

## I. Introduction

A. Children go through a “why phase?” in which they use the word about every ten seconds.

1. Come on Timmy, we’re going to the store.
2. Why?
3. Because we need to buy food for dinner.
4. Why?
5. Because we do not have any food left?
6. Why?
7. Because we ate it all.
8. Why?
9. Because we were hungry.
10. Why?

11. I could go on but many of you have been there. And you know that eventually they ask a question that you can’t answer and you either get snippy and say something profound like, “Because I said so that’s why” or “it’s time to play the quiet game. Who can go the longest without talking.”

B. I played around with the why question in Fence Posts One a few years ago. Some of you will remember it. I started by noting that we all have a set of beliefs – assumptions about life that are so basic that they cannot be explained by any other idea. For example, if you were to ask a college student why he (or she) was taking the classes they were taking the conversation might unfold like this:<sup>1</sup>

1. You: “Why are you taking philosophy?”
2. Student: “To satisfy a humanities requirement.”
3. You: “Why do you want to satisfy a humanities requirement?”

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Jim Leffel, *Understanding Basic Beliefs*, for this illustration.

4. Student: “So I can graduate!”
5. You: “Why do you want to graduate?”
6. Student, rolling their eyes: “To get a job, what did you think!”
7. You: “Why do you want a job?”
8. Student: “So I can make money.”
9. You: “Why do you want to make money?”
10. Student: “So I can buy stuff!”
11. You: Okay, but why do you want to buy stuff?”
12. Student: “So I can be happy.”
13. You: Okay, but why do you want to be happy?

C. I then noted that at this point, they might stare at you because they believe it’s self-evident that we all want to be happy. In Fence Post One we then entered into a discussion on epistemology – how we know what we know. Today I want to turn in a different direction. I want to talk about joy.

D. I do believe that it’s pretty self-evident that we all want to be happy and joyful – terms that I am going to use as synonyms today even though I do think that rightly understood there is daylight between them. Joy is generally understood to be deeper, less tied to circumstances. And as Christ-followers we also recognize it as a gift from the Spirit of God.

E. But for now I’m papering over the differenced and simply noting that: we like to be happy – we like to laugh and smile and feel good. But sometimes that’s hard. Hey, we live in Chicago, where it’s easy to be a bit depressed over the traffic and the weather – and the fact that the Bears still have Jay Cutler; and Derick Rose is hurt, and so is Patrick Kane. And I could go on.

1. A few weeks ago a friend from Texas called me to say, “it’s 75 here and I’m golfing. What are you doing?” I was shoveling snow for the third time today but I didn’t want to concede that.

- F. I think a discussion about joy is timely. And today that is where we are headed. The promise we find in today's passage is that joy is possible, not just in the future – when things change, when I get a new job or get married or we have kids or the kids leave or we go to heaven! But now. Even now.
- G. By way of warning let me say, this text is a bit complicated. In fact, after I started studying it I wondered, “Why didn't I assign this passage to Syler and go visit my Mom this week instead of last week? I could have taken the fun passage about the kingdom advancing as Jesus sent out the 72. I could have talked about pressing ahead rather than evil, Satan, scorpions and confusing statements.<sup>2</sup>
- II. I'm joking, sort of I think Syler did a great job. I appreciated his call for us all to be in the game. And as he was speaking, I was struck by two big ideas:
- A. First, the fact that we are here (I am here) at least in part because of the 72 who went out. In Luke 9 Jesus sent out the 12 – and they set a lot of things in motion, helped launch the Revolution. Luke 10 opens with him sending out 72 “others.” These are the “no names.” But they went out and it was their obedience and risk and generosity that set in motion a series of handoffs, where someone shared with someone who shared with someone who shared with someone (on and on) until someone shared with you and with me. The 72 were faithful in passing along the baton – which is in our hands now. I felt a debt of gratitude to them and a sense of responsibility to pass along the baton.
- B. And I was also struck by the fact that we are supposed to be playing offense. In so many ways the church in the west today is playing defense, but we are supposed to be playing offense. We are supposed to be part of a Revolution. But we are trying to hold on to what we have instead of recklessly and boldly Proclaiming the Good News and Engaging in Good Works. The church was not designed to play defense.
- C. OK, well, enough from last week. Let's walk through this passage.
- III. **V17: The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”**

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<sup>2</sup> The Gospel is Good News – not good science of good philosophy. If it was something other than good news it's possible that people could work it out on their own. Because it is good news, someone needs to tell them.

- A. This second group did not expect things to go so well. The disciples – the A Team – had had a rough go of it. In some ways they had failed. The 72 knew this. Plus, when Jesus sent this second group out he said a lot about evil and suffering and told them that they were going out as “lambs among wolves,” which might be translated, “You are wolf-food and I’m sending you to the wolves.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. So when things did go well they are quite surprised. When evil blinks first, they are thrilled. “Jesus, even the demons submit to us in your name.”
- C. If you’ve been on a short term mission trip, you know a bit about what they were feeling. There is nothing quite like it. You work hard, get pushed spiritually but marvel at what God does in and through you. If you have not been on a short term mission trip, it’s time to go. You need to make this part of the plan. These are catalytic events.
1. This week we had a team return from India, where they were working with our partners at HBI, and we had an advance team return from Istanbul, Turkey, where they were working through our partners – the Robleses – who focus on Refugees. This week we have a family trip headed to Gallup, New Mexico to work with impoverished children from the Zuni Tribe and later we have a team headed back to Kuve, Ghana where we’ve been sending Advent Conspiracy funds, building a school and the like.
  2. And next year we have all of these teams headed out plus a woman’s team headed to Kathmandu, Nepal to work with women at risk for sex trafficking.
- D. These trips will change your life. Go. Make plans for next year. Go.
- E. OK, back to the text. The seventy-two come back. They are all excited. They are saying, “Jesus, you’ll never guess what happened.”

**IV. V18: Jesus replies with a very confusing statement, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”**

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<sup>3</sup> Consider how you might have felt if you had been sent out: 1) as “lambs among wolves (10:3); 2) with lots of statements about rejection (10:10-16); 3) not being allowed to take any provisions (10:4) and being told to eat whatever you were served (10:7-8).

A. There is no comprehensive development of evil in the Bible. We get a piece here and a piece there.<sup>4</sup> And sometimes it's not completely clear what's going on. But it's pretty clear that this fall happened long before this and that means that this is a figurative statement. What Jesus is saying is that their going out shifted the momentum.<sup>5</sup>

B. As more people sign on with His kingdom – become champions of love, grace and truth. As more people Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works, the good guys start to win. However, V20

**V. V20: However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”<sup>6</sup>**

A. The word “joy” (or some derivative of it) makes its second appearance here. In verse 17 we are told that they “returned with joy.” Here Jesus talks about their “rejoicing”. In the next verse we’ll see that Jesus is “full of joy through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I said some things about evil a few weeks ago and will again, so let me pause here only long enough to say: 1) Evil is real. I'd love to tell you that it's not. But it is. 2) Evil is limited. Satan is not God's equal but opposite. He is a limited being that we need not fear if we stand with Christ. 3) Evil still rages. Evil has been mortally wounded, but its effects are everywhere: pain, suffering, injustice, wrong, death. The system is broken. Christ's mission ultimately includes making things right. He came to die to pay our moral debt, but he came for more than that. He came to restore things – to not just defeat but destroy evil. And as Paul tells us in I Corinthians, the last thing that will die is death itself.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus was there in the distant past when Satan was cast out of heaven. That event happened long before the disciples were sent out.

<sup>6</sup> Remember, this is not even proof that you are a Christian (Luke 9:1-2)

<sup>7</sup> This is one of only two places where we are told that Jesus rejoices – the other being when Lazarus died (John 11) which reads: Then Jesus told his disciples plainly, ‘Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you might believe.’ There are other references to Jesus joy (John 15:11; 17:13) but not to an instance of his present act of rejoicing. His earthly pilgrimage was a season of great burden-bearing. ‘He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’” This does not mean that Jesus was not joyful even when he was sorrowful – they are not mutually exclusive (cf 2 Cor. 6:10).

B. Here we are told how to gain joy. Here we get very specific advice about how we can be joyful in a world that is broken: we need to cultivate an eternal perspective – to think about and bank on Heaven. Because Eternity Changes Everything. We have to learn to live with one eye looking out beyond the horizon – peering into heaven, where things work, where God’s will is done and his love and mercy are pervasive. When we do that, then we gain a sense of well-being and peace and joy that is bigger than the storms we’re facing.

1. Let me be clear, this world is not evil. God created it and announced that it was good. But it’s broken, and it’s a battle zone. And evil has infiltrated everything, including in our own hearts. The infection rages. And though we might enjoy periods of joy, evil is still there and it will rear its ugly head.

2. We have to be looking ahead. We cannot hold onto the joy God offers without a growing, overwhelming confidence that Jesus is who He says is and that He did what He said He did – and that our ever after is secure. That as he promised he has gone on to prepare a place for us.

3. Some people think this is the land of the living and that when we die we go to the land of the dead. No! This is the land of the dying. This is a world that is broken. Here we get knocked down – we get cancer and have strokes, our marriages unravel and we get fired from work. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus we get our bearings back – we can rally, we can press through the pain that riddles this life because we know, Heaven waits. Eternity changes everything.

## **VI. V21: At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit**

A. God exists – and always has – as one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

B. Part of what the Holy Spirit does is bring joy. The fruit of the Spirit – that is, the supernatural result of yielding our life to God, includes joy. The list is: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Joy is a byproduct of a life yielded to the Holy Spirit.

C. We can have a deep sense of well-being – a supernatural serenity and happiness – even when things are coming undone all around us as we lean further and further into God.

D. Jesus was not full of joy because of his circumstances – they were bad and getting worse. He is headed to Jerusalem and he knows that he will suffer and die there. His joy comes from God.

**VII. V21: At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.**

A. There are two important things to note here. First, it appears as though Christ’s default response is to pray. He is talking with the people who are reporting back to him one moment, and the next he is praying, praising God for what he has done. We will be in a series on prayer soon. ‘Talking with God’ will grow out of Luke 11:1, where the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. I’ve been working on this series for a while. I am excited about it. By the way, before I forget, please send me your questions about prayer. Email me. But let’s keep moving.

B. The second thing to be aware of is that we have another confusing statement that does not mean what you might think it means. “I praise you Father because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to the little children.”

C. This passage, alongside I Cor. 1:20 – where Paul talks about making foolish the wisdom of this world – are two verses that some use to justify a lack of education. Look, higher education has problems that go way beyond the skyrocketing cost. I spent eight years as a college pastor and another ten ministering to college pastors, so I feel like I know this problem as well as most.

D. And one of my huge frustrations was the demand placed upon Christian groups in particular (but other groups as well) to be “neutral.” I did my best to explain that neutral wasn’t neutral – that it was its own position. The idea that every idea is equally valid is called relativism and is, quite literally, nonsensical. In demanding that every idea is equal you are forcing one idea – the idea that every idea is equal – above other ideas. I was never quite able to get them to see the bias of their own position. And this is just one of the many problems with much of higher education. But I’ll save all of that for another day.

E. Instead of that let me note that Jesus is not against clear and rigorous thinking. He is not against school. He tells us to love God with all of our mind and Paul writes about our need to renew our mind. What Jesus is speaking against here is the arrogance and intellectual snobbery of the Pharisees. And what he is celebrating is the child-like faith of children – not the childishness of children, but their trusting faith.<sup>8</sup>

**VIII. V22: All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**

A. This is another plank in the argument Luke is making. And this one is big. The word “know” is powerful. In the Old Testament we are told that “Adam knew Eve and she conceived.” The reason it’s stated this way is not because God is a prude and is embarrassed by sex so He used the word “know” euphemistically. The word “know” is used because it hints at a deep relational intimacy. What Jesus is saying is that his relationship with God the Father is a very profound one.

B. Again, this is another part of the answer Luke is providing for the question Herod Agrippa asked back at the beginning of Luke 9 – which is the question of all questions: Who is Jesus? Luke is writing to persuade Theophilus – and others – that Jesus is God. And in this section he is particularly focused on answering the question that is framed at the beginning of Luke 9. As I count, this is the sixth way:

1. First, he reported on Christ’s ability to supernaturally feed 5,000
2. Then he reported Peter’s response to the question, who do you say that I am? Peter had replied: You are God’s Messiah. You are the Christ.
3. Then we have The Transfiguration – where Jesus released his glory
4. Then we have Jesus claiming to be the Son of Man – a huge claim, equivalent to saying, “I am the most important person ever and will be worshipped by everyone.”
5. Then we have Jesus demonstrating a power over evil that no one else had every displayed.

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<sup>8</sup> The way Jesus and Paul warn against pride demands careful thinking! We are not being told not to think. This is a statement against pride and for humility. Serious, careful, faithful and humble thinking leads to a knowledge of God.

6. Now we have Jesus claiming a unity – a closeness, a connection – with God that no one else has.

a) He is also calling God “Father” at a time when no one did so. This was a scandal in its own right. The Jews were scared to use God’s name and here Jesus is calling him Daddy.

b) And He is saying that He is the only way to get to God. Can you imagine Jesus saying this today? Can you imagine the headlines? The responses of Deepak Chopra, the Dalai Lama and others? For the record, this claim wasn’t very popular back then – in fact, it led to him being killed. If Jesus had made this comment today the social media would light up, He’d be vilified in the blogs and His Q scores would plummet.

IX. Finally, **V23: Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”**

A. Jesus huddles them up and says: guys, people have been waiting for a long time for this day. Generation after generation kept asking, “When will the Messiah appear?” The wait has gone on for a couple thousand years. Well, I’ve finally arrived and you are here to see it.

B. It was always all about me. Remember all the things the prophets said – when Micah talked about the fact that I’d be born in Bethlehem? Isaiah talked about one who would suffer and die? That was about me. Remember the sacrificial system? The Passover lamb? Me, me, me. It was all – it is all – about Me. I’m The One. You are very fortunate to be alive right now. You are in a very privileged position.

- C. That is what Jesus said to them. In some ways, we are in a more privileged position. But it requires keeping a few big ideas front and center – namely that our names are recorded in heaven! Is yours? There are lots of lists out there that you don't want to be on: IRS audit lists, spam lists, detention list. But this is one list where you do want to see your name. In fact, if your name is only ever going to be on one list – make it this one: the Lambs Book of Life.<sup>9</sup>
- X. Let's step back from this a bit. There is gold in this passage. There is a lot to think about here, but there is advice from God here about how to have joy. About how to raise our joy index.
- A. And if we step back just a bit to get our bearings – and weave this advice in with some of the other things the Bible says – what we take away is that joy is a by-product of a relationship with God and a life rightly lived. And God holds it out as a reward.
- B. Legalism might be defined as an effort to use fear and guilt to keep us in line. Well, the Bible often uses joy.<sup>10</sup>
- C. Lots of people today think that joy comes by acquiring what you want. That you go directly after it – that you do not deny yourself anything. That doesn't work. We could look at what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes. We could also read the Greeks. At a big level philosophy is a failed experiment. After 3,000 years of trying to figure out “the good life” there is no agreement among philosophy about what works. But there is awareness of what doesn't. Hedonism doesn't. Oh, pleasure is pleasure for a while. But then there is a backlash. If you think, “I really like chocolate cake, therefore that's all I'm going to eat,” you don't grow joyful you gain weight and feel bad and have health issues.

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<sup>9</sup> At the moment, many – especially in the Middle East – live in fear of suicide bombers. They are willing to blow themselves up in order to go instantly to Paradise. The President and others argue that we can slow down the recruitment efforts of radical Islam by having better educational and job opportunities for young men. I suspect there is some truth there. However, as David Brooks has recently noted, that is not ultimately the solution. That solution comes from people who are far more interested in getting into Princeton than Paradise – who are living for the moment. So, what is the difference between suicide bombers and what Jesus is suggesting here? Well, I think there is a large difference between being willing to die so that someone can know the love of God and killing them so you get to 72 virgins more quickly.

<sup>10</sup> Some Christians wrongly seek to be masochistic, talking only about the “price of discipleship.” In fact, in the past Christians would literally whip themselves trying to subdue the flesh. They were all about the pain. That is not what we are called to. A life of faith can be – should be! – a life of joy. Even God himself is after His own pleasure. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2).

D. Men and women, joy comes from a relationship with God and it is the by-product of a life rightly lived. And that turns out to be a life quite different than what we might think. For example:

1. We have lots of people who think joy comes from being served. I'd be happy if I had more people doing on me. Jesus says, serve others. You want joy? Serve.

2. Many today think that joy comes from freedom and independence. The Bible says, "you want joy?" seek God. Serve God. Start your day with God in Bible reading and prayer.

3. People think, "I'll be happy when I get revenge. That will be so sweet." The Bible says, "love your enemies. Pray for them. Forgive them."

4. Lots of people think: I'll be happy when I have a huge pile of money. And the Bible says, "live generously. Give, give, give. Store up treasure in heaven."

XI. Men and women, you can have a deep, ongoing sense of joy even in the midst of life in a broken world. It will require some effort – principally to look beyond the moment and into eternity. But this is something we are not just allowed to do, but encouraged to do.

A. Let me end by reading verse 20 again. It's worth committing to memory: Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."