



The Highest Joy

Luke Series # 29

Luke 10:1-24

David Sunday

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Let's turn to the Word of the Lord Who has mercy on us. I would like to thank Jim Gordon and Dan Leeper for preaching the Word to us these past weeks. I listened to the messages and was really encouraged by them. We're going to continue in Luke's Gospel with our sermon text of Luke 10:1-24. This passage is all about the mission in which all of us are called to engage. Jesus sends out 72 of His disciples to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God. Some manuscript traditions say 70, so don't be too alarmed if your translation says 70 while others say 72. We all have an urgent mission to proclaim the message of the Kingdom. I want to focus on the motivation for engaging in this mission—joy. The whole passage is moving toward verses 17-21, particularly verse 20.

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" ¹⁸ And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." ²¹ In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit...

This is God's Word.

Joy! Do you hear that key word again and again in this passage? Can you hear the disciples' laughter as they return from the mission and recount the triumphs of their God and King? Can you hear the joy of Jesus as He prays to His Father? Do you know a joy like this? Have you tasted of the joy of the Lord as your strength? Have you found a spring of joy that can satisfy your thirst for all eternity? I believe there is such a spring and it is my earnest desire as a preacher to lead you to that spring each and every Lord's Day.

I believe in the words of Isaiah the prophet who says, "...everlasting joy shall be upon the heads" of God's redeemed (Isaiah 35:10). As the Apostle Paul says, the Kingdom of God is characterized by "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). I wonder if you know and pursue this joy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a final letter to his friends during the Advent season of 1942, before his arrest, imprisonment and execution by the Nazis. He told them there is a joy that,

“...abides with God, and it comes down from God and embraces spirit, soul, and body; and where this joy has seized a person, there it spreads, there it carries one away, there it bursts open closed doors... it is invincible, irrefutable. It does not deny the anguish, when it is there, but finds God in the midst of it, in fact precisely there. It does not deny grave sin but finds forgiveness precisely in this way; it looks death straight in the eye, but it finds life precisely within it.”

(Source: Discipleship: [Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works](#))

That is the joy I am talking about—the joy of Jesus found in our passage. Should we not reach for it and refuse to be satisfied until it becomes the dominant force of our lives?

G.K. Chesterton contended,

“Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live.”

(Source: [Orthodoxy](#) by G.K. Chesterton)

I am commending this sentiment to us as a church, so that we may be a church for whom praise is the permanent pulsation of our souls and joy is the uproarious labor by which we live the Christian life. I believe that is what Jesus wants for us for He said we should abide in Him and His Word. When we do, His joy will be in us and our “...*joy may be full*” (John 15:11).

What brings you joy today? What energizes you and gets you out of bed in the morning? To what do you look forward? Is the object of your joy strong enough to continue delivering joy when misery and suffering suddenly descend on your life, as they will? Will the source of your joy sustain you 10, 15 or 100 years from now? Ten thousand years into eternity, will that joy be getting brighter and more robust or will it soon evaporate? Jesus is talking about a joy that never evaporates and which cannot be crushed by circumstances. This joy floods His Own heart and He wants to pour it into the hearts of His disciples.

How do we get this joy and live under the dominant impulse of it? How do we become motivated by this joy as we worship our God and obey Him on mission? There are three principles from this passage that show us the way:

1. This joy is tasted when we are on mission with Jesus.
2. The joy Jesus wants to pour into us is not based on what we do for Jesus but on what He has accomplished for us.
3. This joy is consummated in the eternal fellowship of the Triune God.

Joy Tasted When We Are on Mission with Jesus

Look at Luke 10:17. “*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’*” From what did they return? “*After this the Lord appointed seventy-*

two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few'' (verses 1-2). They were sent on mission into harvest fields to labor and pray dependently, “Lord, send out laborers into Your harvest to join us in this great work.”

We see in this passage that the joy of Jesus is not found in the place of ease or comfort. Remember the whole thrust of this section of Luke’s narrative is that Jesus has set His face resolutely toward Jerusalem. The shadow of the cross is looming over all these narratives. Jesus has called us—as His disciples—to follow Him on the path of the cross, deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him. Jesus wants us to know from Luke 10 that following Him on the way of the cross is not drudgery but joy.

However, if we want to taste this everlasting joy flooding the heart of Jesus, we can’t stay in our safe place. We must go into the place of toil and harvest (verse two), into the place of danger “*...as lambs in the midst of wolves*” (verse three). Verses four through eight tell us we have to set aside comfort and leisure, devoting ourselves single-mindedly to the pursuit of Christ and His Kingdom. We’ve got to make the proclamation of His gospel as clear and urgent as we can, for we see that this gospel of the Kingdom is urgent: “*The kingdom of God has come near to you*” (verse nine). It is a matter of life and death, for judgment is in view every time the gospel is proclaimed. Heaven and hell—eternal joy and eternal misery—are hanging in the balance when this gospel is proclaimed.

Jesus says, “You will taste My joy when you join Me in this mission.” Don’t think of missions as dreary; rather think of them as an explosion of joy because you have the glorious message of the Kingdom and Christ’s triumph over Satan to proclaim. Jesus says when we go forth in mission, He invests us with His very authority.

- Luke 10:16: “*The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*”
- Verse 17: “*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'*” (). They are rejoicing in the power of Jesus’ name and the freedom Jesus brings to others.
- Verse 18: Jesus says, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*” The triumph of the gospel through Christ’s messengers foreshadows His ultimate victory over Satan through His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus will win the ultimate victory over Satan at the cross and that victory will be consummated at the final judgment when God will cast Satan into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night, forever and ever.
- Verse 19: Jesus says, “*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.*” There is great joy in joining Jesus on this mission because we get to see the power and authority of His name at work. To test if you really believe this, we are going to let a cage of cobras loose from under this stage. You can see if you really have the authority of Christ. Do you believe that is what Jesus is saying? Is the test of sharing in His authority our ability to handle snakes? No. The

test of really believing you have the authority of Christ is when you go forth in His name and proclaim His gospel with your shoes fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). As you walk with your beautiful feet bringing news of the gospel to the nations (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15), those feet are crushing Satan's serpentine forces. Jesus says we can rejoice at the power and authority we see as we go forth on mission in His name. It is all from the name of Jesus.

- Also in verse 19, He tells us, “*...nothing shall hurt you.*” Satan will try to tempt us, ruin our witness through scandal, weaken our faith in the possibility of sanctification and make us think sin will gain the upper hand and have dominion over us. Jesus tells us that this is a lie for Satan has no authority to lure us into sin. We've been freed from the dominion of sin through the gospel of Jesus Christ and He is calling us to believe that. Satan and his demons seek to deceive and induce a strong aversion to Biblical truth, incline our hearts to not believe the Scriptures, introduce counterfeits and produce in us a distaste for the things of God. But Jesus says we have authority over the deception of Satan. The weakest, simplest believer whose intellectual capacity might not be very large but who receives the Holy Word of God with meekness will grow strong in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Satan's power cannot control our minds when we submit to the authority of Jesus.

Satan tries to distract us from pursuing the mission through accusation. He reminds us of sins and failures that have long been forgiven by the blood of Jesus and torments our consciences with guilt and shame. He exaggerates our sins, distorts our thinking and causes us to come under a cloud of condemnation so we won't go forth in obedience to Christ and His mission. Satan loves to wrap up his own wicked, evil thoughts in a package, leave them at the doorstep of Christ's disciples and play 'ding-dong ditch.' He rings the bell then runs and hides because he wants us to take on those accusing, condemning thoughts. Temptation, deception and accusation are only some of his strategies but Jesus says to His disciples and to us, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Matthew 28:18). “*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 10:19). One of the marks of a church strong in God's grace is that it is actively standing against the onslaught of Satan. They are not on the defensive but the offensive—believing in the authority of Jesus Christ.

This kind of joy cannot be had if we don't follow Jesus into dangerous places in mission. We don't have to go overseas to do this. In fact, we should not go overseas unless and until we are doing this in our own sphere, with our own gifts and personalities and our own network of relationships. All that is required of us is belief in the gospel. We must believe it is urgent, necessary, compelling, beautiful, powerful and must be made known. When we believe that and seek where God has placed us with the gifts He has given us to be on mission with Jesus, He says we will find a joy we cannot taste anywhere else. Joy is tasted when we are in sync with Jesus and His mission.

However, Jesus warns us of a danger to be avoided when we are active in His service. We may start to find our highest joy in what we are doing for Him and our spiritual energy may revolve around our service activities or activities in the church. Jesus says that must never become our highest joy.

Joy Based On What Jesus Has Accomplished For Us

The joy Jesus wants to pour into us is not based on what we do for Jesus but on what He has done for us. As these disciples return with joy and Jesus shares in the joy and celebration with them, Jesus in effect says, “Stop concentrating your joy on what just happened.” “*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). There is a higher joy. It is not in what you experience in your service to the Lord, in the victories and successes of the gospel through you, your activity for the sake of Christ but in His activity on your behalf that results in your name being graven on His hands, written on His heart and carried by Him as our Great High Priest into the Holy of Holies as He stands representing you in Heaven.

Your name is recorded in that heavenly census—the registry of life Daniel speaks of—the Lamb’s book of life we read of in Revelation 13:8: “*...written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.*” Before God created the world and before any of us were here, God the Father and God the Son covenanted to bring redemption to a people who would fall into sin. God recorded the names of His redeemed in the Lamb’s book of life.

Jesus says to all who believe in Him that your greatest joy is to know your name is written in the book of life and your citizenship is in that heavenly city. All the joys and privileges of full membership in that heavenly Kingdom are already yours in Christ and nothing can separate you from His love. One day you will stand face-to-face with God and the Lamb Who was slain for your sins and fellowship with Him forever in that place. Don’t rejoice so much in what you do for God but in what He has done for you and in being known by Him. He knows your name, remembers you and guarantees permanent eternal life to you. Once your name is written in the book, it is written in marks of indelible grace and cannot be blotted out or removed.

My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.

(From [A Debtor to Mercy Alone](#) by Augustus M. Toplady, 1771)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the most powerful preachers in the English-speaking world during the 20th century. He is one of the most influential deceased persons on my life. When he was dying in 1981 at the age of 81, his friend and biographer—Iain Murray—asked him,

How are you managing to bear up? You have been accustomed to preaching several times a week. You have begun important Christian enterprises; your influence has extended through tapes and books to Christians on five continents. And now you have been put on the shelf. You are reduced to sitting quietly, sometimes managing a little editing. I am not so much asking...how you are coping with the disease itself. Rather, how are you coping with the stress of being out of the swim of things?

(Source: For the Love of God, D.A. Carson)

In the eyes of men, he was no longer needed. Dr. Lloyd-Jones' response was simple but profound. He quoted Luke 10:20: "*Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*" Then he said, "I am perfectly content." Lloyd-Jones didn't need to be in the middle of everything, experience success in ministry, have lots of activity, be highly fruitful and have the applause of men in order to have joy. He had joy that could not be taken from him—joy that would expand throughout eternity. His joy wasn't based on what he did for God but on the fact that Jesus had died for him so his name could be recorded in the Lamb's book of life. That joy can never be taken from us.

Jesus doesn't want us basing our joy on the works we do for Him because it is possible to do great works in the name of Jesus and not even know His salvation. In Luke 9, we see that Judas was one of the apostles sent out on mission and from all appearances, he was successful. People didn't suspect him until the end. He could do the things of God because the name of Jesus is what saves and delivers from the power of Satan. But while Judas was proclaiming the name of Jesus, he did not know the salvation of Jesus in his life. Our gifts do not count as much as grace and our power matters less than our position—seated in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus. Not what we do for Him but what He has done and continues to do on our behalf gives us true joy.

I think there is a warning here: Success in ministry can become an intoxicant. Instead of worshiping God in Christ, we start taking pride in ourselves, our knowledge, our Biblical doctrine, natural abilities, experiences. We forget that apart from Him we could do none of this. We have nothing we have not first received from Him. We can get our identity wrapped up in our fruitfulness, our works in Jesus' name, the success of our church, our ministry running smoothly and being on the cutting edge. Yet all the while, we are losing our joy in Jesus and the gospel of what He has done for us. Our hearts are not overflowing with gratefulness to Him. Jesus tells us that when our joy is misplaced, it is time for a mid-course correction. We should not keep rejoicing in these things but instead focus our joy on what God has done for us, for this joy will never be altered no ended by circumstances.

Our Christian lives often fluctuate—one day we are happy, the next miserable; one day certain, the next uncertain; one day steady, the next doubting—because we have joys that are misplaced. We focus on things that are transient rather than eternal, peripheral rather than central, occasional rather than constant

and certain. Jesus is telling us to rejoice in the only thing that can help our souls on the verge of eternity. Rejoice in the only thing that will keep us sustained with robust joy all the years of eternity.

You will soon pass from this weary world—where you have been an alien and stranger—to be home with your Lord. God has made you like a package, written His own name on you, recorded your destination as, “The Heavenly City” and is determined to bring you there to bask in the joys of face-to-face fellowship with Him forever. There you will feast on all the riches of His Kingdom. Focus your joy there because nothing and no one can ever take that joy away from you.

How do you get this joy and assurance of your name being recorded in Heaven? Believe and trust in Jesus alone. Trust in His manger because God—Who is eternal—became an infant, lived the perfect life we failed to live, went to the cross, bore your sin, shame and guilt before a Holy God and atoned for you sins so you might be reconciled to God. He rose from the dead and has the authority to free you from Satan’s power and give you everlasting life. Simply believe on Him and you will be given by the Spirit the assurance that your name is written there. Moreover, in your life, you will start to see more of the character of heaven formed in you. Your affections will become heavenly affections, your loves heavenly loves; your conduct will carry more of the scent, tone and atmosphere of Heaven.

If you do not have this assurance and knowledge that your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, there is no lasting, sustaining joy. It is only worth placing your joy in what God has done for you in Christ. Can there be any higher joy than that in Luke 10:20, “‘Your names are written in heaven’”? I think there can hardly be a higher joy than this except for the joy of Jesus Himself.

Joy Consummated in the Eternal Fellowship of the Triune God

The eternal, everlasting joy tasted when we are on mission with Jesus and based not on what we do for Jesus but on what He has done for us is consummated in the eternal fellowship of the Triune God. Bear with me for a couple of minutes, because I think what we see in this passage is so sublime and beautiful. There is a joy higher than the joy of knowing your name is written in Heaven. It is the joy of Jesus Himself as He rejoices in the Holy Spirit. We see a joy from the Holy Spirit filling the heart of God the Son as He focuses on God the Father in grateful thanks.

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. 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 10:21-24).

According to Phil Ryken, we see here, “...the joy that is at the heart of the universe, the rejoicing that takes place within the Godhead, where God is both the subject and the object of His own joy. There

can be no greater joy than this: the eternal joy that God Himself enjoys in the being of God.” There has been a heavenly symphony going on from all eternity before any one of us was made by the God Who is mighty to save—Father, Son and Holy Spirit rejoicing in One another. Jesus gives us a glimpse of this eternal joy of the Triune Godhead and the fellowship between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rarely do we read of Jesus rejoicing in the Gospels. Yet here in Luke 10:21 we see Jesus filled with exuberant joy. Luke has to find a new word to describe this joy—a word that speaks of exuberant joy that cannot be contained—overflowing and intense.

Why was Jesus rejoicing like this in God? The source of Jesus’ enjoyment is how God—in the sovereign grace of election—has chosen to include people like you and me in this knowledge of the Son and Father. He did not choose the wise and learned or those who have it all figured out but weak people like us who realize we have nothing to offer to God but our sin and need. God in His sovereign grace and mercy has revealed to us as little children—dependent on Him—the knowledge of the Father and Son. He has opened our eyes to 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 10:24). He has opened our ears to hear things they longed to hear but could not hear. Jesus is saying, “Father, thank You for choosing to make these mysteries of Your sovereign grace and mercy known to weak people like My disciples.”

Jesus is rejoicing in the fact that God has chosen us for salvation. He rejoices that God has made that choice from before the foundation of the world and written our names in the Lamb’s book of life. One day we will join Him, know in His presence the love that exists between the Father and Son, know and have real fellowship with God and find everlasting joy in God. Jesus rejoices in this.

I don’t know what you think of when you hear about the truth of God’s sovereign election—that those who are saved are saved by the grace of God initiated by God’s sovereign choice long before we had anything to do with it. We did not choose Him but He chose us and appointed us to bear fruit. Some Christians react to this doctrine pridefully, others react angrily, others are disturbed and troubled by the doctrine. I want you to see how Jesus rejoices in this truth. If the fact of God’s sovereign election isn’t flooding our heart with joy, perhaps we are not understanding and receiving it the way Jesus did. This is not meant to trouble your mind, cause pride or cause you to react in anger. Rather, it is meant to cause us to bow down in profoundest adoration and say, “Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Father.”

’Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me.

(From *’Tis Not that I did Choose Thee* by Josiah Conder, 1836)

This truth should cause joy, worship and humble gratitude. The highest joy is not just knowing your name is written in the book of life. The highest joy is the joy of Jesus, in the Spirit, toward the Father

for this is the everlasting joy that will crown the heads of God's redeemed. "...*everlasting joy shall be upon their heads*" (Isaiah 51:11).

I love John Piper. He wrote the post in the [Desiring God Blog](#) on July 1, 2012:

How Would You Like to Wear Your Joy?

"Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads."

- Upon their heads as a crown — because joy is the mark by which we share the rule of God.
- Upon their heads as a wreath — to signify the reward of victory over every sorrow in this life.
- Upon their heads as a helmet — because the joyful mind is unassailable with Satan's dark thoughts.
- Upon their heads as oil — because of God's anointing, consecration and approval.
- Upon their heads as a hood — to protect from the searing heat and the soaking rain.
- Upon their heads as an insignia — to show they belong to the God of all joy.

You will not have to choose [how you want to wear that joy]. The everlasting joy of the redeemed is complete. It satisfies every longing, every holy desire. This joy was in the fellowship of the Godhead before the creation of the world. And in the end, it will rest upon us and make us able to enjoy Him with His own joy. And then joy will have its immeasurable effects forever.

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