

## Fill My Life with Purpose

Luke 4:14–21

### Where Do You Come From, and Where Are You Going?

Time flies. Doesn't it? It feels like we just celebrated the start of 2025, and now January is already behind us. How has your New Year been so far? After returning from my vacation, I was greeted by a whirlwind of responsibilities and had a busy month. Henry David Thoreau once said, "*It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?*" That's a question worth asking. It's not just about how much we do or how hard we work. It's about **why** we do it. Without a clear purpose, all that busyness can leave us feeling empty. We can move nonstop and still end up wondering if we're just running in circles. In times like these, when our world feels more divided and uncertain than ever, it's especially important for us to pause and reflect on our purpose as God's children.

### A Polarized Society

Last December, something interesting happened in my household. My wife's favorite TV program completely changed. Can you guess what Juhee's new favorite show is? *National Assembly TV*. Until then, she had enjoyed dramas and movies, but after December 4, 2024, her attention shifted to live debates in Korea's National Assembly. Why? Because on that day, Korea's president declared martial law and attempted to shut down the National Assembly. Thankfully, the situation was resolved peacefully without bloodshed, thanks to the mature and courageous actions of citizens and soldiers who refused to carry out unjust orders from their superiors. Since then, the president has been impeached, and an investigation into charges of treason is underway.

Juhee says that watching *National Assembly TV* is now more gripping than any drama. It's fascinating—and unsettling—to see what once seemed like fiction playing out in reality. But the more we watch, the clearer it becomes how deeply divided the political and social landscape of Korea has become. Anger, hatred, and revenge seem to be the forces driving so much of what we see.

And this isn't just Korea's story—it's ours too. On January 20, the second Trump administration took office. Throughout the campaign, the president portrayed immigrants as a threat to the country, and one of his first actions in office was to sign an executive order authorizing the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants. Another executive order declared that federal law would only recognize two genders—male and female—and terminated all federal diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Supporters have celebrated these decisions with enthusiasm, but for many others, especially those directly affected, they have brought fear and despair. The divisions run so deep that, before leaving the White House, President Biden issued preemptive pardons for his family and members of his administration, fearing political retaliation. One journalist captured the moment perfectly, writing, "*Pardons by Trump and Biden reveal distrust of each other.*" In this time of extreme polarization, distrust, fear, hatred, anger, and the urge for revenge have become powerful forces shaping our society. What we need in such a climate is not to let our hearts be ruled by fear and anger. Instead, we must pause, reflect, and realign ourselves with the deeper purpose of our lives.

### Jesus' "Ministry Manifesto"

Today's passage marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. After overcoming temptation in the wilderness, He began teaching in Galilee and eventually arrived in Nazareth where he grew up. There, He read from the scroll of Isaiah, proclaiming:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This was Jesus' "Ministry Manifesto," a clear statement of His purpose. But consider this: He delivered it in Nazareth, His hometown, a place shaped by the trauma of Roman oppression and the aftermath of a brutal rebellion.

[ppt] Nazareth was a small, quiet village in Galilee, but it was near Sepphoris, a bustling city that played a central role in the region. Sepphoris was a Roman administrative hub, and during Herod the Great's reign, it was a major center of activity. After Herod died, a massive rebellion broke out across Galilee, including in Sepphoris. The Roman army, led by General Varus, crushed the uprising in a brutal crackdown. Thousands of rebels were crucified, their bodies displayed along the roads as a warning. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus likely have seen firsthand the aftermath of the rebellion—the destroyed city, the trauma of His people, the deep scars left by Roman oppression.

Imagine being a Galilean who witnessed these horrors. Imagine walking those roads, seeing your fellow countrymen hanging on crosses, dying slowly. The grief would be unbearable. The anger and thirst for revenge would be consuming. In this context, the Jews longed for a Messiah. But not just any Messiah—they wanted a political savior who would overthrow their oppressors and bring justice through vengeance.

Yet, in this context, Jesus read a passage of hope, proclaiming God's favor to the marginalized rather than judgment on the oppressors. [Slide] And when He read from Isaiah, He intentionally left out the part about vengeance. By doing so, Jesus radically redefined justice—not as retribution, but as mercy, grace, and love. Think about how radical this was. In a time when revenge was seen as the only way to achieve justice, Jesus chose a different path. He declared God's mercy and love for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the broken. His ministry wasn't about retribution or anger—it was about compassion, grace, and hope. Jesus wasn't interested in seeking revenge on behalf of his people. Instead, He embodied God's love, mercy, and grace, offering salvation to all through those gifts.

Now, I want to invite you to reflect on your own life. What's driving the direction of your heart? Is it shaped by your political views or the urge to win against those who think differently from you? Is it anger or the desire for revenge? If so, let this message be a reminder to realign your heart with the mission of Jesus. Let go of bitterness and vengeance. Choose instead the path of compassion, mercy, and grace. That's the life Jesus calls us to live—a life rooted in love and guided by the Spirit of the Lord.

### **God's Purpose-Driven Life**

Living according to God's will doesn't mean simply practicing religion faithfully while turning a blind eye to the political and social realities around us. Following God's will includes seeking justice, serving others, and caring for those in need. But here's the key—it's not about doing it all with our own strength. Instead, it's about trusting that God's promises, like Jesus' proclamation of the Jubilee, will be fulfilled through God's guidance and power.

This is why our faith is not just another social movement or ideological battle. It's a way of life grounded in the belief that God is alive, sovereign over the world, and leading us toward

God's vision for creation. Jesus' words today reveal where that vision begins—with mercy and love flowing toward the vulnerable and oppressed.

I'm reminded of something that happened after a recent presidential inauguration. Next The day following the presidential inauguration, an interfaith worship service was held at the Washington National Cathedral. During the service, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde gave a sermon before the president. She said:

"Let me make one final plea, Mr. President. Millions have put their trust in you. And as you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now."

She specifically called on the president to show mercy to immigrants and LGBTQ+ individuals. This wasn't just a political request—it was a spiritual reminder. Showing mercy and compassion to the weak is what people of faith are called to do. It's the heart of God's purpose for us.

Today, in a world filled with hatred, anger, and revenge-driven politics, we are called to something different. Let's remember Jesus' words and replace hatred with compassion, anger with love, and revenge with mercy.

When we do this, God's Word is fulfilled in our lives. After reading from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus declared, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Think about that. Every time you decide to show mercy to someone in need, every time you stand against injustice and speak the truth in love, God's Word is fulfilled.

If you've found yourself harboring hatred for others—whether they're people you disagree with politically or those who simply think differently—remember this: they are also God's beloved children. Choosing to let go of hate and embracing mercy instead is another way God's Word comes alive in your life.

So today, I urge you: live each day guided by the Spirit. Let God's purpose direct your actions, your words, and your heart. When mercy and love replace anger and fear, you are living a God's purpose-driven life, and God's kin-dom is realized in and through you. May we all walk this path together, trusting in God's promises and sharing God's love with the world. Amen.