



Sermon Transcript

October 29, 2017

Living Sent Lives

The Joy of the Lord

Luke 10:1-24

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 29, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Luke 10:1-24

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. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

¹³ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. 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.”

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 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. ²² 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.” ²³ Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are

the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ 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.”

Introduction

Nehemiah 8:10 says, “*The joy of the LORD is our strength.*” It is a great verse. It is a verse that reminds us that our joy is not tied to our circumstances. Rather, because our joy is in the Lord, it is a joy that transcends our circumstances. In fact, it can even defy our circumstances. Consequently, it brings to us a strength that can endure our circumstances. “*The joy of the LORD is our strength.*”

In our passage this morning, Jesus is dealing with a group of people known as “the seventy-two.” Like we saw with the twelve apostles last week out of Matthew 10, the seventy-two were also sent out on mission by Jesus. Our passage tells us that when they returned from their mission trip, they were all excited. In verse 17, it actually says that “*The seventy-two returned with joy.*” But why? It is because things went well. With excitement, they reported back to Jesus by saying, “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!*” I can understand why they would get excited about something like that. I get a lot of joy in ministry when I see signs that God is at work in a person’s life. I get that. But Jesus turns to this excited group of seventy-two and he redirects their enthusiasm by saying, “*Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*” That is another way of saying that our joy is not hitched to our circumstances. Rather, our joy is anchored in the Lord.

This was a real teaching moment Jesus had with the seventy-two. And you can’t lose sight of the context where this teaching moment emerged. This is a passage that deals with a group of people, namely the seventy-two, who were sent. In other words, in this passage, Jesus isn’t just talking generically about the topic of joy. For example, when we hear the verse, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice!*” That is just a “blanket statement” for life that applies to any and all situations. But in our context this morning, this general statement zeroes in on a specific point of application. It is a teaching moment that applies to a group of people who are sent. For those who are sent, it is important to keep in mind that “*the joy of the Lord is our strength.*”

When you think about living a life that is sent, there is a lot that could discourage you. There is that person you have been praying for with whom you have shared on numerous occasions your faith, but they are just not buying it. Or, there is the family

member who for whatever reason has rejected Christ. Or, there is a cultural drift that finds you in your context not even sure how to engage or navigate your faith and you find it discouraging. An exclusive truth doesn't mix well with a pluralistic culture and we truly need to be "*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*." Consequently, you are always on edge and that can be exhausting. Or, in some cases, we may even feel some form of rejection or opposition, or some mild form of persecution, which not only may rob us of our joy but it could cause us to withdraw from living as one who is sent.

Don't forget the final Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*." The blessing in the first Beatitude and the final Beatitude are the same, "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*." It serves as bookends, an inclusio that brackets and frames the entire list of Beatitudes. In other words, these Beatitudes are the summary and the norm of what it is like to follow after Jesus and live as people of the kingdom of heaven. Last week we saw that living lives that are sent means that we not only proclaim the message of the cross, but we adopt the pattern of the cross. We step into the suffering of this world and at times we also suffer. And yet, no matter what form that suffering takes, it does not ultimately rob us of our joy. In fact, Jesus closes out the Beatitude this way, "*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*."

Here is what we have seen to this point. Living sent lives is first of all born out of a passion for God. Jesus said, "*my food is to do the will of him who sent me*." Secondly, it is compassion for people who are without hope in this world that compels us to move outside of these walls. When Jesus saw the crowd he was moved with compassion. Why? They were like sheep without a shepherd. Last week we saw that living sent lives requires us to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Not only is the crucified Christ the message we proclaim, but it is the pattern by which we go. We embrace those who hurt and those who suffer and it is often in our own weakness that God's strength is on display. But no matter what our circumstances are as we live sent lives, this morning we are reminded that wherever we go and whatever our circumstance may be, there is a certain joy that marks us. Do you know what? This joy is attractive. It can't be bought. It can't be manufactured. It only comes from the Lord.

This morning, I want us to think about the role the joy of the Lord plays in living lives that are sent. I hope you see this morning that "*the joy of the Lord is your strength*."

The Joy of the Lord Calls us to Participate

Our passage begins by introducing us to a group of people known as the “seventy-two.” It says in verse 1, “*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.*” Clearly, it is a group of people who were sent by Jesus and in verse 9 we discover the focus of their mission. They were to proclaim that “*the kingdom of God has come near*” in the person of Jesus.

Last week we saw a similar situation unfold when Jesus sent out the twelve apostles. In fact, when you read through the instructions in our passage this morning, you can’t help but pause and say, “we have seen this before.” Like in the account we read last week, we once again hear the words of Jesus in verse 2, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*” As he prepares the seventy-two as to what to expect, like with the twelve he says in verse 3, “*I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.*” Even some of the particulars as to what to take and what not to take on their trip mirror the instructions given to the twelve apostles.

But there does seem to be something unique about the mission of the seventy-two compared to the mission of the twelve apostles. Just like the circle of seventy-two is a wider circle than twelve, there is a widening of the geography where the message of the kingdom of God is proclaimed. Up to this point, the ministry of Jesus was mainly contained to the north, in Galilee. But right before Jesus commissions the seventy-two, at the end of Luke 9, we see that Jesus has now set his face to go south to Jerusalem. In Luke 9:51-52 we read, “*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him.*” In the commissioning of the seventy-two, we read in our passage this morning that Jesus “*sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.*”

So not only is the size of the missionary force expanding from twelve to seventy-two, but so is the geography of where the message of the kingdom of God is spreading. Now I am not suggesting that at this point the message of the kingdom of God is being proclaimed much outside of Israel. Granted, at the end of Luke 9, they came to a town in Samaria where Jesus was rejected. But don’t forget, you had to travel through Samaria to go from Galilee to Judea. And we know why Jesus is going to Jerusalem. It says in Luke 9:51, “*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” The

words “*taken up*” are a reference to his eventual ascension into heaven, which was preceded by the cross and the resurrection. He was going to Jerusalem to die.

In this passage we witness an expanding missionary force from twelve to seventy-two. We also witness an expanding geography from Galilee, to Samaria and to Jerusalem. It speaks to the expanding nature of the Kingdom of God. You can’t lose sight of the fact that it is Luke who is telling us about the seventy-two and their mission. He is the only gospel writer who speaks about the seventy-two. It is important to keep in mind that Luke also writes a second volume that picks up the story of the spread of the kingdom of God after Jesus rose from the dead. Joel Green says this about the sending out of the seventy-two, “Luke uses this scene to prepare for and anticipate a mission that is in the process of expanding beyond the land of the Jews.”¹ In fact, the book of Acts ends with a wider circle of impact than you could have imagined. It ends with Paul in Rome and it says in Acts 28:28, “*Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.*” And then the last verse of the book says that while in Rome, Paul was “*proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*”

So do you see the expanding nature of the kingdom of God? It expands from Galilee, to Jerusalem, to Rome . . . to right here in Wethersfield. And do you see the expanding nature of the “missionary force” that is sent? I hesitate to use the phrase “missionary force” because I am not narrowing that phrase to that special group of people who go out as missionaries. Rather, I am talking about you and me. This force grew from twelve, to seventy-two, to Paul . . . to you and me, the church. Do you know what I like about the seventy-two? Unlike the twelve apostles, they are nameless and faceless. Last week we read the names of the twelve. But nowhere do we find the names of the seventy-two. I like that because it is the nature of the kingdom of God to spread through the untold numbers of nameless and faceless people known only to the ones who have touched them with the love and grace of God. That is the joy of the kingdom of God. We get to participate in spreading the good news that the reign of God is at hand.

Granted, the nature of this mission is not without conflict. On the surface, in his instructions to the seventy-two Jesus alerts them to the fact that some will welcome this news while others will be inhospitable to them. Below the surface, though, we see that there is a real cosmic battle taking place for the hearts and souls of people. So Jesus says in verse 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.*” But nonetheless, the kingdom of God has come into this world through Jesus. Darrell Bock says it this way, “The power to

deliver from Satan's power has started to work itself out in history and among humanity."² And this one thing I know. God is using us to advance his kingdom. His kingdom is eternal and it will outlast this generation. It is our joy to participate in the work of the kingdom and in the ever expanding work of God in our generation.

The Joy of the Lord Allows us to Anticipate

This brings us to the heart of our passage where the seventy-two have returned from their trip and are rejoicing in the opportunity they had to participate in this work of the kingdom of God. They give testimony that they saw the power of God at work through them. They reported to Jesus with joy, "*even the demons are subject to us in your name.*" In other words, they saw visible signs of how through Jesus the kingdom of God was advancing against the forces of evil and overcoming the power of death.

Somehow you have to explain what is wrong with this world. Every worldview has to answer four questions. Where did we come from? Who are we? What is wrong with this world? How do we fix it? It is hard to find someone who doesn't agree that there is something terribly wrong with this world. Though some would argue, like the French philosopher Rousseau, that man is basically good and so problems could be solved by creating a utopian state. And yet, Colson reminds us that "all of history's utopian schemes have ended in tyranny."³ If we are basically good, why do our best efforts fall short? What is at the heart of our problem?

So what is wrong with this world? I like the story that goes like this. A newspaper posed the question, "What is wrong with this world?" To which, G. K. Chesterton wrote in response, "Dear Sirs, I am! Sincerely Yours, G. K. Chesterton." And yet, that is only part of the story. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1-2, "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*" Later, in Ephesians 6, Paul adds that our battle is not "*against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" We are born in bondage to our sin but there is even something deeper than our sin that holds man in bondage.

The seventy-two return and give testimony that demons are now subject to them and Jesus refers to seeing "*Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*" Satan is "God's supernatural adversary, the chief of those diabolic forces opposed to God's purposes."⁴ In Luke 11, Jesus refers to Satan as "a strong man." But take note of what Jesus says to

the seventy-two. *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven?”* What does Jesus mean by that? Surely he doesn’t mean that Satan is no longer present or active in this world. Rather, what he means is that through Jesus and his work on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, “his doom is sure!” So when Jesus says to the seventy-two, *“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”*, he is saying that Satan cannot keep the gospel of the kingdom of God from advancing through our testimony.

Jesus said in Luke 11:20, *“If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* So in Jesus, there is one stronger than the “strong man.” We sang it this morning,

And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed, His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.⁵

And yet, as thrilling as that may be, Jesus says to his disciples that even this is not the source of your joy. He says to them in verse 20, *“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* I wonder if Jesus said this because it is very easy for us to ride the highs and the lows of ministry. In the instructions Jesus gives to the seventy-two, clearly he prepares them for the difficulty they would face because of those who oppose the gospel. We know how that has played out through time and in church history. We even know in our own ministry setting and in our own church that there are things that encourage us and things that discourage us. We can see fruit and at the same time, we face challenges. But that is the reality of the present form of the kingdom of God. It is here, but not here in full. So our joy needs to rest in something more than the ups and downs of life on the front lines of the kingdom of God.

So Jesus says that the true fountain of our joy is found in that we belong to him by God’s grace and through faith in Jesus. When Martin Luther discovered that there is a righteousness that comes to us by faith, it became a wide open door to a life filled with joy. But he gave a warning that the doctrine of justification by faith is a fragile thing. In other words, this idea that we are actually made right with God through faith in Jesus and not by any works we do is a fragile thing. It is not fragile in itself. Actually, it is a truth that is strong and able to hold us firmly to the end. But what makes it fragile, Luther said, is “us.” We doubt it. We forget it. We wonder how God feels about us because of our many shortcomings and failings. Luther goes on to say that when we

forget that God loves us in Jesus, we “forfeit the joy of the gospel.”⁶ In other words, our joy is not rooted in what God does through us. Rather, our joy is rooted in what God has done in us through Jesus Christ.

So Jesus tells the seventy-two that he is their joy. Our joy allows us to anticipate that day when we stand before God, and Jesus our advocate, stands next to us and with great joy presents us to the Father as those without fault. That is our joy. Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 1:6. *“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you have been grieved by various trials.”* So what is it that causes us to rejoice while our circumstances are not favorable. Starting in verse 3 he says, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. . . . In this you rejoice!”*

Yes, there is joy in the call to participate with what God is doing in this world. But as we live as people who are sent, let us remember that our joy really rests in what we anticipate. We anticipate that someday our faith will be sight and this allows us to endure through suffering and scorn. Jesus is our joy.

The Joy of the Lord Causes us to Celebrate

Finally, it is the joy of the Lord that causes us to celebrate the goodness of God to us. In verse 21-24, Jesus informs them that it was God’s sovereign and gracious will to reveal himself to them. It was an act of his grace and nothing more and nothing else. And so he says in verse 23, *“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.”*

By God’s grace, we are incredibly blessed to see our need for Jesus and know where we can find forgiveness. So what is keeping you from seeing how blessed you are in Christ? What is robbing you of your joy? The Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see the truth of Christ and has given you an ability to believe. Through faith in Christ, your name is written in heaven. You are a son or daughter of the Heavenly Father. Your sins are forgiven. Not even death can separate you from the love of God. Rejoice!

This is what marks us as a people. It is joy! In Acts 2:46-47, the early church gatherings

are described this way, *“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.”* We know how much despair there is in this world. We live in it. We experience it. But when we gather for worship or when we gather in community groups, we need to leave with a sense of joy and hope. When the disciples saw the risen Jesus in John 20:20, it says that they were “overjoyed.” The joy of the Lord causes us to celebrate.

Conclusion

As a sent people, we don’t need to strive or try to make something happen. What we need to do is *“Rejoice in the Lord, always. Again, I say, Rejoice!”* When this joy marks us, it is noticeable. It is attractive. As we live “sent lives” one of the best things we can bring with us is the joy of the Lord. We ought to be known for our laughter. We ought to be known for our smile. We are loved by God in Christ.

We are sent into a world that is filled with worry. That really seems to be the tone in our country. Uncertainty. Fear. Resentment. Disappointment. Loss. Division. If you take the last two Sundays and put them together, they form the perfect combination of how to step into our world as a people who are sent. Embracing the pattern of the cross, we step into this suffering world. But we do so with a deep and inner joy that allows us to bring hope to a world filled with despair.

“The joy of the Lord is our strength.” It is a joy that calls us to participate in the work of the kingdom of God. So participate! It is a joy that allows us to anticipate a day when our faith will be sight. So rest in God’s love. It is a joy that causes us to celebrate. So may the smile of Jesus grace your face this week. May the song of Jesus be hummed wherever you go. May the laughter of Jesus be infectious and bring hope. It may the joy of the Lord transcend your circumstances.

Rejoice!

¹Joel Green *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 411

²Darrell Bock *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 293

³Chuck Colson and Catherine Larson, "When Atheists Believe: The Confounding Attraction of the Christian Worldview" October 22, 2009 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/october/33.58.html?start=2>

⁴Green, 418

⁵Martin Luther, from the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*

⁶http://www.azquotes.com/author/9142-Martin_Luther

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COMMUNITY GROUPS



Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Would you rather live on 1/10 of the electricity you presently use - OR - have to live on 10 gallons of water per day (for all purposes). Share how your “joy” is impacted by normal everyday inconveniences. Why do you think that is so?
2. Describe something that made you smile this week. Why did it cause you to smile?
3. Share a thought or observation that struck you from the sermon.



Diving Into The Word

4. Nehemiah 8:10 says, “*The joy of the LORD is our strength.*” What does this mean and how do you find it to be true?
5. Read Luke 10:17-20. How does this passage encourage you as you seek to live as someone who is sent?
6. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. What are the circumstances that tend to rob you of your joy? How does this passage help restore your joy?
7. Read Acts 2:42-47. Identify the role joy played in the witness of the early church. Why is the joy of the Lord an important to our living sent lives? What do you think this “joy” looks like?



Taking It Home

8. What do you need to do this week to live in the joy of the Lord?
9. What could be different about you if you were consciously aware of bringing the joy of the Lord with you wherever you happen to be?