

Ultimate Joy and Maximum Blessing

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Date: 24 May 2020

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[0 : 01] This morning's reading is from Luke chapter 10 from verse 1 to 24. After this, the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

He told them, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals, and do not greet anyone on the road.

When you enter a house, first say, Peace to this house. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them. If not, it will return to you.

Stay there eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you.

[1 : 12] Heal those there who are ill and tell them, The kingdom of God has come near to you. But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you.

Yet be sure of this, the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

Whoever listens to you, listens to me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me. But whoever rejects me, rejects him who sent me.

[2 : 23] The 72 returned with joy and said, Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name. He replied, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for this is what you are pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

[3 : 44] Okay. Imagine, if you will, imagine a young boy. Imagine him standing there with a seashell pressed to his ear.

Imagine him full of joy and excitement at this discovery that you can hear the waves pounding when you press the shell to your ear. This boy is excited. He's happy about this discovery.

And imagine that he's standing there, listening to these waves inside this shell, which, by the way, that sound, that's a feature of the fact that the shell is a resonant cavity. You're actually hearing mostly the sound of your own blood pumping around.

Imagine he's standing there with that shell pressed to his ear, straining to hear the sound of the sea in his ears. And imagine he's doing that, standing two feet away from the shore.

The actual waves are crashing all around, and he's ignoring them completely. Would we not say that this boy has got himself just a little bit mixed up?

[4 : 45] He's missing the point. He's excited about this feeble imitation, instead of about the grand reality. Well, that's the kind of situation that Jesus' disciples are in today.

They are excited about the wrong thing. And as we look this morning in God's Word at how the disciples have missed the point, what we'll see is that it's all too possible for us to do exactly the same.

That it is frighteningly common that we get excited about a small thing. We get excited about the little details when the immensity of God's goodness to us stands off at the side, overlooked and ignored.

So here in these verses, in verses 17 to 20, Jesus shows the disciples where to find ultimate joy. And in verses 21 through 24, he describes to them maximum blessing.

There is for us in these verses to be found ultimate joy and maximum blessing. Remember, hopefully, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at verses 1 through 16, the first part of what Sarah read for us a few minutes ago.

[5 : 58] We looked there at Jesus sending out the disciples, sending them out in dependence upon God, sending them out with that significant, serious message. We remember that the message that offered joy and hope to some was also a solemn warning to others, and that depended on how the towns and villages responded to these messengers of the kingdom.

So that's the first part of this section, Jesus sending out the disciples. And Luke doesn't then record for us any detail of what happened while they were out and about.

We skip straight on from them being sent. We skip to their return, verse 17. And our focus today is here on verses 17 to 24, where Jesus tells the disciples how they ought to respond to what's happened to them while they've been away.

And as I say, we find here ultimate joy and maximum blessing. So, ultimate joy. Here, verse 17, these disciples that Jesus has sent out, the disciples come back to Jesus, and they're pretty hyped up, aren't they?

They're pretty excited about what's happened. Like a little girl who comes home from the party and wants to tell her parents absolutely everything that happened. She's thrilled about the time that she's had.

[7 : 14] The disciples are thrilled about the experience that they have had. It is just the most amazing thing in the world. They've discovered, having been sent out to heal the sick, verse 9, they've discovered that this includes even the ability to cast out demons.

And, well, they should be excited. This is, indeed, reason to be amazed, isn't it? The disciples know that these demons are far stronger than they are. They know the reality of evil forces at work in the world.

They know that Satan and his demons are stronger than anything on this earth. The disciples themselves did not stand a chance. And, nor for that matter, do you and I.

We don't have the power to withstand demons ourselves. It is amazing that these demons submitted to Jesus' disciples. And so Jesus celebrates with them. Verse 19, he recognises that as his authorised representatives, they do have power over the enemy.

And that was there, too, in their exaltation in verse 17. It's when the disciples speak, in the name of Jesus, that the demons submit. The disciples, you and I, we're weaker than the demons.

[8 : 29] But Jesus is stronger. Jesus is stronger than any power. Romans chapter 8, Paul declares that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, and so on and so on.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The power of Jesus, the love of God, is stronger than the demons.

So Jesus celebrates together with these disciples. And yet, yet, verse 20, that is not the real reason for rejoicing.

Or at least it's not the most important reason. This is kind of a hyperbolic statement. Jesus isn't quite saying that there must be no element of rejoicing that the demons submit. But what he is saying is that any rejoicing for that reason pales into utter insignificance by comparison to the greatest reason for rejoicing.

Why should the disciples rejoice? Why should Christians rejoice today? Why should I be rejoicing right now? Well, says Jesus, rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

[9 : 33] Jesus says that even this ability that the disciples found to work miracles, even the fact that they can cast out demons, even this amazing thing, it is inferior to God's grace.

The more important thing is what God has done for you. The reason why you should celebrate is that your name is written on his hands and graven in his heart. Because while in heaven he stands, nothing can force you to depart.

This is truly amazing grace, isn't it? That the names of sinful, undeserving people like you and me, that our names are written in heaven.

See, we get caught up in the good things that God gives us instead of being caught up in God himself. J.C. Ryle, he puts it well.

He says the distinction here drawn between grace and gifts is a vastly important distinction and often sadly overlooked in the present day.

[10 : 37] Gifts such as mental vigour, vast memory, striking eloquence, ability in argument, power in reasoning are often unduly valued by those who possess them and unduly admired by those who possess them not.

These things ought not to be so. Men forget that gifts without grace save no one's soul and are the characteristic of Satan himself.

Grace, on the contrary, is an everlasting inheritance. And lowly and despised as its possessor may be, that grace will land him safe in glory.

He that has gifts without grace is dead in sins, however splendid those gifts may be. But he that has grace even without gifts is alive to God, however unlearned and ignorant he may appear to man.

He's right, isn't he? That the grace is of so much greater significance than any gifts. He's right that we get so caught up with the things that we can do or the things that we wish we could do and we forget that these abilities are gifts of God and we make them a source of pride in ourselves or a source of envy of others.

[11 : 57] But even if we avoid those traps of pride and envy, even if we do recognize that the gifts are themselves evidence of grace, it's still not in those gifts that we should rejoice, is it?

But in our eternal standing before God. So often, so often we're like children on Christmas Day, given the most amazing toy imaginable and tossing it to one side to play in the box that it came in. We set our sights too low. We are too easily pleased. We are satisfied with small things and we overlook the marvel of the most amazing thing.

We forget to rejoice in the best news in the universe. Jesus says, rejoice. So folks, if you are, if this morning, if you're kind of standing on the outside looking in and you're wondering, what's it like to be a Christian?

If you're wondering whether you can trust this Jesus or if you're kind of not sure what all the fuss is about, why bother? Well, Jesus says, Jesus says, come on in because it is better than you could possibly imagine.

[13 : 17] Come and join the party. Come and rejoice. Come and have your name written down in heaven. Come and have it written where it cannot be erased.

Come and throw your lot in with the king of the universe. Jesus says, come and rejoice. If you are standing outside looking in, well, it's time to come in and rejoice.

But if you're already here on the inside, as it were, well, Jesus says, stop setting your sights so low. Stop being pleased with so little. Stop valuing the small things.

Stop rejoicing in the tiny things and rejoice instead in the knowledge of eternity set before you. Rejoice in the salvation that is won on your behalf.

This isn't even turn away from something bad and turn to something good. No, it's value, not just the good, but the best. Not merely the valuable, but the treasure without price.

[14 : 26] Jesus says, rejoice in the most amazing news in the universe. Rejoice in the best thing that could possibly have happened to you. Rejoice that your name is written in the book of life.

And that means, Christian, that means you have grounds for rejoicing every single day. The situation here that the disciples are in, they can see grounds to rejoice.

They can see the good news that the demons have submitted and they rejoice in that. But if what Jesus says is true here, that the greatest reason to rejoice is because your names are written in heaven, then that means there is grounds for rejoicing every day.

That means there is reason to rejoice whatever else is happening around us. Folks, in these present circumstances where everything is a bit rubbish, still we rejoice.

In fact, even when the pain is acute, even when it's not just a bit rubbish, but when our circumstances are truly atrocious, even still, even still it is true, if your name is written in heaven, still you can rejoice in that precious truth, even if you can't rejoice in anything else.

[15 : 52] Ultimate joy because your name is written in heaven. But Jesus isn't done. Verse 21, we see Jesus himself is rejoicing and Jesus is rejoicing for a very similar reason.

Jesus is full of joy because God has chosen people for salvation. Verse 23, Jesus says his disciples know God's blessing. So following on from that ultimate joy, here we find maximum blessing.

Jesus shifts in these verses from addressing the disciples, he shifts to praying to God, to praising the one he calls Father, Lord of heaven and earth that emphasizes both God's power and authority and the closeness of the relationship between the Father and the Son that Jesus will elaborate on in the following verse.

See these verses, these are focused on the idea of revelation and it's this that Jesus declares to be a great blessing.

Verse 21, he says, things are hidden from the wise and the learned but revealed to little children.

Verse 22, he says, knowing the Father is possible because the Son reveals him.

[17 : 06] Verse 23 and 24, he says, blessing is found in seeing, in knowing God's plan revealed through Jesus. See, there were people then in Jesus' day and there are people today in our day, people who make much of their great learning, people who claim for themselves great wisdom, people who don't believe that they could be taught anything further, who think that they have reached understanding, if not of everything, well at least of the things that are most important.

See, the wisdom of this world makes people proud. Great learning can actually, in some ways at least, serve to close their mind, to make somebody unwilling to listen to another.

Tragically, the wisdom of this world can cause people to push away the good news of the gospel that Jesus came to proclaim. John Calvin, he says that the people who Jesus scathingly calls wise here, that they are those who swelled with diabolical pride, cannot endure to hear Christ speaking to them from above.

The word diabolical there is used very literally. This pride that develops in us, this pride is one of the methods that Satan uses to close people off from listening to the hope that comes from knowing Jesus.

Oh, religion was all very well for credulous people hundreds of years ago, but I've grown out of fairy stories now, thank you very much.

[18 : 45] That's pride. And contrast, the child, the one who's willing to listen, the one who's going to take Jesus at face value, the child knows God's blessing.

He has the hidden things revealed to him. Alternatively, sometimes people will set off on a quest to find themselves.

Whether it's teenage self-discovery or it's a midlife crisis, you get people who want to go and find themselves. But Jesus says you're not going to find the truth there.

You won't find the answers by looking within. You won't find truth in your heart. In fact, the heart is deceitful beyond all things. We can't even know ourselves truly by looking within, let alone know the truths of the universe.

Well, others might seek the truth by looking around, by diligent examination, by considering everything that they can lay their hands on. And that's well and good, but it will only get you so far.

[19 : 53] Jesus says to know the answers to the questions that really matter. You don't need the wisdom of this world. You need the heart of a child. Jesus says, verse 22, that to know the answers to the questions that really matter, to know the identity of the Father, to know who God is, and therefore to know the true nature of the universe that he's made, and to know your identity as part of that universe, in order to know God, you need him to reveal himself.

and wonderfully he has done just that. God's blessing is found in this, that he has made himself known.

Verse 23, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. Even the prophets and the kings of old, they didn't know the fullness of God's plan. Even they didn't see what these first disciples of Jesus were privileged to see.

And the contrast that Jesus is drawing here is between those who died before Jesus came and the disciples, not between us coming after relative to the disciples.

No, he's talking about the great heroes of the Old Testament, that they, these prophets, these kings, they were not as blessed as these humble fishermen and tax collectors and so on, following Jesus around and hearing what he had to say.

[21 : 18] And you and I, we enjoy the same privilege as these disciples, because the fullness of the plan has been revealed. We can see what they saw.

We can hear what they heard, because these things are recorded for us, aren't they? We can know what they knew. We can have this same blessing.

See, it's not some sort of mystical insight that's required. It's not even exhaustive analysis that's required. All we need to share this blessing that Jesus pronounced upon his disciples, all we need is to see and to consider the same things that they did.

To trust the revelation of God that we find in Jesus Christ as presented to us in God's word. Folks, that is maximum blessing, to see God's truth revealed.

That is ultimate joy, to accept that truth and therefore know that your name is written in heaven. And friends, that's my prayer. That's my prayer that you will find fullness of joy in having your names written in heaven and that you might recognize just how blessed you are that Jesus has revealed the Father to you.

[22 : 38] Amen.