

Action Figures: Jesus

Luke 4:14-21

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Unrolling the scroll of Isaiah Jesus found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” Was that passage that Jesus found just a random passage? Scrolling through the scroll did he point his finger wherever the scroll happened to stop and say, “This is the one I will read.” Was the passage assigned, part of what we call now the lectionary. Was that the Sabbath when the passage from Isaiah 61 was traditionally read and Jesus knew right where to turn? Or, maybe Jesus chose that one particular passage for that one particular day. It was the day Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and in his hometown synagogue, standing up to preach for the first time, maybe Jesus knew exactly which passage he wanted to read to announce his ministry.

I wonder if Jesus had a bucket list. What if he did have a bucket list? That is incredibly intriguing to me. What if Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Beloved Son came to earth with a bucket list, things he wanted to be sure he did while he walked this earth. What if on his bucket list was a note about wanting to go back to that synagogue where he grew, wanting to be invited up to read from the sacred scroll, wanting to be handed the word of God, wanting to unroll that scroll until he came to just the right spot where he could read for his people words about God anointing a servant with the Spirit of the Lord and that servant bringing good news to the poor and so much more, wanting to finish the reading from the scroll of that one particular passage, and after he rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, wanting to say, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Whether you call it a bucket list or not, it seems pretty clear that Jesus didn’t just stumble into the life he lived, mistakenly mounting a donkey as got caught up in the excitement of the crowd and disastrously being picked out of that crowd and put to death. The scriptures are clear that the coming of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus were not random events that in which Jesus was innocently and accidentally swept up in. I think it is fair to say Jesus did have a

bucket list, and as we look back at his bucket list, it is absolutely amazing the things Jesus had on his bucket list.

We started our Disciple Bible Study classes this past week. To help the class understand the importance of the Old Testament, I handed out a sheet where I compiled the Old Testament references that show up in the New Testament. There are something like 110 times in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, where something that happened in the Old Testament is mentioned as it relates to the life of Jesus. Most of those passages relate to prophecy...something was promised by God...and in Jesus that promise, that prophecy was fulfilled. The person Jesus was and the things Jesus did were not random and they were not by accident. I really think we can look at the life of Jesus in terms of him having a bucket list of everything he wanted to accomplish while he was here on this earth.

The Gospel of John begins with these words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made.” Colossians affirms that in the Son of God all things were created. These passages and others point to what is referred to as the “Preexistent Christ.” He was with God in the beginning. Not only was the Word of God there at the beginning, the Word of God was watching over all that was taking place on this earth. And then...at one particular time in the orbit of this planet, in the history of this world, in the fabric of human life, the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. Did this all happen by accident? Did Jesus trip and fall into this world at the wrong time? Oh no, Galatians 4:4 says Jesus came in the fullness of time. He brought his bucket list to his birth.

Now if you were the Son of God, how would you script your entrance into the world? If you were going to be born just one time, where would you be born, when would you be born, how would you be born? What would be on your bucket list? If there is an argument about whether Jesus had a bucket list, I guess you could use his birth as exhibit A that it couldn't have gone according to plan. There might be some reasons it did not go according to plan. We were not that advanced with space travel back in the day, and so when this holy child of God entered our world, his vessel missed Jerusalem, the obvious target, and landed in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is only 247 miles from Jerusalem. Considering that the circumference of the earth is almost 25,000 miles, to miss

Jerusalem by only 247 miles is not bad. Actually, it is even better than 247 miles. When I googled how far it is from Bethlehem to Jerusalem it showed up as 247 miles, from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to Jerusalem...wait for it...Jerusalem, Rhode Island. In Israel it is only six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. If Jesus had Jerusalem on his bucket list as the place where he wanted to be born, he only missed it by just that much, six miles.

I'm guessing some of you know being born in Jerusalem was not on the bucket list for Jesus. When the Wise Men from the east arrived in Jerusalem and asked where they could find the child who was born as King of the Jews, they were told the Messiah, the Savior, was to be born in Bethlehem. The prophet Micah had written, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who shepherd my people Israel." When Jesus was born in Bethlehem that was on his bucket list. That is just where he wanted to enter this world. And he who had every choice available to him, of where to be born, of how to be welcomed, of who his parents would be...was born to a young girl carrying a child who did not belong to the man she was going to marry and when they arrived in Bethlehem with the young girl heavy with child there was no room at the inn so his bed was a manger. And all of this was not by accident. It was not random. It was not a mistake. This was how God planned for the Christ to be born.

Whatever Jesus had on his bucket list for childhood and as a young adult we don't know much about, but we do know sometime around the age of 30 he showed up with his bucket at the Jordan River. Apparently, lots of folks had it on their bucket list to go see this fellow called John the Baptist. The Gospel of Mark tells us the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to see John. They were baptized. So was Jesus. John the Baptist tried to stop him. John the Baptist said to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you." Jesus held up his bucket. John, being baptized is on my bucket list. I have been waiting a long time to take a swim. Let's do this.

Once again, it would be real tempting to think this was a mistake or an accident. If Jesus wanted to go swimming the Mediterranean Sea was not all that far away. Deep blue seas with crystal clear water on a beautiful shore. Or if you follow the Jordan down to the Dead Sea you can bob in buoyant salty waters, floating and relaxing. The Jordan? It is not an impressive river.

Nevertheless, Jesus holds up his bucket. This river. This river where people are being baptized. I want to swim in this river, in these waters. This river is on my bucket list. So, the Son of Man jumped into the waters where all the sinful people had been coming to be cleansed, to receive forgiveness. After he swam that day, he pulled his bucket out of the Jordan. It was filled with polluted water. Those many sins that were washed off formed a film of filth and yet Jesus filled his bucket with that water. Watching Jesus with his bucket, filled with the sins of the people, carrying those sins away...our curiosity should be running wild. What else is on his bucket list?

After his baptism we wait a bit to find out what else is on his bucket list. The devil shows up and starts to tempt Jesus. The devil shows Jesus some stones and says, "If you are the Son of God command these stones to become bread." Jesus hears the devil talking, knows the devil is tempting him. Jesus knows the devil is testing him. Jesus looks at those stones. Then Jesus looks in his bucket. "No, that's not on my bucket list." "Throw yourself down from the highest point of the temple. Surely you want to prove that the angels will rescue you." That is what the devil says. Jesus looks down from the temple. Then Jesus looks into his bucket. "No, that's not on my bucket list." The devil plays his trump card. "I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world, if you will worship me." Jesus looks at all the kingdoms of the world, wealth, power, prestige, privilege, he looks at it all, in all its allure. Then Jesus looks in his bucket and says, "Nope, that is not on my bucket list." If it is not miraculous powers to turn stones to bread and if it is not dramatic high wire rescues and if it is not possessing all earthly power, then what in the world does Jesus have on his bucket list?

To get a sense of what is on his bucket list, let us return to that day when he stood up in his hometown synagogue and unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to that one particular passage he chose. Jesus was the Son of God. He could have read any passage, and any passage would have been meaningful. All scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, and training in righteousness. Jesus could have read any passage. But it was on his bucket list to read from Isaiah 61, as if Jesus were saying, "This is why I came." Slowly, purposefully, one by one he pulled out the things that were on his bucket list:

- Bring good news to the poor
- Proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind
- Set the oppressed free
- Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus left his hometown synagogue, bucket list in hand. His bucket list said find that leper, a man covered with a painful, and ugly skin disease, a disease that made him unclean and jeopardized his place in the community. His bucket list said make time for those who are troubled by demons. Pull a few boards out of the ceiling so those dedicated friends can drop the paralyzed man into the room. He needs healing, healing and forgiveness. Stop by the IRS and tell that guy named Levi to leave his tax collecting booth. Say yes to the wedding invitation because you never know if they will have enough wine for the reception...they just might run out, and you don't want the party stop. Plop yourself down by the well, right in the middle of the day. A woman is coming to that well...she doesn't know anything about this bucket list...but Jesus knows her, and his time on earth would not be complete unless he told this lost and lonely woman about living water, and unconditional love.

In so many ways it was a mundane bucket list. Sure, there were some fireworks...I'd like to walk on the water...and multiply loaves and fishes...and holler out at the wind and waves "Settle down!". But in so many ways it was a mundane bucket list. A leper here, a lame man there, a well in Samaria, a sycamore tree in Jericho. I wouldn't blame you if you find yourself frustrated with his bucket list. Jesus, this world needs a Savior, and your bucket list is barely scratching the surface of the deep needs that plague this world. Do you really have the time to bend down and draw pictures on the ground? Is that really on your bucket list? As a matter of fact, yes it was. A woman was caught in adultery, the religious leaders wanted to rush to judgment and put her to death, they asked Jesus whether he agreed that she should be stoned. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. They kept pressing him for an answer. He stood up and said, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." Of all the things he could have done, that one thing, writing in the dirt and then speaking words that cut to the quick and expose the hypocrisy of the human heart, that made his bucket list. Boy, did we need that one on his bucket list.

One day Jesus pulled an item out of his bucket, an item that was on his list. As he did it was like a cold dark cloud cut off the light of the sun. This was on his bucket list. “Set your face toward Jerusalem.” He did. The prophets, whose words so long ago played such a central role in shaping his bucket list, one of the prophets said you ought to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. So he did. Every faithful Jew had on their bucket list to celebrate the Passover. So he did.

Before Jesus got to the Passover, before he got to that meal that would be his last supper, as his time was drawing near, as his time was running short, Jesus made sure to check off some really important items on his bucket list. One of those really important items was to tell everyone what commands were most important. Love God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength. And love your neighbor as you love yourself. And oh yeah, right before everything fell apart, Jesus gathered his disciples together for a private meeting. He had something to say specifically for his disciples, for those who followed him. What Jesus said with his words is just about the perfect commentary on what Jesus did with his life. After telling his disciples many things privately (Matthew 24:3), Jesus told them whenever you give a hungry person something to eat, whenever you see a person who is thirsty and give them something to drink, whenever you see a stranger and welcomed that stranger, whenever you see someone needing clothes and you clothe them, whenever you visit and take care of the ones who are sick or in prison, Jesus said to his disciples, “You are doing these things unto me.” Whenever you do these things for the least of my children, you do it unto me.

And then came the Passover, that Last Supper. Now his death was imminent. Before he shared the Passover Meal, he pulled one other item out of his bucket, out of his bucket list. That night, with his disciples, at his last supper with them, Jesus set his bucket before all his disciples. Jesus set his bucket down on the floor. The bucket was still filled with that water from the Jordan River. When Jesus pulled his bucket from the Jordan River it was brimming with filthy water, the waters of sin and brokenness, the waters of suffering and shame. Now something had happened to that water. It was clean. It was pure. It was holy. With the water from his bucket he gently, but thoroughly, washed the feet of his disciples. As he made their feet clean that night, it was a sign and symbol that his bucket list would not be complete until he had made all his children clean, and pure, and holy. After he washed their

feet, he broke the bread and he poured the cup, telling his disciples, “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you.”

By now there weren't a whole lot of things left on his bucket list. Say a prayer in the garden. Pray for God's will to be done. Lift up the cross. Walk up the hill. Give my life. Suffer and die.

In some ways the bucket list of Jesus seems so mundane. There is so much he did not do. The needs of this world are so great. What did Jesus do? What was on his bucket list? A leper here, a lame man there, a well in Samaria, a sycamore tree in Jericho. But I tell you, by the time he climbed up that tree called Calvary and offered his life as a sacrifice of atonement, as an act of redemption, as a ransom that was paid, there is not a bucket big enough to hold all the blessings he brought. Because his bucket list was not about saving his life, but about giving his life away Jesus was able to save this world. Because there is no greater love than to lay down your life for others, his bucket list has showered this world with love, with unconditional love, with a love that accepts, and heals, and restores. Because his bucket list said reach out to the least, the last, and the lost, countless lives have been rescued by Jesus, and the deep darkness of despair has been pierced by the bright hope of knowing there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God that has been given to us in Jesus Christ.

Let us never take it for granted, and let us never forget, let us never, ever forget, the blessing that has come to us as a direct result of that day when Jesus unrolled the scroll in his hometown synagogue and said, “This is my bucket list!”

- Bring good news to the poor
- Proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind
- Set the oppressed free
- Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That was his bucket list, and that is what he did. Sinners like us, poor and needy, prisoners of a dark power that binds us with chains of oppression, leaving us blind and staggering, we have found freedom through Jesus Christ. Sins have been forgiven. Broken hearts have been mended. Crushed spirits

have been restored. Hope has been rekindled. The sting of death has been removed and the joy of living has been revived.

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it spoke about good news to the poor and all those other blessings. I have been saying that was his bucket list. That is what he came to do, and that is what he did. Let me ask you a very important question. Let me ask you a very personal question. Let me ask you an urgent question. Pretend you have a bucket. Pretend your life is a bucket. What is on your bucket list? Jesus not only told us what was on his bucket list, he lived out his bucket list. What is on your bucket list?

That question is not my question. That question is Jesus' question. One day he asked his disciples, people like you and me who follow him, one day Jesus asked his disciples that question. "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world but to forfeit their life?" Is your life about filling a bucket with things that try to gain the whole world? Jesus says that just isn't the way to find life. In Mark 8:35 Jesus says, "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it." What is on your bucket list? As we sing our closing song, listen to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to his summons. Let the life of Jesus and let the love of Jesus shape the bucket list of your life.