Jesus's Mission Statement
Luke 4:14-21

News Spreads:
Jesus has spent the last forty days in the wilderness taking the battle to the enemy and now He returns to His home area, His home county of Galiliee. And Luke says in v14 that He returns 'in the power of the Spirit.' He hasn't eaten for forty days, He's wrestled with major temptations over that time, physically and emotionally He must have been seriously drained and yet He comes out of it all in the power of the Spirit. So for those of you who are beginning to fight stuff in your life, and rather than give in to these temptations and these inner desires to do what you know is wrong you've made the decision to start addressing these issues, there may be times when you will wonder 'is it worth it? Is it worth the emotional energy trying to fight through on this issue? Because, frankly, it's just leaving me drained'. Listen, when you come out the other side, you will be all the stronger for the fight. Allow the enemy to walk over you and you will feel drained and guilty and powerless. Begin to take your stand and confess and repent of your sin and start resisting temptation and you will know more of the Spirit working inside you, transforming you by His power.

And Jesus comes out of the battle in the power of the Spirit and His ministry begins. And from the start – and carrying right on through - His ministry: His teaching, His miracles, His compassion, everything He does is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This isn't Jesus acting alone, this isn't Jesus gone rogue. This is God the Holy Spirit working in and through Jesus.

And news about Him starts spreading. Luke says in v14 'a report about him went through all the surrounding country.' Everyone's talking about Jesus. In fact the Greek word for 'report' there is the one that we get our word *fame* from. Jesus' fame starts spreading. Which I think is interesting, because a year or so ago I read about a survey of children at primary and secondary school age and when they were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up a growing proportion said they simply wanted to be famous. It didn't matter what for, they just wanted fame. Being a nurse or a doctor or a teacher were out, their role models were the so-called celebrities who are famous for simply being famous. And they wanted that fame. They wanted that attention.

Mark and I read a chapter of a book [Piper: Brothers, we are not professionals] together this week. It made the point that the reason we do things is just as important as what we do. The motives we have when we do something are just as important as the things we do. Paul says in 1 Cor 13:3 'If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.' In other words, you can make great sacrifices and serve and work, all at great personal cost, but if it's all about you and it's for your fame and for your name, and if we do it because we want the spotlight to fall on us, then all those sacrifices and all that service and all that work will count for nothing on the last day when as Paul says in 1 Cor 4:5 the Lord 'will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.' How much better to live and work and serve and sacrifice for Jesus' name, and to see His fame spread through all the country. That's the lasting fame worth sacrificing for.

And it seems like everyone was talking about Jesus. Because the power of Jesus to transform lives for good was and is news worth talking about. And you will

feel the pressure to keep quiet as a Christian. I had the privilege of reading Mia's testimony this week, of how as a young schoolgirl in communist Romania she was called before the Communist party to account for her faith and how God gave her the words to speak. Well, our current politicians are an easier bunch, but there is this increasing pressure to keep your faith a private matter. But Jesus is no private matter and the Christian faith if not a private one. And the enemy will try and intimidate you at school or at university or at the workplace into staying silent. But good news is always worth talking about. Now that doesn't mean you should be a religious nutter, ramming it down people's throats, it simply means that as God gives us opportunities we naturally talk about Jesus. That's all these folk were doing and news about Him spread.

And what caught their attention, what riveted them to their seats, was Jesus' teaching. Luke says in v15 'He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.' Does He do miracles, yes he does and Luke will tell us about some later, but here it's His teaching that grabs people and Luke says they glorified him. They had never heard a man teach like Jesus taught and the people were singing His praises.

So let's look at what He said.

The Message
V16: And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

So Jesus is back home amongst His own, amongst the people He's grown up with in small-town Nazareth and Luke tells us He goes to the synagogue 'as was his custom'. Which is remarkable, because it means that even Jesus, the Son of God, went to church. Despite His local synagogue being less than perfect, despite it always being the same people who were there Sabbath by Sabbath, despite the fact that no doubt the preacher went on too long and wasn't as good as the guy He could watch on Youtube, He made it His custom to go. You young guys, as you grow up, and you move away, there will be a barrage of reasons why you should stop going to church. The timing's inconvenient, the distance is too far, the worship is naff, the preacher's dull, the people are so small-town. When that thought enters your mind, remind yourself, what's good enough for Jesus is good enough for me, and as the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:25 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.' Rather make Christ's habit, your habit and keep going, even when no-one's watching you.

And Jesus goes to His home synagogue and He stands and reads this passage from Isaiah 61 and then He sits down, because they would preach sitting down, and Luke says in v20 'and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.' Everyone had heard what their home-grown boy was up to elsewhere, they knew everyone was talking about Him, and now He'd come home, and was back in their synagogue, and He was going to preach to them and everyone's attention was on Jesus: 'what's He going to say?'. And Jesus said 'today this scripture – this scripture about the Spirit of God anointing His servant to preach good news to the poor, this scripture about proclaiming liberty to the captives and sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed, this scripture that talks of

proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. This scripture doesn't speak about what God is going to do in the far off never-never, this is God at work now. Today this Scripture is fulfilled because I am here.

And that was a simply stunning claim to make and I want us just briefly to listen to what Jesus is saying about Himself and His mission here. Because in just two verses Jesus sums up why He's come.

Firstly He says (v18) 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me.' And Jesus is looking back to His baptism and that moment when heaven opened and the Spirit came down and rested upon Him. And Jesus takes these words of Isaiah and says 'God has anointed me by His Spirit.' And that is crucial. Because you can pick any number of self-appointed and self-annointed prophets and messiahs and religious teachers and self-help gurus. The airport bookshops are filled with their stuff. And if this is just Jesus, another one in the long line, the carpenter from Nazareth having ideas above His station and taking it upon Himself to be a kind of religious busybody, sticking His nose into other people's business but God isn't in this, but God hasn't anointed Him, then we're in trouble. But Jesus says 'The Spirit of the Lord himself has anointed me.' What you are seeing taking place, and what is to come, is from God Himself.

And this Holy Spirit anointing, this empowerment from on high is so that He might proclaim good news to the poor. Now if you're here and you're not yet a Christian you might hear that and think 'well, from what I know of religion I'm not sure it is good news, because I see what religion does'. And if you've got religion in mind, you'd be so right. But Jesus didn't say I've come to proclaim religion and hypocrisy and laws and you must do this and that and meet this standard of piousness before I consider you. He says The Spirit has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, and liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

And if you're numbered among the poor or the captives or the blind or the oppressed, that's great news. The question is: are you? Does He mean you or me here? Who are these people Jesus is talking about? Is this some sort of revolutionary manifesto to overturn the power of the bourgeois middle-class, in which case most of us here would be outside the pale? Does He mean the physically poor, or the spiritually impoverished? Does He mean real-live-behind-prison-wall prisoners, or people held captive by sin, does He mean the physically blind, or those who are blinded to the truth? And when it comes to setting at liberty the oppressed, does He mean He wants to start a revolution against the Romans beginning at Nazareth or does He mean those who are oppressed by whatever spiritual and emotional and physical things can oppress us?

The answer is, this message, this good news, this proclamation of the year of the Lord's favour is for everyone, whatever your circumstances. And this is not some sort of revolutionary manifesto aimed at the structures of societies, as if by bringing down the governments and busting the prisons and offering free eye-check for all everything will be right. The reason all these totalitarian regimes go

bad is the problem of the human heart. And Jesus' mission statement, His manifesto is a declaration that He has come to create a transformed people: a people who are set free from what binds and oppresses them, who see as they should see and who then work to bring that same transformation to others. The revolution Jesus has in mind is the gospel, the spreading transformation of the good news.

And that good news is for the poor. The physically poor. It's for the needy, who know they need God to provide their daily bread. Who are spiritually sensitive enough and humble enough to know they need Him. But it's also for the spiritually poor who may be physically very rich. And they've been sold a lie and they've given themselves to the pursuit of money and career and possessions and found that it just doesn't fill the nagging, gnawing hole on the inside. And Jesus says 'I've come to proclaim good news to both of you, to the slum dweller in some township somewhere and to the ex-pat living in Lausanne who knows they need God.'

And Jesus says he's come to proclaim liberty to the captives. Now He's quoting from Isaiah here, and Isaiah has in mind the captives who were taken by Babylon into exile with the fall of Jerusalem. And they ended up in captivity and exile because of their sin and their turning away from God. And Jesus sits before His home town and says: I'm here to proclaim liberty to captives, because you don't need to be in physical exile to be separated from the people of God and cut off from God's presence. That was true then and its true now: our sin and turning our backs on God leads to a dead-end prison. We end up captive to our sin, the apostle Paul says we become slaves to it, it has this controlling power over us, we can be captive to wrong thinking about ourselves and about God and the chains go on, and the shackles bind us, and Jesus says 'I've come to proclaim liberty; I've come to set you free, to end your exile and bring you home.'

And Jesus says He's come to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind. And physically He did just that. But in doing so He would use His healing of the blind to point out our spiritual blindness. Now, when it comes to seeing our own faults we can be pretty blind, can't we? Everyone else can see them clear as day, some of our friends might even be brave enough to point them out to us, but we can be as blind as bats when it comes to issues in our own lives. And the sad truth is we can be just as blind spiritually. We can be oblivious to the truth, the truth about God, the truth about the human heart, the human condition, it can be staring us in the face, you might not be a Christian yet and you come to church Sunday by Sunday and you think 'nope, still don't see it.' And Jesus says, "I've come to help you see.'

Then Jesus' final attention falls on the oppressed and His declaration that He has come to set them at liberty. Now what would have been the things oppressing His audience that day? No doubt they would have faced the relentless struggle to survive, the pressure of financial need, of poverty and the oppression of the occupying Roman forces. And yet Jesus doesn't lead a revolutionary charge against the Romans or the tax collectors or the money-lenders. Instead, He goes for the issues of men and women's hearts and calls them to repentance and to turn to God. Because the sad truth is the poverty of not knowing God and His

love, and the captivity that comes to our lives and minds through our sin, and the darkness of soul and spirit that envelopes us when we can't see the truth, leads to an oppression of soul far worse than an occupying Roman force could inflict.

And Jesus says: I have come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. It's jubilee time. The time in Israel's history when every debt would be settled, and slaves were set free, and property was restored. And Jesus says, I have come and it's Jubilee time: Satan's prisons are being emptied, shackles of sin are being broken, blind eyes are going to see the truth and the dark night of oppression is going to lift. Forgiveness and grace and salvation have arrived.

And that manifesto, that mission statement of Jesus demands a response.

What Happens Next?

What if you're not yet a Christian, but you know you're in one of those groups Jesus is addressing? On the outside you're fine, like the rest of us, but on the inside, also like the rest of us, you're beginning to realize that you're poor, or a captive, or blind or oppressed and you want to know this year, this era, this favour of God on your life: you want to be a part of Jesus' jubilee. How can you know this freedom and liberty and life He proclaims?

Well, if you didn't know, Jesus' popularity doesn't last long. Our modern day politicians aren't alone in discovering the crowd can turn quickly against you. And within three years, this same Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, whom everyone is glorifying, would die the death of the cursed on a cross. And yet it was through His death that He brought about the freedom and the deliverance and the forgiveness that you need. Because He suffered and died in your place, bearing the punishment you deserve, you can receive the forgiveness of God and be set free from the hold that sin and darkness has on you. And by His being raised to life you can know newness of life. Not by you doing anything to earn it, but by you putting your trust in what Jesus has done for you. It's His gracious gift to you. And as you receive it, by faith, you are made right with Him and then there begins this life-long process of what the Bible calls sanctification, slowly, but steadily being made more like Jesus.

But what if you're a Christian? How should you respond to what Jesus says here? Well, I don't know if you've ever written a personal mission statement, or one for your family, but you can't go far wrong by adopting Jesus' declaration of intent as your own. That you will give yourself, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by whatever means and in whatever situation He calls you to, to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed. To let whoever will listen hear that this is the year, the time, and the season of God's grace in Jesus. For all of us, that is a better cause to live for than to live for your own fame.