

A long time ago, Connie and I decided to have a couple over to the house over for dinner. The idea was to cook some chicken breasts on the grill on the deck. That was the plan anyway.

- The grill was generating a little heat underneath, but the chicken was not cooking as it should have.
- I was so embarrassed when I realized that I was out of propane.
- We just don't know, what we don't know.
- The propane tank felt like it had gas in it.
- Connie cooked the chicken on the stove. Fortunately, our new friends were easy going.

Life can be difficult, especially when trying to navigate with a only sliver of knowledge and experience. We have never been at this phase of life before.

The Bible talks a lot about knowing and not knowing. For example,

- Jesus encountered a rich young ruler who asked him, 'What do I still lack (Mt 19:20 NIV)?'
- Paul said, 'I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet (Ro 7:7 NLT)."'
- He also wrote, 'We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Ro 8:26 NIV).'

Not knowing is generally pictured as an empty container, like my propane tank. Knowing is pictured as a container being filled up with knowledge or experience.

Today's message focuses in on three episodes of lack: Apollos, the Ephesian disciples, and the seven sons of Sceva. In each episode, they did not know they lacked.

## Overflowing Joy

### Acts 19

One of my favorite passages is, 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ro 15:12 NIV).'

- Hope is a future orientation, a vision of what can be.
- Joy and peace are emotional states.
- To trust Him is the only action we do; it is a choice based on faith.
- The result is an overflowing of hope.



## 1. Background.

Recently, we have been looking at literary segments within Luke-Acts. Today's segment highlights lack and fulness.

- Specifically, we have been looking at how joy runs throughout Luke-Acts.

Joy is important because ...

- Joy is attractational. It is missional to live a life of joy. The way our country is right now, we need to be people who have an attractational joy all over us. Let me add another reason to highlight joy:
- Joy is a fulfilled life. Jesus said that the mingling / cooperation of both human and divine brings joy; it is why we were created. Jesus said, abide or 'remain in my love' ... 'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:11 NIV).'
- Overflowing joy comes from abiding with Jesus.

We don't know the deep level of joy we are missing until we remain in God's love and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

- 'Joy is the meaning of human life ... (it) justifies created existence.'<sup>1</sup> – Jürgen Moltman
- God fills the lack in our life with Himself, so that we can have overflowing joy.

In Acts, Luke wants us to see the unstoppable Good News.

The Good News Advances from ... to

- Jerusalem, Acts 2-7 (30 A.D.). Three years after Pentecost, the Good News goes to
- Samaria, Acts 8 (31-33 A.D.), + the Ethiopian eunuch to Africa. Then 7-10 years after Pentecost the gospel goes to the Gentiles.
- Caesarea, Acts 10-11 (37-40 A.D.). Twenty four years after Pentecost, we see weaknesses among the Christians in Ephesus.
- Ephesus, Acts 19 (54 A.D.). And 30 years after Pentecost we have the Good News going to Rome. I spoke on this last week.
- Rome, Acts 25-28 (60-61 A.D. ).

While the Good News is unstoppable, the church is no longer an infant and there are threats to the Good News.

- It is at risk of being diluted and people profiting off of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltman, *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 42.

- Today, we look at the way things were 24 years after Pentecost – and we see lack.

Apollos' lack is our first story.

## 2. Apollos, Acts 18:24-28.

'Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. <sup>25</sup> He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy (Act 18:24-25a NLT).'

Five descriptive phrases make him sound like a good man.

- Eloquent and learned man.
- Powerful in the Scriptures.
- Instructed in the way.
- Aglow with the Spirit.
- Accurate.

'However, he knew only about John's baptism (Act 18:25b NLT).' There is a deficiency, a lack. If it was not doctrine, or false teaching, or the ability to teach, what was wrong?

We don't really know for sure, but it appears 'that Apollos needed empowerment from the Holy Spirit.'<sup>2</sup> 'When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately. <sup>27</sup> Apollos had been thinking about going to Achaia, and the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him to go. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him. When he arrived there, he proved to be of great benefit to those who, by God's grace, had believed. <sup>28</sup> He refuted the Jews with powerful arguments in public debate. Using the Scriptures, he explained to them that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28 NLT).'

- They took him aside 'and explained the way of God even more accurately (v. 26).'
- God fills the lack in our life with Himself, so that we can have overflowing joy.
- John practiced water baptism for repentance, but he pointed to Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit is for empowerment.
- When Apollos gets to Achaia, he is even more successful because he was filled up.
  - Ladies, in support of female ministers: note that the wife is mentioned first here. In keeping with the custom of the day, the first time we meet them (Acts 18:2) Aquila is mentioned first. Afterwards, both Luke and

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<sup>2</sup> Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 239

Paul address Priscilla first. Therefore, it is likely that she was the public minister, and Aquila played a support role.

In Ephesus, there were also twelve Christ-followers who lacked that special something.

### 3. Twelve Ephesians, Acts 19:1-7.

'While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. <sup>2</sup> "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-2 NLT).'"

Paul assumes they are believers, but he notices that something is missing, and he asks a very specific question: 'did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'

- We receive the indwelling Spirit of God's Spirit when we believe. 'For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body... and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1Co 12:13 NIV). God's indwelling Spirit is what connects us to Christ's body. Here, Paul thought they were believers and yet they lacked something.
- Jesus told them, 'John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:5, 8 NLT).'
- 'Luke concern is not defining who is "in" and who is "out."' That is a modern theological issue.<sup>3</sup> Luke is concerned with the charismatic power and gifting of the Holy Spirit.
- Paul noticed that they lacked charismatic empowerment, which is why he asked the question.

"Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John." <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." <sup>5</sup> As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all (Acts 19:1-7 NLT).'

There is an intimacy with the Holy Spirit that is indescribable, yet the heart longs to express something. That desire overflows into speaking with other tongues, and prophecy in this case.

- Their lack was filled with the Holy Spirit coming upon them.
- We are created with a God-shaped hole inside of us that only God can fill.
- But more than a onetime filling, God desires intimacy and relationship with us.

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<sup>3</sup> Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 240.

- God fills the lack in our life with Himself, so that we can have overflowing joy.

Joy overflows out of a life lived in relationship with God. Jesus said, ‘If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing ... <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love ... <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:5, 9, 11 NIV).’

- God wants us to ‘remain,’ or ‘abide,’ with us. This means to He wants us to live and be close to him.
- Yes, God wants us to bear fruit. But more than what we can do for God, God wants to be with us – remaining in His love.
  - Encounter, this Friday at 7 pm.
  - Prayer over social media.
- But you cannot just fill up with Jesus like you fill up a propane tank – it is not a mechanical or mathematical formula. It is a relationship with God Himself. Like a relationship with a spouse or close friend.
- ‘You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever (Ps 16:11 NIV).’
- God fills the lack in our life with Himself, so that we can have overflowing joy.

The story continues.

#### **4. Paul’s Ministry, Acts 19:8-12.**

‘Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly ... Then he held daily discussions at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. <sup>12</sup> When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled (Acts 19:8, 9b-12 NLT).’

- The important point is that the Good News is powerfully advancing, even handkerchiefs convey the power of God.
- There is a growing group of people spreading the Good News: Stephen, Philip, Saul, Peter, Apollos, Pricilla, and the twelve.

Unfortunately, we see a group trying to capitalize financially by mimicking the ministry of real Christ-followers.

#### **5. Seven Sons of Sceva, Acts 19:13-16.**

‘A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, “I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!” <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, “I know

Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered (Acts 19:13-16 NLT).'

- Just like the demonic slave girl, this demon knows and recognizes genuine Spirit-filled authority.
- These seven men did not know they lacked authority to use the name of the Lord Jesus.
- This is supposed to be mildly funny. The demons are supposed to flee, but here the would-be exorcist flees. It is a parody of the genuine.

Despite trying to use Jesus' name for profit, authorized disciples advance the Good News.

### **5. Triumph over Magic, Acts 19:17-20.**

'The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. <sup>18</sup> Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. <sup>19</sup> A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. <sup>20</sup> So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect (Acts 19:17-20 NLT).'

You might be thinking, where is joy in today's story? This is one of those cases where not knowing ancient Greek and its culture means we miss the underlying theme of joy. Let me show you where joy is in this segment ...

'A solemn fear (v. 17) ... the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored (v. 18).' In English we read it superficially as fear and honor. Yes, they were afraid of spiritual powers, and they honored the name of Jesus, but Luke has consistently paired solemn fear and joy throughout Luke-Acts. After 43 chapters, the reader is supposed to see the implicit joy.

- Zechariah - 'overwhelmed with fear (Lk 1:12) ... you will have great joy and gladness (v. 14).'
- Shepherds - 'they were terrified (Lk 2:9) ... good news of great joy (v. 10).'
- Disciples - 'they were frightened (Lk 24:36) ... because of the joy and amazement (v. 41).'
- Pentecost - 'filled with awe at the ... miracles (Acts 2:43) ... glad hearts (v. 46).'
- Post-Pentecost - 'no one else dared to join them ... highly regarded (Acts 5:13).'

The word Luke used is *megaluno* = to make great, to magnify, to praise or glorify. It's a joy-filled word.

- These Ephesian Christians are in awe of God's power and gladly burn their magic books.

- It is a joyful bonfire scene.
- The bonfire is an act of repentance, a genuine turning away from false gods to the one who fills them with joy.
- A 'cry of joy' runs through the entire New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

In the children's story, *The Ugly Duckling*, the 'duckling' orphaned from his family and is raised among barnyard animals. The barnyard animals see that he is like a duck, but he is not a duck – hence the ugly duckling.

- He is out of place, mocked, and unsure of who he is.
- Eventually, he discovers he is a swan. He finds his true family, identity, and purpose.

In the same way, you and I were designed for relationship with God. We were not designed for our own selfish pleasure. We were designed to be loved by God and to love Him.

- We try to fill that hole in our heart with things around us, but our spouse cannot fill the hole in our heart, nor can pleasure or achievement.
- 'You have made us for Yourself, O LORD, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.' – St. Augustine<sup>5</sup>

I now have two propane tanks: one on the grill and a full one in the garage. Only when the tank runs out do I go and exchange it with a full tank.

We cannot have overflowing joy 'while being preoccupied with' self.<sup>6</sup> We must empty ourselves of selfishness so that God can fill us with His Spirit and our heart will be less selfish.

- The friends we made the day we ran out of propane are very close friends. They filled a need we had at that time in our lives. We look back and laugh about that empty tank – but now our lives are full of joy because we have each other as deep friends.

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton Arnold, 'Joy,' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 3, David Noel Freedman, Ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1023.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1

<sup>6</sup> 'The fullness of joy comes when there is a deep sense of the presence of God in one's life ... From a psychological perspective one cannot experience joy while being preoccupied with' self, C. Davis, 'Joy,' in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 588.

- Joy can only truly be expressed in relationships. That is why the OT has so many festivals – to express joy.
- God fills the lack in our life with Himself, so that we can have overflowing joy.

'Now remain in my love ... <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:9, 11 NIV).'

Pray.