

JESUS FULFILLED HIS PURPOSE SO YOU COULD FULFILL YOURS

Have you ever laid awake wondering, “What’s my purpose?”

- You might be surprised how writing a few simple bullet points of “personal purpose statement” can be empowering and life-directional.
- Sure, discovering your purpose includes examining your heart, gifts, and passions purpose, but even more, you need to look outside yourself, to God and God’s higher purposes.
- As followers of Jesus, our purpose is found in following in the footsteps of Christ’s purposes.
- In an odd twist, it’s only when you discover it’s not all about you, that you really find your own actual purpose.



Today we return to the 4th chapter of Luke, to the start of Jesus’ public ministry.

- The whole chapter is about Jesus defining and demonstrating his purpose.

Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had gone to his hometown of Nazareth and announced his God-given purpose statement: *“To preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.”*

- These words apply to both spiritual and earthly needs.
- Jesus brought the good news in both ways, to body as well as soul.

Jesus next returned to Capernaum, where several short stories happen in quick succession, each one illustrating how Jesus was living out his purpose.

- It’s a Saturday. Jesus is preaching in the Sabbath synagogue service.
- He casts out a demon that was possessing a man.
- This is Jesus *“releasing a captive and setting free one who was oppressed”*, just as his mission statement had said.

In today’s gospel reading, starting at Luke 4:38, we pick up the story after the sabbath service is over. It’s Saturday afternoon and Jesus is hanging out at Simon Peter’s house when suddenly Peter’s mother-in-law is sick with a serious fever. There’s a bunch of details you might miss here if you rush over them.

- Peter had a house.
- Peter was married and had a mother-in-law.
 - 1 Corinthians 9:5 also mentions that Peter had “a believing wife” who accompanied him on his ministry journeys.
 - Just a few decades later, Clement of Alexandria recounted how Peter’s wife had a ministry to women.
- Notice, too, that this group of people already all knew each other before Jesus started his public ministry and before Jesus had called Peter or any of the others to be his disciples.

- One faith lesson you might take from all this normal-life stuff is that the Jesus story didn't take place in some imaginary, adventure-land; it took place in the midst of real life in the real world, the same world that we occupy still today.

The key images and words used to describe Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law also come right from Jesus' mission statement.

- The fever is described as an entity that holds her "captive." (Haven't we all felt held captive by a sickness at times?)
- Jesus heals her by "rebuking" the fever as if it were an evil entity. He frees her by speaking alone, by rebuking her oppressor.
- Soundly rebuked, the fever then "releases" her. It's the same root word as used in "proclaim release to the captives."
- The story and the words themselves all illustrate Jesus living out his purpose statement.

It might make us bristle a bit to read that once healed, Peter's mother-in-law immediately starts serving the men. What kind of sexism is this?

- But try reading it instead as her choice, of her gladly using her recovered abilities in order to say thank you and show hospitality to the one who healed her.

The day continues. Word is out, Jesus can heal. It's still Saturday, but when the sun sets, the Sabbath prohibition against work will be over. Imagine all the people with sick loved ones waiting for the Head Rabbi to declare Sabbath is over. Suddenly, the work of bringing the sick for healing is allowable, and the race is on, people rushing to be early in line at Peter's door.

- Again, Jesus heals, but this time with a touch of his kind hands.
- But there are demons here, too, not just illnesses, and those Jesus again rebukes.
- Notice how Jesus is soft on people and hard on issues and evil.
- This is the second time in this chapter that Jesus has silenced demons.
- Do you perhaps have some personal demons of your own you also need Jesus to silence?

At daybreak the next morning, Sunday, Jesus goes out by himself to pray. The crowds chase after him to keep him from leaving town. They want to keep Jesus and his healing power to themselves.

- But also for the second time in this chapter, Jesus refuses to be held captive by a people who want to keep a good thing for themselves alone.
- He said to them, "*I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.*"
- And off he went. I guess the only way to keep being with Jesus is to keep following Jesus to where he's going next in his mission.

Here are some questions to ponder or discuss:

- How does your being a follower of Jesus help define your purpose in life?
 - What kinds of things knock you off your purpose path? Is there some harmful force you need to rebuke and be freed from?
 - Jesus was a healer. As a follower of Jesus, how might you also be a healer in your world?
- Amen.