

“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 notice 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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(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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SIGN THE **ONE** 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!