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Luke 10:17-24

33rd Message

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CAUSE FOR JOY!

SERIES: GOSPEL OF LUKE

The theme of our text this morning is joy. What gives you cause for joy? In my home it's baseball, a passion that is driven by my wife, Emily. Her love for the game took root when she was a little girl. Her father was a shy and retiring biomedical librarian, who kept his inner thoughts and feelings private. But he did have a passion for baseball and loved to take Emily to Dodger Stadium to see the Dodgers play. They would take their seats in the left field bleachers; Bob would take out his scorecard, light a cigar, and teach his little girl all about the game. Emily loved everything about baseball—the immaculate field, the beauty of the green, and its symmetry and clean lines. There are no grays in baseball you're either "safe" or you're "out". But above all, baseball evokes the memories she has of being close to her dad.

When we married and left Los Angeles, we entered Giants territory. But it wasn't until we had our first-born that she felt it was important to change her allegiance. Like her father before her, she taught our daughter Becky everything she knew about baseball and the art of keeping score. Finally, after waiting for over half a century, the Giants won a World Series, the first for San Francisco. The victory was so unexpected, that it made the thrill of victory all the more sweet. An entire city was overcome with joy, a joy they savored through ceremony, ritual and song. Oh the thrill of victory! That's about as good as it gets in sports. However, as good as that is, you cannot sustain it, no matter how hard you try.

Last week Jesus *sent* out seventy-two disciples to prepare the way for his arrival into all the towns where he was about to go. In our text today the disciples return from their mission exuberant with joy, having experienced the power and authority of ministering in Jesus' name. Jesus validates their experience, but redirects the focus of their joy away from the authority they were *given*, to the relationship they have with the *giver* of the gift—an everlasting, consummate joy that their names are written in heaven. The implication is that they are personally known and unconditionally loved by the Creator of the universe.

Through the debriefing process Jesus is able to help the disciples extract the eternal significance of their mission and expand and savor their joy in a context much larger than themselves. Debriefing after a mission is just as important for spiritual formation as the training that precedes it. As the disciples place their ministry before Jesus and allow him to speak into their lives, their initial joy is outstripped by an eternal joy that expands and fills the universe with thanksgiving and praise.

The practice of recognizing the presence of God in life's battles and savoring it in acts of worship and praise was nothing new in Israel. Jesus is following a long established tradition, practiced by Moses, Hannah, Deborah, King David, and in Luke's gospel, Zechariah and Mary. Today I would like you to place yourself in the shoes of the disciples and ask, "What gives you joy?" Then sit quietly and allow Jesus to speak into your life and expand your horizons. Finally,

following Jesus' example, write out a psalm of praise to your heavenly Father for a joy that is everlasting and as large as the universe.

I. The Thrill of Victory (Luke 10:17-20)

A. Surprised by joy

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" (Luke 10:17 ESV)

After Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples, it is surprising that Luke doesn't give us any details of the actual mission. If you remember from last week, Jesus was explicit about the dangers involved and the rejection they could expect to receive. But coming home, the disciples make no mention of danger, conflict or rejection. All they can speak about is the joy they experienced in exercising authority over demons. Their joy is no doubt all the greater coming on the heels of their initial, failed attempt to cast out a demon in chapter 9, followed by Jesus' stinging rebuke for their lack of faith (9:41). But now the disciples seem to have learned their lesson. On their new mission they do exercise faith in Jesus name and successfully cast out demons.

To "crush the head of the serpent" (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20) was one of God's great promises for humankind, and during their mission the disciples discover that in Jesus' name they are able to extend God's dominion over heretofore-unconquerable demonic forces. They are undoing the works of the devil. This is indeed a groundbreaking moment in the history of humankind. What could be more thrilling?

B. Joy validated and expanded

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you." (Luke 10:18-19)

Hearing their report, Jesus validates their joy and underscores the cosmic significance of their mission by describing a vision he experienced while he was interceding for them: "I *was watching* (*theōreō* – "to observe with sustained attention") Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Jesus' prophetic vision of Satan's fall is taken from the imagery of Isaiah 14, which he earlier used to describe the fall of Capernaum. The vision suggests that the disciples' victory over the demons is a preview of Satan's ultimate downfall and demise.

For, as John Carroll observes, "Luke's audience will soon discover, there are still demons to be banished and resistance to Jesus' work will escalate, eventually posing a threat even to the integrity of Jesus' company of disciples. All of this betrays the still-powerful activity of Satan."¹ But the vision is a gift of grace to give the recipients a taste of future realities, so that the faithful are able to press on through the conflict, being fully assured of victory, a victory that is already breaking in to the present.

On another level, Jesus' statement expands the disciples' understanding of Jesus' role in their mission. Their ability to subdue demons was not simply a matter of having faith to tap into a divine power source and appropriate it at will. Rather they had walked onto a stage that had already been prepared for them through Jesus' intercessory prayers. And the fact that they had exercised faith to confront demons in Jesus' name was in a large part due to the Father's gracious response to Jesus' petitions.

Jesus' prayers *gave* them the authority that had been given to him by his Father. The perfect tense "given" (*dedōka*) suggests the gift is not temporary, but remains continually in their possession throughout their mission and extends to any and all forms of evil manifestations—whether it is the beguiling temptation of the snake or the surprising and deadly sting of the scorpion (Deut 8:14-15). The disciples will have permanent and wide-ranging authority over evil, so that in the end "nothing will hurt them." Luke uses the emphatic double negative (*ou mē*) for emphasis ("nothing will not *no [way]* hurt you "). The term "hurt" means "to suffer injustice," which seems outrageous given all the injustices which the apostles and early church will endure. But in another sense, the promise holds true for those who make the journey with Jesus. The disciples will suffer no injustice along the way to Jerusalem, because all injustice will fall on Jesus on their behalf. Later Jesus extends our outlook of the promise to beyond the grave. Ultimately no injustice can harm those he will raise from the dead (Luke 21:18).

C. Joy redirected and purified

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20)

As great as the thrill of dominating evil spirits is, it is not sufficient grounds for joy. To focus on the euphoria that power gives is extremely dangerous. It feeds the ego and leads to abusive control. Jesus insists that there will be many who prophesy and cast out demons in his name, but he will say to them, "I never knew you" (Matt 7:23).

Therefore Jesus redirects the focus of their joy away from the authority they were *given*, to the relationship they have with the *giver* of the gift. They are to continually "rejoice" (present imperative) in the fact that their names are written in heaven. The implication is that they are personally known and unconditionally loved by the Creator of the universe. Darrell Bock explains that the Book of Life "indicates that the disciples are personally known by God and that their eternal presence before him is certain...[and] the evil one's power cannot remove their secure position before God."²

Always after a Romania mission trip we schedule a debriefing time in Gmunden, Austria, to do just this: to redirect our focus off the joy we experienced doing missional work and back onto the giver of that joy, extracting the eternal significance of our trip. On one trip, we had a baptism, and among those who were baptized was Maren Coleman. Her dad, Ken, participated in her baptism, and just prior to submerging her under the water Ken looked Maren in the eye and said, "I love you, but somebody loves you more, and I have to let you go," affirming her as his daughter and pointing her toward her greater Father.

II. Consummate Joy (Luke 10:21-22)

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and

revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (Luke 10:21)

A. Spirit filled praise

Jesus' joyful outburst "in the Spirit" models for the disciples that the appropriate response to their successful mission is "inspired" praise. When we take time to place our work before the living God, the Spirit gives us eyes of faith to see the sovereign hand of God at work in all things, not in vague generalities, but with keen discernment to recognize the specific contribution of each person of the Trinity, working together in love and orchestrating all things to bring life to those who are humble. But seeing is only half of the equation. The Spirit not only gives Jesus a lens to see, it inspires his speech in praise that magnifies the glory of God with a joy as large as the universe.

We have already seen "Spirit-filled" praise bursting out in the lives of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Simeon in Luke's introduction. But now Jesus is elevating King David's psalms of "Spirit filled" praise as the model for spiritual formation for all disciples. Spirit filled praise is the highest form of human speech since it transforms the knowledge of God in our minds into the holy presence of God in our hearts. No wonder the apostle Paul describes it as the fundamental manifestation of the Spirit within a congregation:

...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:18-20)

B. Grace for the humble

There is an unspeakable joy when we discover how God exercises his dominion in the world in ways that defy human expectation. The way Jesus describes how the sovereign Lord establishes his kingdom is identical to David's inspired praise in Psalm 8:1-2, and thus placing Jesus' praise on the map of Israel's history.

**O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger. (Ps 8:1-2)**

While the heavens are singing God's glory in verse 1, in verse 2 we are confronted with the rising discord of powerful foes and avengers who devour the weak on earth.³ The juxtaposition of these two brings to light the unexpected and mysterious way that God makes his rule majestic on earth. God delights to be gracious to those who are vulnerable and weak, and uses their prayers and praises to create a defensive fortification that resists and ultimately eliminates all the attacks of the wicked. As Bruce Waltke affirms in his exegesis of this psalm:

In sum, the psalmist makes God's majesty in all the earth even more awesome by contrasting I AM's obvious splendor bestowed upon the stars with the frailty of the mortal who must look to him to fulfill the commission to rule. The heavens are the work of the Creator's fingers, but his rule on earth in salvation history is his work through the mouth of "children," "infants" (a hyperbolic metaphor for people who depend totally upon him). It is an apt metaphor for ancient Israel who, trapped as a small and insignificant state between the giant superpowers of Egypt and Mesopotamia, found strength in their dependence upon their

God. It is also an apt metaphor for the church which, in a world armed with military and political power, also conquers by faith.⁴

Throughout Luke's gospel the pattern of radical reversal has remained constant and continues to amaze and give us cause to rejoice. Carroll summarizes,

A young woman, unmarried and lacking pedigree, is chosen to give birth to the Messiah and sings praise to a God who honors the lowly; revelation comes direct from heaven to shepherds who, despite their low status, are favored by God and glimpse the Savior-child lying in a feeding trough; the Messiah encounters rejection at home and among the righteous and well-positioned, while the sick and sinners and outsiders embrace him and the liberation he brings; a young child models authentic greatness, and welcome of this child means hospitality to Jesus himself and to God. Now in 10:21 babies are singled out as recipients of divine revelation, which is concealed from persons of mature knowledge.⁵

When everything that matters in life is a gift of God's gracious will, our joy is unending. When you never earned something there is no fear in losing it via poor performance. Such praise cultivates humility and leaves no place for pride or self-adulation, for the recipients of revelation must remain childlike in their faith.

C. Praise among the nations

When we praise this way, it furthers God's mission in the world. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 96, we are to sing our praise in the presence of the nations who do not know God.

**Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Ps 96:1-3)**

Chris Wright, who regards this psalm "as one of the most richly missional songs in the whole Bible," makes these verses come alive adding some imaginative dialogue:

"Let's sing a new song!" cries the songwriter.

"Sure, what are the lyrics?" we respond.

"Let's sing about the name of YHWH, the salvation of YHWH, the glory of YHWH and the marvelous deeds of YHWH."

"But those are the old songs!" we protest. "Those are the words of all our great songs since Israel was redeemed from Egypt, learned the name of YHWH at Sinai, saw his glory in the tabernacle, and experienced repeated acts of salvation at his hand. What makes this a new song?"

"It may be an old song for us," our psalmist replies, undeterred, "but it will be a new song 'among the nations', 'among all peoples.'"⁶

D. The Father and Son are fully invested

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Luke 10:22)

At first glance this verse may seem narrow, exclusive, if not arrogant. But on careful analysis, another perspective is achieved. God is on a rescue mission to save the world caught in the slavery

of sin. What is needed is a mediator who can provide adequate payment for the penalty of sin. The only one capable of making the payment is God's Son, who is fully human and fully God. Thus God has invested everything he has and placed it in the Son to save the world. Similarly the Son gave himself fully as a ransom for all our sin by allowing evil to exhaust itself upon him. Rather than being exclusive, his sacrifice on the cross paid for the sins of the world and thus opened the door for the whole human race to be saved. It is true that some people won't respond, but that is because they are proud. But to any and all who are humble enough to receive the gift of forgiveness, both Jesus and the Father are eager to reveal themselves to them. The question then is not whether God is invested, but are we fully invested with him?

It is for this reason that the apostle Paul urges the church in Ephesus to pray for "all people." The reasons are: 1. It is God's desire to save all; 2. The need for a mediator has been met in Christ, who gave himself and paid the ransom for all; 3. Apostles, preachers and evangelists have been sent to all nations with the proclamation that all can be saved.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people... This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (2 Tim 2:1-7)

III. The Joy of Privilege (Luke 10:23-24)

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Luke 10:23-24)

One of the most moving moments of World Series ceremonies occurred when San Francisco's Hall of Famers—Gaylord Perry, Orlando Cepeda, Willie McCovey and Willie Mays—were escorted out onto the field. After they were introduced to the cheers of the fans, they had one thing to say to the new champions. "Despite our greatness and fame, you have had the privilege of experiencing something we never had, yet always dreamed about: Winning not one, but two World Series!"

In similar fashion, you can imagine the chill these disciples felt when Jesus said that they had the privilege of seeing what prophets and kings could only dream about. If you wonder exactly what they saw, Isaiah tells us they saw "the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God," that was displayed in Jesus, who opened the eyes of the blind, saved his people and is now leading the ransomed home with everlasting JOY.

**The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;
it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.
Say to those who have an anxious heart,**

“Be strong; fear not!
 Behold, your God
 will come with vengeance,
 with the recompense of God.
 He will come and save you.”
 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped...
 And a highway shall be there,
 and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
 and come to Zion with singing;
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
 they shall obtain gladness and joy,
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa 35:1-2, 4-5, 8, 10)

As Bock observes,

Mission involves trust, responsibility, authority, rejection, but above all privilege. To see the blessing of mission is why Luke narrates the story of the seventy-two. This sense of privilege is to inspire disciples to continue the task. Whatever their success, they need to understand that God is behind their cause. In that knowledge is real joy.⁷

When you meet people who really believe Jesus’ words, joy consumes them. When I was working with college students in the mid eighties, I had the privilege of meeting Bud Hinkson. Bud was the dynamic director of affairs for Campus Crusade for Christ in all the Soviet Bloc nations. His daughter Joi was in our college group and invited her dad to share with us. Bud loved the Scriptures and had committed eleven complete books of the Bible to memory. When he taught, he spoke with words aflame from the depths of his heart with no notes or Bible to reference. He exuded a contagious joy and a fearless faith that could launch a payload of young disciples anywhere in the world. Bud was the first individual to encourage me to take students behind the Iron Curtain. Little did I know how that seed would sprout in the next few years.

This week Bud’s daughter Joi was in town and stopped by to see me with her husband and daughter. We hadn’t seen each other in twenty-five years. For our brief visit it was evident that Bud’s fearless faith and passion for Christ had taken root in both his children and grandchildren. Joi and her husband Roy work with BEE (Biblical Education by Extension) and have lived on the cutting edge of disciple-making since their wedding day. Their world knows no geographical boundaries, as Joi is conversant in eleven languages and, like her father, exudes the joy for which she was named. Her husband Roy is cut out of the same cloth. But what impressed me the most was their daughter, newly graduated from college. I asked her what she wanted to do with her life. With a glow in her eyes and a precious smile, she said she wanted to return to Russia to minister in the land in which she was privileged to grow up and loves with her whole heart. As they left Jesus’ words seemed to come alive—“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.”

So what gives you joy?

1. John T. Carroll, *Luke, A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 239.
2. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2:9:51-24:53* (ECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1008-1009.
3. “The compound, “children and infants,” in its seven occurrences refers to the helpless offspring of a people threatened with annihilation by a ruthless foe (1 Sam 15:3; 22:19; Jer 44:7; Lam 1:16; 4:4; Joel 2:16).” Bruce K. Waltke and James M Houston with Erica Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 261-262.
4. Waltke, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 257-258.
5. Carroll, *Luke*, 241.
6. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People, A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 252.
7. Bock, *Luke Volume 2:9:51-24:53*, 1014.

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