Part One: What was the Mission of Jesus?

Why did Jesus come to earth?


What does this passage tell us about the mission of Jesus?

Two thousand years ago, God’s Son entered the world – a world of poverty, oppression, injustice and war. It was a world where hope seemed in desperately short supply.

An essential part of Jesus’ mission was, of course, to die for our sins on the cross and, through repentance and faith in him, open the way for us to experience eternal life with the Father. As Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins!

But there is more. When Jesus began His ministry on earth, by standing up in the synagogue in Nazareth to read the Scriptures, He outlined His mandate – “to preach good news to the poor.....to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.....” (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus came to earth to preach the Good News – to give people an understanding of the Kingdom of God and the eternal hope that they had through Him. And Jesus particularly delighted in doing this among the impoverished, the weak, the hurting and the rejected in society. Jesus not only preached the Good News through His words, but He powerfully demonstrated the Good News through His actions!

Throughout the Bible we see God’s compassion and concern for those in need. In the Old Testament, He constantly commanded His people to reflect His heart to those around them. Read Isaiah 1:17 and feel the strength of God’s command to “learn to do right”, or in Jeremiah 22:3 to “do what is just”. God went as far as saying that “there should be no poor among you” (Deuteronomy 15:4-5). Unfortunately, this was a lesson that God’s people struggled to learn – and in Isaiah 58 we see God’s frustration with His people because of this.

Jesus came to reconcile a broken world – to put into a right relationship all He created – and bring in a kingdom of righteousness, peace and justice. This is something that He has started, and which will be completed when He comes again!

In the meantime we still live in a world where there is enormous need, poverty, injustice and pain. As God’s people, we are commanded to show His compassion to the poor. We are called to be His hands and feet in a hurting world. And this is not optional. It is a responsibility with which we are entrusted and are expected to fulfil.
Discuss

What might ‘encouraging the oppressed’ look like in my life, and in the mission of my church?

Identify some people or groups that are oppressed (i) locally; (ii) nationally; (iii) internationally.

Is my church committed to ‘seeking justice’?

When the poor see us, and our churches, do they see Christ’s love at work through us?

Think of three things that you, or your church, can do better to reflect God’s concern for the poor.

Around the World

- More than one billion children live in poverty in the world today, and 22,000 children die each day as a result of poverty (UNICEF). It is estimated that more than half of the population of Haiti lives on less than $1 a day (World Bank).
- More than 100 million children around the world have no choice but to live on the streets (UNICEF). In Wau, a small town in South Sudan, there are hundreds of street children – and the number is increasing. These children are at risk from starvation, abuse, disease and of being rounded up by the local police and thrown into prison.
- More than one million children are trafficked each year into exploitative work in agriculture, mining, factories, armed conflict or commercial sex work (UNICEF). Child labour is a major problem in Guatemala.
- Hundreds of thousands of children under the age of 16 years are fighting in wars around the world. One 11 year old child soldier in Africa said: “The drugs and alcohol don’t dull the pain. The memories keep flooding back. I have nothing to live for; I wish I could be killed” (Viva).
- More than 15 million children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Many of these are in African countries such as Kenya. But AIDS is not the only killer disease – in fact, almost one million people die each year due to malaria (WHO). In Zambia, malaria is the biggest killer of children under the age of five (UNICEF).
- 1.8 million children die each year because of diarrhoea caused by a lack of access to safe drinking water (UN). Access to clear drinking water is a problem for more than half of the population of Papua New Guinea (WaterAid).
A Weekly Prayer Guide

Spend some time each day over the next week praying for some of the issues facing orphans and vulnerable children around the world1:

**MONDAY - Lamentations 2:11:** Ask God for forgiveness for the way that we have often failed to care for children, and that, as a result, so many are homeless, exploited and abused. Pray that God will call many Christians to share His love and the good news of the Gospel with these children.

**TUESDAY - Psalm 113:7:** Thank God for those Christians who already work with children at risk. Ask Him to encourage and strengthen them. Pray for their protection.

**WEDNESDAY - Psalm 68:5-6:** Pray for families, that God would protect and keep them together. Pray for children who have been orphaned, that they would know that they can have a Heavenly Father who loves them and who will never leave them or forsake them. Ask God to heal those who suffer with feelings of rejection and loss.

**THURSDAY - Proverbs 2:6:** Pray for schools and educational projects that work with orphaned and vulnerable children; for their success; for support from local governments; and for finance. Pray for teachers that they would have faith, wisdom and strength, and confidence in the ‘call of God’ on their lives to teach.

**FRIDAY - Jeremiah 22:3:** Pray for children who are exploited in the workplace. Pray for their safety and for legislation to rescue and protect them. Pray for healing and restoration of childhood for those children who have had it taken away and do not know what it is to play.

**SATURDAY - Isaiah 58:6-7:** Pray for children that are hungry and sick. Pray for those who reach out to orphans and vulnerable children with food and health programmes. Pray for debt relief and fair trade practices to release resources to fight hunger and sickness.

**SUNDAY - Isaiah 1:17:** Pray that God would show us what we should be doing to tackle issues of poverty and injustice. Pray for individuals and churches to step up to the challenge to “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow”.

---

1 The Daily Prayer Guide is adapted from a prayer resource produced by Viva (2002).