



Luke 10:17–20

17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ 18 He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Paul White)

In John 14:12 Jesus says these incredible words to his disciples. They're enough to make us do a double-take, even two thousand years later. I can only imagine how Jesus' twelve disciples reacted to them. John 14:12,

12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus calmed storms with a word. He fed the five thousand. He healed hundreds if

not thousands. He cast out legions of demons. He raised people from the dead. He preached and taught with wisdom the likes of which the world has never seen, not before or since. And this is not even to mention his dying for the sins of the world. So how on earth can he say that his followers will go on to do greater things than him? But of course, Jesus spoke the truth. At his ascension the Christian church amounted to around 120 people. Two thousand years later the number is in the billions. His followers, following the pattern set by our master, have indeed gone on to do greater things than Jesus did.

And over the past couple of days we've had the privilege of watching the birth of this missionary movement. Jesus the first missionary, at the beginning of Luke

chapter 9 sent out the Twelve whom he'd been training for exactly this purpose. Then at the beginning of chapter 10 he called, trained and sent out a further seventy-two missionaries. In today's passage the seventy-two return home from their first mission. Let me read it to you, from Luke 10:17–20,

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ten in heaven.'

Do you remember back in Luke chapter 4 when Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan? Moments earlier Jesus had been baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, a great crowd of God-fearing Jews looking on. As Jesus came up out of the water the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. And at the same moment God the Father thundered from heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' We remarked at that time that those crowds having heard the testimony of both John and heaven that Jesus was the Messiah could well have risen up with Jesus at their head and retaken Jerusalem from the Romans. But instead

of heading to Jerusalem to take the fight up to Caesar, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit out into the wilderness where the real battle would begin. Because contrary to popular Messianic expectations Jesus had not come to do battle with Caesar, he'd come to do battle with the real prince of this world. Jesus didn't come to rid the world of Roman occupation, he came to rid the world once and for all of Satan's domination. Jesus came not to defeat the Romans. He came to defeat Satan, sin and death. And those forty days in the desert represent the first skirmish in a battle that would end victorious on the cross.

In today's passage Jesus announces a significant breakthrough in his campaign against Satan. The Twelve had earlier struggled to cast out a demon that tor-

mented a little boy, but the seventy-two come back victorious, overjoyed at the demons they'd cast out in Jesus' name. Whether Jesus is speaking metaphorically about their success, or if he indeed has had a vision of Satan's downfall in the heavenly realms, he says these words in response,

'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

Satan's grip on the world is beginning to loosen as the kingdom of God advances through the work of Jesus' followers. I think that's what's behind the image or vision of Satan falling like lightning from

heaven (which is also perhaps an allusion to a similar prophecy in Isa 14:13–15). And the reference to trampling on snakes and scorpions is no less powerful. Both are Biblical symbols of evil. And trampling on snakes recalls the very first prophecy about Jesus right back in Genesis 3:15 in which a ‘serpent-crusher’ would one day crush Satan’s head. The serpent-crusher is Jesus and his followers too have been given the authority and power by him to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the Enemy.

What a joyous occasion! And yet Jesus would temper their joy. He has a word of warning and a word of reminder in this joyous moment for his followers as their training continues. Verse 20,

20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

The disciples were right to rejoice in their successful mission. Just as we are right to experience joy and delight in our service of God and in the enjoyment of his good gifts and creation. But there are also perils in deriving too much joy from ministry successes or seasons of special grace and blessing. Success can easily foster pride. And the highs of life in our broken world can quickly turn to lows. So we need to keep these joyful moments in perspective. There is, however, a joy that we can indulge in to the fullest; a joy that can never be taken away. That joy is that our names are written in heaven.

We can rejoice that our names are written in heaven because it is not something we achieved or could ever have earned. It is not something given to us by man that can just as easily be taken away. We can rejoice that our names are written in heaven because God chose to write them there. It was and is his sovereign choice. We are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem; we are children of heaven by God's choice. We rejoice because when we are absent from the body, we will be present with the Lord where it will be better by far. We rejoice that our names are inscribed above because awaiting us there is 'an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison'.

Think & Pray

You might not feel particularly joyful this

morning. And yet through meditating over Jesus' words to us we can cultivate this joy. If you have received Jesus into your heart as your Lord and Saviour, repenting of your sin and trusting in his death and resurrection on your behalf then your name has been written in heaven by God your Father. He knows you. He looks on you and regards you as his treasure. You are not your own, you were bought at a price – the precious blood of your brother and co-heir (imagine that!) Jesus Christ who right now is preparing a place for you in the house of his Father. Raise your vision to these eternal realities. Spend some time cultivating this joy this morning.¹

Then close in prayer. Pray for missionary endeavours right throughout our globe. Pray for joyful news of success on the mis-

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 389–90.

sion field – new names from every nation written in heaven. And pray that missionaries everywhere through good times and bad might be carried, strengthened and sustained by the deep and abiding joy of knowing that their names are written in heaven, no matter the ups and downs of their service of our Lord.