will not be forsaken. We know that we live in a broken world where many people feel lonely. There are plenty of women in Malton and Norton on Derwent whose husbands have walked out on them. There are plenty of children whose fathers have forsaken them. There are men whose wives have left them. Others who feel abandoned, forsaken, and lonely by someone. But God promises never to abandon us.

For many, the Christmas Season is ‘THE MOST LONELIEST TIME OF THE YEAR’.

Of course, we are told that Christmas is ‘THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR’. A time when everyone is supposed to be happy, but many people are not. Death makes people lonely; divorce makes people lonely; desertion makes people lonely. I am told that it is lonely at the top, so success must make you lonely! Old age makes you lonely. You can be lonely in a crowd of people.

A woman said to evangelist **Dwight L Moody**, “I have found a promise that helps me when I am afraid. It is **Psalms, 56:3** – ‘WHAT TIME I AM AFRAID, I WILL TRUST IN THEE’”. Moody replied, “I have a better promise than that! **Isaiah, 12:2** – ‘I WILL TRUST AND NOT BE AFRAID’”.

When I am discouraged, his comforting presence sees me through. When I am lonely, his comforting presence cheers me up. When I am worried, his comforting presence calms me down. When I am tempted, his comforting presence will help me out.

David Livingstone, the great missionary of another century, went to Africa in order to unlock the secrets of that great continent, and take the Gospel to its people. On 14 January, 1856, he was sitting at his campfire, surrounded by hostile tribes. There in the midst of darkest Africa, the natives were beating their drums and Livingstone feared imminent attack.

Livingstone wrote in his journal: 'Felt much turmoil of spirit in prospect of having all of my plans for the welfare of this great region and this teeming population knocked on the head by savages tomorrow... But I read that Jesus said,

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Matthew, 28:18-20, KJV

'This is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honour. Therefore, I will not cross furtively as I had intended. Why should such a man as I flee? I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though it may be the last, I feel quite calm. Thank God'.

There in the middle of the jungle, surrounded by wild animals and savage people, Livingstone was reminded of the promised presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was sustained in his work by the companionship of the Lord's presence.

'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.'

Psalms 23:4, NIV

3. KNOW THE CONFIDENCE OF HIS PROMISE

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you". So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?".'

Hebrews, 13:5-6, NIV

A promise is no better than the one who makes it.

Who is it that says: "NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU; NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU"? It is none other than the God who 'IS INFINITELY PERFECT, THE CREATOR, PRESERVER, AND GOVERNOR OF ALL THINGS'. It is none other than the omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (all present), God. This is the confidence of his promise.

Therefore, when I think I do not have enough strength for the New Year, the omnipotent God answers and says, "NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU; NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU". When I think I am too afraid to go through the New Year, the omnipresent God says, "NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU; NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU". When I do not know what to do, the omniscient God answers, "NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU; NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU"!

This is a promise not from a Salvation Army officer, but from the very Word of God.

'The LORD is my shepherd.'

Psalms 23:1a, NIV

4. KNOW THE COMFORT OF HIS PROTECTION

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you". So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?".'

Hebrews, 13:5-6, NIV

The recipients of this letter were undergoing many trials and tribulations.

They knew the Christian life was not all honey and no bees. They were facing opposition from family, from friends, and from foes alike. They were facing mockery, and robbery, and brutality, and even death. Paul wrote his letter to encourage them to remain faithful in their trials.

Alexander McLaren was a Scottish preacher who lived in Glasgow. When he was a young man of about 16 years of age, he got himself a job about eight miles from his home. He did not have a horse or any other form of transport, so he arranged to stay at his place of work from Monday to Friday, only walking back home for weekends.

Between the city and his home there was a deep ravine. It was a bad and dangerous place to walk, especially at night. It was a dark and scary walk home, through a place where muggers and even murderers were known to hang out, in order to catch an unwary victim. He did not fancy walking through this place in the dead of night, so Alexander pleaded with his father to be allowed to walk home on Saturday morning instead. His father was adamant. Because both mother and father would so miss their son in his absence during his working week, Alexander must walk home every Friday night.

So, Friday night, when he got off work, a very frightened teenager began his walk home. His heart seemed to be beating faster and faster as he walked through that dark valley. Just to make himself feel a little better, he started whistling to himself, but soon stopped as he realised it might make others aware of his presence. Instead, he started talking, well whispering, to an imaginary friend as he walked. Just then, he heard something move in the distance. Alexander stopped immediately. He was frozen with fear and could not move.

Out of the darkness a face appeared. As he looked with fear and trembling, Alex was relieved to recognise his own father walking quickly towards him. "Son, I came to meet you. I was so lonely without you that I came to meet you so that we could walk home together". Alexander McLaren said, "You'll never know the difference that made. With my dad there by my side we walked through that valley without one fear. I had no fear in the world because my father walked beside me all the way home".

I do not know what you are going to have to contend with in the New Year.

I do not know, and neither do you! I do not know what sickness will befall you. I do not know what heartaches you will have to bear. I do not know what trouble may come, but I know that you can face them all, if you can truly say with confidence, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT CAN MAN DO TO ME?".