

Lessons in Kingdom Ministry  
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We somewhat begin a new section today in the Gospel of Luke. I say somewhat because while there's a slight shift of focus and theme, Luke is still serving his main idea, which is giving an accurate account of the ministry and work of Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord. Everything in this book is supposed to fit together; when you read your Bibles try to see the intent or the direction of the author throughout a book. The author has a plan; find that plan. Luke is no different.

But there are various sub points or sub themes in a document this large. So, we study these sub points and sub themes because they all point to the big idea. Let's begin by reading the text (READ Luke 8:1-3).

In these three verses I want to draw your attention to three points. One point is a continuation of what we've already noticed; Luke reinforces an important theme. And then in addition, there are two new ideas presented. When I studied this short passage and these three points, I saw helpful lessons for you and me in ministry. When I say *ministry* I'm referring to our collective work serving others with the grace and truth of Christ. God has given us a kingdom to work for; that's our collective mission. So, what I'm going to do is show you what this text is saying, but apply it to our ministry life together so we can join Jesus in the ministry he has given us in Taylor County. So, let's take them one at a time.

Luke still has laser-like focus on the ministry of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God. Do you see that in vs. 1? "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." The introduction of Jesus' ministry of the kingdom has received significant attention from Luke in his Gospel because it's so important to knowing Jesus and the salvation he offers us.

The message of the kingdom was probably best articulated back in Luke 4:18-19a when Jesus himself opened up the book of Isaiah and said this about himself (READ vs. 18-19a). The message of the kingdom is about good news to the poor, liberty and release for those captive to sin, healing to the sick and the blessing of God with the coming of Jesus. We've already seen how these things are fulfilled in the rich offer of forgiveness from sin by Jesus. Salvation, in its truest form, has been sins and debts cancelled by Jesus. Over and over again he's telling people, "your sins are forgiven." He's ruffled the feathers of the religious leaders by doing so; "Who does this guy think he is? Nobody can forgive sins, but God alone."

Notice how our sin is the real problem. Our true poverty is the absence of God's life-giving presence in our life due to sin. But when our sins are forgiven, we gain access to the presence of God and are given the riches of the kingdom. Our true sickness is a soul plagued by the disease and impurity of sin. But when our sins are forgiven we are healed of our true malady. Our bondage to Satan and the powers of evil is our slavery to sin that locks us in a prison of destruction and

death. But when our sins are cancelled and forgiven by God we no longer are captive to Satan's power.

Our problem is our own sin. Not someone else's sin; our sin. That's why John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by proclaiming a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Over and over again in these first 7 chapters this has been a theme and Jesus is not going to stop doing this.

And let's put the cherry on top and finish the thought: how does one receive this good news of the kingdom? Turn. Turn to God. Don't be ignorant to the resistance in the world and in our own sinful selves to turning to God. We don't want to turn to God; we're told we don't need to turn to God. It's humbling; it's offends our pride. I can handle this myself, thank you very much!

In Acts 7 a godly man named Stephen gave a long sermon right before a hostile and angry crowd murdered him. He was trying to convince them to trust in Jesus Christ, but he knew they wouldn't. Towards the end of his sermon he throws a few stones of his own by rebuking the people for their lack of faith. The very first thing he says of them in vs. 51 is this: "You stiff-necked people... you always resist the Holy Spirit." Stiff-necked. We've all had a rough night's sleep where we wake up and our neck is killing us. It's feels sore and stiff. We have to keep turning our entire body to look around; our necks are so stiff. That's one of God's favorite word-pictures for people who refuse to turn, to repent. People who won't turn to God have stiff-necks. They keep going in their destructive path.

Now, that's the message of the kingdom (I couldn't resist talking about it again), but that's not the point I want to draw your attention to. Jump back to Luke 4:43; when the people wanted Jesus to stay with them, we read this "but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'" Now, in vs. 1 of chapter 8 that's exactly what Jesus is doing; he's going to more cities and villages preaching this same good news of the kingdom.

I see a helpful lesson for ministry in Jesus' example. Jesus didn't get bored or disinterested in this work. Jesus knows this is what the people need so he keeps on giving them exactly what they need. He doesn't get to a new town and think, "You know, I've preached this message of the kingdom for a while; maybe let's try something new." No. He remains focused on the most important message, the message of the kingdom, and doesn't grow tired of the work.

I do grow tired of the work of ministry sometimes. I can get bored doing the same thing over and over again. Maybe you do, too. Maybe you've been teaching 1st graders in SS or in Awana and you're teaching the same verses, the same stories every year. Or maybe the challenge of working with teenagers or playing on the worship team isn't as fulfilling as it once was and you're starting to feel fatigue. Or consider your ministry at home to your family. Some of you moms might be bored with 2 year old problems and 2 year old interests. Now, we do need Sabbath breaks and rest; there is a time when we need to take a step back. But the reason for stepping back isn't because we're

bored. There's a right perseverance that we need to have in kingdom work. It's important; don't stop!

I call it *maintenance ministry*; ministry that the church of Jesus Christ needs over and over again. Guess what, FBC, we need that. Maintenance ministry can sound stagnant and even stuck in a rut. And yes, there are certainly ways we can get too comfortable in our ministry here with one another or at home that's not helpful. And new things are usually more exciting to me, too. But remember this: every new batch of 1st graders *needs* to learn John 3:16. Every new batch of Jr. highers *needs* adults ready to love them just as they are. The church of Jesus Christ *needs* to sing some of the same songs of grace over and over again just like they know them. Just because you might find yourself doing the same ministry over and over again doesn't mean it's not incredibly important.

One of the keys to persevering in ministry and not growing tired of doing good in following the example of Jesus is placing the needs of others and the needs of the ministry above your own desires and good. This is love; sacrificing for the good of another. And I can do this, I can sacrifice for the needs of others as I'm cultivating a life of love through a constant humbling of myself. Again, I'm not saying there are not times when we need breaks and we're called into something new. But ask for grace to persevere in ministry following the example of Christ.

Secondly, this paragraph introduces a shift in Jesus' interaction with his disciples. They are *with* Jesus in a new way. Before, the disciples are there, they are even identified, but they seem to fit into the larger group of the crowd. They are kind of eavesdropping and seeing Jesus do his thing along with everyone else. But in chapter 8, the disciples are with him in a way they weren't so much before. Probably the most significant difference is that Jesus' disciples are given more direct and private teaching from Jesus. Our Lord doesn't really have specific or unique teaching to his disciples prior to Chapter 8, but now we will see Jesus pulling his disciples aside and saying things like, "Let me explain what I just taught" or "I'm letting you see and understand what these things mean, but I'm not doing that for others."

Why is this? Why does Jesus spend more time with his disciples instructing them? The answer, I believe, is that Jesus will soon send them out for ministry themselves. So far, the work has been done by Jesus. We don't get any sense prior to chapter 8 that the disciples are doing any ministry themselves. They are basically tagging along; Jesus is the worker of grace. But that's going to change. In just one chapter (ch. 9), Jesus will send out his followers to be messengers of grace as well. He wants to get them ready.

The only way you and I will be ready for ministry is if we are with Jesus, too. That's our second lesson. There's preparation and teaching we need from Jesus to grow more and more effective in our ministry to others. Now, let me say that a person born again today can be effective in ministry tomorrow. If they merely bear witness to God's saving grace by telling others how they got saved, God can and does ignite that testimony with power from on high so more get saved. But

being able to help people grow more obedient in faith requires servants better prepared and instructed by Jesus.

Will you do that, FBC? Will you do what's required to be with Jesus and hear him teach to you? There's a sacrifice in that. Our continued growth in maturity, in wisdom and in faith is the result of intentional faith decisions on our part to grow. Intentional steps to listen, to apply, to serve. Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Growth comes from God. But he uses means, doesn't he? He used Paul to plant the seeds of the gospel in the lives of these now Corinthian believers. He used Apollos to water those seeds. In God's sovereign plan an atmosphere of growth and maturity was prepared so that God's life-giving power would produce the growth He wanted. Could have God produced the growth without Paul or Apollos? Of course he can. God can do whatever he chooses. But does he? No, he doesn't. Time and time again in the scriptures we constantly see God's regular and preferred method of ministry happens through the obedience of his people. Obedience to God is a test in itself for us to grow in Christ. Yes, God showed up in a burning bush. And he spoke through a donkey. But he only did those things once in a special time for a special reason. The commands of the NT are clear; God gives teachers, pastors and leaders to the church for us to grow in our knowledge and faith. Will you do that? Will you make the sacrifices needed to be with Jesus and learn with him? Do it; it's worth it.

Let's read vs. 2 and 3 for our last lesson in ministry (READ). Not only were the 12 disciples with Jesus and about to hear instruction from their master, but so were a group of women. We don't know how many women, but after 3 of the women were specifically mentioned it says so were "many others." What's *many*? I'm not sure. Probably more than 12. Notice three things about these women. First of all, it seems these women were apart of this inner circle of followers. The image of Jesus walking around with just his 12 disciples probably isn't accurate; the group seems larger than that. Some of these women certainly were with Jesus in the same way. Maybe even more men and women not identified in this group. And I don't know if we have to think these disciples were always with Jesus. Maybe there were reasons to go home for a season and then come back and find Jesus.

The second observation is that these women were direct recipients of Jesus' ministry. It says these women had been healed of evil spirit and infirmities. This is how it's usually supposed to work: we are served by the sovereign grace of God, all due to his mercy and love, and in response we follow him and serve him. That's exactly what these women did.

Finally, notice their role in Jesus' ministry at the end of vs. 3; they were women "who provided for them out of their means." Not only did Jesus break the social norms by including women as his disciples, but he actually was willing to humbly be supported by them. I have to admit, there's a pride in me that would struggle with assuming such a humble posture. I'm supposed to be self-sufficient, independent. I have this picture in my mind of my mom and my little sister coming to my rescue when I want the accolades of being the knight in shining armor.

One of the reasons why receiving this kind of support and help is humbling for us is that it makes us feel in debt; it makes us feel that someone has something on us. We're tempted to scramble and pay people back hoping that we can somehow we can get on level ground.

But, think of it: Jesus lived off of support. He operated his little itinerant ministry and traveling seminary for men and women off of the finances of these resourceful and wealthy women.

What's interesting to note as we move into our ministry lesson is that the Apostle Paul makes a big deal about not living on support. For him, living on support served to be a hindrance to his gospel work. But for Jesus, it's clear that living on support was not an obstacle or problem. Here's the lesson for us: Jesus gives us an example that doing ministry with the financial support of others is the right thing to do. Like I alluded to before, I think we want to lift up tentmaker ministry, how Paul lived and ministered, as the true noble path. But I think that's wrong. In one case, tentmaking ministry is the right approach; in other cases, receiving support is the right plan. What makes the difference? I would say this: what will prosper the gospel ministry the most? Paul didn't reject receiving support because it was less noble or dignified; he rejected living on support because it hurt the mission. That's what we should care about.

This makes a difference to us first of all because we are senders. We support missionaries. We should be glad to do this just like, I'm sure, these faithful women were glad to support Jesus. If you give to the ministries of FBC, a portion of the money you give goes to support missionaries both domestically and internationally. Rejoice in that! Even better, look for updates from the Mission Board so you know how your support is being used.

But also, some of you may or will receive support yourself. We'd love to have more people say, "God is calling me to go and make disciples!" Living with the financial support of others, like Jesus, may be in your future. I know some of you currently, right now, live and do ministry with the support of faithful partners. Rejoice in that partnership! Be glad in God's provision! Resist the sins of pride and self-sufficiency that lie to you and say that doing ministry with support is second best. Jesus received the support of his female disciples; if it was good enough for Jesus it's certainly good enough for you.

So, here are the lessons we learned today for kingdom ministry.

1. Keep persevering in the necessary work. It can get tiring; new things are sometimes more exciting, but remember what's needed.
2. Receive continued instruction by being with Jesus.
3. Give and receive financial support if it helps kingdom work.

Learning these lessons will continue to make us effective in ministry.

Key Verse: Luke 8:1-2a ~ Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women.

Questions for the week

- What are some reasons we might not persevere in kingdom ministry?
- Name a several obstacles that are currently keeping you from growing in maturity?
- Has God changed any thoughts this morning related to ministry? Share them with a friend.