

Text: Luke 4:14-21

By Brian Mavis

Have you ever had that moment when you looked in the mirror and thought, “I can’t believe this is my life.” “How did I get here?” “I don’t even feel like myself anymore or know who I am.”

It’s not so much that you hate your life; that’s not it. Instead, it’s that you don’t like your place in the world. You’ve chased money instead of meaning. You’ve run after success instead of significance. You have a lot to live with, but not a lot to live for. You’ve climbed to the top of the ladder and then realized it was the wrong ladder.

If you have felt this way, or do feel this way, you are not alone. The Bible is full of stories about people who had lost their way. In fact, these are the only kind of people you will read about. They were living for the wrong things. They ended up in places they didn’t want to be. They needed a new mission in life.

(Note to Pastor: If you can, share your own story of how you have felt this way. Let people know that you can relate.)

There is one exception in the Bible of someone who was exactly who He was supposed to be, was doing exactly what He was meant to do, and was in the exact right place in the world. That person was Jesus. Jesus knew His mission from the start and He followed it faithfully.

Are you surprised to find out that Jesus had a mission statement? Did you think mission statements were invented by 20th century corporations or 21st century life-coaches? No, Jesus had a mission statement, and you can find it in Luke 4:14-21.

I like to read the entire passage without stopping; think of this as looking at the picture on the box of a jigsaw puzzle. Then we’ll take the passage apart, looking at one section at a time; think of this as collecting the pieces of our puzzle and putting them right side up. And finally, like the point of a puzzle, we’ll pull it all together.

Let’s read Luke 4:14-21:

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16 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. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

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*18 "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,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*20 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, 21 and he began by
saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (NIV)*

Let's look at this passage bit by bit. Verse 14 and 15 say...

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him
spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and
everyone praised him.*

The passage just before this one is about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. But between verse 13 and verse 14, several months have passed. If you read a chronological Bible, you would see that the events described in John chapter 2 and 3, which included some miracles, healings, and preaching by Jesus, had occurred. That's why it says in verses 14 and 15 that "news about him spread through the whole countryside" and "everyone praised him." Jesus was becoming famous around that area.

Now verse 16:

*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.*

Let's set the scene. Jesus has returned to His hometown – the town He grew up in. It's the Sabbath day, Saturday, probably in the morning. He goes to the synagogue, which is what Jesus has been doing in other towns. The synagogue is filled with more people. Men and their sons are sitting on backless benches, and in the balcony are wives, daughters, and sisters. In the front of the room are a row of elders. One of them, the attendant, gets up. He speaks briefly. He then asks Jesus, the son of Joseph, to read the scriptures. Jesus gets up and walks to the middle of the room where there is a raised desk, kind of like a podium. People are excited to hear from Jesus because all sorts of amazing stories have been circulating about

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this "hometown boy".

Verse 17:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:...

There was first a reading from the Law and then one from the Prophets. The attendant carried a heavy scroll to the podium and handed it to Jesus to read from the Prophets. It was a scroll containing the writings of the prophet Isaiah. If Jesus was reading a prescribed text in Isaiah, the attendant would normally have handed the scroll to Him unrolled to the place He would begin reading. But the scroll was rolled up. There is great dramatic effect in how long it took to scroll through Isaiah to get the passage Jesus has chosen to read. The scroll contained no chapter or verse divisions, like our Bibles do now. Jesus came to the passage that we call Isaiah 61:1-2. He began to read in a way that sounded different than the other religious leaders. He read as if He was reading about himself. He spoke the first line...

Verse 18:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me..."

When Jesus said this, it didn't sound like He was reading something that was written hundreds of years ago. It sounded like He was identifying with the words He was reading. In fact, look back at verse 14. It says, **"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit."** The Spirit of the Lord IS, in fact, on Him.

Jesus continues reading the old words with new meaning. He reads them as His personal mission statement.

"because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

There is a sense in which physical prosperity was a sign of God's blessing within the confines of the nation of Israel. So people thought that being rich was a sign of God's favor and being poor was a sign of God's judgment. The Pharisees and Sadducees despised the poor, and philosophers neglected them, but Jesus blessed them. He came to tell the poor that there was good news: that God loved them. In addition, He taught that the riches of God's kingdom were an inward and spiritual reality. Have you felt out of favor with God? Jesus has good news for you. Jesus continues...

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“He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...”

What! Jesus came to empty the prisons? That doesn't sound like such a good idea. The meaning of this passage gets a bit lost in translation. Don't picture Jesus busting thieves, rapists, and murders out of prison. Think more of a prisoner of war, a captive. Another group this passage represented was all those enslaved or imprisoned because of a debt they owed. And like all of these statements, Jesus had a literal meaning, as well as a deeper, spiritual meaning. Jesus came to release people captured in sin, even those who are in prison. Whether you are literally or spiritually captive, Jesus has come to set you free.

“... and recovery of sight for the blind,”

The blind were thought to be blind because of some sin they had committed (or their parents committed). The religious leaders figured such people deserved to be blind. Jesus came to heal and show mercy to people who were physically handicapped and spiritually condemned.

“...to release the oppressed,”

Jesus does a bit of improvising here. He inserts a phrase—“to release the oppressed”—from the well-known passage of Isaiah 58:5-6. It would be unexpected that He would mix passages in a reading. But He does this to drive home the point of this passage. Jesus came to set wrongs right. He came to help the helpless. He came to give justice to those who experienced injustice.

“...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jesus stopped right in the middle of this familiar passage, and purposely omitted reading the last part to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. People certainly would have noticed the omission. His messianic mission, at this time, was all about showing God's favor ... healing, saving, encouraging, comforting, delivering, and making people whole.

The phrase “the year of the Lord's favor” is a reference to the Old Testament Year of Jubilee. The Law of Moses required that every 50 years, slaves were to be freed and all debts cleared. Whether someone owed one shekel or one thousand shekels, all was forgiven. Those who had become slaves for economic reasons were freed. Everyone had a clean slate. The Jews never observed the Year of Jubilee. We'll come back to discuss the Year of the Lord's Favor in a little while.

Let's look at verse 20:

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,

Jesus rolls up the scroll – hands it to the attendant – then sits down. Normally, the teacher would remain standing. Jesus creates tension in the room— a dramatic pause. Everyone is staring at Him – their eyes are glued. You can hear a pin drop. He breaks the silence with these words:

Verse 21:

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

That was a slam-dunk statement! When Jesus said that, it set people buzzing because they knew that this passage applied to the Messiah! Jesus was saying that He was the one Isaiah was writing about. He was the Messiah. And that this passage was His mission statement.

Ok, let's work on putting this puzzle back together. What was the big picture Jesus was getting across?

First and foremost, Jesus declared He was the Messiah. He was the One scriptures foretold. In fact, Jesus said, right now, in your very presence, this Scripture is fulfilled. He was saying that *“the messianic kingdom begins now!”*

Second, Jesus defined the messianic mission. As king, He came to establish and characterize His kingdom. He said it is like the Year of Jubilee. In a spiritual sense, Christians should love this idea. In fact, as a Christian, you depend on it. Jesus said our sin is like a debt we owe to God, a debt so large, we could never pay it back. So God forgives our debt. We get a clean slate. Jesus came to establish an age of grace.

But what if Jesus wanted this era of grace to extend beyond the spiritual realm? If that were the case, then Jesus' mission would be a banker's nightmare. (FYI - The Year of Jubilee is the foundational principle for our modern bankruptcy laws.) If that were the case, then Jesus' mission and His kingdom would affect every sector of society. It would influence politics, business, and personal lives. Jesus' mission would have not just spiritual consequences, but financial and social consequences as well.

The first Christians recognized this. Listen to these verses that describe the life of the very first Christians in Acts 4:32, 34, 35:

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³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.... ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Jesus' mission hasn't just influenced first-century biblical history. His mission has had a profound affect on world history and modern times. In government, it has promoted equality and liberty for all. In education, it has championed school for the masses. In literacy, it created a written language for many of the world's spoken languages. In science, it developed a world-view that a rational God created a rational universe that could be known. In music and art, many of the greatest composers and artists were Christians expressing God's glory through their craft. In slavery, although many Christians owned slaves in history, historians credit Christians with being the primary force behind ending the international slave trade.

So much more can be said about Jesus' impact on history. A whole sermon series could be devoted to it. But Jesus' greatest influence was in creating a culture of compassion. Jesus emphasized helping the neediest. People like Mother Theresa devoted their lives to emulating Jesus in this way, the Salvation Army, religious hospitals, and church-supported soup kitchens and thrift shops in every community do their work in the name of Jesus.

The bottom line is Jesus' mission has made the world an incalculably better place. And by joining your life to His mission, you can have a better place in this world too. This place will probably not be a more comfortable place, or a safer place, or a richer place, but it will be a purposeful place. A place that makes a difference.

Ironically, this very thing – discovering your purpose by attaching it to Jesus' purpose – happened to Kay Warren, the wife of Rick Warren, the author of "The Purpose Driven Life."

For more than three decades Kay lived in the shadow of her famous husband. She was content being a suburban mother, grandmother and pastor's wife until she stumbled across an article six years ago.

In an interview with "Good Morning America," Kay said, "I picked up a news magazine on my dining room table. It had an article on AIDS in Africa, and I didn't care. I thought it was a gay man's disease; therefore, I didn't have to care. I was ignorant and hardhearted."

But that magazine had pictures of children being orphaned by AIDS and dying of AIDS themselves. "The pictures were so horrible. I tried to reduce the horror by looking in the smallest way, but I couldn't escape it."

She new that Jesus wanted her to join Him on helping these most helpless of people. She shared her passion with her husband. "When she first started talking about AIDS, I didn't get it" admitted Rick. But eventually he realized that his wife

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was in the right place and he needed to join her. Rick confessed that they and the church came late to the table on this issue. “We regret it,” said Rick, “That was a mistake, but we’re here to stay.”

Jesus’ mission has been missing in Africa. His age of grace and Jubilee needs to be known there.

And it’s not just AIDS that is devastating the continent of Africa; it is also extreme poverty and debt. And it isn’t just Baptist, pastors’ wives who are engaged, it is also one of the biggest rock stars on the planet.

In order to relieve Africa’s debt and AIDS, Bono, the lead singer for U2, has created an organization and campaign called “ONE”. It is not paternalism towards Africa; it’s a new partnership with Africa. The mission of the ONE campaign, as stated on their website www.One.org is to “Make Poverty History.”

That is a great mission statement, but some Christians object to it, and here is why. In John 12, six days before Jesus was crucified, a follower of Jesus named Mary poured a pint of very expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet as an act of worship. Let’s pick up the story in verse 4:

⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages” ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

There it is; the last sentence. Jesus said ***“You will always have the poor among you.”*** If Jesus said the poor will always be with us, then the mission to “make poverty history” is a misguided mission.

Here is the problem with using this passage as a reason not to fight poverty: Jesus was not making the point that since the poor will always be around, it was a losing battle to try to help them. Instead, He was pointing out that Mary, who anointed Him, was doing something that she only had a short window of time to do, unlike caring for the poor, which could always be done.

Interestingly, in the book ***Bono in Conversation***, the author who is interviewing Bono, also challenges him on his mission. So Bono clarifies the objective of his campaign. He says:

I know that we can be the generation that ends extreme poverty, the kind of poverty where a child can die for lack of simple immunization or having food in its belly. Because we can, we must. Yes, there will always be poverty, yes, there will always be people dying of disease, but no, not that stupid poverty

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(215).

Bono admits that there will always be poor people, but he explains that is not what he is talking about. He is taking on an extreme level poverty, which he calls “stupid poverty.” He defines “stupid poverty” as people who are dying because they don’t have clean water, or a couple of dollars for an immunization shot, or who are starving to death.

There is one other point that needs to be made here. Today, the disparity in personal wealth and living circumstances is extreme as compared to Jesus’ time. In Jesus’ time, those considered wealthy and those who were poor had more in common. Both could have their lives cut short because of a common disease. If water was contaminated, “poor” and “rich” suffered. But today, what many people spend on coffee in one day could buy an inoculation that would save a baby’s life.

So, just as Mary took advantage of her unique circumstance to anoint Jesus with perfume, we can take advantage of our unique circumstances of abundant resources and medical knowledge to combat stupid poverty, AIDS, and other preventable diseases. Here is how President George W. Bush said it in his 2003 State of the Union Address:

AIDS can be prevented. Anti-retroviral drugs can extend life for many years. And the cost of those drugs has dropped from \$12,000 a year to under \$300 a year -- which places a tremendous possibility within our grasp. Ladies and gentlemen, seldom has history offered a greater opportunity to do so much for so many.

And in a speech given to the graduating class at the University of Pennsylvania, Bono proclaimed:

... we’re the first generation that can look at poverty and disease, look across the ocean to Africa and say with a straight face, we can be the first to end this sort of stupid extreme poverty, where in the world of plenty, a child can die for lack of food in it’s belly. We can be the first generation. It might take a while, but we can be that generation that says no to stupid poverty. It’s a fact, the economists confirm it. It’s an expensive fact but, cheaper than say the Marshall Plan that saved Europe from communism and fascism. And cheaper I would argue than fighting wave after wave of terrorism’s new recruits (May 19, 2004).

Note to Pastor: You can read this scene below, but if you want to show it, here is the time stamp: DVD Chapter: 10 Start Time: 0:42:59 End Time: 0:47:04. Since the DVD is two-sided, the identified chapters on your player will reset. This scene is actually in chapter 37, but it will likely display on your player as chapter 10.

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The generation known as “The Greatest Generation” saved our world from evil tyranny and built a prosperous nation. What will our generation be known for? The Internet? The war on terror? Probably yes to both. But, can also be known for defeating stupid poverty.

I know the task seems too big for anyone to make a difference. I feel that way too. But I think there is a lesson to be learned from an Oscar-winning film – Schindler’s List. This movie depicts life in German-occupied Poland during WWII. The German, Oskar Schindler, came to Poland with the hopes of striking it rich, partly by exploiting concentration camp workers in his factory. Fortunately, his heart is changed, and it becomes his mission to save whatever Jews he can from the horrors of the Nazis.

Towards the end of the movie when the war is over and the Jews are liberated, Schindler finds that he must be on the run. Schindler gives his faithful assistant, Stern, his last orders as he leaves the factory.

Stern tells Schindler that everything will be done as he asked. The workers present Schindler with a letter, explaining all he has done for them, in case he is captured. All of the workers have signed it. They also present him with a ring, on which is inscribed, **“Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.”**

Schindler is moved. He accidentally drops the ring, and immediately bends down to search for it in the gravel. He finds it, puts it on, and claps Stern’s hands. Overcome, he whispers, “I could have got more out. I don’t know. If I just...” Stern shakes his head, “Oskar, there are 1,100 people who are alive because of you. Look at them.”

Reflecting, Schindler says, “If I’d made more money” and then he laughs sadly, “I threw away so much money.” He begins to cry, “You have no idea. If I had just...”

Stern interrupts, “There will be generations because of what you did.”

Schindler says, “I didn’t do enough.” But Stern insists, “You did so much.”

Inconsolable, Schindler says, “This car. Goeth would have bought this car. Why did I keep the car? Ten people right there.” He scans the faces of his workers, “Ten people, ten more people. This pin. Two people. This is gold. Two more people. He would have given me two for it; at least one. He would have given me one; one more. One more person. A person, Stern. For this.”

Sobbing and stumbling, Schindler falls forward. Stern catches him to hold him up. Schindler says, “I could have gotten...one more person. And I didn’t. And I didn’t.”

What a powerful scene. And its power doesn’t come from the hundreds of people he saved, but from the importance of saving one. Schindler’s passion was to save just **one more life**. The inscription on the ring: “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.” In other words, you may not be able to save the world, but you can save the world for someone.

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The numbers and statistics concerning AIDS can be staggering and mind-numbing. But what if we pictured the world as a village of 100 people? It would look something like this:

The village would have 60 Asians, 14 Africans, 12 Europeans, 8 Latin Americans, 5 from the USA and Canada, and 1 from the South Pacific.

80 would live in substandard housing

67 would be unable to read

50 would be malnourished

33 would be without access to a safe water supply

33 would be living on only 3% of the income of “the village”

5 would control 32% of the entire wealth; all 5 would be US citizens

1 would have a college education

1 would have AIDS

1 would be dying of starvation

Those last two hit the hardest. One has AIDS. One is dying because of stupid poverty. If the world were just 100 people, I know you would do whatever you could for the one who was starving and the one with AIDS.

So what can you do? With God's help, who knows? You may do incredible things. But I'm asking everyone to do one simple thing. I just want you to share your voice. Go to www.one.org and sign your name to the ONE Campaign to make poverty history. People are listening and Christians need to join this chorus.

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SIGN THE DECLARATION TODAY.

“WE BELIEVE that in the best American tradition of helping others help themselves, now is the time to join with other countries in a historic pact for compassion and justice to help the poorest people of the world overcome AIDS and extreme poverty.

WE RECOGNIZE that a pact including such measures as fair trade, debt relief, fighting corruption and over time, directing an amount equal to one percent of the U.S. budget toward meeting basic needs- education, health, clean water, food and care for orphans- would transform the futures and hopes of an entire generation in the poorest countries.

WE COMMIT ourselves -one person, one voice, one vote at a time- to make a better, safer world for all.”

NAME	EMAIL (Please print clearly!)	ZIP CODE	Interested in volunteering?

By adding your name and email to our declaration, you are joining the ONE email list, where you will receive occasional emails regarding issues like AIDS, poverty and debt and ways that you can help. Thanks for your support!