

### **Luke 8:1-3** **Snapshot of a Ministry**

Recently, we have seen Jesus minister to large crowds of people (Luke 6:17-19) then preach what was probably His most famous sermon (Luke 6:20-49). He spoke of the kingdom of God and the character qualities its subjects possess. He then healed a centurion's servant without even encountering the man (Luke 7:1-10) and raised a widow's son from the dead (7:11-17). He graciously reassured John the Baptist's disciples that He was the Messiah (Luke 7:18-30) and then chastised the crowds who were never satisfied and always found fault (Luke 7:31-35). Finally He channeled His teaching into a powerful moment where He not only ministered to the needs of an outcast woman, but pronounced for all to hear His unmistakable assertion that He was God.

This passage is a brief 'summary' passage often used by Luke as a transition. Luke 4:14-15, 4:31-32, 4:40-41, and 6:17-19 are other examples. Yet though parenthetical, this passage does give us a snapshot of the ministry of Jesus, and there are four things we can take away.

#### **Jesus was Intentional**

Luke begins, "And it came about soon afterwards, that He began going about from one city and village to another" (v. 1). Jesus was faithful in doing good. Despite the fact that many did not believe, He persevered in following God's plan. Man's unbelief did not dissuade Him from doing good. Rejected in one village, He moved on to another. He healed, cast out demons, and preached wherever He went. Fully human, He must have tired, thirsted, hungered, and become mentally fatigued. Yet He never ceased doing good.

Jesus never wandered around. He never was random in His actions. He was always doing the will of His heavenly Father. The words "going around" (v. 1) do not reflect a haphazard approach to ministry. John 5:30 gives a clue as to the purpose of this approach, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." He did what His Father said, He went where His Father directed Him, He ministered to those His Father put in His path. Can we do any less?

The lesson for us is clear, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

People often have great intentions of doing great things for God. Many have dreams and make plans. But far too often that is where the journey ends. And the excuse is frequently the same - "I didn't have enough time." There is a disconnect between what we want to do and what we do for the kingdom of God.

It is true that time is short. Therefore we must do our best with the time we have. We all have the same time. Be busy. James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that preparation and action is the same thing. To want to do somethings is not the same as doing it. Good works are just that - work. They are not wishes or aspirations, they are actions. Jesus did not want to do His Father's will, He did it. Despite the

challenges and trials that it brought Him (even unto His own death) He never wearied from doing His Father's will.

It is true that time is short, but there will come a time when there will be no one to share the gospel with. We must work now, for there will be no work for us to do later. When we are glorified with God in heaven, our opportunity to work will be done. We must do all the work we can now, for there is no other opportunity guaranteed to us.

### **Jesus had a Specific Message**

Jesus preached the kingdom of God. Without repudiating man-made laws, Jesus yet insisted that an age of grace had arrived. God is king and salvation is a free gift, not an earned reward. Jesus did not use His position to engage in political or social debates. He did not use His authority to call for revolution or upheaval. He stuck to one basic message throughout His time - the kingdom of God.

To be sure there were many nuances to this message. Not every sermon was word-for-word the same. There were different practical applications depending on the audience and circumstances. But Jesus preached the gospel.

This passage speaks to both the method and the content of His message. He went about "proclaiming and preaching" (v. 1). The word of 'proclaiming' is *kerysso*, and it means to openly and publically announce something. This was no covert operation. Jesus did not work in the shadows. He was not ashamed of His message or reserved in its presentation. A hostile audience was no deterrent.

The word of 'preaching' is *euangelizo* from which we get the word evangelize. As you would expect, this word refers to the gospel message, the good news first brought by the angel Gabriel and then shouted from the heavens by the angels to the shepherds. It is the same message we have the privilege of sharing today.

The content was "the kingdom of God" (v. 1). As we have discussed before, this idea includes two concepts, God's rule and sovereignty is one, and the spiritual blessings received when we are saved is the other. These are not unrelated. The reign of God in heaven and earth includes His plan of salvation and our incorporation into the body of believers. Our salvation began in heaven and should bring glory to Him Who ordained it.

This is the basic gospel message that underlies all the New Testament. Beginning with John the Baptist, the call of sinners to repent was clear (Matthew 3:2-8). Jesus instructed His disciples to present this same truth, "and they went out and preached that men should repent" (Mark 6:12). The gospel, clearly presented, begins with the fact that sinners must repent. And the idea of repentance requires that one understand that they must be sinners. There is no shortcut to this truth that Jesus "proclaimed and preached."

In addition to this is the idea that the sinner must not only repent, he or she must believe. Jesus said, "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). And we must believe the correct things. It is not enough to try to stop being evil

and believe that Jesus was a good moral teacher, or a great prophet, or a profound miracle worker. We must believe that He is the Son of God, and that He is God the Son. We must believe that His atoning death paid the price for our sins and provided the complete vehicle by which the wrath of God was propitiated.

Finally, if we truly have repented, and truly believed, we will obey. There is no more clear barometer of our faith than obedience, “and why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I say” (Luke 6:46) Jesus asked. If we believe Jesus died on the cross and thereby brought us from a place of eternal damnation to a place of eternal blessedness, how could we respond but with love? And if we love, how could we not obey? “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me” (John 14:21) Jesus said.

This is a specific message. While Jesus always took into account the context of His preaching, He never adulterated or abridged the message to make it more palatable to His listeners. He never compromised the truth as a means of being successful. The gospel is specific, and so was the message Jesus preached.

### **Jesus Invested in People**

As Jesus went along “proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God,” we are reminded that “the twelve were with Him” (v. 1) Jesus did not go at it alone. He did good works that impacted many lives, but He also specifically invested in particular people as He did so. While it is true that in a human sense He probably never knew many of the thousands He fed with a few loaves and fishes, it is equally true that Jesus was intimate with a dozen or so men in whom He invested the prime of His life.

It is good for us to reflect on the qualities of these people Jesus chose as His disciples. None of them were elites. None of them were ranking members of Jewish or Roman society. None of them had influence within the synagogues. None of them were particularly wealthy, and what wealth they had they left behind to follow Jesus. None of them had influential friends or any particular influence in high places either socially, politically, or religiously. None of them were known for academic or intellectual accomplishments. None of them possessed any fame or celebrity.

Perhaps more importantly, none of them had particularly strong faith. They were frightened of storms (Matthew 8:26, 14:31). They lacked confidence in God's provision (Luke 9:12). They bickered over rank and privilege (Luke 9:46). They never really understood the purpose for which Jesus had come (Mark 9:32; John 12:16). They ultimately deserted Jesus at the crucial moment (Matthew 26:56). These are not the character qualities one would normally look for in choosing people to invest in.

Still, Jesus understood that the kingdom of God required, by God's design, others to carry on the message. In this manifestation, Jesus had come to die, not to reign forever, and therefore the continuation of the gospel fell into the hands of those men in whom Jesus invested. The four generation process described in 2 Timothy 2:2 is worth considering, “the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Here we have Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others, all participating in sharing the truth of the gospel. Investment is key.

It is worth pausing to reflect on whom we are investing. Each of us has a certain amount of spiritual maturity. There are others in the body of Christ who are more mature, and others less so. Have we partnered with a person who can be a 'Paul' to us, and our we a 'Paul' to someone's 'Timothy?'

### **Jesus Gave the Opportunity to Serve**

It was virtually unknown for a rabbi to allow women to follow him. Rabbis, like the ancient world generally, had a view of women that considered them unworthy. The ancient world was not kind to women. Ancient writers from Socrates and Aristotle to the Essenes indicate their low status.

Interestingly, Luke's gospel is characterized by a generosity toward women. Think of the prominent places given to Elizabeth and Mary. Also Anna, the prophetess, the story of Mary and Martha, and the widow at Nain. Not to mention the woman discussed last time, whom Luke used as an example of tender, devoted love.

Luke refers to "some women, who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses" (v. 2). Clearly some of the many people Jesus encountered and ministered to were so moved by His mercy that they chose, like the disciples, to follow Him. Many of these are nameless in Scripture, but here Luke selects three. We are not given the criterion of his choice, but through the superintending of the Holy Spirit their names are recorded as examples of those women who followed Jesus.

"Mary who was called Magdalene" (v. 2) is clearly the most famous of the three. Her name comes most probably from the village of her origin, Magdala. She is featured in all four gospel accounts. She was present at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:55). She saw where Jesus was buried (Mark 15:47). She went to anoint His body (Luke 24:10). She was the first to whom the risen Christ appeared (John 20:1-18, Mark 16:9).

The passage tells us that "seven demons had gone out" from her (v. 2). That she had the usual manifestations of mental instability which would naturally accompany such a phenomenon is likely, but there is not a shred of biblical evidence to point to her as a woman of immoral character. Gregory the Great was probably the first to consider Mary Magdalene a harlot. Church history reinforced this with such enthusiasm that the color red was used throughout medieval and Renaissance painting to indicate her in works of art, and red has been the color associated with immorality ever since.

"Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward" (v. 3) is the second woman mentioned by Luke. That her husband was Herod's steward indicates that he had some position at court of responsibility. Joanna was with Mary Magdalene at the burial and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 23:55, 24:10). Like Mary she would be with Jesus for the duration of His earthly ministry. It is wonderful to consider, that the ministry of Jesus, even in such a short time, could reach from the small village of Magdala to the palace of King Herod.

It is interesting to speculate if Joanna first heard of Jesus from the mouth of the imprisoned John the Baptist. It is equally interesting to wonder if she was a source Luke used as he wrote his gospel for details on Herod and his household. Of Susanna nothing is known, but that does not diminish the impact Jesus had on her life, nor the value of her response.

These women along with “many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means” (v. 3) were the sources God used to allow Jesus and His disciples were able to proclaim and preach the kingdom of God. Some argue that the twelve disciples might have been able to pay their way. After all, John, Peter, and Andrew had a fishing business (and had just hauled in an enormous load of fish before they left to follow Jesus permanently. Matthew had been a tax collector and no doubt had money laid by. Yet Luke 5:11 and 5:28 indicate that those men “left everything” to follow Jesus.

Allowing these “many others” (v. 3) to “support out of their private means” (v. 3) the ministry of Jesus was a grace. Though fully human, Jesus was fully God. If He could miraculously turn a boy’s lunch into food of thousands, He could certainly provide the needs of His own few companions on a daily basis. He did not *need* to have His physical needs met by anyone. He chose to allow others to participate in the proclaiming and preaching of the kingdom of God.

The passage reminds us of the opportunity we have to serve our Savior. God is gracious enough to allow us to participate in His ministry. He does not need our time. He does not need our money. We have nothing He needs, yet He allows us to play a part in His sovereign plan. He gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for Him.

### **Take Aways**

Multiple choice, using this example of a snapshot of Jesus’ ministry, choose one . . .

Reflect on how you use your time. What else can you do for the kingdom of God?

Reflect on your approach to sharing the gospel. Do you stick to the true gospel message?

Reflect on your relationships. Can you be a better ‘Paul’ or ‘Timothy?’

Reflect on your stewardship. Do you take advantage of opportunities to participate in the furthering of the kingdom of God?