

WHAT TO REJOICE ABOUT

by Steve Zeisler

If you are like me, the drama of the return of the American hostages has made you recall privileges, blessings and advantages you may have been taking for granted. Perhaps you have been reminded, as I have, that simple blessings, such as being able to enjoy a meal with your family, or deciding for yourself how you will spend the hours of the day, are not some thing you can automatically count on. We have much to be thankful for. We should respect and appreciate the many privileges granted to us.

Now the same thing is true in the spiritual life also. As Christians we have been given many wonderful privileges and advantages. Yet we frequently fail to appreciate them. We treat God as if he did not matter. Let us consider that issue this morning, from a passage in the tenth chapter of Luke. Jesus is reminding his followers of some of the tremendous gifts they have been given, of their great standing "in the Lord," of what they can and should rejoice about.

This passage divides into two sections. Luke 10:1-16 are instructions given by Jesus to his seventy followers as he prepares them for ministry; while vs. 17-24 describe a debriefing period that took place after they returned, when Jesus helped the seventy see themselves more clearly as a result of their ministry. Luke 10:1-16:

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. "Go your ways; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. And whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' And if a man of peace is there, your peace will rest upon Him; but if not, It will return to you. And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you! And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades! The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."

The first privilege we need to remember is that to us is given the honor of being thrust out into the ministry. God has chosen to use very ordinary people like you and me to minister to the world, to bind up hurts, to tell the truth to those who are in darkness. Many Christians spend much of their lives as spectators on the sidelines. They don't really believe that the work of ministry is a privilege, that to use the gifts God has given them is an honor.

Jesus suggests two reasons why this is so. He says, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest." The work of the ministry is often hard, with much strain and long hours. It can also be dangerous. Notice Jesus' reminder here in Luke 10:3: "I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Following the Lord and taking up the challenges he lays before you can put you in hot water. Now although Jesus is saying to men

and women like you and me that standing for him in this world will be hard and dangerous work, he still considers this to be a privilege. Anyone who has ever really allowed the Lord to use him in the ministry can vouch for that. It is indeed an honor, and something to be thankful for.

Consider the honorable position given us in Jesus' statement (Luke 10:16), "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." That is an alarming statement, Jesus is saying that very ordinary people, who may or may not be educated, who, may or may not be attractive, are given the right to stand for him, and beyond him, for the Creator God himself, to interact with this world, telling and living truth in such a way that Jesus himself touches the world around us. What an exciting opportunity that is. We are Christ's representatives in the world. How could we be more privileged? Remember that these seventy disciples were taken from among those of his followers whom Jesus knew and was closely identified with. We know that his followers were ordinary people who worked with their hands for a living, in no sense were they the educated cream of the crop, the people with strong emotional sifts.

The history of God's work is filled with such examples. Moses was an 80-year-old man who had spent forty years of his life tending sheep, yet he was chosen by God to challenge Pharaoh, to bring down plagues on Egypt so that God's people would be set free. Elijah was an unsophisticated, wild-eyed prophet who challenged the priests of Baal; he denounced Ahab and Jezebel. He spoke the word of God with tremendous authority, yet he did not have that authority because of his own attributes or for any winsomeness of his own. The apostle Paul was a tent maker who was once rightly accused of upsetting the whole world by the things he said. Martin Luther, an insignificant monk, proclaimed Scripture to the world and the course of Western history was changed. In America today there is a growing movement to awaken this nation to the problem of abortion on demand, and what that says about our view of human life. The leaders of that fight are housewives, and their weapons are duplicating machines, 15-cent stamps and phone calls. They are standing for the truth, representing the Lord in the world. Yes, it is a remarkable privilege to be called upon to minister in his name.

Now we need to see that the specific directions for ministry given here pertain to a particular situation. Jesus' commands to take no bag, to greet no one on the way, etc., have to do with the assignment that these seventy were given. They were seventy Jews, operating in Jewish territory, going into cities where Jesus himself would go later. (In fact, later on the Lord himself would say to his followers, ("but now let him who has a purse take it along. likewise also a bag. and let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one.") The fact that this was harvest time (Luke 10:2) in these cities, cities where Christ had been, cities that had seen the miracles of Christ and made it right to call for immediate response. "The kingdom of God has come near to you." That message may not always be our message. Those were particular circumstances. Sometimes we are sent out to plant and water before the harvest time, but in their case this was harvest time. The Lord was going to be there, maybe for the last time. It was decision time and that is why these ministers could announce judgment on cities that would not receive their message.

But having said that these were particular circumstances, we can still make some observations which will be useful wherever the Lord sends his servants. The first is that many of Jesus' directives here deal with the problem of being sidetracked in the ministry. Telling the seventy to "greet no one on the way" is not a directive to be rude to everybody, rather it is an admonition to them to get on with what they were called to do and not let anything turn them aside. They were told to eat what was set before them so that they would not be bothered about food or hospitality (hoping to be invited into a wealthier home, perhaps). If they paid attention to themselves, if they were in any sense distracted, they would be less effective in ministry. That temptation is always present for those who are thrust out in the service of Christ, but we should be on our guard against that. I think that is why Jesus sent them out in pairs. If you are teamed up with other people, you will find that when you forget what you were supposed to be doing and get caught up with things your partner can haul you back in line.

Secondly, I think we can say that these seventy were told to go with a kind of optimism that God would be at work. Everywhere we go as his servants we can expect that the ministry of the Spirit has gone before us so that the ground is prepared for what we have to offer. That is why Jesus told them that when they went into a home for the first time to announce a blessing right away, and if it turned out to be inappropriate God would cancel it later.

One with a less hopeful attitude might have waited to see if a host proved himself worthy before blessing him. The point is that we should have a note of expectancy about us, knowing that God is at work in ways we cannot anticipate and that it is good news which we bring to the world.

Third, it is clear in this passage that the ministry of warning is very important. If you know people who are headed for misery and destruction and you do not tell them so, then you do not love them, Jesus is instructing the seventy that when they encounter cities that are unreceptive to the message they bring that they should publicly shake the dust from those cities off their feet, This is a way of facing people with the grave choice they have made.

Further, it seems to me, we can say from this passage that warnings need to be appropriate to the situation. These cities had had tremendous opportunity. All throughout Galilee the teaching of the Lord, and those who had been healed by his word, had spread. That is why Jesus can say that Capernaum and Bethsaida and Chorazin are especially to be judged-"to whom much is given much is required." People who have had great opportunities also have great responsibility. If you shared the gospel with a student from a Moslem nation and encountered a degree of caution or hesitancy from him, you should view that differently than if you talked to a student from a warm Christian environment in this country who adopted a kind of intellectual agnosticism for his ego's sake. "To whom much is given much is required." Because of that, Jesus can say so severely, "These people ought to have paid attention. They have been given a great deal."

In Jesus' instructions to seventy of his followers being sent out as heralds (Luke 10:1-16), we have a description of what a privilege it is to minister. These seventy are very excited, looking forward to it, a little nervous maybe, taking on the challenge. Jesus told them, "The one who listens to you listens to me. The one who rejects you rejects me and he who rejects me rejects the one who sent me." When they return from their assignment, we hear the sequel to the story. Luke 10:17:

And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." And turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

This passage is filled with instruction and commentary about the related ideas of joy and blessing. Luke 10:17 says, "The seventy returned with joy.."; in Luke 10:20 Jesus says, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this"; Luke 10:21, "He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit"; and Luke 10:23, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see." But we are also instructed about where we should center our sense of joy. The disciples were thrilled to have been used as instruments of God's power. Evil spirits had been subject to them in the name of Christ. It would be hard not to be excited about that kind of an experience, and Jesus shared their excitement at first. In fact, he carried it a step further. He told them that as a result of their ministry he saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning; the power of the evil one began to crumble, the fortress of resistance to truth and hatred of God was being undermined by their ministry. Furthermore, Jesus said, during the time they were on this assignment they were impervious to harm. He determined that they would be protected from any kind of harm. It was all right to be excited about that.

Seeing God display his power in us is exhilarating indeed. Consider the situation here at Peninsula Bible Church. There are many exciting things going on here. In the bulletin this morning we read that starting tomorrow, messages that were delivered from this platform will be broadcast on the radio to places all over this country. Each

week we print thousands of copies of the Sunday morning message and they are mailed all over the world, In a few weeks a number of us are flying to Australia to meet with Christians there to share what God has taught us, and hopefully to learn what he has taught them. Now imagine the impression those open doors for ministry would make on one of those seventy disciples. But in any situation it is Christ who opens the doors. whether by conquering demons or making it possible to fly around the world on ministries, He allows the opportunity; he says where ministry will take place.

The work of the ministry is exciting. But there is a potential danger! That is why the Lord reminds the seventy that they should not center their joy in what they have done, but they should rejoice in their relationship with Christ. Their names are recorded in heaven. They will be with the lord Jesus forever, not because of anything they contributed, but only by the merits of Christ applied to them—they are no different than anybody else. They are recipients of these blessings, and that is where their joy ought to be centered.

If we only look at the exciting things that get accomplished through us we can easily lose our bearings. Consider the statement the disciples made, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." The two most important words in that statement are the words, "to us." The disciples, however, could be tempted to think that they themselves, in fact, were the instruments of righteousness, that they were more important than the power of God behind them. There is the danger. The Lord is suggesting if we center our sense of joy on what has been accomplished, losing sight of the fact that it is only because of what we have received, just like every other Christian has received, we can be thrown off course. Look briefly at Acts 14:11:

And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycannian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.

Paul was tremendously concerned that these people were confusing him, the instrument, with the Lord whom he served. One of the reasons for his concern was that it must have been exciting (and tempting to him) to be thought of as a God. That is a very present danger, and anybody who has ever been used of God at all needs to be aware of this. That is why the Lord says, "If you want to rejoice in something, rejoice in this: you have a relationship with Jesus Christ that will last forever, Your names are recorded in heaven," That fact ought to be the source of our excitement.

Jesus now goes on to comment further about the lack of pride in themselves that ought to be true of his followers (Luke 10:21-22):

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

At this very hour, Jesus "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit," I would like to see an artist's impression of that. I picture Jesus with his arms folded, his head back, laughing out loud as he realizes the way the world really is. He is excited that the "wise and intelligent" people, those who are consumed with their own wisdom, those who judge themselves to be especially wise and intelligent have had hidden from them some of the most important things human beings can possibly discover, Just moments before, Jesus said he saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. These babes hear that the power of the evil one is crumbling away, but the self-important people may

never get to know that. Now it may be that there are wise people who will find these things out, but they will only discover them if they are as humble as children, if they realize that for all their wisdom they are basically needy little children requiring instruction. That thought struck Jesus as wonderful. But do you see what that does to our sense of pride in our accomplishment? The disciples are running around saying, "The demons are subject to us in your name, and, you know, we're fairly dynamic too." But Jesus says, "Well, the best thing about you is that you are so humble, you are so childlike. That is really your great advantage."

He says further, And turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear."

Some of the most important people who have ever lived—the prophetic leaders of thought in every age, kings, warriors, men of wealth and power who ruled nations, who could have had anything their hearts desired—longed to discover how the world really works, what was really worth having, but they never found out, while privileged nobodies like us have been entrusted with that kind of information. Isn't that amazing? We have been given remarkable privileges in Christ. We are privileged to serve him, to represent him in the world. We have insight into the way the world really is, we are given clear and insightful information into the nature of things which some of the most important people whoever lived cannot touch.

We should be thankful for the privileges Jesus has given us. I once spent eight weeks in a very uncomfortable full leg cast. I was sure that at the end of that period I would never again take for granted a hot shower, a comfortable night's sleep, etc. But I did. My appreciation for those things didn't last even a week after the cast was removed. Christ's challenge to us here is not to lose sight of what he has given us, but to learn from him and to continue to be grateful and delighted as he was, rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, because God set up the world the way he has and we are the beneficiaries of that.

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