

JANUARY 2, 1994

MISSION TO PEOPLE

Can you imagine going into an area of the world where people were constantly sick of some disease such as strep throat and you had with you a truck load of penicillin that would cure the problem? What would you do? Would you be able to keep quiet about the fact that you had a positive cure for the problem or would you want to tell everyone? I think that it is safe to say that most people would want to share the good news that there is a cure. Imagine now that you did tell everyone that you had this medicine that would heal their disease and all they had to do was to be injected with a shot and just about everyone said to you, "No way, I will not let you stick a needle in me, I'd rather be sick!" What a disappointment!

There have been numerous stories written about a king or a prince dressing in common clothes and living among the people so that he could know what their life was really like. In the process he would also discover which of his subjects were noble and which were scoundrels. In these stories, the king or the prince would always take on the role of an obscure person and at some later time would do something to try to benefit his subjects. These stories have a familiar ring to them. It almost seems as if they are an adaptation of God's plan of salvation. But there are some really significant differences. When God, the Son, came to live on earth in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, He was not obscure by any stretch of the imagination. He did not hide the fact that He was here and that He was going to make a difference. Similarity can be found in that both the earthly king and Jesus show great care and concern for the needs of people. While the story of the earthly king is limited to physical needs of people, Jesus came to address the full gamut of man's needs: body, soul, and spirit.

After Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, He went to the area around Capernaum and started His mission of ministry to people. After a while, He returned to Nazareth.

LUKE 4:16 We can learn a few things about the culture and the things that Jesus considered important from this one verse. At this time in the history of the Jews, the synagogue was

the local place of prayer and teaching from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Many times the synagogue was the center of the community for things such as funerals, weddings, etc. The prevailing thought is that the idea for the synagogue came about during the exile in Babylon and the people were not able to go to the temple to worship. Part of the normal practice was for someone read from the Scriptures.

We see also that people would frequent the synagogue on the Sabbath day. They may have gone there on other occasions, but it was customary to go there on the Sabbath day. It was also the custom of Jesus to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Since the Fourth Commandment is to keep the Sabbath holy, then we can conclude that attending a house of prayer and learning truth from God's word is a holy thing to do.

Usually someone would read from the Law and then someone would read from the Prophets. We are not told if this was something that a person volunteered to do, but Jesus stood up and in doing so signaled His intent to read.

LUKE 4:17-20 Jesus operated within the protocol of the worship service of the day to deliver the message of Good News to these people that He loved. He did not bring in some strange new doctrine but relied on the word of God that had already been given. The truth of God's word never changes; however, our understanding of that truth is constantly being updated as God reveals more and more of Himself to us as we grow in faith and the ability to receive the revealed word.

It was not just coincidence that the Scripture passage for that day was from Isaiah. Jesus opened the scroll and read the mission of the Messiah. Notice that the passage began with "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, . . ." These words really define the concept of the Messiah or the Christ. He was to be One anointed by or with the Spirit of the Lord. You will remember that at the baptism of Jesus, there was a manifestation of God's Spirit coming upon Jesus. The purpose of the anointing of the Holy Spirit is given in clear terms in the verses from this passage in Isaiah.

Healing the Brokenhearted: Life is full

of disappointments and always will be. It is good when there is a gap between what we would like to achieve and where we currently are. This drive improvement. However, when the gap is so wide that people give up and become hopeless, then despair can take over. The poor people of Jesus's day had little hope and many had no purpose in life. They were literally in captivity to the Romans. The Roman system brought some apparent benefits to the people. There was stability of government and some order to life, but the people were not free. In a similar way, there are people who are in bondage to sin and they will justify their actions by telling others of the apparent benefits that their wrong doings brings to them. People hooked on drugs will tell you how good it makes them feel. People who steal can point to the material things they have. Those who engage in immorality will tell you how much fun they are having. What they don't realize, until it is too late, is these practices have control over them and they can't stop doing them any easier than Israel could have chased the Romans away.

Sight to the Blind: Medical practice has always been inadequate and one of the most feared conditions was and is blindness. Physical blindness causes a person to miss so much of life and there is such a sense of helplessness. Similarly, spiritual blindness causes us to fail to see or realize the spiritual significance of what is going on around us. Jesus wanted to bring relief in both areas. Just as it would take miraculous power to heal the physically blind, it would also take a miraculous touch to open spiritually blind eyes.

Liberty to the Oppressed: Oppression of people is a reality even in today's world. It is the cause of uprisings, civil wars, and troubles throughout history. Jesus came to release people from oppression in that the root cause of one person oppressing another would be eliminated. The major factor in oppression is greed and the desire for power over others. The only cure for that problem is real love for our fellow man.

Year of Favor: Isaiah may have had in mind the time when the Jews would be released from their captivity in Babylon. Some think that this concept may also refer to a Jubilee year in which all debts are canceled and land returns to the original family. Jesus may have had both ideas in mind as types of the spiritual favor that God would give to His people.

Apparently, Jesus was standing in front of the congregation when He read the passage. When He finish He close the scroll, handed it to the minister and sat down. Sitting down in the front was a indication that He was going to teach. Of course, He had the attention of everyone there.

LUKE 4:21-27 We are not told all that He taught them, but He started out telling them they were witnessing the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. As He continued, they were amazed at His ability to open up the meaning of the Scriptures. They whispered back and forth to each other about Him being Joseph's son. They just couldn't see beyond their paradigm of who they thought He was. They could not even consider the possibility of Him being God's Messiah.

Jesus had done many miracles in Capernaum before coming back to Nazareth and the people had heard about it. Many may have been expecting to see some miracle performed, not because they believed that He was the Son of God, but just because they were fascinated by the unusual. Mark tells us that Jesus could not do any great miracle among them because of their unbelief. It was easier for the people of Capernaum to believe in Him than for the people of Nazareth simply because they were so familiar with Him. This was not the first time prophets were able to help people outside of their own area but not those who knew them. Jesus used two examples to make His point: Elijah and Elisha both had help foreigners when their own people had the same needs. The difference was that the foreigner had faith and the Jews didn't.

The people became enraged with Jesus because all they heard was that Gentiles had received benefits that had been denied to Israelites. Now in their own time, people of another area had received help that was being denied them. They could not receive the help because of their lack of faith.

Just as Jesus was willing to minister to people in the power of the Holy Spirit, we too should share the good news and minister the benefits of the Kingdom of God to other that will receive it by faith.