

Luke 4

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[0 : 00] I was in Asda, in Garth D on Tuesday night, and it was just after 10 o'clock, and I was a little irritable.

Now, I can explain why that is. To be honest, if I'm ever in supermarkets at that time of night, I'm likely to be irritable because it's not what I want to be. I'm not a fan of supermarkets at the best of times, but certainly not after 10 o'clock at night.

And so I was, I confessed, conceded, recognized, whatever, just in a bit of a bad mood. And then, as I continued at the time my fruitless search for a jar of red curry sauce that I had been commissioned to find, it was very important that I find it because I had been given this task, I heard the words of joy to the world echo through the aisles.

Now, I am not a fan of Christmas in mid-November, but the words of the carol lifted my waning spirits as the sacred invaded the supermarket.

If only for a fleeting moment before the Asda Christmas playlist moved on to Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

[1 : 35] Let earth receive her kin. The Lord is come. He has come. Hallelujah. We will soon, in a month or so, in a special way, be celebrating the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But why did He come? Why did He come? Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Yes, He has come. But why? Why did He come? What answer might we get to that question?

Imagine if on Tuesday night, having secured the jar of red curry sauce, because that was my first priority, but having done that, if I had quizzed my fellow shoppers, as they heard that carol as well, most of them perhaps oblivious to the fact that it was echoing through the aisles, but if I had quizzed them and I'd said, listen to what that song is saying, the Lord has come.

Do you know why? Do you know why He's come? I wonder what answers I would have got. Probably very few. I would have been deemed to be a very weird chopper altogether, and people would have avoided me.

But nonetheless, had I secured an answer, I wonder what kind of answer I would have secured. Well, who else might we ask that question? Why did the Lord come?

[2 : 51] Well, how about asking Jesus Himself? We could ask Jesus, why did you come? But we don't need to ask Him, because He has already answered the question.

He answered the question in many ways, but He did so very dramatically in the unlikely surroundings of the synagogue in Nazareth, there in the backwaters of Galilee, as He embarked on His public ministry.

In the synagogue there in Nazareth, as we have read in Luke's Gospel, Jesus opened the scroll that had been handed to Him, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and He read the opening words of Isaiah 61, and having read those opening words, He sat down and declared, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

It was a moment of high drama. I imagine you could have heard a pin drop in the synagogue as Jesus declared that these words referred to Him, that He was the one spoken of in Isaiah.

Perhaps some of those hearing didn't believe or couldn't imagine that that's really what He was saying, but the more they thought about it, there could be no other way of understanding what He had just said.

[4 : 09] Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Over the next three or four Sundays, we will study this chapter, Isaiah 61, to discover for ourselves the answer that we find in that chapter to the question, why did Jesus come?

And why was His coming the cause of joy to the world? And this morning, as I've already anticipated or indicated, we're going to be looking at the first three verses of the chapter that we read just a few moments ago.

And we'll order what we have to say under three headings, really each of them in their own way answering the question, why did Jesus come? And the answers that we'll explore are as follows.

Why did Jesus come? Well, because He was sent by His Father. But then secondly, He came because He was tasked with a mission. And then thirdly, He came because He had a purpose to secure.

As we see as we go through each of these things, there is significant overlap between them, but each of them can be considered distinctly for the purposes really of ordering what we want to say.

[5 : 18] So let's think about these three answers to the question, why did Jesus come? Answers that we find in the verses there at the beginning of Isaiah 61. First of all, why did He come?

Because He was sent by His Father. Notice how the chapter begins. Isaiah 61, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me.

Just to there, just that one sentence, not even a full sentence. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me.

And in those few words, quite strikingly, we are presented with three divine actors in the drama that is unfolding or is about to unfold.

And the very presence of three divine actors gives us a hint, perhaps more than a hint, of the plurality in God that we have come to express in the doctrine of the Trinity as we have gathered the biblical material together and ordered it in such a way as to describe God with this language of God as a triune God, of a plurality in God, one God but in three persons.

[6 : 31] And in these words, we see these three divine actors. Let's just notice them as we find them there at the beginning of the chapter. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, the Sovereign Lord, the Sovereign Lord, Adonai Yahweh, the God of gods, the God of hosts, the living and true God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, the personal God of his covenant people is here spoken of at the beginning of the chapter, the Sovereign Lord.

Sovereign Lord. But then, as we read on, it says, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me. So we have another actor here, a me that at this point is not identified.

Who is this me? Is this Isaiah? Isaiah? If we didn't have anything else to go on, if we didn't know what we already know by having read in Luke's gospel and we were just reading this chapter for the first time and we thought, well, this is the book of Isaiah, maybe it's Isaiah that is being spoken of here when we read, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me.

Is this Isaiah? Isaiah? Well, as we continue to read in the chapter and what is said of this character, we discover that it couldn't possibly be Isaiah.

Certainly not all that is said could be exhausted in the person and ministry of Isaiah. Who is this me? Well, we don't need to deliberate on this any longer because we've already seen how Jesus in the synagogue there in Nazareth declared, I am the man.

[8 : 08] I am the one who is spoken of there in that chapter of Isaiah. But then we have a third actor here at the very beginning here of the chapter because we read, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me.

And the language used is such that the Spirit is almost identified with the Sovereign Lord, and yet He is distinct from Him, the Spirit of God.

So on this stage, using the language that the fuller revelation of God in the New Testament allows us to use, we can see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Father anointing.

His Son anointed by the Father as the appointed Messiah. And the Son anointed not with oil, as would have been the custom for kings and prophets and priests, but rather anointed with the Holy Spirit, with God Himself, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord.

The Lord Almighty, Adonai Yahweh, commissions, sends, and equips His beloved Son for His God-appointed mission.

[9 : 30] When Jesus announced His manifesto there in the synagogue in Nazareth by reading from the prophet Isaiah, what had happened just before, just before He was there in the synagogue declaring that the one spoken of in this chapter was Himself?

What had just happened to Him? Well, let's just remind ourselves as we look in Luke chapter 3, so just the previous chapter and verses 21 and 22 of that chapter.

We read there, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, You are my Son, whom I love, with You I am well pleased.

So what do we see there? We see those same three divine actors, God sending His Spirit on His Son. And of course, this has happened just before Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth says, see the one spoken of by Isaiah, that's me, that's me.

What just happened there in the Jordan, that's what was said would happen, and I am the one who has been so anointed. I am the one who has been commissioned to perform all that the prophet speaks of, all that God speaks of through the prophet.

[10 : 59] Why did Jesus come? Because He was sent and anointed by His Father. But sent for what? Anointed to empower Him for what?

Commissioned to do what? Well, this takes us to the second answer to the question, why did Jesus come? And the second answer that we're suggesting is this, that Jesus came not only because He was sent by His Father, but because He was tasked with a mission.

He was tasked with a mission. In the second half of verse 1 and through to the beginning of verse 3, we have in the Hebrew, and it's reflected in the English translation as well, a series of purpose clauses that together give us a pretty expansive picture of the mission Jesus was sent to accomplish.

When I talk about purpose clauses, I'm simply noticing how there in verse 1 it says, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to. It's the answer, well, what for?

Why have you been anointed? Well, I've been anointed to do this and this and this and this. And that's what follows. All of the things that Jesus had been anointed to do, that Jesus had been empowered to do, that Jesus had been commissioned to do.

[12 : 17] The mission that He had been tasked with is outlined in what follows in these two verses. Now, each of the elements or aspects of this mission is worthy of careful consideration.

But this morning we can only try and enjoy the grand sweep of His mission as it is described to us in our text. We can perhaps note the very first purpose clause and see how those that follow all, in a sense, develop that first purpose.

Well, what is the first purpose identified for which Jesus was anointed? Well, we read, The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

To preach good news to the poor. That is why He came. That is why He was sent, to preach good news to the poor. This mission, whatever it is, is good news to the poor.

Those thirsting for good news. The Hebrew expression there translated good news is equivalent to the Greek evangelion or evangel.

[13 : 27] Which is a composite word meaning just that, good news. Why did Jesus come? Well, He came to bring good news to the poor. To the poor in every sense of that word.

To the materially poor. To the spiritually poor. The poor in body and the poor in spirit. This is good news for the poverty stricken of our own city of Aberdeen.

And yes, that is a fair description for our city and for our nation. We are populated by those who are, in so many very real ways, poverty stricken. Well, Jesus came to bring good news to such.

He came to bring, to announce, to preach good news. But what is this good news about? Well, it's good news about what He will do. This is where Jesus, in a very radical way, stands apart significantly from every prophet who came before Him.

The prophets largely were engaged in a ministry of announcing good news. Jesus came to both announce and to do the good news.

[14 : 38] He came to announce and to act. And we can run through what follows in these two verses to see how the good news was enacted in the ministry of Jesus.

This good news. Let's just run through what we're told. It was, first of all, good news of healing. What does the passage immediately go on to say? Having declared Jesus as having come to preach good news to the poor.

We then read, He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted. This is good news of healing, of the healing power of Messiah.

Jesus came to bind up the broken. It's a beautiful description of His ministry. It is a picture of tender, hands-on, personal, intimate, and loving care for the wounded and scarred and flawed and weak.

Jesus binds them up. He binds us up. He can tenderly bind up your wounds. I don't know what your wounds are.

[15 : 43] I don't know how deep they are. I don't know how hidden they are. I don't know the cause of those wounds. If they're self-inflicted wounds or they're the wounds that others have inflicted on you, I don't know, but I can tell you this, that Jesus came to bind up those wounds, to bind up the brokenhearted.

Joy to the world. The Lord has come. This good news is good news of healing, but it's also good news of liberation. The passage goes on. It speaks of the Messiah as one who had come to secure freedom for the captives, to proclaim freedom for the captives.

Now, Isaiah's original audience, as they read these words, no doubt imagined that this was a promise of deliverance from their Babylonian exile, because that is indeed the circumstances in which God's people found themselves, as Isaiah writes these words.

And no doubt that liberation is included in this promise. But what we read here also points forward to a greater and deeper liberation to be secured by Messiah Jesus.

He came to liberate His people from bondage and captivity, bondage to oppression, bondage to idolatry, bondage to sin, bondage to despair, and bondage to hopelessness.

[17 : 05] He came to break every chain, to set the captives free. And so we do sing, as we ought, joy to the world. The Lord has come. This good news is good news of healing.

It's good news of liberation. It's good news of renewed vision. We read there in the passage, not only to proclaim freedom for the captives, but release from darkness for the prisoners.

It's interesting, when Jesus takes this passage and applies it to Himself, He somewhat changes the language and speaks of sight for the blind. Of course, the sense is the same, but He explicitly uses that language of sight for the blind.

This is good news of renewed, restored vision. Jesus came to release us from darkness. We grope in the dark, looking for happiness, for meaning, for purpose, for hope.

And Jesus came to open our eyes and flood our consciousness and experience with light, unimaginable light that we might see.

[18 : 09] See God in something of His wonder and beauty and see His glorious purposes for us. Good news of restored, renewed vision, joy to the world.

The Lord has come. But good news also of comfort for those in need of comfort, for those who mourn, for those who grieve. We notice how that language is also used to describe the mission of Messiah.

At the end of verse 2, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion. Now, there are many causes of grief and mourning.

I'm not going to list them for you. You're well able to identify them for yourself and perhaps in your own experience especially. But among them, among the causes of grief and mourning, are the consequences of our sin and the sin of others as they play out in our own experience.

And Jesus came to comfort those who mourn. To comfort those who grieve. Is that you? Does that describe you?

[19 : 24] Do you, if we were to focus on one aspect of that, do you know what it is to mourn for your sin? To grieve for all that you have done that is contrary to God's will and harmful to yourself and others?

Jesus comforts those who mourn for their sin by granting to the repentant sinner forgiveness that is full and free.

And the comfort that accompanies that forgiveness. And so we do cry out and sing, joy to the world. The Lord has come. Good news of healing.

Good news of liberation. Good news of renewed vision. Good news of comfort. Good news also of transformation. Notice the threefold description of transformation in the second part of verse 3.

Where it speaks of how the Messiah would bestow on His people, bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

[20 : 34] This threefold description of a people transformed. A crown of beauty instead of ashes. Instead of the ashes that was fitting for those who mourned, for those who grieved, the ashes are removed, and in their place there is a crown of beauty.

A crown of beauty granted to God's people by God Himself. A crown that makes us beautiful in God's sight. That enables us to live beautiful lives that are of blessing to others.

The oil of gladness instead of mourning. We know how oil is a picture of not only anointing, but also of joy in the Old Testament. And here this picture is employed to describe the transformation that is performed by the Messiah.

As mourning is replaced with gladness. And then thirdly, a spirit, or rather a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

A garment of praise. The language is very evocative. A garment of praise. Yesterday, together with Martha, I was at a wedding.

[21 : 50] A very lovely occasion, as weddings tend to be. And as you can imagine, at a wedding, all were suitably dressed for the occasion. But of all those, very fancily dressed.

All very striking in their wedding apparel. Especially, of course, the bride stood out adorned with a beautiful wedding dress.

But even that garment, beautiful though it was, pales in comparison to the garment of praise that adorns the child of God.

A garment of praise with which we are clothed instead of a spirit of despair. If you know what it is, if the very language of a spirit of despair resonates in the very depths of your soul, then how much better to enjoy what Messiah provides.

A garment of praise to replace that spirit of despair. The mission with which he was tasked. But I wonder if you've been following carefully the passage in front of you in the Bible.

[23 : 07] I wonder if you have noticed, and maybe you are wondering, if I'm being a little selective in my treatment of what is said in the passage. Picking out what you might say is the good news.

Because in what we're told here in Isaiah, there's also news that maybe we wouldn't so obviously describe as good news. Because in Isaiah, the Messiah is also described as one whose mission was to proclaim God's day of vengeance.

Notice there in verse 2. His mission, among all the other elements that we've just noted fleetingly, His mission to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

It's striking, and I think significant, without doubt significant, that when Jesus quotes this passage, Isaiah 61, and these very verses, these very first opening verses of the chapter, when He does so there in the synagogue in Nazareth, and we've read the passage, He stops at the task of proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

And there's a sense in which He stops mid-sentence. Because that sentence, the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, they go together. It's not an obvious place to cut what you're quoting, and yet Jesus does so.

[24 : 31] All He speaks of, or the final thing He mentions, is the year of the Lord's favor, but does not go on to speak of the day of vengeance of our God.

Of course, this year of favor is an echo of the Old Testament institution, of the year of jubilee that provided release from debt and slavery. And of course, the ministry of Jesus, in a much fuller way, provides a year of jubilee, of release from slavery and oppression and debt.

The question is this, why did Jesus choose not to speak of the day of vengeance of our God? Did Jesus, like some today, prefer to soft-pedal or airbrush away the hard and discomfiting truths?

Well, by no means. I think the way to understand this is to understand that the mission of Messiah that this chapter speaks of is a mission that is conducted in two phases, which is maybe to simplify it somewhat, but I think it's one way of seeing it.

It's conducted in two phases that correspond to His two comings. In His first coming, when He came 2,000 years ago, and we will celebrate that coming soon in a special way, in His first coming, He announces and inaugurates the year of favor.

[25 : 52] And in His second coming, the day of which has been appointed and will come to pass, in His second coming, He will sit as judge in the day of vengeance of our God.

Jesus is not saying that that day isn't happening. No, but it's not what is the focus of His ministry as He came on that first occasion, born there in the stable in Bethlehem.

The day of vengeance of our God is a day that is coming, and we need to be ready for that day, but that day is not today. Today, thank God, we are still in the day of God's favor.

So what I would say to you this morning is don't let this day pass you by, this year of the Lord's favor, that God extends out of His patience and mercy that all might repent.

In this year of favor, turn to Messiah Jesus. Put your trust in Him. Rest in Him. Enjoy the forgiveness of your sins that He is able and willing to grant to you.

[27 : 00] Today is the day to acknowledge and trust in Messiah Jesus. But we need to move on. Why did Jesus come? Well, He was sent by His Father.

He was tasked with a mission. And more briefly, finally, He had a purpose to secure. And this purpose is so intrinsically connected with the mission.

It's what we might call the outcome of His mission, of all that He has done and indeed all that He is still doing. And what is this purpose? Well, it's us. It's His people. His purpose is to gather a people for Himself, to create a renewed humanity.

And look how God's people are described there in the final part of verse 3. It's a beautiful description. What is said of God's redeemed people?

Well, there in the final section of verse 3, what do we read? They will be called. All those who have been the objects of His tender healing power, all those who have been released from captivity, all those to whom their sight has been restored.

[28 : 05] How are they described? They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor. It speaks of how we are called, we are called oaks of righteousness.

A righteousness, a righteousness that is pleasing to God. And in the light of the fuller revelation of Scripture and of the work of Jesus, we know a righteousness that is not our own, but one that is given to us.

We are called oaks of righteousness. We are planted by God. It is God who plants us. We are rooted in Him. He grants to us strength and stability and permanence, planted by Him, rooted in Him.

This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. We are called, we are planted, and thirdly, we are to display His splendor for the display of His splendor.

There's a sense in which here we find the ultimate purpose of all that is being described, that God's glory would be proclaimed and announced and displayed, that we, God's people, would display His splendor, not our splendor, for we have none, but His splendor, that we would reflect His splendor, that that crown of beauty would point to Him as the one who grants that crown to us, saved, redeemed, rescued, liberated for the display of His splendor.

[29 : 35] This is our high calling. This is your high calling. This is your royal calling, to display the splendor of the one who has saved you. Is that what we do in our lives?

Do we display His splendor? Why did Jesus come? He was sent by His Father.

He was tasked with a mission, and He had a purpose to secure, a purpose He has secured and continues to secure as He gathers a people for Himself.

And so we sing, as we must. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word.

We thank You for what we have read from the Bible, and what we have been able to consider in the Bible this morning, as we read of and discover more concerning the mission of Messiah Jesus.

[30 : 35] We thank You for all that He has done. We thank You for all that He continues to do. And we recognize and acknowledge all that He has yet to do when He will come again.

We pray that You would help us by Your Spirit to know what it is to be ever trusting in Him as our Savior and as our Lord.

Help us as Your people to ever more clearly display the splendor of the One who has rescued us.

And we pray these things in His name. Amen.