

## Reasons We Rejoice, Part 1

Luke 10:17-18

Luke 10:17, and we're getting into another section, here, which is a very joyful section of this tenth chapter. Jesus appointed seventy-two disciples, as we've been studying. He sent them ahead of him two-by-two into every town and place where he himself was about to go, and you need to realize that that was not the first time that they'd been with Jesus. He'd been training them for many months, probably a year or more, throughout Galilee; and here in this passage he's enlisting them and sending them with instructions.

We're expecting the seventy-two to head out into troubled waters. As they go through the land, they're going to face great difficulty, because after all, baby lambs don't fare all that well when they visit wolves' dens. They just get torn to pieces. Beloved, perhaps you feel that way for yourself. As the Lord has commissioned us as well as the church, as he's sent us out into this secular, very secular world, hostile world against the Gospel, he's sent us out as well to make disciples.

We live in this world. We're not of the world, but we are certainly in this world, and so all of these things in the culture and society around us really do set a tone in our relationships, don't they? I mean, they occupy the subjects of the conversations we have with friends and family, around Thanksgiving, around Christmas, around weddings and funerals, and all types of family gatherings. We face these pressures, don't we?

The fear of social reprisal, angry reactions against what we believe as Christians, what we practice as Christians, about the way we view the world, which is so contrary, made more apparently so every single day, it seems, so contrary to the world. We can all feel the strangling, gagging presence of tyranny that is starting to settle over our land, to choke out honest conversation, to choke out any protest, any different opinion. For many people in this country, freedom-loving people, their complicity in the moral revolution is through their silence, through the fear of man, afraid of what other people are going to think, and so they just close their mouths and ride out the storm and let the revolution happen.

Christ turns to us, though. He turns to his people. He turns to his blood-bought Church, and he tells us, "Go. Go." Luke 10:3: "Go your way. Behold I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." "Go. I know it's dangerous. I know they're ravenous. I know they want your blood. Go." In fact, if you back up one verse, Jesus doesn't merely command our outward compliance with his command to go; he actually commands our inward desire. He says in Luke 10:2, "Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, to send out laborers into his harvest." We pray about what we long for.

Listen, if we will obey his Word, not just outwardly, looking to and doing our duty, but with no heart in it really, if we'll obey his Word inwardly, with zeal for the Lord, with a passion for holiness, with a desire, a longing, even, to see God worshipped, to see Christ and his name high and lifted up, if we'll go with an inward zeal and passion to hear his Gospel proclaimed throughout our city, throughout our region, throughout our state and nation, you know what we should expect is going to result from our obedience? Joy. Joy. Invincible, uncontainable, cannot-keep-the-lid-upon, joy, our joy.

That's what we find here in the next section as these seventy-two missionaries return from their mission, being sent out as lambs in the midst of wolves, yeah, but they come back, and as we read these verses, starting in verses 17-20, we find so many reasons for joy. They are rejoicing, and they need, we need to see this and see this very clearly. In fact, as we read, I'm going to read through verses 17-20, see how many reasons for joy that you can come up with as we read these few verses in the text.

Look at what it says there, verse 17, "The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' 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. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'"

Isn't that marvelous? I mean, what reasons for joy, so many significant reasons for joy! And I'm guessing you found quite a few; you probably lost count because I'm reading too fast, and

you couldn't process it all or catch up. But there's more. Let's keep reading. Notice how Jesus himself actually enters into the joy of his disciples in the next section, verse 21. "In that same hour [So at the same time, the same time this is happening, that he's speaking verses 18-20, the same time he's saying that, the 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. 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.'

"And 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.'" Notice that Luke, in writing, recording all of this, he's brought us to the "woes" of verses 13-16 into the beatitudes of verses 17-24. He's made this radical shift, this transition, swinging from one set of emotions to another. From the depths of woe to the heights of great, great joy and rejoicing. And it all begins

with these seventy-two disciples, these missionaries, ambassadors, emissaries, and they're returning from their mission, having completed their mission. And, by the way, having been successful in their mission. Jesus is here with them alone. We get to listen in, as it were, to part of the mission debrief that he conducts with them.

Now listen, just a quick theology about joy, and a clear up a misconception here. Joy is not happiness as we understand happiness, though the two are connected. Happiness as we know and understand that concept in our language and in our culture, happiness is really dependent upon changing circumstances and unreliable situations. We could be happy with a new friendship, rightly so, but then we lose the happiness when the friendship is tested, or worse, when it sours and friends become disloyal. We can be happy with strong bodies and good physical health but then be turned, have that happiness taken away whenever we suffer in some physical way. We could be happy with a promotion, but lose the happiness when the enticement of that promotion, the extra pay, actually has led us into a gilded cage of enslavement to a really bad job. We could be happy when our favorite sports team wins, but inexplicably depressed when they lose. Listen, joy is not happiness.

Joy, biblically defined, is an abiding sense of gladness and delight that is anchored deeply into the unchanging essence, eternal and infinite, the holy and powerful reality of the ever-blessed triune God of heaven, the only God who is. Knowing God is joy. Trusting God's promises, which are an extension of his fixed nature, that's how we remain anchored into that transcendent, absolute joy. "Rejoicing in the Lord always," if you look at Philippians 4, means that we have, in verse 5, we have a gentle, kind, forbearing way about us because we always know the Lord is at hand. The Lord is near. We need not fear, we need not be anxious, we need not worry because the Lord is there; the Lord is near.

Joy means we're not anxious about anything, as the verse says, because we're daily often even hourly in communion with the living God "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." We don't roll our troubles around in our tiny little heads. That does no good. Instead, we let all our requests be made known to God, and when we do that, verse 6, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding [which is tantamount to the effect of this transcendent joy and rejoicing, that peace of God] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Look, we know God and we rejoice in him. We cast all of our cares upon him because he cares for us. Isn't that amazing that a God as great and eternal and infinite and powerful, who is the one who created all of this that we see and know the ground we stand on, the air we breathe. He is the one who is sovereign over every single cell in our bodies. He planned our life, the beginning of it and the end of it and everything in between, including the trials. He's got it all in hand. He sustains everything. That God cares for us, individually. His eternal peace envelopes our hearts and our minds, forming a barrier between us and all true soul-killing trouble. And he settles us in pure, unmitigated joy.

Well, there's more to say about that, and we'll save that sermon, sermon for another time. But back to Luke, chapter 10, verses 17-20. What we learn from these verses, we get thirty reasons to rejoice. Thirty reasons that protect us from sorrow and discouragement in a world that is quite frankly, completely losing its mind.



Number one: The joy of preservation. The joy of preservation. The seventy-two returned. That is to say, every single one of them. All of them returned. Even though Jesus had sent them out as lambs in the midst of wolves, without any money, any money, any knapsack, no sandals, they made it back safe and sound. Turns out the instructions that Jesus gave them were sufficient. They actually worked. Not one word of Jesus' instructions had failed them, and so not one of them was lost. That's worth meditating on.

Number two: The joy of trusting and obeying. The joy of trusting and obeying. The seventy-two returned, which means they obeyed Jesus' instructions. Why? Because they trusted Jesus. On the part of the disciples, they demonstrated faith in Jesus. They tested his words through obedience, and they found protection and provision in his promises all-sufficient, perfect, brought them home safely. That's what every child should learn in Sunday school, right? "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus," and we might add, and to be provided and protected and cared for and kept safe and kept happy and kept joyful, in Jesus. Trust him, believe, and do what he says. Obey him. Very simple lesson.

Number three: The joy of mission success. The joy of mission success. They returned with joy; that is to say, there's no shame when they returned. There's no shame in his presence; there's no making excuses for any failure; there's no concern that they've departed from his instructions because somehow they came up with a better idea that became innovative and they thought, "I know! We'll bypass Jesus' instructions for this case because this case is special." Nope. They didn't do that. They did what he said. They succeeded in their mission. They trusted Jesus, they obeyed his Word, they accomplished what he sent them out to do, and the result of obedience is joy.

Now I want to slow down on this point number three. So we've talked about the joy of preservation, the joy of trusting and obeying, and here number three, the joy of mission success. And I want to slow down on this point for a moment because success is so highly regarded in our culture, in our evangelical context, but so often misunderstood in our evangelical context at the same time.

You'll notice in what Luke records here, there's no account of the mission itself; there's no record about any of the

specifics. There's nothing but white space between verses 16 and 17. Actually, I have a heading in there that says, "The Return of the Seventy-Two," but that's written in by the translators and the producers of this Bible. There's white space between those two verses. Luke doesn't give us any details. There's no count of the number of responses. There's no count of the number of receptive versus non-receptive towns. There's certainly no count of the number of decisions for Christ.

Know what that means? This tells us that the doing of the mission is the success of the mission. The doing of the mission is the success of the mission. You want to have success in the mission? The Great Commission? The Gospel? Just do what Jesus says. You'll have success. Doing what Christ commands, do his will according to his instructions, that is what defines success for the Christian. Notice it's nothing external, it's certainly nothing countable, it's nothing that's measurable by men, nothing quantifiable. God's ways are not our ways.

Oh, how I wish Christians would learn this most basic principle of ministry success. Success is not counted in numbers of people. Success is not counted in the size of buildings or

the number of buildings or the breadth of the campus. Success is not counted in the number of programs and community outreaches. It's not counted in the size of the offering or the annual budget. Success is not counted in terms of influence, reach, impact, breadth of ministry or any external outcome or apparent effect. Success is counted, though, in terms of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, which is something really only God can see in the heart of every individual. Any other view, beloved, is manifest evidence of pride.

That's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and then in verse 5 as well. He said, "This is how one should regard us: as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it's required of stewards that they must be found [what?] faithful. When the Lord comes [verse 5], he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart, and then each one will receive his commendation from God but not until then." Don't count, don't judge your brother, don't criticize, just look at yourself before the Lord and look at your own heart, what you truly know. Do you trust? Do you obey? Do you do his will in his way, or do you not? If you don't, it's okay. All of us have blown it in some way. Just repent of that. Understand that the Christian

life is the life of repentance; we must keep growing and growing and growing.

A few verses later, in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul said, "I've applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers." Paul, the Apostle, the mighty Apostle, Apollos, the man who was said to be "mighty in the scriptures," eloquent, reasoning, a great preacher. Paul says, "I've applied all these things to me and Apollos." He told them earlier, "I planted, Apollos watered." "Okay, so we did some gardening work, but God is the one who gave the growth. God is the one at work; we're just planting and watering. We're nothing." So what did he want them to learn by that? Well, he tells us: "I've applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, so that you may learn by us not to go beyond what's written, that none of you may become puffed up in favor of one against the other." Oh, how much we commit this sin, don't we? Making comparisons. Listen, success is trusting Jesus. Success is putting faith in his promises, and our faith is manifest when we do his will. Now that's something that can be seen. That's something that's observable, when he do, we do his will his way, and we leave the results to God. Anything else, though, comes from sinful ambition and arrogant pride.

If I could narrow it down, put this into Luke Gospel terms, making this really simple, we need to learn to define success in Luke 9:23 terms. Success is denying self, taking up our cross daily, and then following Jesus as Lord. Success for us is to deny ourselves and take up Jesus' cross daily and follow Jesus as Lord, which brings us to a fourth reason to rejoice.

Number four: The joy of Lordship. The joy of Lordship. The first word, notice, that comes out of their mouths is a formal address to Jesus as "Lord." And in so doing, these disciples have acknowledged their place and his place. There's a right relationship here that's acknowledged between the one who is Lord and Master and those who have the blessing of being his subject, his servants, his slaves. And when we walk in obedience to his Lordship, you know what? We're happy slaves. We find that Jesus calls us not just slaves, but friends. So the joy of Lordship.

Number five: The joy of Gospel friendship. The joy of Gospel friendship. They rejoiced, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." That could only have been revealed

if they'd found receptive towns, that they might engage in the ministry that Jesus commanded to do in receptive towns in verse 9, which apparently they did. Remember, find Gospel friends, that's verses 5-7, and then partake of their hospitality in verse 8, and then get to work healing the sick and proclaiming the Kingdom. They were engaged in that work when they find they're able to cast out demons in his name. So they had Gospel friends. They had partners in the Gospel. There's a joy in Gospel friendship; we've talked all about that. So it's while they were engaged in that ministry that they discovered the power they had to cast out demons in Jesus' name. It all happened in cooperation, though, with Gospel friends, with Gospel partners, which leads to a fifth, or a sixth point.

Number six: The joy of unexpected blessing. The joy of unexpected blessing. Again, we just mentioned this. The disciples rejoiced, saying, "Even the demons are subject to us." So it's while obeying Jesus that they discovered that greater works are available to them, greater powers, more than they could ever ask or imagine. So keep that in mind, beloved. If you are always or often reluctant to step out in faith, you will be remanded to a mediocre Christian life. If you are a reluctant believer, shying away from obedience for lack of courage, you're

going to have a mediocre, uneventful Christian life. But listen, if you're bold in faith, if you're running to do what Jesus commanded, then your life is going to be full of unexpected, unanticipated blessings from the Lord, known only those who are boldly obedient. Please file that away. And if you lack courage, you're not alone. All of us, because of sin and the sin nature, we tend toward cowardice. We tend toward the fear of man. But we can't excuse it. We need to call it what it is: sin. And say, "God, I repent of cowardice. I'm going to give myself wholly to your work. Just give me the courage by your Spirit and your Word to do so," and he'll, he'll answer that prayer. He'll give you strength and courage.

And that leads to a seventh reason for joy: The joy of victory in battle. The joy of victory in battle. The British SAS have a motto: "Who dares wins." Make that your motto, beloved. Who dares, who puts God's Word to the proof, engaging in it, doing it, obeying it, if you dare to do that, you win. You win! The joy of victory in battle, they rejoiced, saying, "Even the demons are [what?] subject to us!" They're describing here an instance, really for seventy-two of them, instances, of victory in spiritual warfare.



The translation there, "The demons are subject," it's not wrong, but the word "subject" does not seem strong enough. The word is *hupotasso*. In the active voice it means to "bring under firm control or subordinate," but here it's the passive voice: "The demons are subject or are brought under firm control." And you know, for demons this is not voluntary submission that they put themselves under control. The demons have to submit here. It's what the demons must do. As creatures who must bow at the feet of their Creator, they're subordinate to Christ's authority, they're subject to his power, and they must, therefore, submit to the name of Christ.

Listen, that is spiritual victory, to experience that, to see that. These disciples are doing ministry out on the front lines. They watch demons flee from them, and they not only realize they are engaged in spiritual warfare, here, but they realize they have the upper hand. But wait, "They're running from, from us in Jesus name!" They're winning spiritual battles; they're claiming territory for the Kingdom of God and Christ. Beloved, that happens every time that we share the Gospel. It happens every time we share the Gospel. Notice I didn't say, "When a sinner repents and turns to Christ." That happens, too, but when we share the Gospel, when we preach the Gospel, when we

proclaim the truth, no matter what the apparent outcome, that's victory. Demons flee. They writhe in pain at the name of Christ whenever God's Word is proclaimed. You want to "stick it to the man," the devil? Preach the Gospel. Tell the truth. Preach the Word. Share it with other people. Tell people what you're studying in the Word. Just silence the enemy.