

The Kingdom Manifesto

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The beginning of the ministry of Jesus must have been a strange and exciting time. When Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum, He read from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Then, boldly declared that He was the living fulfillment of the prophecy.

This text has been referred to as the “Kingdom Manifesto.” While this message should have been welcomed, this enraged those present at the synagogue. They could not understand or accept how Jesus could make such a scandalous claim. After explaining Himself further, the people tried to throw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30).

This violent reaction did not deter Jesus. Instead, He commenced with His work. But what was the purpose of His mission? What did Jesus think He was doing? The beginning of His ministry as noted by Luke gives us clues. Consider what the following events indicate about what Jesus was working to accomplish.

Features of Jesus’ Ministry

1). Overthrowing the devil. Before Jesus began His public work, He battled the devil in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Jesus relied on the grace of God to protect and defend Him against the devil. Now, in Jesus’ ministry, He would assault the allies of the devil.

While Jesus was in Capernaum, He cast out an unclean spirit. The evil demon asked Jesus, “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34). Jesus used His authority to command the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

Jesus came to destroy the devil, sin, and death. The time for the prince of the world to be cast out had not yet come. In the meantime, Jesus would demonstrate this deep spiritual purpose by casting out demons.

2). New creation. Jesus miraculously healed the sick. This was a primary feature of His ministry. People from all over the region of Galilee came to Jesus seeking healing. He healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever (Luke 4:38-40). Jesus cleansed a leper (Luke 5:12-16). Jesus enabled a paralytic to walk (Luke 5:17-26). The miracles of healing were tangible expressions of Jesus’ mission of bringing new creation. He was able to reverse decay and give new life.

Jesus’ mission of new creation was not just about physical renewal. While physical renewal happened, there was something deeper at work. Before Jesus healed the paralytic, Jesus forgave the man’s sins. When Jesus sensed the objection to this among those present, Jesus said, “Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to

say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Luke 5:22-24).

3). Forming a group. While Jesus was busy each day, He always had an eye toward the future. He thought about His kingdom after He finished His work. Jesus needed disciples to share in His work.

Jesus carefully began to select men to become His disciples. He chose Peter, James, and John, simple fishermen, to follow Him. Jesus told Peter, “...Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). Without hesitation, the three followed Jesus.

Later, Jesus came upon a tax collector: Levi (aka Matthew). Jewish tax collectors were ministers of the Roman Empire and were viewed by the Jews as traitors. Yet, Jesus asked Levi to follow Him. Levi graciously accepted Jesus’ invitation. Levi then hosted Jesus at his home for a celebration. Other tax collectors joined. Some criticized Jesus for socializing with sinners. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

In time, the apostles would carry on the mission of Jesus. Through the Gospel, they would call sinners to repentance. The group they would labor to form was the Church, the Kingdom of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to invite the sick to be healed.

4). Celebration. The celebration at Levi’s home was strange. Some present asked Jesus, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink” (Luke 5:33). Jesus answered, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (Luke 5:34-35).

The world had been anticipating the arrival of the Messiah for generations. Now, He had come! This was not a time for mourning. This was time for celebration. There would be a time for mourning. Jesus would be taken and killed; however, that time of mourning would be brief. Jesus’ resurrection would bring joy and hope.

Conclusion

When we read about the ministry of Jesus, we see it unfold step-by-step. We are familiar with His miracles. We know His parables. But, just what did Jesus think He was doing? Like the people who experienced Jesus’ ministry, we can see what He did, but what was underneath what He was doing?

There was much more happening than what met the eye. Jesus was embattled with the devil and his powers of evil. Jesus was in the process of bringing new creation to a place and people ruined by sin, decay, and death. Jesus was founding the kingdom of Heaven. And, everything Jesus was doing was cause for celebration. Will we join Jesus?