

Jesus' Purpose Driven Life: Luke 4:14-21

By Reverend Katie Hambrick

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

When I was a kid, I was privileged to have Hayden as my best friend. Hayden and I, only being a month apart, were more like sisters than best friends. We did everything together, and she basically lived with my family for a good chunk of time.

Hayden and I always wanted to be supermodels or movie stars. We always believed we could be-

Little did 10 year old Katie know that I would only grow to be 5 feet tall when the bare requirement is 5 feet 7 inches to be a supermodel. But nonetheless, we believed we could be. And we used to come up with the most dramatic story lines to act out. We would sit down and write out a script for our new drama then we would act it out. We did this almost daily, and if we didn't act it out ourselves then we would act it out with our barbies.

One day, Cole, a boy who lived two houses down from us, came over to play as he occasionally did. He sat there for 20 minutes while we finished our script, then we handed him the script to read over before we started acting it out. I mean we had to be fair and let him get into character, right?

Well this particular script was based off a lifetime movie that we had snuck and watched. When Cole got done reading the

script. He dropped it to the ground and said, “wow, y’all make me want to go home and read the purpose driven life.” He was 9.

Self Help culture is big in the United States and beyond. There are hundreds of books that are geared towards helping people figure out what their purpose in life is or their life’s mission. Advice books from religion to sports to parenting. Rick Warren’s The Purpose Driven Life is an example of that. As of 2020, nearly 50 million copies of this book were sold in 85 different languages.

And though Rick Warren is a pastor and quotes many scriptures throughout his book, he fails to mention today’s passage. Luke 4:16-20 has a special name to many scholars; it is called the Nazareth Manifesto. This is due to the fact that this is when Jesus declares what his ministry will be about and he does so by quoting Isaiah 61, a scripture that would have meant a lot to the people listening. He is declaring he is the messiah and using this scripture as his mission statement if you will; to bring good news to the poor, to set captives free, to recover sight for the blind, and to free the oppressed.

Why would a Christian self help book that is supposed to help people find their purpose in life, not mention Jesus’ mission statement, to bring good news to the poor, to set captives free, to

recover sight for the blind, and to free the oppressed, and self proclaimed ministry purpose?

PAUSE

Robert Parham, A Baptist Ethicist, once said that this scripture is “one of the most ignored, watered down, spiritualized, or glossed over texts in many baptist pulpits, evading or emptying Jesus’ first statement of his moral agenda.”

slight pause Jesus knows his purpose for his ministry. He knows he has come to help bring about healing and justice. This should be a good thing right? A comforting declaration to the people listening, however when you listen to what Jesus is saying... he is declaring that his mission in life is to turn the system on its head.

The reason I believe this scripture gets watered down is because it is scary for people to face what Jesus is asking of us. If we are to be Christ followers, then we must look at our own lives' purpose and mission in comparison to Jesus.

It is much easier to do stuff that makes us feel good than to actually have to live the life we are called to as Christians. That is why we have seen a boom in growth of feel good churches. Churches that make people feel good about themselves and their life. It's like they are slapping a spiritual band-aid on the churchgoer's wounded ego instead of engaging with matters of substance.

This is not a new thing. Feel good evangelism has been around for a long time in this country. I was watching a movie this past week called "Through the Eyes of Tammy Faye." This movie is about Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker. They were big TV evangelists in the late 70s to early 90s. Their entire ministry was built on the idea that God loves you and wants you to feel good.

And their ministry boomed! They were based out of the Carolinas. They had their own TV network, PTL Christian Network, that had 24-7 programming geared towards Christians. They also opened Heritage USA, which was a Christian theme park and water park. The idea was to have a place where Christian families could vacation.

They even assembled a coliseum and villages to resemble the holy land. On the complex where the parks were, they also built mansions for the Bakkers, Tammy Faye's mother, and a few other people. All using the ministry's money with the caveat that they also were building mansions on property for orphans, single mothers and their families, as well as children with disabilities.

At their ministry's peak, they were bringing in \$126 million a year. The reason the Bakker's message resonated with people is because it is nice to feel good. It is nice to imagine that Jesus is going to come take care of everything, and you do not even have to lift a finger. You just have to believe and give your money to the

Bakker's ministry, and everything is going to work out in your favor.

That is not what God intended for us. God calls us to a dynamic life. See, when Jesus makes this declaration that he is the messiah and he has come to bring good news to the poor, he has just gone through two transformative life events. First, being baptized and having the voice of God acknowledge him as a beloved son. Second, he has just gotten back from the wilderness, where he was tried and tested.

Jesus had a very dynamic life and ministry. He was not a feel good messiah. He experienced humanity in its rawest forms in the wilderness. Jesus is faced with his deepest desires in the wilderness. He is hungry and tempted to turn stones into bread, yet he doesn't.*Pause* His ego and pride are thrown in his face. He is alone to face the adversary by himself. He is alone to suffer in his pain.

Glennon Doyle puts it best when she says:

“the change that happens to people who really sit in their pain- whether it's a sliver of envy lasting an hour or a canyon of grief lasting decades- it's revolutionary. When that kind of transformation happens, it becomes impossible to fit into your old conversations or relationships or patterns or

thoughts or life anymore. There is no going back. We have to let ourselves become completely, utterly, new.”

Jesus has just gone through this type of transformation. He has had to face one of his dark nights of the soul and has come out the other side a new creation.

He has not only become a determined person in what he must do, but has chosen to follow that path of righteousness. He has decided that his ministry will be one full of compassion. That his life will be filled with compassion, because he understands both the joy and pain of the human experience.

pause

That is the good news in today's scripture. That Jesus gets it, and he has come to bring healing and restoration. He has come to bring justice. And that we are invited to the same path.

And Jesus isn't just talking about bringing this healing in the future. Christianity has a tendency to always think in the future, but he tells them that today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Today, I am declaring I am the messiah.

Today, I am going to fight to free the oppressed.

Today, I am bringing good news to the poor.

Today!

pause

It is important for us to stay in the present moment and to remember that the kingdom of God is here now. *slight pause*

We are the hands and feet of God on this earth, and today is when we are called to follow Jesus' path of love and liberation.

Luckily, we are in a church family where we truly understand the joy and pain of humanity. We do not take kingdom work lightly. We not only look at our church family, but outwards to our community as well.

We are not perfect, don't misunderstand, but we are the kind of church family that not only raises money for our new AV system but includes money for the missionaries we support in our campaign.

slight pause

We are the kind of church family that not only opens our parking lot to a mobile food bank, but then when we hear about the need these mothers have for diapers, and women's need for feminine products, we hustle to collect as many as we can to give out. Even asking them what kind they prefer and need.

slight pause

I am proud to say that I do not think this church waters down Jesus' mission statement. In fact, I think if we held up the Nazareth manifesto with many of our church documents, we

would see a lot in common. We aren't perfect, no one is- we know that. But be encouraged today.

slight pause

Be encouraged knowing that Jesus lived a full and dynamic life; fully understanding the human experience.

Be encouraged that you do not have to slap a feel-good bandaid on yourself. That you have been called to a beautiful dynamic life by the one who created you.

Be encouraged knowing that you are a part of a church family that does not take kingdom work lightly. That the Kingdom of God is here now.

May we continue to be the church family, who seizes the day and every opportunity we can to be the hands and feet of god. May we leave today being more encouraged and empowered than ever to follow the path of love set before us. Amen.