



THE PROMISE OF PURPOSE

Why are you here?

And why is the Church here?

What has God put you / Church *here* for? (I don't just mean 'here' as in this place, on a Sunday morning: I mean here on this planet.)

For Christians, the answers to those questions are related. And that is the theme of the prophecy we're going to look at today – the greatest mission statement of them all:

Isaiah 61:1-3

Who is speaking here? Is it Isaiah? The nation of Israel, perhaps? Judaism 2000 years ago interpreted it to be the ultimate Israelite, the Messiah. If so, it's telling us that the Messiah would be anointed with all the power of God, to do what He had been born to do. I.e. this is a prophecy about Jesus' mission, starting with His baptism.

Which is the reason it gets quoted at the beginning of His ministry, in Luke 4:14-30. Now notice this: the people of Nazareth start off being receptive towards Jesus – and then they flip. Why? Because they had always seen God's promises as being all about them. But then Jesus challenges that thinking by saying, "My mission isn't to those on the inside. Just like Elijah and Elisha, My mission is to those on the outside." And *that* is when they freak.

However, it would be wrong to think that this is just Jesus' mission. As Jesus' followers, this is ours, too. Which means the reason we're here isn't us – it's others.

What does that look like, then? These 6 things:

1) To Preach Good News To The Poor. The Hebrew for "to preach good news" literally means 'to declare victory!' So what does that mean? Well, it's not enough to say, "Jesus is amazing." We need to *show* it – either by reaching into our pockets or rolling up our sleeves. Because the Gospel isn't good news on a spiritual level unless it's good news on a physical one, right? That's why Jesus performed the miracles that He did. It was to say, "I can meet the spiritual needs you have. And here's the proof."

Historical fact: down through the centuries the Church has been at its most effective when it has recognised the need to put the Gospel into action. Revival and social change always go hand-in-hand.

That's good news to the poor!

2) To Bind Up The Broken-Hearted. When we look at Jesus we find Him not only healing people's physical ailments, but their emotional ones as well - Mary Magdalene; the Samaritan woman; the adulterous woman. And we too live in a world of broken hearts, e.g.:

- Relational issues: marital and family breakdown.
- Mental health issues.
- People who have experienced abuse or neglect.

So how did Jesus heal broken hearts? Like this: He spent time with people, ate with them, listened to them, loved them. Jesus had an 'open door' policy towards those around Him. And we need to have the same.

3) To Proclaim Freedom For The Captives. Praise God that in the west at least, slavery has been illegal for 150 years or so. But even so, slavery is still a reality in our world today. Think about it in these terms:

- Poor working conditions and human rights violations.
- The marketing of baby-milk to third world mothers.
- The trafficking of desperate men, women – and children.

The Bible's trajectory is a world without slavery (think Exodus) – which means that, as followers of Jesus, we have to work at ending it. Now that might affect our buying habits, our eating habits, even our viewing habits. But Jesus came to set people free.

In every way.

4) To Release Prisoners From Darkness. The Greek Septuagint translates 'darkness' as 'blindness', and there are lots of examples of Jesus enabling people to see. But Jesus said that He came to do more than that – because 'blindness' can manifest itself in different ways:

- Religious: a denial of the uniqueness of Jesus.

- Philosophical: a denial of the authority of the Bible.
- Personal: a denial of what God says about you and me (sinners, yes, but loved by God even so).

Jesus wants to free people from whatever darkness is holding them – and He wants to use *us* to do it! That's why meeting and learning together on a weekly basis is so important – it equips us to bring sight to others.

5) To Proclaim The Year Of The Lord's Favour. What is Isaiah talking about here? He's talking about something that occurred every 50th year in ancient Israel: the Year of Jubilee or *yovel* in Hebrew, an expression which means either the year of horn blasts, or the year of shouting. Either way, it suggests celebration – because in this year all debts would be cancelled. And it's a picture of what Jesus would do for all of us, on the cross.

So how do *we* do this? By practicing forgiveness. The root-cause of so much conflict, whether between nations or individuals, is a desire for revenge. Jesus calls us to be different.

He calls us to live out 'the Year of Jubilee.'

6) To Comfort All Who Mourn. Read the Gospels, and you find Jesus doing exactly that. He raised the widow's son; Jairus' daughter; His friend Lazarus. And then to top it all He raised Himself! In all of these miracles Jesus was saying, "I am greater than the thing you fear most."

And everyone needs to hear this, because death is a reality for everyone, eventually. But I want to make it clear: it's not just about the words we speak. In fact, sometimes it's not about words at all – not initially, anyway. Because what matters, initially at least, is being there for people. Sometimes it's in *us* being there that people get a sense of *Jesus* being there, of a hope beyond this moment, beyond this life.

That's comfort. That's Jesus.

State Your Purpose

So that's what Jesus is all about. But it's also what *we* should be about – because this is our mission, too. So at the beginning of 2020, let's commit ourselves to turning this prophecy into action - as individuals, and as a community:

Sovereign LORD, I pray that You will anoint ME and send ME to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, to release prisoners from darkness, to proclaim the year of Your favour, and to comfort all who mourn. LORD, use ME to bring joy, healing, justice, truth, forgiveness and hope to this world.