

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Rejoice Over the Results Versus the Motivation"*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 15:17**. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Luke 15:11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. **13** Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. **17** "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!"

You may be seated. Let's pray.

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We are working our way through what is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son.

I saw something in the account that I wanted to elaborate on, especially with VBS approaching, which is that we should look at the results of what happens, versus the motivation.

Instead of jumping right into it, I want to back up and look at some other examples that make the same point.

We will turn back to Luke, but for now please turn to **Numbers 11**.

Look with me at **verse 11**...ⁱ

Numbers 11:11 Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? **12** Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? **13** Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' **14** I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. **15** If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

How does Moses sound?

In a word, overwhelmed!

He was leading an entire nation – millions of people – and he was crushed beneath their complaining and grumbling.

It was so unbearable he even asked God to kill him!

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He shares with God – in a frustrated way – how he's feeling.

He uses language that makes him sound like a mother to all these children, such as **conceive, give them birth, carry them, and nurse**.

He reminds me of a mother with a bunch of children who are out of control. She might not just get mad at her children. She might also get mad at her husband.

I am not saying that has ever happened in our home, but I have heard it happening in other people's homes.

God is the husband who's in trouble. Look how He responds...

Numbers 11:16 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. **17** And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

God told Moses to appoint elders. They prefigure elders in the church.

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God is going to take some of the Holy Spirit He'd given to Moses and give it to these men so they can help him with this load.

And then something happened when these men received the Spirit...they started prophesying...

Numbers 11:25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. **26** Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.

But not everyone liked them prophesying...

Numbers 11:27 And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

This **young man** thought Moses was the only one who should be prophesying, so he's alarmed...and so is someone else...

Numbers 11:28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.”

Now here's the question...

We saw how overwhelmed Moses was. How do you think he's going to feel about these men prophesying?

He's going to be thrilled!

He thinks he finally has some Spirit-filled men to help him.

Look at **verse 29**...

Numbers 11:29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

Moses said, “I wish every Israelite prophesied. I'll take all the help I can get! I want God's Spirit falling on everyone. I would like to see everyone involved.”

Basically, he said rejoice over the results.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Rejoice over people (Lesson One) using their gifts.

There is so much work to be done for God's kingdom we should rejoice when people use their gifts to serve the Lord.

Let me show you another example before I provide more application.

Please turn to **Mark 3**.

I've told you many times before that much of what took place in the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament, and the Old Testament event with Moses prefigures a similar event with Jesus.

Mark 3:20 Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.

The one person in Scripture with a ministry that was more crushing than Moses was Jesus. Think about all the people pulling on Him to ask Him questions or ask Him to heal them or their loved ones.

Whenever He turned around there were more needs. He didn't have time to eat, drink, or sleep.

Mark 3:21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

It got so bad his family thought he was crazy.

With this in mind please turn to **Mark 9**.

Look at **verse 38**...

Mark 9:38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

There was a man who was not one of the twelve disciples, and it doesn't say he was TRYING to cast out demons. It says he WAS casting out demons.

And there are a few other things I want you to notice about this...

First, this account is similar to the account with Moses: instead of Joshua trying to stop people from prophesying, John is trying to stop people from performing exorcisms.

But notice the use of the word **we**: **WE saw someone...WE tried to stop him**. John is speaking but all the disciples tried to stop this man.

And notice it says we **TRIED** to stop him, versus we STOPPED him.

Not even all twelve disciples working together could stop this man.

Briefly look at **verse 17** to see something that makes this account ironic ...

Mark 9:17 And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and THEY WERE NOT ABLE."

A man with a demon possessed son had taken his son to the disciples to cast out the demon, but they were not able to do so.

Then they tried to stop this man from doing what they had been unable to do.

Instead of trying to stop this man, they should have learned from him!

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Second, think about what they were trying to stop him from doing: casting out demons!

It says demons...plural! He didn't just cast out A DEMON, he cast out DEMONS!

This man was like a professional exorciser.

It would be one thing if they were trying to stop him from:

- Stealing...
- Lying...
- Interrupting Jesus' teaching and ministry...

Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that these are the A-postles and not the B-postles.

You can put this in your notes...

Whenever people cast out demons, you don't stop them. You let them do it!

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Third - just so there's no question this man really was on the Lord's side – notice the words **in your name**:

- This wasn't a magical formula describing what the man said.
- This is describing what the man DID: he cast demons out IN JESUS' NAME.

This shows he was doing it with the power and authority that came from being one of Jesus's disciples.

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Fourth, at the end of **verse 38** notice they said why they tried to stop him: **because he does not follow US**.

It would be one thing if they were upset the man wasn't following Christ, but they were upset the man wasn't following them!

- We should never want people to follow us. If we're ever upset people aren't following us, we know something's wrong.
- Jesus was the Teacher and the disciples were the students or followers. They were supposed to make other disciples follow Christ Him...which is what we should do too.

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Interestingly, the fact that John said this to Jesus shows He thought they were doing something good in trying to stop this man:

- He didn't say something that He thought was going to get him corrected.
- He said something that He thought would impress Jesus.

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Now, thinking about what we read in **Mark 3** – and how busy Jesus was – how do you think He's going to feel about someone helping Him remove demons from the land?

Consider how similar Jesus's response is to Moses's response...

Mark 9:39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **40** For the one who is not against us is for us.

Basically, Jesus told them to rejoice over the results.

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Not long after I started pastoring this church another pastor in the area took me out to lunch. During the course of the conversation I still vividly remember something he said to me...

“Right now you walk about 3 feet off the ground. But in the future you are going to walk around town and you are going to see people who USED TO go to your church.”

I remember thinking – and I mean this sincerely – which shows how naïve, or proud, or both I was at the time...

“Well, I am sorry that has happened to you, but I bet the people who come to my church will stay at my church.”

Last week was the Planters Day parade and guess what I saw when I walked around town?

People who USED TO go to my church!

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Now, assuming these people are serving other churches, I have two choices...

I can be like the disciples and complain that these people are not with us. Basically, I can be upset about these people leaving my church.

Or I can remember that it's not really my church. And assuming these people are serving at other churches, I can rejoice at the results that Christ is still being served.

And I can be thankful that God gave me a season to minister to them:

- And that hopefully they grew while they were here.
- And that God might be using growth they experienced at our church to better help them serve Him at another church.

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Let me show you one more place. Turn to **Philippians 1**.

Listen to these verses...

Philippians 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.

In other words, some people preach the gospel with bad motivation, but others with good motivation.

Philippians 1:16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

Good motivation.

Philippians 1:17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

Bad motivation. They were actually preaching the gospel to try to hurt Paul!

Philippians 1:18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

He could rejoice in the results.

Paul's maturity has to challenge you:

- He didn't care about himself.

- He cared about Christ and others.

And this brings us to lesson 2...

Rejoice over people (Lesson Two) preaching the gospel.

Paul said:

- *Even if they preach Christ to compete with each other...*
- *Even if they preach Christ hoping to add to my affliction...*
- *Even if they preach Christ while spreading lies about me...*
- *Even if they preach Christ for financial reasons...*
- *Even if they preach Christ for attention or fame...*

I rejoice that Christ is preached!

Paul chose to leave all the motivations to God to sort out:

And this is a good rule for the Christian life...

Rejoice over the results and leave people's motivations to God.

Now turn to **Luke 15** and I will show you what made me think of this sermon.

Look at **verse 17**...

Luke 15:17 “**But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!**”

Now let me ask you to think about something...

Why did the son want to return to his father?

Honestly, because he was hungry.

He wanted to go home because he thought he was going to starve to death.

- He thought about how much better his father's servants were doing than he was doing.
- He thought it would be better than being in some faraway land starving to death.

This is not the most spiritual reason, is it?

In fact, it is completely physical:

- Don't we want to read that he was broken over his sin?
- Don't we want to read that he feels terrible about how sinful he has been and how wickedly he has behaved?

Don't we want to read that he's like the tax collector in the parable?

Luke 18:13 **But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’**

It is not the godliest reason to return to his father. It is actually selfish.

But here's what I would say about this...

It doesn't matter why people return to the Father. It just matters that they return.

And this brings us to lesson three...

Rejoice over people (Lesson Three) repenting.

I would say it like this...

Sometimes people:

- come to church,
- or pray
- or look to God
- or want to turn their lives around

But it's not for spiritual reasons:

- Maybe it is completely selfish
- Maybe they just want something
- Maybe they are tired of suffering

We can still rejoice over what is happening, because even if they are looking to God for the wrong reasons...they are still looking to God...which is probably more than they were doing before.

Whatever God uses to get people through the doors shouldn't bother us. We should rejoice over the results: He got them through the doors!

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Consider these verses:

- **John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.**
- **John 6:65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."**

Isn't God the One drawing people...even if they don't know they're being drawn?

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Have you ever had an unbeliever talk to you about Christianity, not because they had sincere questions, but because they wanted to argue with you or criticize your beliefs?

I would say that is still a good thing, because it is getting a Christian an opportunity to talk to a non-Christian about Christianity.

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Anyone know who Lee Strobel is?

Lee Strobel is a journalist and lawyer. When his wife became a Christian, he doubted her beliefs and began investigating them by applying his experiences as a journalist and lawyer.

His motivation was terrible. He wasn't trying to become a Christian. He was trying to disprove Christianity.

But through his investigating he became a believer and wrote *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*.

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A few weeks ago, a homosexual journalist contacted me. He knew I was a pastor and an author of a Christian marriage book. He wanted to know if he could interview me, and here is part of the emails he sent me...

“This interview is for a print article about biblical therapy. I would like to talk to you about counseling, especially as it pertains to sexual orientation (conversion therapy). I would like to learn more about the specific kind of biblical counseling you provide to congregants, or the children of congregants, who come to you seeking ‘help’ with homosexuality. Would you be able to hop on the phone with me and explain what kind of counseling you would provide in such a scenario?”

To be honest with you, I wasn’t too thrilled about being in an article written by a practicing homosexual whom I thought might just want to argue with me, twist my words, or misrepresent me to make Christ look bad.

But I also saw as an opportunity to share scriptural truth with a practicing homosexual...and all his readers if he quoted me.

We spoke on the phone, and I thought it went very well. I told him that I really appreciated his attitude and he said the same to me:

- I was able to dismiss some of the myths he’d heard about Christians and homosexuality
- Although he did not agree with me that homosexuality is a sin, I was able to tell him what the Bible says about homosexuality...so that at least he heard what the Bible says about homosexuality.
- I was also able to let him know that being a Christian doesn’t mean being better than anyone else. It simply means we are forgiven because of our faith in Christ. I told him that I need Christ as much as the worst sinner he could imagine.
- Although I didn’t sense any change in him, I was able to share the Gospel with him, and I’m thankful for being able to sow those seeds

We concluded the conversation thanking each other.

I would say the result of the phone call was more important than his motivation for calling me.

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Next week is VBS. Who can tell me why many people are going to bring their children?

Because they think it is one week of free babysitting.

And you know what I think?

I think praise God!

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Let me share something with you and I apologize ahead of time if some of you already know this...

Twenty years ago I was teaching elementary school with a few Christians who kept inviting me to church. Elwyn was one of them. But I wouldn’t go.

Then my brother died of a drug overdose and I was struggling. One of the Christians said, “Look, you haven’t been willing to come to church before, but you should come now to talk to the pastor because he lost his brother when he was about your age and he might be able to help you.”

So to be perfectly clear:

- I wouldn’t go to church to pray
- I wouldn’t go to church because that’s what God commands
- I wouldn’t go to church to worship
- I wouldn’t go to church to hear the gospel
- I wouldn’t go to church for any of the reasons we should go to church

And even when I did go to church I basically went for selfish reasons: I was hurting and I thought someone would help me. That’s it.

To make a long story short, I did go to church and I heard the gospel for the first time in my life and soon after I became a Christian.

So you know what I think now when I think about going to church 20 years ago for selfish reasons?

I think, “Thank you Lord for bringing me to church 20 years ago for selfish reasons.”

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Let me conclude with this...

1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

There is a lot of planting and watering happening. Hopefully we plant and water throughout our Christian lives.

But who makes it grow?

We can rejoice over the results – or the growth – and leave the motivations in God's hands because He's the One at work.

- He's able to take our little efforts and turn them into something great.
- He's able to make all things work together for good.
- He's the Judge of the earth who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. He can take lame motivations like the prodigal son's desire for food and turn it into one of the most powerful accounts in all of Scripture.

Our God can do those things and we can rejoice.

Let's pray

ⁱ Numbers 11:1 And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. 3 So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

We could have another sermon just on complaining. God doesn't like it, and He definitely didn't like it after everything he had done for the Israelites:

- He unleashed plagues on Egypt to get them released from their captivity
- He parted the Red Sea to deliver them from the Egyptians who were chasing them
- He led them with a cloud during the day that protected them from the sun
- He was a pillar of fire at night that kept them warm
- He gave them water from the rock
- He gave them bread they could walk outside their tents and pick up off the ground

Yet they're complaining.

To teach them a lesson He unleashed fire that burned parts of the outside of the camp.

Unfortunately, they didn't learn. Look at **verse 4**...

Numbers 11:4 Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6 But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

You might remember this chapter from a few weeks ago when we looked at Israel complaining about the manna and asking for meat. We are going to skip over those verses.