

Luke 10:17-24
Joy and Even Greater Joy

Our God has many attributes. We know of His love and His wrath, His mercy and His judgment, His sovereignty and His goodness. We know He is omniscient and all-powerful. We know He loves us. But our God is also a God of joy.

Zephaniah 3:17, “The Lord your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

Jeremiah 32:41, “I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

Our ultimate end, if we are children of God, will be in a place where joy abounds. Revelation 21:4 promises us that “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” In the parable of the talents, Jesus illustrated the future of believers by telling His disciples, “his master said to him, ‘well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master’” (Matthew 25:21).

Nevertheless, we usually do not think of Jesus as being particularly joyful during His time on earth. He was busy; He was about His Father’s business. As He healed and taught, we sense urgency and purpose. But even as He amazed the crowds, He knew of their indifference and unwillingness to follow Him. We recognize commitment and passion, but we usually do not think of Jesus as being particularly joyful as He made His way through His life toward the cross. Why should He, His life was hard.

At the tomb of Lazarus, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

When He approached Jerusalem, “He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41).

In Gethsemane, “He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed” (Matthew 26:37).

Yet in this passage we have, recorded by Luke alone, the one instance in which Jesus is said to be rejoicing.

The Joy of the Seventy

We have no idea how long the seventy men spent on their short-term mission trip, but when they returned, they returned full of joy (v. 17). No doubt they did. Though they had undoubtedly been rejected in some places, as Jesus promised they would be, they had followed the commands of Jesus and seen the power of God as they went along. They had proclaimed that the kingdom of God had come. They had healed those who were ill. But most importantly, they had obeyed. Let us learn this first. We will never be more full of joy than when we walk in obedience to the commands of the faith.

Why were these men so joyful? Simply put, it was because they had been successful. “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” they shouted (v. 17). That perhaps had surprised them. Still,

they were eager to accept their accomplishments as something produced of themselves. Isn't it easy for people to become full of themselves when they are successful? We can imagine these grown men rushing up to Jesus like little children to boast of their achievements. Pride comes so easily to man. We can see why Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit wrote that a leader should not be "a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil"

(1 Timothy 3:6). We ought ever to pray for humility when we are successful and prosperous. It is a curious thing that when our crosses to bear are light, we are most likely to stumble. It is difficult to carry a full cup without spilling.

These demons were originally holy angels who had chosen to follow Satan in his rebellion against God as recorded in Revelation, "and his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (Revelation 12:4). Demons were, and still are, actively involved in trying to limit the success of the gospel message. We are told "that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1), and that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4). Despite their temporary success, their eternal destiny has been determined. "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41).

During the time of Christ, demonic activity had reached its zenith. We have seen in many passages the work of demons as they tried to disrupt the plans of Jesus and destroy what He was trying to build. "34'Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!' 35But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet and come out of him!' And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst of the people, he came out of him without doing him any harm" (Luke 4:34-35).

And the Jews of Jesus' day were very familiar with Satan and his demons. They knew that immediately after the Fall, God had promised,

"I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel" (Genesis 3:15).

And the conflict had never ceased.

It is not recorded that Jesus explicitly gave them power over Satan in His original instructions when He said "8whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:8-9). Nevertheless, these men had been chosen by Jesus to walk in the power of God as they went along. It was, and is, only by such power that demonic activity can be challenged. In our own power, we are incapable of opposing successfully demons. An excellent example of the hazards of doing so is found in Luke's account of Paul's time in Ephesus. As Paul preached there, he encountered some men who were trying to emulate his power over demonic activity, but with little effect,

“¹³some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’
¹⁴Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ ¹⁶And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:13-16).

The response of Jesus to the joy of these men in their victory over demons is worth noting. Jesus “said to them, ‘I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning’” (v. 18). To what was He referring? Opinions differ. Some suggest that Jesus is referring to the original fall of Satan from heaven as described in Isaiah. Others argue that Jesus is referring to His victory over Satan during His temptation recorded in Luke 4. Still others suggest this is a reference to Jesus’ work casting out demons while He was here on earth. There are those who believe this refers to the victory of Jesus over Satan at the crucifixion and resurrection, and there are those who insist this refers to the final judgment of Satan looked forward to in Revelation.

The phrase “like lightning” (v. 18) would seem to suggest a single event, but the grammar of the sentence suggests that this is not a one-time event to which Jesus is referring. It is an ongoing fall of Satan. The idea of lightning may indicate the surprise with which the seventy achieved their success. In that case, perhaps a good explanation is that Jesus is referring to the continual destruction of Satan’s kingdom here on earth one soul at a time as people come to faith in Christ. In the parable of the lost coin Jesus taught His disciples that “in the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

In any case, Jesus continued to the seventy, “I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.” (v. 19). Believers have authority. That is something about which to be joyful. But are these literal serpents and scorpions? Some have believed so and combined this passage with Mark 16:18, “they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” and Paul’s experience on Malta “³but when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ ⁵However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm” (Acts 28:3-5) to conclude that this is a present gift of the Holy Spirit to be practiced literally.

To answer this, we must remember that Jesus frequently used figurative language - the ‘leaven’ of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6-12), the raising of the temple in three days (John 2:19-21), the vine of John 15 are examples which may be added to easily. Therefore, it is more accurate to think of these as metaphors for Satan and his demons.

“And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Revelation 12:9).

“And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:2).

²He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. ³Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power . . . ⁵their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man . . . ¹⁰They have tails like scorpions, and stings” (Revelation 9:2-3, 5, 10).

We, as believers, have been given power through the Holy Spirit over such tormentors. We can have confidence that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” (Romans 16:20). We know that “the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). And ultimately we can rest in the assurance that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Like the seventy, we can rejoice that through the Holy Spirit, we can have victory over Satan and the temptations he sends our way. But that is not the greater joy.

The Joy of Jesus

While Jesus rejoiced, His focus was different. “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (v. 20), He said. The power and authority to do great works (including casting out demons) is not of itself a guarantee of salvation. We can assume that even Judas, as he went out, did these things. Great works do not make a saved man. Grace is greater than gifts.

Jesus knew that Satan can do damage to us for a time here on earth. All of God’s saints have felt his attacks. Think of Job; think of Paul. But He acknowledged that while we would have victory, that victory was not limited to this world. The greater joy is that we have assurance of eternal victory over Satan and his power,

“²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29)

“³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Jesus rejoiced not that the men had been successful in overcoming Satan in this world, but that their souls were secure in the next. The first great understanding that Jesus wanted these men to recognize as they celebrated their temporal accomplishments was that a greater joy was to be found in their salvation.

For the only time recorded in Scripture, Jesus was joyful. “At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit” (v. 21). His joy was spiritual. True joy always is. Joy in temporary things is not wrong, but it is fleeting. Joy in things eternal is lasting. It is a joy that does not fade cannot be taken away. That is why it is the greater joy.

In His joy, Jesus began to pray. That is, He began to talk to His Heavenly Father, expressing His joy that could not be contained. “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight” (v. 21), he said. He praised God. He rejoiced that God was well-pleased.

First of all, let us notice that Jesus called God His Father. We cannot skip over this, for the Jews certainly did not, “for this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). And Jesus made certain which God it was as well. His Father was the “Lord of heaven and earth.” This was an ancient title for God among the Jews,

It had been used from the beginning, “Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth’” (Genesis 14:22).

It was true during Israel’s history, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.

Where then is a house you could build for Me?

And where is a place that I may rest?” (Isaiah 66:1).

And it remained true even after the exile, “Thus they answered us, saying, ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth’” (Ezra 5:11).

Second, Jesus rejoiced that what had happened pleased God. Jesus’ entire life was lived in obedience. His every purpose was to please His Father. This was no exception. Jesus rejoiced that what He had done had been pleasing to God. That was a greater reason for rejoicing.

Third, Jesus acknowledged God’s sovereign plan, “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (v. 22). The ‘things’ refers to all that was involved in the incarnation, life, and passion of Jesus’ life. These things that are beyond our understanding had been ordained by a sovereign God Who chose to reveal them to whomever He wished. Jesus rejoiced, that these men were among those chosen by God for understanding.

We know that God chooses. And it is clear that God chooses sovereignly, without respect for the particular attributes of those whom He chooses. That is, we may be intelligent, or well-positioned in society, or influential, or excellent in some other way, but God does not choose people for any of those reasons. He chooses people because it pleases Him to do so.

We, too, ought to rejoice that God has not limited salvation to the “wise and intelligent” only. In fact, quite the contrary. Those who are full of their own self-righteousness cannot humble themselves sufficiently to find salvation. We must first recognize that we are truly bad to ever have hope of being good. That is why

“¹⁸the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to

know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. . . . ²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21, 25-29).

Part of this sovereign plan was that “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (v. 22). Jesus knew He had been given authority to bring about God’s sovereign plan. He knew that He alone was the perfect representation of God,

“the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

God chose those to whom He would reveal this truth. Jesus understood this, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:65). This is not caprice, it is sovereignty. We are unable to save ourselves, so unless God chose to save us we would be lost. We have been blinded by Satan and corrupted by our own sin. We could not possibly choose to understand spiritual truths unless God chose to reveal them to us because “¹⁴a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual appraises all things” (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Finally, Jesus rejoiced that His followers had this special blessing. “²³Turning to the disciples, He said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, ²⁴for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them’” (v. 23-24). Peter must have remembered this later when he wrote, “¹⁰as to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The great Old Testament saints, men such as Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and others had seen glimpses only of the future kingdom of God. They had understood in a dim way God’s eternal plan of salvation. They had been chosen, they had been privileged, but they had not seen and they had not heard the incarnate Christ.

The Old Testament saints had “died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). They “³⁹having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was

promised, ⁴⁰because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40). Now the kingdom of God had come, and these men were chosen to be a part of it.

This small flock of insignificants were chosen by the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe to participate in the development of His kingdom. What a privilege! What a reason to rejoice!

Take Aways

May we have the grace to, as Jesus did, but full of joy at the reality of our salvation, than the achievements of our life. May we also recognize that we have been given a great privilege as children of the King and “from everyone who has been given much, much will be required” (Luke 12:48).