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## WHAT MAKES JESUS REJOICE

Luke 10:17-24

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January 31, 1999

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Luke Lesson 50

## What Makes Jesus Rejoice Luke 10:17-24

“Congratulations! You have just won the Reader’s Digest Five Million Dollar Sweepstakes!” Would that make you rejoice? “Congratulations! You have just been used of God to move a soul from eternal darkness to eternal light and life!” Now *that* should make the believer rejoice like nothing else! But all too often, when we hear of a soul being saved, we respond with, “That’s nice. Hey, who do you think will win the Super Bowl?”

Whatever makes us the happiest reveals our true values. Do we get more excited about temporal blessings or eternal ones? Do we get more excited about a new car or a new brother or sister in Christ? Our text is unique in that it is the only time in the Bible where it is said that Jesus rejoiced greatly. The word “rejoice” alone is too weak a translation. The Greek word means to exult or to be exuberant. Jesus mentions His own joy on at least two other occasions (John 15:11; 17:13), but here alone it says that He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit. What He rejoiced greatly about was the news of how God’s sovereign grace had resulted in the salvation of souls through the ministry of the 72 (or 70, depending on the textual variant). If thinking on these matters of sovereign grace caused Jesus to exult, then the same should be true for us as we grow to be more like Jesus.

God’s sovereign grace in salvation brings great joy  
to Jesus and should bring great joy to us.

To understand what made Jesus exult and what should make us exult, we need to grasp the meaning of God’s sovereign grace:

1. God’s sovereign grace means that salvation is totally from God and not at all from man.

Scripture plainly shows that salvation from sin and from God’s judgment is all from Him and not at all from us, lest we boast. The apostle Paul hammers this home (1 Cor. 1:26-28) by emphasizing three times that it is God who has chosen us and that His choice did not depend on anything in us, but only on Him.

His conclusion is "that no man should boast before God." Then he adds, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let Him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:29-31).

The apostle John also makes it clear that the new birth is not by human effort or human will (John 1:12-13):

But as many as received Him, them He have the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

James makes the same point: "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures" (James 1:18).

Some will say that God initiates salvation, but then it depends on our decision to believe. But Scripture shows us that both faith and repentance are the gifts of God (Eph. 2:8, 9, where the word "that" includes the whole salvation by grace through faith process). Phil. 1:29 states that it has been granted to us to believe in Christ. Acts 11:18 makes it clear that God grants repentance (see also 2 Tim. 2:25). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65).

Some try to dodge this by asserting that we are elect according to God's foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:1, 2). They say that this means that God in His omniscience knew in advance who would believe in Christ and that their faith is why they are His elect. But that view would make man the one who determines God's eternal plan, whereas Paul, in the context of dealing with our election to salvation, declares that God works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Also, if our choosing God is the reason He elected us for salvation, then election would not be due to His grace, but due to our choice. Furthermore, a study of the Greek word translated "foreknowledge" shows that it means more than God's knowing something in advance. It refers to God's personal and determinative choice of an individual (Rom. 8:29) or nation (such as Israel, Rom. 11:2). It means that God determined before time began to know these people in a special way, to pour out His love on them

according to His purpose. Apart from God's knowing us, choosing us, and drawing us to salvation, we would be lost.

In our text, Jesus shows that ...

A. We are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us.

He states that "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" (10:22). There are at least four reasons why we are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us:

- We are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us because our finite reason is incapable of knowing the infinite God.

Philosophy begins with man and tries to reason toward God, but the finite human mind cannot, in and of itself, grasp the infinite Triune God (note the reference to each person of the Trinity in our text). Jesus' statement here is a strong assertion of both His deity and His humanity. The fact that all things were handed over to Him by the Father shows Jesus' humanity; the fact that only Jesus can reveal the Father to us shows His deity, because no mere man nor any created being could reveal the eternal God to us. "As the Son he was equal to the Father, but as man he was beneath the Father and received 'all things' from him" (*Concordia Triglotta*, in R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* [Augsburg Publishing House], p. 591). As God in human flesh, Jesus said to Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). But our problem is bigger than just the fact of our finiteness:

- We are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us because we are spiritually blind by nature.

As Paul explains, the "natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he *cannot* understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14, emphasis added). Just as a blind man cannot see a beautiful sunset because he lacks the necessary organs to do so, even so a sinner who does not have the Holy Spirit cannot grasp the things of God. When Jesus gives eternal life to those whom the Father has given Him (John 17:2), He imparts to them the capacity both to understand spiritual things and also to know God personally in

Christ. As Jesus prayed, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Without such spiritual life in Christ, we are no more capable of knowing God than a corpse is capable of seeing and knowing a living person. But being spiritually dead and blind is not our only problem.

- We are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us because we are under the domain and power of Satan.

When the 72 returned, they reported to Jesus how even the demons were subject to them in His name (10:17). Jesus concurs by saying how He was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. He further underscores this by saying that He has given them authority to tread on serpents and scorpions without harm (10:19). In the context (10:18, 20), it is clear that Jesus was referring to the power He gave them over Satan and the demons, not to some literal ability to handle snakes or scorpions. The disciples' success in ministry was "a symbol and earnest of the complete and final overthrow of Satan" (Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* [Scribner's], p. 278).

The fact is, it takes the defeat of Satan to save a soul, because he has "blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). When God saves us, He delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). We cannot free ourselves from this bondage to Satan. God must do it for us (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

- We are dependent on God to reveal His salvation to us because there is nothing in us that obligates God to reveal Himself to us.

Jesus states that He reveals the Father to whomever He (the Son) wills (10:22). Also, God was well-pleased to reveal His salvation to babes rather than to the intelligent. The phrase "well-pleased" points to God's sovereign pleasure according to His secret counsel. Clearly, Jesus' words would make no sense if He revealed the Father to everyone equally. As revealed throughout all of Scripture, God chooses certain individuals and reveals Himself to them, but He lets others continue on in their spiritual darkness. He

chose Abraham, but He did not choose Abraham's father, brothers, or neighbors. He chose Isaac, but He did not choose Ishmael. He loved Jacob, but He hated Esau. As Paul points out, God did this while they were still in the womb, before they had done anything good or bad, so that His purpose according to election might stand (Rom. 9:11). In case we missed the point, Paul strongly asserts, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

In other words, salvation does not depend on human will or human effort. It depends totally on God's mercy, not at all on us. Martin Luther comments, "Here the bottom falls out of all merit, all powers and abilities of reason, or the free will men dream of, and it all counts as nothing before God; Christ must do and must give everything" (cited by Lenski, p. 593).

If you fight against this doctrine (and most of us do, at some point), I would suggest that it is because you have too high a view of man and you don't have a high enough view of God in His absolute holiness. You have too high a view of man in that you think that God is somehow obligated to show mercy to everyone equally. But Scripture is clear that God is not obligated to show mercy to anyone. He could have treated us as He treated the fallen angels, and left us in our condemnation with no Savior. Is God unfair because He condemned all the fallen angels to the abyss without any chance of salvation? Of course not! They rebelled and they have no claim on God's mercy. The same is true of rebellious, fallen man. In His holiness, God would be perfectly just to condemn the entire human race to hell. But He chose to show mercy to some, which is His prerogative. Thus,

B. God was pleased in and through Jesus Christ to reveal His salvation to His elect.

This is what Jesus meant in Luke 10:22. It is what Jesus meant when the Jews demanded, "If You are the Christ, tell us plainly," and He responded, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My father's name, these bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:24-28). God's sover-

eign grace means that salvation is totally from God and not at all from man.

## 2. God's sovereign grace brings great joy to Jesus.

Joy is a frequent theme in Luke, but this is the only time that we read of Jesus rejoicing greatly. Clearly, what made Him exult was the report of the 72 and the thoughts about the sovereign grace of God in salvation as He expresses it in 10:21-22. There are at least four reasons that Jesus exulted in God's sovereign grace:

A. Jesus exulted in God's sovereign grace because it glorifies the Father.

If man can glory in any part of his salvation, it robs God of the total glory that is due to Him alone. But if salvation is due solely to God's choice and God's power, then we can only boast in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

B. Jesus exulted in God's sovereign grace because it defeats the power of Satan.

I can almost hear Jesus laughing for joy as He speaks verse 17. Why God allows Satan to have dominion over this fallen earth for as long as He does, no one knows. But we do know that the day is coming when that deceiver will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10). Every time a soul is saved from hell, it is a fore-taste of God's final and complete victory over Satan.

C. Jesus exulted in God's sovereign grace because it humbles the proud sinner.

When Jesus says that God has hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes, He does not mean that no wise or intelligent people will be saved, whereas those who lack intelligence will. Rather, the contrast is between those who proudly trust in their own reason and intellect versus those who humbly bow before God's revealed wisdom in Christ. The proud man thinks that he can approach God in his own way, on his own terms, and through his own merits. But as Paul explains, God will destroy the wisdom of the wise through the power of the message of the cross: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased

through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

Obviously, Paul himself was an intelligent, well-educated man. But, as he says, all those things that were gain to him he counted as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:7). Scripture is clear that "God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble" (Prov. 3:34; 1 Pet. 5:5). The humble person is the one who comes to Jesus as a needy sinner, trusting totally in God's mercy and not at all in anything in himself.

D. Jesus exulted in God's sovereign grace because it promotes holiness in His elect.

It has rightly been said that pride is the mother of all vices and humility the mother of all virtue. Those who know the greatness of God's holiness, His glory, and His saving grace in Christ, will constantly judge their pride and rely on Him for everything that is needed to live in holiness. For all these reasons and more, Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit when He thought about God's sovereign grace in salvation.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "I can *accept* the doctrine of God's sovereign grace in salvation, but I can't *rejoice greatly* in it." If that is so, it reveals an area where you are not yet conformed to the image of God's Son. Jesus exulted in this truth. Thus,

3. God's sovereign grace should bring great joy to us.

It should bring great joy to us for the same reasons that it brought great joy to Jesus, namely, because it glorifies the Father, it defeats the power of Satan, it humbles the proud sinner, and it promotes holiness in His elect. But, also, ...

A. God's sovereign grace in saving us should bring greater joy to us than our service.

This is Jesus' gentle correction to the 72 in verse 20. They were excited about how God had used them in defeating Satan's forces through their ministry. Jesus is not telling them not to rejoice at all in such victories. Rather, He is putting it in perspective. Our greatest joy should not be in seeing how God uses us to serve Him, but rather in the simple fact that our names are recorded in heaven. Service has its ups and downs; but salvation through

God's grace and the assurance that whom He saves, He keeps, should fill us with steady joy.

B. God's sovereign grace in saving us should bring greater joy to us than all other joys, because it is eternal.

Every joy that the person outside of Christ enjoys is temporal. Did he just win a million dollars in the lottery? Did he just get a promotion in his career? Did he just marry a beautiful young woman? Did he just get elected to a high public office? Don't envy him for a second. Why envy a man who in a short time will be cast into the lake of fire? If he could only see as God sees, that successful man would gladly and quickly trade places with the person whose name is written in the book of life, even if that saint were suffering from terminal cancer! Our joy is eternal and will only grow greater when we pass into the presence of our Savior!

C. God's sovereign grace in saving us should bring greater joy to us than any Old Testament saint had.

Certainly, all the saints before Christ were saved and looked forward to being with God throughout eternity. But, as the writer to the Hebrews states, "apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:40). Or, as Peter puts it, "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry." But, "it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet. 1:10, 12). Because of this great salvation, we who believe should "greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).

### Conclusion

Some are robbed of joy when they think of God's sovereign grace because they take the doctrine to conclusions that may seem logical, but they are not biblical. For example, some say, "If God has sovereignly determined everything, then why pray? What will be, will be." But as we saw in our last study, Jesus commands us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers (10:2). Clearly, Jesus knew all things that would come to pass, and yet He prayed often. So should we.

Others wrongly conclude, "If God is sovereign in saving people, why evangelize?" But again, the Lord sent out these workers to preach the gospel. Paul said that he endured all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:10). When Paul was tempted to leave Corinth because of the threat of persecution, the Lord told him to go on preaching and promised to protect him. Then the Lord added, "For I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Because God had His elect in Corinth who were not yet saved, Paul needed to keep preaching. Earlier in Paul's ministry, when the Jews stubbornly rejected the gospel and opposed Paul, he turned to the Gentiles. Acts 13:48 records, "and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." God's sovereign grace in electing some to salvation should motivate us to evangelize, since we know that our efforts will be used by God to save His elect. The Book of Revelation assures us that Christ has purchased with His blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9).

Perhaps someone is thinking, "What if God didn't write my name in His book of life before the foundation of the world? What if I'm not one of the elect? How can I be saved?" The answer in Scripture is plain: Come in faith to Jesus and He will save you. Don't worry about knowing God's eternal decrees. Respond to Christ's invitation. He said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). His promise is for you: Come to Jesus and He will give you rest in your soul! You will know the great joy that Jesus had when He thought on God's sovereign grace in salvation.

### Discussion Questions

1. Does God's sovereign grace make you rejoice greatly or stumble? Why? What should you do about it?
2. Some argue that the doctrine of election discourages prayer and evangelism. Is this so? Why/why not?
3. Is it contradictory to appeal to sinners to believe in Christ when we know that they cannot believe by themselves?
4. Why is it important to base our joy on God's sovereign grace rather than on the results of our service for Him?

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