Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Scope of Jesus' Ministry
Scripture: Luke 8:1-3
Code: 42-102

I'm very thankful for growing up in a home where the Word of God was central, for sitting under the ministry of my Dad who always preached faithfully the Word of God because as a young boy growing up, I understood the authority that the Scripture bore over my life. And as I look back over the years of life, I can see that it was my confidence in the Scripture and my understanding that I needed to submit to what the Scripture taught and affirmed that set the course for my life. As a young man, obviously I was faced as all young men are with a lot of decisions...a lot of decisions. And you make those decisions in those years and it literally fixes you in a path for life.

That was true in terms of ministry. As a young man filled with passion and certainly mingled with ambition, I had a desire to fulfill a calling that God had placed upon my life to serve Him. And in those early years, like so many young men, I...I was forced with decisions the import of which I really didn't understand. But there were a few decisions that I made that literally have made the difference in my entire life. One of them was when I was coming out of seminary and actually before I was called to come to Grace Community Church nearly 35 years ago, and it was a decision that I sort of put together in a simple little sentence. If I take care of the depth of my ministry, God will take care of the breadth of it. That little slogan has stood by me all these years. In a sense it's sort of against the grain of a young man's ambition to be driven by depth rather than breadth, to be driven by excellence rather than success, to be driven by quality rather than quantity. Ambition sort of pushes you in the direction of what can I do the biggest and the fastest, not what can I do the smallest and the slowest. Ambitious people tend to be driven by breadth rather than depth. They tend to be driven by success rather than excellence and by quantity rather than quality.

And so, it is possible to rise like a shooting star, or like fireworks that blaze for a little while and then after an exciting and brief moment, they're lost in the darkness. I remember reading many years ago something that David McKenna(?) wrote and he said, "Self-styled messiahs are always megalomaniacs." In other words, what he means they're a...they're maniacal for megala which is the Greek word for big. And he wrote, "Their sense of mission has no limitations short of conquering the world and conquering it now. At the slightest signal that their efforts are being frustrated, they usually respond with rage and madness," end quote. I didn't want to be a megala maniac, I didn't want to become consumed with the size of anything.

And it was there that God began to burden my heart for the kind of ministry that would unfold by creating in me a passion for the depth of it and not the breadth of it. I could have come to this church

and poured my energies into programs and strategies and activities, but I didn't. I came here and poured myself into intense study of the Scripture. I could have tried to find as many places on the planet as I could to preach my message, believing that I needed to get it as far and wide as I could, but I determined that I would spend my time preaching here all the time week end, week out, that's been going on for 34 years. It was probably, my wife would tell you, fifteen years before I ever took a day off and she would argue that I ever take a day off even now. I was here from 1969 to 1981 I was here. I was here every week. I was focusing on what God had given me. And the interesting part of it is by 1981 we were distributing 20,000 tapes a week that were going all over the world. God was confirming the principle that if you take care of the depth, you can leave the breadth to Him. If the work that you do in His Word is worthy of being spread around, then He'll see that that is done.

That's a meager little story of one person but it illustrates the point that the scope of ministry is very important and the people who are the most eminently successful people in impacting the world are not the people who get lost in what is big but are the people who devote themselves singularly to very clear focus, they go down and the effect of their going down is that it gets spread because of its importance.

Where did I learn that? Well, I honestly learned that from studying the life of Jesus. The whole plan that the Father unfolded in the life of Jesus is counterintuitive, it just goes against the grain of normal human thought. If you were God and you were going to send Jesus down to the earth, and you had a plan to redeem the world, you had a plan to spread the gospel to the corners of the earth, it's unlikely that using the best human wisdom, pulling together the best brains, having the biggest strategy session you could, that the consensus would be that you go to this tiny minuscule infinitesimal little dot on the globe called Israel to one little group of people living in apostasy, that you go to that country, live your life in obscurity for 30 years and then for three years have a ministry there in sort of a, you know, sixty-mile circle, never go outside that country except maybe to foray across the border and back again on a couple of occasions, that you do absolutely nothing to win over the elite of the nation, the influential people, the people who are the movers and the shakers, the world changers, but rather you spend your time with the poor and the outcast and the downcast and the downtrodden and the rejected, even the social scum, that you disdain all of the normal channels so that you don't surround yourself with the highest kind of educational credentials, nor do you surround yourself with the kind of people who can get you where you want to go to reach the high places, but rather you disdain all of that in favor of humble men and women. It just doesn't seem like the way to get the job done. But we all know that Jesus is the most influential person who ever lived.

Even though He was born in obscurity in a little village, lived His 30-year-life in a little village and then meandered around the little nation of Israel for the rest of His brief three-year life teaching and preaching, and in the process alienating most of the nation until they finally executed Him, all of that is counterintuitive to any kind of a strategy that you would assume would bring about the end that God desired. But that's precisely what Jesus did.

In fact, the limits that God imposed on the life of Jesus are staggering...they're staggering. Jesus had limits on His ministry. He had an economy of effort that never ceases to stagger me. It always has. The limited scope of His ministry in which He functioned with precision was God's design to bring about changing the entire world so that He, engaging Himself in the depth of that ministry, left the breadth of it to the divine purpose. And we all know that though Jesus spent three brief years in ministry, ministry which was basically rejected by the leaders of His country, the religious leaders, basically His life was taken from Him. He was murdered because they despised what He did and yet in that brief three years He set in motion the most powerful force of truth the world has ever seen and it has spread completely over the globe, continues to do so in every generation. Jesus accomplished this because He worked within the limits that God had designed.

Understanding the scope of Jesus' ministry then is a very rich experience. Look at Luke chapter 8. In our ongoing study of the gospel of Luke, we...we get glimpses of Jesus that are anecdotal, you know, like the last passage, the story of the prostitute who came and anointed Him at the feast at the Pharisee's house and we've seen a number of those kinds of stories that Luke tells, true stories, true historical accounts, stories of Jesus casting demons out of certain people, stories of Jesus healing people that were ill, raising the dead son of the widow. There are accounts of His sermons that are given, the Sermon on the Mount, sermons that He preached in synagogues. As you get those wonderful accounts of specific events in the life of Jesus, but occasionally in Luke's gospel he bridges these accounts with a summary. For example, you will find back in chapter 4 verse 15 that Luke...actually verses 14 and 15, Luke gives a kind of a summary telling us that Jesus was going here and going there and He was preaching and teaching and doing that. Later in chapter 4, I think it's verse 43, he talks also there about Jesus sort of in a summary fashion of what His life and ministry were all about as Jesus was going along preaching in various places, including synagogues and things like that. So you have these specific events bridged by these general summary statements that just sort of sweep up the fact that we need to be reminded that this is one event in a daily routine of ministry. And here you have in verses 1 to 3 a picture of sort of the routine of Jesus' ministry, and here's what it says.

"It came about soon afterwards that He began going about from one city and village to the other proclaiming and preaching the Kingdom of God and the Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses, Mary who was called Magdalene from whom seven demons had gone out and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means."

And that's not an incident, that's not an event, it's not a healing, or a casting out of demons or a sermon, it's just a general summation of the nature of Jesus' ministry. And in this particular summation, I find some very interesting and helpful insight into the scope of His ministry, or how He functioned in a narrow precise way. And this is very helpful for us today because ministries today

tend to be designed for the widest possible impact, designed to be diverse and eclectic and synergistic and culturally connected and complex and far-reaching and all of that, and time and money and man power is spent on broad strategies and plans and activities and communication styles designed to influence as many people as possible to create some kind of a matrix of perceptions, cultural expectations and felt needs can be met at the widest level by the ministry. And there's just an awful lot of effort in that regard.

And yet in a contrast to that, when you look at biblical ministry, especially in the case of Jesus, it is not complex at all. It isn't some kind of mingled matrix of all kinds of cultural things in order to achieve the goal of reaching all kinds of people, but rather it is simple, it is fixed and it is very, very precise. When you look at a model of biblical ministry, you can't find a better one than Jesus Himself. You can learn a lot from Paul, as we do, in studying Paul's letters. But here in the text that I just read, in the case of Jesus there is really a remarkable insight into the scope of Jesus' ministry. Or that is to say how He limited His ministry according to the divine purpose. He ministered in, what as I said earlier, just a fashion that goes against normal human thinking. By the way, this bridge in the first three verses here, bridges us into the final phase of His Galilean ministry. The bridge back in chapter 4 verses 14 and 15 bridged us into the first phase of His Galilean ministry, featuring the city of Capernaum which seemed to be His home base. This little summary here bridges us into the last phase of His Galilean ministry and there's no mention of Capernaum. So this looks to be a more itinerant kind of ministry, maybe moving Him further from Capernaum. And this particular phase of the Galilean ministry runs through chapter 9 verse 50 and then in chapter 9 verse 51 He heads toward Jerusalem which brings about, of course, a whole new phase of ministry as He goes to Jerusalem, ultimately to die there.

So we're being bridged into the final phase of His Galilean ministry and they're going to be some wonderful things we're going to see in the stories that are told about it. But first, this general summary which gives us a sense of the scope of His ministry. Now I just want to kind of break down an understanding of Jesus' ministry in some ways that we can understand it.

First of all, the scope of His ministry was determined sovereignly...the scope of His ministry was determined sovereignly. He never designed His ministry to give people what they wanted. He never designed His ministry to fulfill an ambition that He wanted. He never designed His ministry to appeal to a collective group of people who had come to the conclusion that that's what they wanted. His ministry was always under complete sovereign control by God, His Father. That is not stated here. But let me just read the opening of the verse. "It came about soon afterwards," that is soon after the incident just recorded, the Pharisee's dinner where the woman came and anointed Jesus, soon afterwards...that's all it tells us, that's all we know. We don't know how soon, probably fairly soon, perhaps in a close place, maybe even in the same area as where He began. But soon afterwards, after that incident, "He began going about."

We'll stop at that point. And the question here at least can be posed, what prompted Him to do what He did? What prompted Him to leave where He was and begin to move into this more itinerant and final phase of the Galilean ministry? And though it is not stated here, it is stated elsewhere in the gospel record and it's very clearly this, He was responding to the will of His Father. In fact, He writes...He says, I should say, as John records it, John 5:30, "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me." And He said, "This is defining for My ministry and for My life. I do the will of Him who sent Me. My meet is to do that will of the One who sent Me, the Father," John 4:34. In a number of occasions in the early chapters of John, John has quoted Jesus as saying, "I do what God wants Me to do." Always He was under this sovereign control, always He was doing what the Father wanted Him to do. And I think one of the reasons that He went up to the Mount of Olives so frequently to spend prolonged times in prayer when He was in Judea and other times when He went away from the crowds into the mountains to pray alone, were times when He was going in order to commune with the Father to discern the Father's will.

Not only did He desire to do the Father's will, that is the tasks that the Father wanted Him to do, but He desired to do them in the Father's timing. And that is why in a number of occasions John records, for example, in John 7:30, John 8:20, there are other indications as well where Jesus said this, He would say something like this, "My hour has not yet come. My hour has not yet come." And that is to say the time isn't right yet. I not only do the Father's will, but I do the Father's will in the Father's timing." He even went beyond that to say, "Not only do I do God's will only and God's will only in God's time, but only to those people to whom God sent Me." That is He set limits on Himself as to the task He did, it had to be the will of God, as to when He did it, it had to be the timing of God, and as to the people, it had to be the people whom God had determined that He would do this ministry for, and that is why He said, Matthew writing this in Matthew 10:5 and 6, Jesus says to the disciples, "Do not go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans but rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The plan of the Father is that we don't go to the Gentiles and we don't go to the Samaritans, we go to the Jews. We know that John tells us Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews." Paul says, "The Jew first and then later to the Gentile." And so Jesus had this amazing economy of effort, only the Father's will, and only in the Father's time, and only to those to whom the Father sent Him.

Furthermore, not just to the Jews but we remember in Luke 5:32 He said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Among the Jews, not the self-righteous, not the Pharisees, not the scribes, not the Sadducees, for the most part, but the sinners, those who recognize their sin. So He had very narrow restraint, very narrow limitation placed upon His ministry. You go where I tell you to go, when I tell you to go and speak to the people I tell you to speak to. And that would be again counterintuitive the way we would want to plan a ministry. We would want to go as far and wide as we could, as often as we could and speak to as many different people, groups as we could, and yet Jesus had this amazing kind of concentration. And He knew, as God knew, that concentration is the key to multiplication. That's a principle you can learn in ministry. Concentration is the key to

multiplication. The way you multiply your ministry, the real ministry, the way you multiply the power of ministry through the truth and changed lives is by concentration on changing lives and teaching people the truth. And the more intensely you teach that to a group of people, the more likely they are to multiply it.

So, Jesus was committed to this and while He was narrowing, of course, His ministry from the perceptions of the Jewish people, criticism was mounting with each limitation...a criticism that ultimately ended in His death. But He was, after all, committed to God's plan, whatever that involved. Anybody going into ministry needs to remember that. This is the way it has to be if you want to work for the Lord, you want to work in His Kingdom, you have to begin by saying, "Look, I only want to go where You want Me to go, when You want me to go, to whom You want me to go. This is Your plan."

I cannot...as I've told many young men in seminary...a call from a church somewhere is not a call from God, neither is a need a call from God. You better discern in your own heart through prayer and patience what it is that God wants you to do and when He wants you to do it with whom He wants you to do it. And Jesus was committed to that and that is the model for ministry. We serve at the divine discretion, do we not? We are servants of God and we are agents of His purpose.

Secondly, there were limits on Jesus not only sovereignly but geographically. And this always has fascinated me. "He began going about from one city and village to another." In the first place, He's up in Galilee which is obscure, it's not the intellectual center of Judah, Jerusalem is. People said later on, "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" And they disdained and mocked the disciples because they were uneducated Galileans and so forth. It was...it was against the grain. It wasn't...it wasn't the place you would think He would want to go and carry on this several-year ministry. But...but that's exactly what He did. And it's always amazing to me, too, that He never went outside His own country and He spent this very brief amount of time, three years, just going around and around the little towns and the little villages and talking to the most ordinary people. But this was the place to whom God had called Him. "Going about," diaduo(???), this was His...it's an imperfect tense, He was just moving around, moving around village to village, town to town. Every place became His pulpit. He would be preaching on hillsides and in valleys and in public squares everywhere He went throughout the region of Galilee and huge crowds would come. Verse 4, "A great multitude coming together." Down in verse 19, His mother and His brothers came to Him and weren't able to get to Him because of the size of the crowd there. Also down in verse 40, "A multitude welcomed Jesus' returning." They had been waiting for Him. And then in verse 45, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are...the multitudes are crowding and pressing on You," so it was all over the place.

Some commentators have assumed that this meant that He was no longer going into the synagogues. Because it doesn't mention synagogues, they conclude that He probably had been shut out of the synagogues because of the mounting animosity of the scribes, the Pharisees and the rabbis, the Word was being spread throughout the religious life of Israel that you weren't to have

Jesus in your synagogue. And some commentators, quite a number actually, say that Jesus was probably now o longer welcome in the synagogues because He had been so totally rejected by the religious leadership that He had been banned from them. But there's no reason to assume that. In fact, there is reason to assume that He continued to have access to some synagogues because way at the end, just before His death, you remember in John 18:20 He said, "I have spoken openly to the world, I always taught in synagogues." So I don't think there's any reason to shut Him out of the synagogues.

I think He was just going everywhere within the scope that God had defined for Him. For now, it's the land of Israel and it never was any different. He never went outside of that nation to preach or teach and He spent so much of His time up in the Galilee that that was, of course, the focal point of the first prolonged period of His ministry. And yet in that very limited area, going to very small towns and villages, He accomplished the will of God. He took care of the depth, He took care of establishing the reality of His ministry. Then God put the record of His ministry down by the four writers of the gospels and has spread the truth of that ministry through the epistles in the New Testament all the way through the whole New Testament which is then spread around the world so that what Jesus accomplished in those few years in that small place is known to the whole world.

Paul also had an economy of effort. He took three missionary journeys. It always interests me that the three journeys went back to the same place...the same place, just extending a little further each time. But basically tracking back to the same cities and yet God took the influence of the Apostle Paul and has spread that around the world. Well Paul traveled a lot more than Jesus. Jesus never left Israel. He never got on a ship and went anywhere in the Mediterranean and yet His life has influenced the whole world.

It's just a good reminder to work where God has put you, to stay where God has placed you, to not feel that because you have the opportunity to go everywhere and say whatever you can say, whatever you can bring to bear upon that situation that somehow that is a mandate. And I know in my own life that's always been a challenge. But I've held on to that because I've always been compelled by this economy of geographical effort. If the Lord's going to do something on a wide level, that's up to Him. All I can do is do what He's asked me to do on a deep level in the place that He's put me. So I don't really....people ask me, you know, if I have a desire to go anywhere else, and I never have. People ask me if I have a desire to travel and preach everywhere and I don't and never really had. I'm more than content to do what God's called me to do right where He's called me to do it and leave the impact of that to Him. And it does amaze me how God chooses to spread it.

Thirdly, there was a limitation placed upon Jesus' ministry theologically...theologically.

If you look at verse 1 again, "He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the Kingdom of God." He didn't have a lot of subjects to deal with, He just had

one...just one. This is the scope of His message. The scope of His movement was just in the region of Israel. The scope of His message was the Kingdom of God. He was proclaiming...that's an interesting word, kerusso, it means to publicly herald something, like a town crier before they had newspapers and media, the king would send his authoritative representative into the city square and "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye," he would give the message.

And that's what the word kerusso meant. It meant to herald openly with authority a public message. And what was that message? "Preaching the Kingdom of God." He was proclaiming and what He was proclaiming is described, "Even preaching the Kingdom of God." The word "preaching" is euangelizominos(?), preaching the gospel, to evangelize comes from that word. He was evangelizing. He was evangelizing with the message of the Kingdom of God. That was the narrowness of His ministry. He didn't talk about anything else. The Kingdom He spoke about was not of this world, He said in John 18:36. He always preached the Kingdom.

Jesus began to preach, Matthew 4:17 records, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" And He always preached the Kingdom, always, always, always preached the Kingdom. Matthew calls it the Kingdom of heaven. Matthew was the only one that calls the Kingdom of God the Kingdom of heaven and He does that 32 times in his gospel, I think to help Jewish readers because out of the intertestamental period, the 400 years between the Old and the New Testament, there had developed a kind of a strange sort of tradition in Judaism and that was a refusal to speak the name of God, the tetra grammaton, the four Hebrew letters that we would transliterate Yahweh or Jehovah. The Jews came to the point where they felt that as an act of sacredness and an act of reverence and an act of worship toward God they would display their unworthiness to even speak His name. And so coming out of that period there was this desire not to speak the name of God, but to substitute something for the name of God and heaven was the general substitute. And so a Jew instead of referring to God, would refer to heaven. And we can understand that. We even do that sometimes in English. We might say, "Heaven looks down with favor on that." We mean by that God. And that's the way it developed in Judaism. So Matthew using the Kingdom of heaven as just deferring to that familiarity with the Jewish people, but it means the same as the Kingdom of God.

I want to show you that because so many people get confused about this. No need for that. If you turn to Matthew 19, I'm going to give you just a brief insight that I think will really set in place your understanding of the Kingdom of God. There are all kinds of books and, I mean, all kinds of books, big thick books written on the Kingdom of God trying to explain what it means. And there are lots of things you could talk about but I think to understand the basic concept of the Kingdom of God is pretty easy. In Matthew 19 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, it's hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven." It's hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Next verse, verse 24, "In fact," He says, "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Therefore Jesus is using Kingdom of heaven, Kingdom of God

interchangeably...interchangeably. And that's very important definitively because for years and years and years there were people who wanted to make a distinction between the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God and there is no distinction as these two verses indicate. A rich man entering the Kingdom of heaven in verse 23, a rich man entering the Kingdom of God in verse 24 clearly indicate that they both refer to the same thing.

And to what do they refer? Verse 25 explains that. "Because the disciples who heard it were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be...what?...saved?'" So entering the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God is to be saved, that's a very important interpretive section. Jesus talks about somebody entering the Kingdom of heaven, entering the Kingdom of God and says it's hard for a rich man to do that, and the disciples say, "Well then who can be saved?" Meaning they understood entering the Kingdom of God as being saved, and that's exactly how you want o understand it. When Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, He was preaching salvation. That's exactly what that means. He was preaching salvation. And we've gone through many discussions of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven in our study of Matthew and Luke, don't need to go over that all together. But essentially what it means is the Kingdom of God is the sphere in which God rules over those who have come to Him for salvation, the sphere of salvation over which God rules as sovereign monarch. And so this was Jesus' message. It wasn't a political message, it wasn't a social message, it was a salvation message. Always a salvation message, always talking about the riches of the Kingdom of God, seeking the Kingdom of God and everything else being added to you, always the Kingdom of God. In fact, when Jesus died and then three days later rose again, after His resurrection it says in Acts 1:3 that He spent 40 days appearing to His disciples and speaking to them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Even after the resurrection He was still speaking on the same subject, the sphere of salvation. The whole of the Bible is the story of salvation, isn't it? All the way through human history from Adam to the very end and all the way through redemptive history from election to glorification, the whole Bible is the saga, the story of salvation. Preaching the Kingdom is preaching the good news then that sinners can be saved, they can be delivered out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. They can be delivered out of the domain of Satan into the domain of Christ. This is the message.

And Jesus preached the Kingdom in its fullness when He preached salvation. For example, in Matthew 22 He told the story about a banquet and about going out into the highways and byways and compelling people to come into the banquet which was the Kingdom. And so Jesus is teaching then that there is to be a response to a invitation, that you go to the sinner and you invite the sinner to come into the Kingdom of God. In Mark chapter 1 we find that preaching the Kingdom of God not only involves inviting sinners to come to the Kingdom of God, but Jesus says the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel, Mark 1:15. It is then a call to repentance and belief in the gospel. In the twelfth chapter of Mark and verse 28 and following there's a discussion of the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength," and the scribes said to Jesus, "You have truly stated to love Him with all your heart,

with all your understanding, with all your strength and love one's neighbor as yourself, this is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. This is the ultimate, ultimate demand of those who come into the Kingdom." It is an invitation for sinners to come. It is a call to sinners to repent and believe the gospel and to love God and to love God singularly, to love God fully, to love God totally to the exclusion of any other God. And then in Luke chapter 9 verses 61 Jesus is calling some would-be disciples to follow Him and in verse 62 He says, "No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." So there's another component. What does that mean? That means you assent to the truth, you embrace it and you never look back. It is a complete and final commitment.

So when Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, He was always preaching about salvation. He was inviting people to come into the Kingdom of God. In order to come in they had to repent of their sin and believe the gospel. They had to come to the place where they were committed to loving God with all their souls, as much as is possible. And then they made a commitment to follow and never look back. I think it's all summed up in the two parables of Matthew 13:44 to 46 where Jesus said there was a man who was plowing in his field and he unearthed a treasure in the field and when he saw how valuable it was, he sold everything to buy it. And then there was a man who was searching for pearls and he found the pearl of great price and he sold everything he had to purchase the one pearl. And Jesus said that's what the Kingdom of God is like, it's so valuable that when you find it, whether you stumbled over it inadvertently or whether you've been searching for it for all your life, once you find the Kingdom of God, once you find salvation, forgiveness, grace, once you find that, you give up everything to embrace it, you hold on to nothing. You totally abandon everything to receive that. That's what Jesus preached when He preached the Kingdom. He called people to come to the Kingdom of God and coming to repent and believe the gospel, to commit themselves to loving God with all their hearts and embracing Him, assenting to the gospel and embracing it and never looking back and being willing to give up everything valueless to embrace what is priceless. Like Paul, you count all things but dung compared to Christ. That was the ministry of the Kingdom of God, that's the message Jesus preached.

And once in the Kingdom of God, you were to live as a Kingdom citizen. Jesus talked about life in the Kingdom, how Kingdom citizens live and He also talked about the glorious future when the Kingdom of God comes on earth and then even the eternal and final Kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. But His message was always about the Kingdom, it always came out of the revelation of God about the Kingdom. And that's what our message always has to be as well. That's why I've said it so long, God has called us into ministry and there's only one book that we are to proclaim, it's the book about the Kingdom.

The scope of His ministry sovereignly, determined by God. The scope of His ministry geographically, determined by where God put Him. The scope of His ministry theologically, determined by the truth of the Kingdom of God which is the only message that matters. And fourth, there were limits placed

upon the scope of His ministry strategically...strategically. As Jesus ministered, He had a strategy. He was not without a strategy. He wasn't just a long guy out there doing what He did, He had a strategy and that's indicated at the end of verse 1 when it says, "The Twelve were with Him...the Twelve were with Him." I'm back to that same principle that I mentioned earlier, concentration leads to multiplication. Jesus concentrated on the place God put Him, the time God put Him there, the message God gave Him and the men God gave Him. You remember, He went up that night before He chose the disciples, identifying them as the Twelve and He spent the time in prayer to determine what God's will was, who God wanted and then He picked these twelve. The multiplication strategy was then set. Jesus would invest Himself in twelve men...twelve ordinary men, not a scribe, not a Pharisee, not a Sadducee, not a chief priest, not a ruler of a synagogue, not a rabbi, not anybody influential. In fact the very opposite, they were ordinary, very ordinary men. They were not the movers and shakers, they were not the influencers, they were not powerful, they were not privy to the great movements of their time, they were not friends with people in high places. They were the humble and the meek. He didn't seek people who could somehow elevate Him, who could get Him in to where He thought He ought to get. He didn't pick rich people, famous people, well-heeled people, well established people in points of interest, nothing like that. In fact, He picked very ordinary men, so ordinary that we can't find any reason why He would pick them at all.

And I thought...that's the whole point, that when they are transformed into men that turn the world upside down, who gets the credit? Jesus does and the reason for their ability to do that was because they proclaimed the truth, not because they had some personal powers or personal points of influence. That's an illusion, somehow, that the spreading the gospel and the advance of the Kingdom of God is somehow related to getting in with the rich and the famous. That just couldn't be further from the truth. There are not many noble and not many mighty whom God has even chosen. They are the exception. There are some, as we'll note in a moment. They are the exception. He took ordinary men but He invested three years of His life in them and they were a tough group. They disappointed Him. They doubted Him. They deserted Him and they even denied Him. Yet they were transformed into world changers. This is the strategy. I don't think the strategy is any different today. If you want to have a long-term impact on a wide level, then pour your life into a small group of people who will continue the process of doing the same. As Paul said to Timothy, "The things you've learned from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." That's four generations, Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others also, and that's just keeping the flow going until here we are today and you're here as a result of that process of multiplication.

They weren't doing anything at this time, by the way. They hadn't even been empowered yet. That happens over in chapter 9 at the beginning of the chapter and we'll see more of that in chapter 10 at the beginning of that chapter. Right now they're not preaching, teaching, healing, casting out demons, they're just watching, listening, observing. This is strategically part of their training. It's critical in any ministry that's going to have any kind of impact. Multiplication comes from discipleship. You invest in a few, you change the world.

The scope of His ministry socially...the scope of His ministry socially. We'll hurry to a conclusion. The rabbis had an interesting view. They believed and taught that women were not capable of learning. They were not capable of receiving spiritual instruction. In fact, there were laws made that forbid women to be taught by a man in public, even her own husband. Socrates, Aristotle, Demosthenes, other Greeks also disdained teaching women. The Kumran (?), the ascetic community of Judaism also had a low regard for women.

Not Jesus. Socially we learn that He not only had twelve men with Him, but He had some women who followed Him, too. Verse 2, "Also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses; Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward and Susanna." Now that's an interesting note for us because it was politically incorrect. It flew in the face of conventional thinking. And why would you want to just accumulate a lot of women? They're not going to be very influential, particularly in that environment when there was such disdain toward women. You were really going against the grain of normal rabbinical behavior. But traveling along with Jesus were some women, not necessarily all the time, or all together, but during His travels. They were women who had been delivered spiritually and physically by His power over illness and over demons. They had become believers.

In fact, Mary Magdalene is with Jesus, the scriptures record, at His cross, at His anointing, at His burial and she was among the women who first saw Him when He was risen from the dead. There's no reason to think she was a prostitute, it never says that in the Scripture. It just says she had been delivered from seven demons. Magdalene is simply a way to identify her from the other Marys. There are a number of Marys, including Mary the mother of Jesus. And that Magdalene comes because she was from a town called Magdala, modern Migdal(?), it's about three or four miles north of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. She was then identified with her town to sort her out from the others. She had been delivered from the terrifying torment of demons by Jesus and she was so faithful all the way to the end.

By the way, Joanna also was there at the resurrection. And so these were women who remained faithful to the Lord. Joanna stands out because Joanna is the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Herod's epitropos in the Greek, Herod's procurator would be one translation, Herod's manager. This is very, very, very high ranking. This is an official in the very palace of Herod, maybe the manager of Herod's personal estate who ruled over his own household.

So Jesus reaching in to Mary of Magdala, a small little nowhere town, to take a woman who is full of demons and transform her life, and He also reaches from, I guess at the best you could say, that would be middle class to the upper class and by His grace He has delivered either from a physical illness or demons the wife of Chuza who manages the king's estate, Herod the Idumaean king who, as you know, becomes a part of the trial of Jesus and wants nothing to do to save Jesus but wants to

hand Him back to Pilate. And so the Lord is drawing women from all over the place.

And then there's Susanna. And we don't know anything about Susanna because nothing is said. Her name never appears again. We could assume that because there's nothing to describe her that she was among the many non-descript who just came from the poor who dominated the land of Israel.

So you have a woman who was demon possessed. You have a woman who was from the highest possible state in the land. She is the wife of the man who manages the king's estate. And then you have the non-descript Susanna. All of them believers in Jesus. All of them followers of Jesus. This tells us that the scope of His ministry socially went against the grain of modern convention which says you can only reach a certain type of person in a certain type of ministry and this is this homogeneity concept. Jesus preached the Kingdom and God brought into the Kingdom all that He had chosen to be in the Kingdom from every strata of life...men and women. There were no limitations placed upon His ministry in that regard. In fact, by the time you get here, we've already seen what a role women played in the ministry of Jesus. There's Elizabeth and Mary and Anna and there's Peter's mother-in-law, we've met in Luke, and the widow of Nain and the sinful woman in the seventh chapter. These three then there will be a crippled woman, they'll be a woman later on with a lost coin story in Luke 15, a couple of widows we're going to meet. The Lord reached way beyond the conventional lines in ministering socially across the widest spectrum.

Then finally materially. Even though there were limits on His ministry, sovereignly, geographically, theologically, and strategically, there were no limits on His ministry socially. He reached to everybody at every level. And then materially, this is so interesting. It says, "And many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means."

"Many others" goes all the way back to "were with Him" in verse 1. There were many others, besides the disciples, who had left all to follow Him and therefore didn't have financial resources of any great measure. Perhaps they had a little bit of savings, or something they could draw from their families occasionally, but traveling with Him were the Twelve, traveling with Him were these women who may have had some means by which they could assist, certainly the role of women would be to do some wonderful assisting work, preparing meals, caring for the needs of the group in the ways that women could do that. But then there were others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. Jesus' ministry was supported by those whose lives He had changed. And that's really the model of ministry. His ministry depended on the generosity of those who had been changed by that ministry. And there were many of them, no doubt women and men. They had a purse, John 13:29 says, they had a purse, they had a treasurer named Judas. They had more than enough because they were able to take out of their purse and give to the poor. Yet they didn't have any possessions. The disciples had left all. Jesus had left all, didn't have anywhere to lay His head, "The foxes have holes," He said, "the birds have nests, I don't have a place to lay My head." At the end of His life they gambled around the cross for the only possession He had and that was the clothes He was wearing.

So they were dependent upon these contributions.

"Were contributing," from diakonia the word to serve from which we get deacon, they were serving and helping by their contributions. Support was coming from those that had been impacted by Jesus and that's the way it always is...support comes from those who are impacted by the ministry. If you have been taught, Paul wrote the Galatians, then share with those who teach you in all good things. Now this isn't paying back a debt, I want to make that clear. They had received forgiveness for all their sins from Jesus, they didn't owe Him anything because of that and neither do you. The sinner's debt has been paid. It was canceled by God against you because it was paid by Jesus. Nothing is owed. Your service to God, your ministry, your gratitude, your giving does not repay your debt.

You say, "Why do we do it?" To mirror the same sacrificial loving grace that God mirrored toward us in Christ. To show our love and our gratitude, not to pay off a debt. That debt was paid by Christ. That's why we celebrate His cross where that debt was forever canceled.

So, the scope of ministry...sovereignly He did God's will and only God's will; geographically, He went where God put Him, covered it thoroughly; theologically, He preached only God's message, the gospel of the Kingdom; strategically, He knew that reaching many was based upon discipling a few; socially, He went to everybody, men and women, in all walks of life; materially, His ministry was dependent upon the support of the transformed who had been benefitted by it. That is a great model for ministry. And it takes us to where we need to be, at the cross of Christ who paid the debt. We don't serve to somehow pay off that debt, we serve out of gratitude and love to the One who did pay the debt.

Father, now as we come to the time around Your table for just a few closing moments, we ask that You would grace us again with a refreshed contemplation of the wonder of the cross and the greatness of our Savior who paid in full our debt.

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