

## **Zeal for Ministry**

### **Luke 10:1-24**

Our annual meeting is in a couple weeks, so I've been working on writing annual reports, and one of the things that does for me is it reminds me of all the great things going on in our church and all the people involved in ministry. There's a lot of stuff happening every week on Sunday mornings in Worship Services and Discovery Land and Early Childhood, and then we have Recharge every Wednesday night as well as multiple Small Groups throughout the week. On top of that we have special events and projects going on, and people are managing church finances, caring for the church building, and much more.

But I also realize there's a lot of ministry happening outside the church. People are involved in their own personal ministry to family members and friends, or neighbors and coworkers. Some do ministry with parachurch organizations or community groups. Some are part of a local mission or outreach; some overseas.

A huge part of being a Christian is being involved in ministry. Ministry and Christianity go hand in hand. That's what Jesus modeled for us and that's what he's commanded us to do. We are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he's commanded us. We are to teach our children, serve the poor, do good works that God has prepared for us to do. So we do all this ministry because God has called us to do it.

But sometimes ministry can be a real chore. Sometimes it can be very difficult. Sometimes people don't recognize or appreciate what we're doing. Sometimes we're just tired and don't want to do it anymore. Sometimes it involves people that are annoying. And there are always other things that we could be doing with our time that we would really enjoy. We all experience the pressure to back away, not get involved, and spend all our time doing other things.

This morning we're going to see a story that I hope will stir up our zeal to keep pressing in and give us reasons beyond just our sense of duty to commit ourselves to the cause of Christ.

We just finished working our way through Luke chapter 9 in which we saw several interactions Jesus had with his disciples over the course of about four months. At

the end of chapter 9 he shifted his attention toward Jerusalem and the things he needed to accomplish in the 8 months leading up to his death and resurrection. So we find ourselves at Luke Chapter 10 and this begins a section of about 4 chapters that cover a period of 2-3 months in the fall and winter. For some reason, none of the other disciples record these things, only Luke.

After what we saw in chapter 9, Jesus and his disciples went on a short trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, which was an annual feast that lasted seven days. Luke doesn't record what happened during that time. To get that you need to read John 7-8 and possibly 9-10. Those chapters show that when Jesus got to Jerusalem he began to do some teaching in the Temple and encountered a lot of conflict with the religious leaders, and it became very apparent that they wanted to kill him. But his time had not yet come.

So, when the days of the feast were over, Jesus turned his attention to the next phase of ministry and discipleship training, and that's where Luke picks things up again. To begin, he sent out a larger group of disciples to do ministry in the towns and villages of Judea he was about to go into. They went ahead to see where Jesus would be welcomed and to begin to get the people ready.

Read Luke 10:1-2.

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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.*

This represents a larger group of Jesus' disciples and shows us that it wasn't just the 12 that were expected to be involved in ministry, these were as well. I don't know who they were or why they were appointed, but apparently they were devoted to Christ and willing to join him in what he was doing. They weren't like most people in the crowds who were just curious and checking Jesus out, they made a commitment to follow him. So I see them as disciples that are similar to us.

Here we see Jesus call them and appoint them to go out and do ministry in that area. They were supposed to go as pairs into the towns and villages where he was planning to go. And as he sent them, he told them: "pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." At first it sounds like he was

telling them to pray for something that they were already the answer to, but I think Jesus had something else in mind. As they entered the villages I think they would have seen how great the needs were, how responsive the people would be, and how only 2 of them were far too few to minister to all the people. So I think they were praying for other workers to be raised up – other disciples who could join in the work of ministry.

Luke goes on to tell us the instructions Jesus gave them.

Read Luke 10:3-12.

*Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> '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.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*

He goes on in the next few verses to pronounce judgment on some of the towns in Galilee for rejecting him.

So, if you put yourself in their shoes, these instructions were a bit on the heavy side because of the context they were in. They were going into enemy territory where they could face opposition, rejection, and even danger. It had happened before, and it would happen again. And from what Jesus just experienced in Jerusalem the week before, it was clear that the religious authorities wanted to kill him – how far would they go with his disciples?

All of the instructions he were influenced by that context. *"I'm sending you as lambs among wolves... Don't take any money with you or extra belongings... Don't stop along the road to talk to anyone... Look for people of peace in each community... If someone opens their home to you, stay with them the whole time and don't go from house to house... When they set food before you make sure you*

*eat it so you don't offend anyone... Start by healing the sick and talking to them about the kingdom of God, and if a town won't receive you, pronounce judgment upon it and move on."*

Not exactly an uplifting pep rally before the big game. Pretty sobering instructions. The reality of ministry is that sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it's dangerous. Sometimes it requires us to do things we don't want to do – to step out of our comfort zones. It reminds me of when I used to take groups of students down to Reynosa Mexico. Each evening after supper we would get our instructions for the next day: "Group A, you are going to do heavy cement work in the blazing hot sun. Group B, you are going to visit people's homes with an interpreter where you can get called on at any time to share your testimony or lead in prayer. Group C, you are going to go door to door to deliver bags of food and share the gospel with people."

These were all ways the church wanted us to do ministry and it was uncomfortable. I remember one time when I was going door to door, I had to go to the bathroom really bad, so I finally asked one family if I could use their bathroom. They smiled and pointed to a little tin shack in their backyard. I opened the door and had to duck inside. The ceiling was low and there were spiders everywhere. When I looked down the pit, the entire thing was moving with maggots and various kinds of insects. It was absolutely disgusting.

Whether you're in Mexico, or Polk County, or Judea, ministry isn't a walk in the park. It's not like you're going to an amusement park or a relaxing day at the beach. It's often hard and uncomfortable. And we do it because that's what Christ has called us to do, but is there something more? Certainly, he is worthy, but I also want us to see a couple other things that come up next in this story – that give us more reasons to keep pressing in. This is what happened when the disciples came back...

Read Luke 10:17-20.

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

So the disciples came back rejoicing. That's interesting. They went out as lambs among wolves, giving up the safety and comfort of home to do the hard work of ministry and to bless other people, and yet they came back rejoicing and excited to tell Jesus what had happened. Ministry brought joy. Ministry got them excited. They could see that God was using them to make a huge difference in people's lives. They were even able to cast out demons from people in Jesus' name. So they weren't just watching Jesus do ministry, they were involved and God was working through them. And the result was joy.

Ministry brought joy. And it's the same for us today. Yes it can be hard and uncomfortable, but when we obey and see God actually working in us and through us to bless other people, it can bring us great joy – a joy that can't be experienced in the safety and comfort of home. Or when we're on a vacation at the beach. Or at an amusement park. Or in front of the TV. Or in a deer stand.

I remember coming back from those mornings in Mexico after doing ministry way outside my comfort zone, and you know what I felt? Joy. It was amazing to see God using us to encourage people and bring them hope, even when we didn't speak the same language. The same thing can happen when you take the time to listen to your neighbor and offer to pray for them, or when you help an elderly person do something they couldn't do, or when you lead a small group at church, or help out in Discovery Land or Recharge. It's still hard and there are times when your efforts don't seem to make a difference, but there can also be a deep joy that God gives when you serve him and minister to other people.

So that's one of the reasons for us to press forward in ministry, and there's one more I want us to see in the last few verses.

Read Luke 10:21-24.

*<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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."*

*<sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup> 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."*

Leon Morris notes that the original language in verse 21 expresses something stronger than "rejoiced." It's more like Jesus was "thrilled with joy." So when his disciples came back and reported all they had seen and heard and all that God had done through them, Jesus was thrilled with joy. Seeing their joy in experiencing the power of God working through them in ministry was thrilling to him. He could see his Father at work, revealing things and doing things that only he could do. And that filled him with praise. It shows how much he loves his disciples and his church. When we find joy in ministry, it fills him with joy too. He wants us to experience the joy of being used by God to touch other people's lives and when we do, Jesus is thrilled.

So I want to encourage you to keep pressing into ministry. And for those of you who aren't really involved, I encourage you to jump in. I won't pretend that it's always fun and enjoyable, but you will find joy and when you do, Jesus will too.