



THE PURSUIT OF JESUS

What Did Jesus Say About Social Justice?
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

We are spending this entire year walking through the life of Jesus and this week we are beginning in Mark Moore's book, Quest 52, Section #3 called The Preaching of Jesus. In our story, He is about to take the people of Israel to school where they can earn a Master's degree in theology. It's about what it really means to understand the true Gospel where there is more than meets the eye!

SCRIPTURE¹

Luke 4:16-30 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 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. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. ... "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

OBSERVATION

Jesus was returning home to Nazareth after about a year during which He had been baptized, performed miracles, recruited His disciples and was well into His three years of ministry. The townspeople were proud of Him because crowds were gathering and they had heard of His miraculous healings. On the Sabbath day He went to the synagogue and stood up to read a passage from Isaiah. Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me. In other words, I am communicating in the power and with the power of the Spirit of God. In fact, I have been anointed and given the power to do the following: **1) I am going to proclaim the Gospel to the poor.** Sin brings poverty and as the "Anointed One" or Messiah, I have come to bring them some good news; **2) I am here to**

¹ Scripture is NIV unless otherwise indicated.

heal the brokenhearted. Sin not only breaks hearts, but it shatters them. I have some good news for these people; **3) I am proclaiming freedom for prisoners.** Sin enslaves people. Sin holds people in bondage and I came to set them free; **4) While I am at it, I am going to give sight to the blind** because sin has a way of blinding us to truth and ethics; **5) The oppressed will also be set free.** I came to be their deliverer; **6) One more thing - I am proclaiming that this is the year of the Lord's favor - this is a year of Jubilee.** Author Mark Moore in Quest 52, sums it up perfectly: "God commanded that every fiftieth year would be a Jubilee. Just as the Sabbath was a day of rest each week, so Jubilee was a restoration period after forty-nine years. All Jewish bondservants would be released, all property sold because of debt would be restored to the ancestral family, and all personal debts would be forgiven. It was an economic principle of compassion that ensured natural disaster or personal catastrophe would not be visited on the next generation." It was a brilliant gift of God to the nation. The year of Jubilee was to be a time of rest and restarting. Just as fields were to be left fallow every seventh year so minerals could be replenished, and just as we are to rest on the seventh day of the week to refresh ourselves, after seven sevens of years, the society was to be refreshed and replenish also. This should have been part of the system of social justice in Israel, but it had never been implemented - Jesus was there to change that. When He was finished, Jesus said to the people, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." There is more than meets the eye in what He had just said. When they realized what that "more" was, they scoffed at Him and tried to kill Him.

QUESTION: How well do you commit to taking a time of rest every week? If you did, what difference do you think it would make to your spiritual life?

Jesus had lived in Nazareth since He was a toddler and was a carpenter's son. The people had watched him grow up into a 30-year-old adult! What was He thinking proclaiming Himself to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah? But that is exactly what He had done! He also came to apply Jubilee spiritually through His death on the Cross where **all** sin debts were paid. We were all given the opportunity to have a new start – a new life – through forgiveness of the debt we owed because of sin. It was erased because Jesus paid for it without consideration of our race, ethnicity or nationality. The only requirement is faith in Him. What the Jewish people had missed for years and years was that Jesus was, has been, and always will be for all people, all nations and all backgrounds. Jesus is for all of us.

QUESTION: Which Gentiles can you name whom Jesus encountered, healed, extended grace to during His ministry?

QUESTION: Who are some of the Gentiles in the Old Testament who worshiped the God of the Israelites?

QUESTION: Who are some of the non-believers in your life who need to hear about Jesus?

APPLICATION

The Jewish people had believed that their Anointed One, their Messiah, would be for them and them alone. For centuries, they had been part of an insular society and were not allowed to marry outside of it. The Jewish men were required to be circumcised to identify them as part of it. Now, Jesus was talking about including Gentiles and breaking down barriers between all peoples. The age of the Gentiles had arrived. There was more to Him than they understood. Today, the way Christianity is taught and practiced similarly implies only the basics. Most churches teach about morals, ethics and behavior. They exclude people groups and dismiss social classes. They often just talk about how to spare people from an eternity in hell, but there is so much more to it! We are to make "a kingdom impact on this world through our good works that bring glory to God and benefit to people."² But not just to people we like or people we are comfortable with, or people who meet our social and ethical demands. The Gospel was declared and commissioned to be our service back to God. Instead, we sometimes have made it more about ourselves than about God for His people. If we are not moving forward on

² Tony Evans

our journey of spiritual growth to a place where we understand the depths of God's love and learn, most of all, how much the Gospel isn't about us, then we have missed the real Gospel.

QUESTION: When did you last serve the needs of others even when doing that was an inconvenience for you?

What we may have missed is an understanding of Jesus' compassion for those in need. Our eyes need opening to seeing things differently when it comes to people's situations and their personalities rather than looking at them judgmentally. If our hearts don't break for the broken-hearted, then maybe we are the ones who are truly broken.

QUESTION: If you lack compassion for a certain people group, which one is it? Why do you think that is true?

QUESTION: If you lack understanding for certain ethnicities or social groups, which ones are they?

QUESTION: If you are dismissive to a people who don't think like you do because of their politics, who are they?

The Gospel runs deep and once we realize and see and sense and feel for the people around us, we can begin to understand the depths to which it extends. If we go back to Jesus' teachings, not only do we find truth, we find a depth of love that He is challenging us to live by. Maybe with that love we would become the church, the body and the people God had always envisioned us to be since Jesus returned to heaven. There is so much more to the Gospel than meets the eye. For those of us wanting to take a step in growing deeper to meet the needs of the least, the lost and the misunderstood, we need to dedicate ourselves to the Word of God, service and prayer. Then we would be a church God might be pleased to take joy in.

QUESTION: How do you define the word "sacrifice"? In what ways do you sacrifice yourself for those around you?

QUESTION: What about our church do you most admire when it comes to serving others?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to look beyond surface features and see individuals and people groups as You see them – saved by the sacrifice of Your Son. We want to strive to see the needs of others and serve them with love and compassion as Jesus did. In His name we pray. Amen.

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