

A Most Magnificent Mission - Luke 4:18-19

by Jon Courson

Jesus' approach to ministry was non-intimidating and incarnational, focused on people and not on impressing others with knowledge, and He defined true holiness as serving and loving others.

Scripture: Matthew 11:30, Matthew 12:2, Mark 1:38, Luke 4:18, Luke 7:36

Topics: "Jesus Ministry", "Christian Freedom"

Description

Jon Courson delves into Jesus' Mission Statement found in Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus declares His purpose to preach the gospel, heal the brokenhearted, deliver the captives, give sight to the blind, and set the oppressed free. Courson explores how Jesus' ministry defied traditional religious practices, focusing on love, grace, and freedom rather than rules and intimidation. He emphasizes Jesus' unique approach to teaching, prayer, and ministry, showcasing a compassionate and non-condemning Savior who prioritized people over religious protocols.

Transcript

If you've been reading leadership or management journals, you know that a real trend in the past several years has been for every organization -- whether business or ministry -- to issue a Mission Statement, a succinct description of its vision or mission.

We find Jesus' Mission Statement in the first message He preached in Nazareth when He said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' Isaiah 61:1-2

In his excellent work, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim makes a strong case that the year Jesus began His public ministry was the Year of Jubilee, a year of celebration and liberation when all debts were cancelled, all slaves set free. If this be the case, Jesus' message would be especially fitting, for He was about to set people free from religious domination as well.

When Jesus read from the Book of Isaiah the prophecy concerning Himself, there were 613 commandments which the Pharisees had determined were embedded in the Scriptures. Consequently, those who heard His words struggled under a heavy burden of what they were told constituted true religion and holiness. No wonder, then, that they marveled at the gracious words Jesus spoke to them (Luke 4:22).

But as He continued speaking to them of their need for Him, their marvel turned to wrath. 'How dare He give a word of correction to us?' they asked. 'We know Him. He grew up here. This is just Joseph's boy.' Jesus caught these people off guard because quite possibly there were boys in the town who were much better candidates to be Messiah than He. After all, the other boys wore phylacteries -- boxes worn on the forehead or around their wrists which contained Deuteronomy 6:8. Jesus, evidently, never did (Matthew 23:5).

Because I like to take my Bible with me wherever I go, phylacteries seem like a good idea. Obviously, the scrolls were too big and bulky to carry about, so phylacteries would seem to be a wonderful way to express the importance of the Word of God. I'm sure I would have spotted the guys wearing their phylacteries faithfully and said, 'There are our leaders, right there.' But that's because I'm a closet Pharisee. I'm impressed with signs of spirituality -- phylacteries, prayer shawls, broad borders, and all the rest.

Jesus, however, models something entirely different. As they watched Him grow up, the people in His hometown didn't say of Him, 'Now there's a spiritual young man.' No, they wanted to kill Him (Luke 4:29). You wouldn't want to kill a man you thought was qualified to be Messiah.

Not only did Jesus not carry a Bible, but He evidently never gave a formal Bible study to His disciples. I look for every opportunity to hold a formal or an informal Bible study. That's what the Pharisees did too. Endlessly. They unrolled the scrolls. They had discussions. They prodded and pontificated. But although Jesus knew the Word better than all of them by the age of 12 (Luke 2:47), His approach to spiritual life and Bible study was entirely different.

And because Jesus was able to move about without a big Bible in hand, impressing people with His knowledge, He was able to do incarnational ministry which was completely non-intimidating -- as when He would derive a succinct lesson on spiritual life simply from seeing a man casting seed into a field (Luke 8:5).

I am anything but succinct. I don't make my points quickly. I love to go on and on. Jesus did just the opposite. When Thomas was doubting, Jesus didn't say, 'Let Me give you five reasons why the Resurrection is true, fifteen Old Testament prophecies which shed light on what is happening before you.' No, He simply said, 'Touch My wounds,' (John 20:27).

It's not that He didn't know the prophecies. It's not that He didn't have a grasp on Scripture. But it's as though He had distilled them to the point where the people He cared about could be effectively reached without being intimidated by His knowledge. His was an incarnational ministry which amazes me.

Nonetheless, I find myself asking, 'Couldn't You have given some Bible studies to Your disciples and recorded them in the Word which we could use as a model for how Scripture is to be taught?' Oh, Jesus did this on one occasion -- on the road To Emmaus. But, being that this is the only time such teaching is recorded, it was the singular exception rather than the rule -- and even then, it was given to two individuals who were outside of His inner circle of 12.

Not only do we find an absence of recorded Bible study in the Word, but there is not one recorded instance in the New Testament where Jesus prayed with His disciples, not one recorded instance when He gathered His boys around a fire and said, 'Let's spend some time in prayer,' not one time where He said to His disciples, 'It's a great night. Look at the stars above. Let's talk to the Father together.'

Finally, after a year and a half, His disciples said, 'Lord teach us to pray. John does. The Pharisees do.' Indeed the Pharisees did pray in the parking lot, on the street corner, in the marketplace, they loved to give long prayers. I like that. That's spirituality. That's holiness. If I were Jesus, I would have taught on prayer, given seminars on prayer, called special prayer meetings.

But what did Jesus do? In response to His disciples' request to teach them to pray, He not only repeated the simple prayer He had taught them a year and a half earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, but He shortened it by five words.

Jesus' disciples knew prayer was the foundation of His ministry. Seeing Him slip away before the break of day morning by morning (Isaiah 50), they knew He was a man of passionate prayer. And yet He didn't necessarily pray with them. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, 'You stay here while I go and pray,' (Matthew 26:36).

Why? I suggest it was because, although prayer is a glorious privilege, it can also be very intimidating to people. Whenever I tell the congregation to break into groups for conversational prayer, I can feel the tension which fills the room. Evidently, Jesus was so kind, so gracious, so loving that He would not put that kind of trip on anyone. I like to pray with people -- but when was the last time I spent all night alone in prayer? Jesus reversed the entire order. He talked about a prayer closet, about praying in secret, as if to say, 'Forget the outward expression because it intimidates people. They're burdened by your seeming spirituality, but I came to set them free.'

As a result, common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). They were drawn to Him like moths to a flame not because He was well groomed or well-attired (Isaiah 53:2), but because there was evidently something in His eyes which welcomed them, something in His voice which warmed them. I'm ashamed to admit that I look for guys who are sharp in appearance as leadership material. The Pharisees did too. The best-dressed men of their day, they came across as very polished and sophisticated. But they also came across as stern and unapproachable.

Not Jesus. So easy was He to be with that for His inaugural miracle, He made wine for a wedding party. History tells us that in Jesus' day, when a baby girl was born into the family, her father would annually make a batch of wine for himself and one for his daughter's marriage celebration. Therefore, if the bride at Cana was fifteen or sixteen, there would have been presented to the happy couple 16 years' worth of wine. But after drinking all 16 years' worth, the wedding party in Cana ran out of wine.

So what did Jesus do? Did He give them a lecture on the danger of overindulgence? Did He make a bottle or two? No, He made 180 gallons (John 2:6). If I were Jesus, I would have kicked off my public ministry with a nice healing miracle, or by bringing someone back from the dead.

Instead, Jesus said, 'Here's a little bride and groom who are embarrassed. I want to help them.' He gave no teaching; He got no glory. He simply provided wine with no strings attached. In fact, in studying His miracles, very rarely do we see Jesus make application to the people He touched or healed or helped. With the exception of a couple occasions, no tract was given out, no teaching given.

'Sell your goods and follow Me,' He said to the rich young ruler,' (Matthew 19:21). But when he couldn't do this, Jesus didn't say, 'Let's get together for coffee and rethink your decision. I want to take you through Ecclesiastes and explain to you the emptiness of riches.' No, He simply let His invitation stand.

I'm intrigued by the Reformers. Reformers are intense, single-minded, committed. Yet the fire in their eyes, and the determination on their faces can cause people to be intimidated, to back away, to feel bad. Reformers can be uptight. Not Jesus. Why? He trusted the Father, that in due time the rich young ruler would see the truth of His words, the depth of His love and come back.

Even when He cleansed the Temple, John makes it clear the scourge Jesus made was a small scourge and that He took care to protect the doves (2:15-16). There's never any panic or frenzy seen in Jesus. Rather, He moved with serenity, certainty, tranquility.

As a result, although He was referred to as a glutton, a winebibber, and the friend of sinners, no one ever accused Him of being too busy. 'Master, all men seek for You in Capernaum. That's the hot spot of the northern region, the epicenter of the area outside of Jerusalem. What an invitation!' But what did Jesus say? 'For this reason came I forth,' -- not from heaven but from His morning prayer time -- 'to go to a little un-walled village to talk to the villagers there. And that will about do it for today,' (Mark 1:38).

Jesus cared about one thing: His Father's will.

That's all. That is how He was able to move around with serenity, focus, and a complete lack of busyness. 'My burden is easy and My load is light,' He said (Matthew 11:30). And He lived this out in such a way that no one ever once suggested or implied He was busy.

Jesus truly breaks the mold of what we perceive holiness and spirituality to be. Although we think this is seen in the fact that He hung around publicans and sinners, I believe it is seen more clearly in the fact that He dined with Pharisees. To be sure, He spoke harshly to the Pharisees because He knew that's what it would take to get through to those about whom He genuinely cared. But when they invited Him to their gatherings, He went.

You see, at the home of Simon, Jesus ministered to the Pharisee and prostitute alike (Luke 7:36-39). We understand so little of this. How easy it is for church congregations to say, 'We want more young people. What can we do to be more youthful and vibrant?' Or, 'We need some tithers. How can we appeal to the older set?' Or, 'We want hippies. We want to do the Jesus Movement thing.' Or, 'We want to reach yuppies. That's what is current.' Or, 'We want to be inter-racial. We want our Fellowship to be one about which visitors say, 'Wow, the people in your church are varied and cool.'

Jesus was completely not interested in this. Pharisee, prostitute, woman, man, old, young -- He loved anyone and everyone the Father sent His way.

'Master, we saw Your disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath Day. This ought not be,' (Matthew 12:2-4). 'Have you not read of David stealing the showbread from the Temple in order to feed his men?' Jesus asked, as if to say, 'There are laws and there is love. But when love and the law collide, love always has precedence.'

A mother in one of our services was called to the nursery to take care of her baby. But because she forgot to take her nursery identification with her, the nursery staff understandably wouldn't let her have her baby. 'I'll get my card,' she said. But when she returned to the amphitheatre to get it, she was stopped by the deacons who were doing their job to keep disturbances at a minimum. So she was stuck. Everyone was doing his job. Everyone was following the rules, but a woman was crushed in the process.

I like rules, parameters. I like everything in place. But Jesus said, 'There's something a whole bunch more important than rules. It's people.'

Jesus dealt with the woman at the well without ever directly dealing with the issue of her living with a man who was not her husband. If I were Jesus, I would have made sure she understood the importance of getting out of that relationship, of making things right. But in recording the story, the Holy Spirit seems to say to any who question this, 'That's none of your business. You don't need to know whether Jesus dealt directly with that issue or not.'

Could this be because, knowing this woman had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married, she would have obviously been branded as an immoral woman whose only option to survive financially was through prostitution? Could it be that Jesus was saying, 'What the religious are concerned about, I'm not all that concerned about. And what the religious aren't concerned about, namely love, concerns me to the utmost'?

'I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,' Jesus said in the most magnificent Mission Statement ever conceived. And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, completely.

Jesus blows apart every idea I have about spirituality and ministry. And in so doing He sets us all free from the burdens and baggage of grumpiness and condemnation, of fear and intimidation.

Revisit Jesus -- this laid-back Lover of people Whose intensity was private and personal, Who didn't put pressure on people.

Re-acquaint yourself with the Friend of sinners, the Man Who spoke gracious words continually, Who healed unconditionally, Who loved sacrificially -- for although He is unrecognized by most religious people, He alone defines true holiness.

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