

Well this morning our study through the gospel of Luke brings us to chapter 8. So I would invite you if you will to open your Bible with me to that portion of scripture. Luke chapter 8. We're going to look this morning at just 3 verses...verses 1,2 and 3. And, partly because I think it's an important little passage of scripture, I don't want to just skip over it and partly because the next portion beginning in verse 4 is the parable of the sower and the soil and the seed and I want to give due consideration and time to that.

Whenever you think of Christianity today, whenever you think of Christianity you know as a "world religion" which it is today, you really have to kind of marvel at that...marvel at its survival at its growth, at its spread, its expanse, its influence all around the globe through the centuries, especially in light of its humble beginning. Jesus told a couple of parables in Matthew 13 that underscore the influence, the powerful influence of the Kingdom of God in comparison to its...its relatively small size or its relatively small beginning. He said in Matthew 13, that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, first of all, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. Or he said, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal...or a bushel, until it was all leavened. He was saying there to His disciples, "Look, don't be discouraged...look what one tiny seed can produce. Look at the influence that a handful of leaven can have...so...persevere, be faithful in your ministry. Don't lose heart. It may not look like much right now, but there's a principle at work in the kingdom of God called *magnification*, multiplication." The power of God takes our tiny little contribution, our puny little effort, and He magnifies it and multiplies it, so that the end result goes far beyond anything that we could ever have imagined.

And those parables tip us off to that...tip us off to expect unusual things. That the end result, the expansion, the growth, the influence of the kingdom of God is going to be far beyond, disproportionate really, to the size and strength of its beginning. And we see that now. We see what he meant by that. Christianity has spread, the gospel has spread, the church has grown. It's really an amazing thing. It's a marvelous thing; particularly in light of all the factors working against that through the centuries. I mean you think about the persecution that Christians have endured: Fire, torture, prison, lions...those things have a way of dissuading people from wanting to join this movement called Christianity, but they've rather been the fan on the flame of Christianity. Or, the political, social, cultural resistance powers that have never really rolled out the red carpet for Christians. The forces of darkness, Satan, demons constantly working against the gospel, thwarting the effort of true biblical ministry. All of those external factors. Then you have an equal number of internal factors. Strife, disunity, discord, schisms, factions, that we create amongst ourselves as believers...so it's really a wonder that Christianity still exists, let alone that it has spread around the world. That's a marvelous thing to me. It's incredible to think about...in spite of what goes on outside, in the world, and in spite of what goes on inside, in the church, the Kingdom continues to thrive.

And that is a testimony, not to us, not to our ingenuity, or our creativity, or our wisdom, or our strength, or our power; that is of course a testimony to the inherent power of God at work in and through the gospel. Jesus is building His church and not even the gates of Hell can stop it.

Well that is the thought that occurred to me as I began to study this portion of scripture. Luke chapter 8. This is a summary. Luke is not adding anything new here, this isn't another story another episode, he just pauses and does the work here of a narrator which is to...uhm...kind of...every now and then step back and just remind us where we are at in the flow of this gospel record. To pause periodically between one episode after another and just recap and remind us of what's going on and what Jesus is doing and where He is and who He's with and all of those things. And that's the effect of these three verses here as He begins this 8th chapter...just a summary briefly to catch us all up to speed, remind us of where we are in the flow of Jesus' ministry. But, this summary, I think provides some very important insights into the nature of Jesus' ministry. What was Jesus' ministry like? And I...I am drawn to just spend a morning looking at this because I find these features to be somewhat remarkable. And I sort of scratch my head and say... "Were these the features that caused the church to expand as it has, or has the church expanded as it has in spite of these factors." It's almost that kind of a either/or nature to them. These features are shocking in that sense. That the church exists today in light of and in spite of how it all began and I want us to look at that. In fact...you know...I just thought of maybe a good, maybe, mental exercise, physical exercise for all of us to do to maybe get the sense of...of what I'm trying to emphasize...go home today and take a globe or look at a world map and just see if you can find Israel. Locate Israel on the globe, put your little tack right there where Jesus spent His life and ministry and then, first of all, notice how small an area that is geographically and how insignificant it seems in the light of the whole. Then, spend that globe around and find where you are, where you live today and then just let it sink in that what Jesus began, the ministry He began way back then in Galilee, northern Israel has reached you.

So I want to just walk you through this passage and let's look at some of the features of Jesus' ministry, that are really outstanding features and I think also provide some principles, maybe a bit of a model, some things that we should look at in terms of our own ministries today and learn from His example. Let me read the text. Verse 1, "*Soon afterwards, [that is soon after the event at the end of chapter 7 where the woman, you remember, came and anointed Him while He was in the home of the synagogue leader, the Jewish authority], 'afterwards, that He began going about from one city and village to another, 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.'*" From that summary let me just show you four outstanding features of Jesus' ministry. You can just jot these down if you're taking notes on that sheet there.

First of all, I call your attention to the secluded location of His ministry...Galilee, right, the secluded location of His ministry in Galilee. Verse 1, "and it came about soon afterwards that He began going about from one city and village to another." That represents sort of a shift, a very slight shift in Jesus' ministry. He had been already moving about from one city to another we saw that in chapter 4 verse 14, "*And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district, and He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.'*" In chapter 4 verse 31, I read, "*He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority.'*" Verse 42, "*when day came [Jesus left], and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and tried to keep Him from going away from them.'*"

But He said to them, I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also for I was sent for this purpose."

And so He kept preaching in the synagogues of Judea. So really since chapter 4, and the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was moving from town to town, city to city, village to village preaching the kingdom of God. But during that time, at least initially, He still had a base of operation that was Capernaum. It was not Nazareth where He grew up because they kicked Him out of there. Capernaum became sort of the headquarters of His ministry and His preaching took place primarily in the synagogues. But now, starting in chapter 8, the ministry seems to take a sort of a slight turn and become even more itinerate, with no real base of operations, no central headquarters, fewer appearances in the synagogue because of growing hostility from the Jewish leaders. And so Luke says at this point, His ministry becomes a touring ministry: *"He began going about."* That's what He did. He was going about. And it's not so much emphasizing the methodical nature of that so much as the wandering nature of that.

Luke is chronicling for us is the nature of Jesus' Galilean ministry. By the way the Galilean ministry runs from chapter 4 through chapter 9. Luke divides that into these two halves. The first half, Jesus was based in Capernaum and made road trips into the other cities and villages, preached and taught in the synagogues and surrounding areas. Now in the second half, the final phase, Jesus is just on the move constantly. And that's how it would be until the end of chapter 9. Luke 9:51, marks the end of the Galilean ministry and the transition to Jerusalem. *"And it came about, when they days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem."* So 9:51 is the...is the turning point.

So what we have here is the summary...the summary, at the beginning of chapter 8 that sort of forms a bridge into this final phase of Jesus' Galilean ministry. A ministry of really, touring non-stop all these little towns and villages. But that is what I find remarkable here. That of all the places Jesus could go to launch His ministry, alright, to lay the groundwork for Christianity, He chose Galilee....Galilee. He was on tour, and He was on tour in Galilee, towns and villages in northern Israel. I mean what does that like? That's like.....that's like Taylor Swift coming to you know Hindsville, Huntsville, and Harrison. With the grand climactic concert in Mountain Home or something. Who does that? So it's not exactly the most strategic location geographically or numerically. Certainly not the way you would think to reach the world...to start a global ministry.

When people today talk about missions or strategy about how to reach people with the Gospel, or where to plant churches...I mean, we usually at least try to find strategic locations and maybe a diverse and large population. We don't usually look at the map and say, let's find the most obscure, remote place with the most uneducated, disconnected people, and let's send our best team there. So I just say, to me, it's a remarkable, outstanding features of Jesus' ministry, that in contrast to our conventional wisdom today which says rule 1, 2, and 3, for success in anything is "location, location, location," the location where He started His ministry and spent the bulk of His time and energy was a tour through Galilee. Of course people said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth and Galilee?" And they ridiculed the disciples because they were from there; uneducated men, unlearned men, unsophisticated men from Galilee. But that's where Jesus was you know? No strategic location, no major metropolitan area; just going about from one town or village to another.

So I think there's a principle there that maybe we should learn about effective, fruitful ministry and that is this: it doesn't matter where...it doesn't matter where. Location is not the issue. It's the "what" of your ministry that makes it significant, not the "where." The place is not the important thing; the size, the population, those are the things that we tend to look at; we want our ministry to be big, we want it to be broad, we want it to reach the masses; so we try to identify the most strategic location; that's not the key, the key is what you do not where you do it...the depth not the breadth. Concentrating on one area, one group of people, and pouring yourself into them, is more effective in the long run, than spreading yourself thin. Jesus had a global impact from Galilee.

The second feature that...that stands out is not only the secluded location of His ministry, but the single occupation of it: Preaching. Verse 1 says, He went about from one city and village to another, *"proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God."* That was His singular occupation. Those are the two most common NT words for preaching: evangelizing and heralding. That's what Jesus did everywhere He went. He was an evangelist – proclaiming the good news; He was a herald – a herald was someone who came into town with news from an important dignitary and he just announced it, like a town crier, "hear ye, hear ye", and he would read off whatever. Announcing a royal decree, announcing a public decree...well, that's what Jesus did everywhere He went. Proclaiming the good news; evangelizing, preaching, heralding what the Boss gave Him to announce. That was His ministry. Preaching, proclaiming, broadcasting the news the message about...about what? *"The kingdom of God."* So He went to all these towns and villages with one method, preaching; one message, the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God?

Well, regarding the kingdom of God, Jesus said, "it is at hand, it has come near, it is upon you, it is in your midst, and you must enter it." So the kingdom of God, I think, refers to the realm of salvation. Salvation is here, that's what He was saying. God is offering salvation now, you must repent and believe in Christ and be saved. Enter that realm of salvation. I can give you one text to support that. Matt.19:23. You remember the statement where Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." So you notice first of all, kingdom of heaven is synonymous with kingdom of God. A lot of people get mixed up about that and want to make a big distinction between the two, no need for that. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same thing. Heaven was just substituted for God because the Jews didn't like to say the name of God. But then verse 25, When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" I mean they could have said, "Then who can enter the kingdom? But instead they said the same thing: then who can be saved? So kingdom of heaven = kingdom of God = being saved. Very simple way to see the definition of that.

So what did Jesus preach? Well, He was preaching salvation. "The kingdom of God is here, you need to enter the kingdom." What does that mean? "You need to repent, believe the gospel, and be saved. So His method, singular: preaching. His message, singular: the kingdom of God, salvation. Jesus knew what He was here to do...He knew what He was here to do. Luke 4:23, I read you already, the crowds were saying to Him, come over here, stay with us, "But He said no, "I must preach the kingdom to the other cities, that is the purpose for which I was sent." He understood that. He was always preaching and He was always preaching the same thing...the Good News of the kingdom of God. That was His occupation. God had one Son and He made Him a preacher. Like Paul, it was not, "these many things I dabble in, but this one thing I do." That was it. So again we see the focus of Jesus' ministry an economy of effort. One location: Galilee, one occupation: preaching the kingdom...preaching the message of salvation. And again I think that's exemplary for us. There's a reason this summary, this concise, brief summary is here so we'll see this.

I mean is ministry really that simple? Preach the kingdom. It should be. We find a lot of ways, don't we, to make it more complicated than that, we create all kinds of programs and activities that may or may not contribute to that. But really, that's the heart of all true biblical, Christian ministry; that is the one thing that should occupy all of us: is evangelizing and heralding, proclaiming the gospel, preaching the kingdom of God. Are we doing that as a church? Do you think? Are you as a believer, as a Christian doing that? We need to learn from Jesus' ministry. Trim the fat; cut the clutter; simplify your focus; one thing is needful: that's spreading the news of the gospel; announcing to people their need to be saved.

Thirdly, what's remarkable about Jesus' ministry? One, I say, the secluded location: Galilee. Two, I say, the single occupation: preaching. Three, I say, the strategic concentration of His ministry: Discipleship. Verse 1 still, the end of it, *"and the twelve were with Him."* Luke is just reminding us that this was the pattern. Everywhere Jesus went, the twelve were tagging along. They were part of the strategy. And notice the disciples are now "the twelve." We met them back in **ch.6. Vs.13**, Jesus called all the disciples to Him, and out of them all, *chose 12, whom He also named as apostles*. Remember their names? Who can help me out? Peter, Andrew, James, John, remember there were 3 groups of 4...Peter, Andrew, James and John, the first group. Who's in the second group? Anybody? Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas...good! Then the forth group...you just got to remember two simple things. There's another James and then another Simon, Judas (not Iscariot), Judas Iscariot. K...so we've met the 12. And, of course it's just easier to say "the twelve", then to name them every time, so that's what Luke does. But this was the pattern and this was the priority now of Jesus' ministry: *"the twelve were with Him."* That's sort of a very...with Him, you know they were close to Him, they were around them that was His whole point that they would be close by so that they could observe everything that He said and did. Jesus' ministry was a *follow Me* ministry. Not sit in a classroom and listen to my lecture. But come, follow me, see how I live and listen and learn and watch and observe and do what I do.

And uhh...and this is really again, is really the most remarkable thing to me about Jesus' life and Jesus' ministry: *3 years 12 men, He left, they turned the world upside down.* That's what happened. Three years, 12 men, and one of them betrayed Him. So three years, 11 men then they added another, so 12. Jesus ascended and they changed the world. So you just think about that...I mean...you know. Pretend you're Jesus. You're the Head of the Church. You're going to build this kingdom. You're going to build your church. You're going to advance the gospel so that it spreads around the world. How do you do that? What's your plan? He didn't start a school; He didn't write a book; He didn't even blog. How could you not blog. I mean He never even left His own country. What did He do? He trained 12 men for three years. That was it. You know that just says to me, you don't try to cover the globe, you just concentrate on a few. You invest so much in them that by the time you leave, they've got it, and your ministry multiplies. That's what He did. Kind of a risky way to do it. He left the whole mission of evangelizing the world, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, to these men, who were with him for just a really brief period of time.

You know I think about that, I don't think the strategy is any different for us in our ministries. Paul said to Timothy, *"the things you've learned from me, commit to faithful men, who will be able to teach others."* That's four generations: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others. That's the kind of generational long-term perspective that we need. You don't have to have a global ministry. You don't have to reach every person in the world in your lifetime. If you want to have a long-term impact on a wide level, you don't do that by flying over, trying to make connections and network people together; you stay in one place, you pour your life into a small group of people who will continue the process of teaching others what you taught them. The key to multiplication is concentration.

Concentrate on discipleship! You want to impact *many*? Disciple a *few*. That'll change the world. And by the way, how do you disciple somebody? What...what are we talking about? Just to simplify that for you. What do we mean when we say disciple...disciple somebody? Discipleship...what is that? Well a disciple is a *learner, right...that's all*. So you find somebody that knows less than you and you teach them what you know. You hang out with another believer for the deliberate purpose of learning, instruction. Maybe you go through a book of the Bible together, maybe you memorize a passage of Scripture together; maybe you get a book and you just read it together and talk about it. Better yet, do ministry together. Grab somebody and say, "Hey come with me, I'm going to go...visit somebody in the hospital", or whatever it is you do. But there's things you know and there's things that you know how to do, and discipleship is just being intentional about sharing that and transferring that to someone else. And we all need to be involved in that and we all can be. We all have people that know less than we know. So there's no reason why every believer in this church shouldn't be involved in that process.

You know I think about this...in the church...I mean...in our church here, there are two kinds of people, you know? There are the ones who sit in the back all the time and there are those who move forward like we ask them to. *Laughter*. Naww...I'm really being mean today aren't I? *Laughter*. That's what happens when I take a week away, you know...I just get all honorary. No, in the church there are two kinds of people; there are those who serve and there are those who don't. But you know...of those who serve, there are also two kinds. There are those who, who do there ministry serve faithfully, they're just faithful to fulfill the task that's been assigned them and they do it with no complaints...you know...it's great. But then there are those who also do their ministry with always a view of how they can include, equip and enlist and encourage other people to do their ministry. I think that's the level, you know, that we want to aspire to. That's...I think that's, what spiritual leadership is. It's not just doing your ministry it's saying "How can I include others; how can I enlist and equip others through their ministry? I think that's what Jesus modeled. And that's what's called discipleship.

Well, the fourth feature, and this is really...I guess...really, the major wow factor in all of this. The special association, maybe the shocking association of His ministry, namely women. You see that in verses two and three. Maybe that's not such a shock to us, but you got to remember, it totally cut across the grain of His time and His culture. It says, the twelve were with Him, and verse two says, *"and some women."* This was really boundary breaking stuff, socially for that time. The rabbis had an interesting view of women. They believed that women were incapable of learning...how's that? They taught that women were not capable of receiving spiritual instruction; it was a waste of time. In fact, there were laws made that forbid women to be taught by a man in public, even her own husband...couldn't do that. And not just Jewish rabbis, but really, all the philosophers of that time period disdained teaching women. And so it was an anomaly what Jesus was doing here. In fact there was a common Jewish prayer, common benediction, Jewish men would pray two or three times a day this prayer: Thank you God that I'm not a gentile and I'm not a woman. So kind of a low view, a low regard for women. Jesus kind of changed that didn't He. But the public association with women was frowned upon.

We see that even in Jesus' interaction in John 4, you remember the little woman at the well seeing Jesus go through Samaria...meets this woman...at the well, Jacob's well, the disciples go on into town and get some stuff. And then they come back and they see Him there, sitting there...talking to this woman... all by, you know, ...just the two of them. And their, "What is He doing?" And it says, the disciples came back and they marveled that *"He had been speaking with a woman; yet no one said, 'Wait, What do You seek?' or 'Why are you talking to her?'"* They didn't say it but that's what they were thinking. So that was...that was....that was...this wasn't done. This was taboo.

But Jesus never allowed those kind of social mores to interfere with His ministry, especially when those social mores were unbiblical and ungodly. So to the surprise of everyone, the entourage following Jesus through this tour, through Galilee included women. Jesus welcomed them, He taught them, He ministered to them, He received ministry from them.

And of all the gospel writers, Luke, in particular, highlights this fact. He takes, I think every opportunity to spotlight the involvement and the contribution of women in his gospel. It's a matter of emphasis to him, both in Luke (and in Acts) to show, I think, primarily that the gospel is for all....it is for all. Christianity is for all, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female.

Three, in particular, are named here, I just want to highlight them, since Luke does. Each one, it says, *"had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses."* So Jesus had delivered them. *"Mary (first of all) who was called Magdalene."* That just indicates where she was from, Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She had been possessed by seven demons at one time, and Jesus exorcised them and delivered her. And apparently from that time on she was with Christ He went. She was there to watch the crucifixion, she saw where Jesus was laid when they put Him in the tomb, she participated in the anointing of His body, preparing it for burial, and she was among the first to see the empty tomb on Easter morning, and the first eyewitness of the risen Christ, after He arose. Pretty remarkable.

"and Joanna the wife of Chuza, (who was) Herod's steward." This shows that Jesus' ministry reached into places we might not have expected it to reach...into powerful, wealthy, influential homes. This woman, Joanna, her husband was the King's, King Herod's "steward." That term refers to some kind of administrative official in Herod's court, or to maybe his...the personal manager of his estate. But this woman did not allow her position or her husband's position to keep her from responding to Jesus. And, that shows us her incredible faith and her courage. And we can also know that she was faithful to the very end, because in Luke 24, she is still with Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb.

And then we meet *"Susanna."* And that's all we know of her, her name. "and Susanna," But that's something isn't it, to be named and remembered as one of the women who followed Jesus and contributed to His ministry. And notice the end of verse 3, it says *"and many others [so, many others, so many other women besides these three] who were contributing to their support out of their private means."* So that is just a little bit of historical insight, a little fact there behind the scenes to tell you how this whole thing was able to happen. Jesus was able to travel around and carry out this itinerant preaching ministry because of generous people like these women, and others who supported Him out of their own resources. His ministry depended on that. His ministry was dependent on the generosity of those who had been changed by His ministry. And, that's how it should be. Paul taught that in Gal.6:6, *"let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches."* 1 Cor.9:11, *"If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?"* So this is the early stages of that. These women supporting materially those, the disciples and Jesus who ministered to them.

Judy Hubbekk said, "Much of what we as women do is in a supportive role, but imagine what would happen to a building if its support pillars were removed." (WCCQ,401) It's a good point isn't it? Certainly the church today, the ministry of the gospel throughout history, would not be what it is without the significant role, the contribution of faithful and godly women who give and use their gifts in ministry, their resources; who contribute and that was a huge part of Jesus' ministry, that's a huge part obviously of the church's ministry still, and of our church's ministry and we applaud all of you women who so faithfully serve and contribute. The word there contribute, is really the word for deacon or deaconess. The idea of waiting tables, just serving in very menial, humble ways to take care and provide for people. And that's what these women did. And many of you do that as well and we appreciate that and we applaud your service. But this was just a simple summary, that's all it is. It's not adding something new. It's not telling us another episode of Jesus' teaching or Jesus' healing ministry. It just pauses the action...to just focus on what's going on around Jesus and how He's doing His ministry.

And I....I just...the question comes, "Do we pay attention to that? Do we as believers today pay attention to how Jesus did His ministry? Shouldn't we?" I mean shouldn't that be a model for us? I think it should and I think we should learn from it. Let's learn from it.

1. This is where God has put you, alright, so bloom where you are planted; get with it; there's plenty to do, right here, do it...do it thoroughly.
2. Keep it simple; do one thing, do it well; get the gospel out; spread the good news. If you're ever at a point in your life in your ministry and you don't know what to do, do evangelism, talk to people about the kingdom of God.
3. Concentrate your energy relationally on a few. You can not minister to everyone; you can not be close friends with everybody; but you can disciple somebody. Find somebody and do that. Make it your goal...in your lifetime...to reproduce yourself in another person, at least one other person.
4. Include the excluded...include the excluded. Is that women? Is that children? Is that teenagers? Is that men? Is that Senior adults? Is that some other ethnic group outside of your own, or your comfort zone? Make room in your life and in your ministry for the contribution and service of those left out.

I think if we can learn those principles, we will have taken from this inspired text that which is profitable for us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word, we do know that it's all God breathed and profitable. So, we thank you for this brief insight to the ministry of Christ and we pray that you would help us by your spirit to know how to apply some of these principles in our own case. You've given each of us, Lord, a ministry to do, for not doing it...we need to get on with it. But if we are we need your guidance, we need a model. So we thank you for your example of Jesus' ministry and we do marvel at how even from these humble beginnings, His ministry has expanded all the way here to us. And, we just praise you for your grace in that. And thank you for how your grace continues to work in us and even in spite of us, many times. You're faithful and we see

the fruit of that and we rejoice in that and we rejoice in the privilege of what you're doing and want to be faithful and want to be fruitful and want to be effective and so I pray that these principles would guide us and you would be pleased.

Continue...continue to magnify your ministry through us and through this church. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.