

Your Names Are Written in Heaven

A Joy Rightly Placed Is Never Lost

Introduction

The Text

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:17–20)

Down in My Heart to Stay

- A. If you recall, last week, we looked at [vv. 4-16](#) of this chapter and we talked about three things in particular: Urgency, Intensity, and Agency.
1. We talked about how the fields are ready for harvest, but the time is short, the window is closing, and we need to get out there and labor for God.
 2. We talked about how the gospel of the kingdom is a matter of life and death, of peace and judgment, and people need us to stop beating around the bush and speak the truth plainly to them in love.
 3. We talked about how we are Jesus’ agents, His representatives, His ambassadors in the world—that when they hear us they should hear Him, when they see us they should see Him. That, as Paul Tripp would say: We are the tone in His voice, we are the look on His face, we are the touch of His hand.
- B. Now, as I was sharing these things I imagine that many of us were characterized by one of two responses:
1. Quite a few probably (though I wish it were not so) came away feeling a bit discouraged. “I’m not doing this. I’m not a lamb in the midst of wolves, laying my life down for Jesus. I’m blowing it. I have close friends who still don’t even know I’m a Christian. Am I even a Christian? God must be ashamed of me, even angry at me, for how little I’ve done for Him.”
 2. Some of us, on the other hand, though maybe we would try to deny it, might have come away feeling a little too encouraged, if you know what I mean. “I am doing this. Sure there are lots in this church who aren’t standing for you Lord, but look at me! I shared my faith with 9 people in the last week (but who’s counting?). I bet You must be so pleased with me and all that I have done for You!”
 - a. Well, let me just say, Jesus is going to blow both of these responses out of the water this morning. He’s going to turn the whole framework we so often live within upside down, flip it on its head. With this text, it’s as if He’s strapping a piece of

dynamite to that whole structure of thought and He's just going to reduce it to rubble.

- C. And He's doing all of this because He's deeply committed to and concerned for . . . our joy—our true and everlasting joy.
 - 1. Do you remember that kids worship song? *"I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Down in my heart to stay."*
 - a. That's what Jesus wants to give you this morning! A joy with staying power. Isn't that what you're longing for?
- D. I've divided the text up under two main headings: (1) A Misplaced Joy (v. 17); and (2) A Gracious Redirection (vv. 18-20).

(1) A Misplaced Joy (v. 17)

Not Lambs But Lions

- A. We read there in v. 17 that the 72 returned from their missionary journey and it seems thing went really well for them. It seems they didn't so much face the rejection piece that Jesus had forewarned. You remember, they were told that they were being sent out *"as lambs in the midst of wolves"* (v. 3b). Not exactly a heartwarming image, right? And they went out, no doubt, a bit nervous about what all that could entail.
 - 1. But they came away from this whole mission, not so much feeling like lambs, but like lions. The victory was pronounced and impressive: *"[E]ven the demons are subject to us in your name!"* (v. 17b).
- B. It is because of their accomplishments, because of their great victories at this point, because of what they have done, that we are told: *"The seventy-two returned with joy . . ."* (v. 17a).
 - 1. But as we shall soon discover, Jesus detects something amiss in this joy. And in love He graciously redirects them to something more stable, to something eternal.

(2) A Gracious Redirection (vv. 18-20)

Entering in

- A. Now, we should say that It seems at first that Jesus is entering into their joy with them. And, indeed, I think in some sense He certainly is. He does see that the work they have done in His name has been good. *"I saw [Gk. 'was watching' NASB] Satan fall like lightning from heaven"* (v. 18)
 - 1. In other words, I think we could read it as: "Well done guys. There is victory being won over the enemy here. Satan is on the retreat. The kingdom of God is breaking into the world. I was watching what you were up to in my Name and it was good."

B. And He continues on in v. 19 along similar lines: “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.”

1. The basic sense of His words here it seems to me is this: Ultimate victory will be yours.

C. That last statement there is particularly noteworthy: “[N]othing shall hurt you.” It’s an astounding promise in the English. It’s even more astounding in the Greek. We can’t see it in the English, but in the Greek there are actually three negatives here, used for maximal emphasis. Let me show you how this works:

1. One negative: “No-thing shall hurt you.” Okay, that sounds good.
2. Two negatives: “No-thing shall not hurt you.” Whoops, that’s now bad news. Two negatives make a positive right? “Everything will hurt you.”
3. Three negatives: “No-thing shall not, not hurt you.” That’s our text. That’s what Jesus is saying. We get lost in it like a riddle. But it’s essentially Jesus’ way of saying what Paul elaborates on for us later: “³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . .³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35, 37-39).

a. No thing with not, not hurt you! You will be more than conquerors through Christ!

“Nevertheless”

A. But now here we come to this most abrupt and important word there at the front of v. 20: “Nevertheless . . .”

1. It feels almost rude does it not? In vv. 18-19 we got the sense that He was about to break out the champagne and celebrate with them a job well done, a mission accomplished.
 - a. But then all of a sudden, here, with this single word it feels almost as if He’s begun to rain on their parade, He taps the brakes on their celebration. He cautions them about their misplaced joy: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you . . .”

B. You see, to this point, the focus has been, more or less, on what these disciples either have accomplished or will accomplish, right?

1. The emphasis has been on the sort of things that they shall do: the demons are subject to us, Satan is falling because of us, we will tread on serpents and scorpions, we have authority over all the power of the enemy—indeed, we are more than conquerors!

C. And just as the disciples are raising their glasses, it’s as if Jesus says: “Not so fast. Yes, yes, well and good. These are amazing effects. But they are effects of some more fundamental cause. They are implications of some more essential principle. They are the fruits of some more basic root system.”

1. And, hence, they are not the sort of things we ought to be rejoicing in ultimately. There is something behind all of these accomplishments, something beneath all of these things. And if you can set your joy there, if you can drop anchor in that, well you will have a joy that no one can touch.

A Name Achieved or a Name Received?

- A. It is to this that Jesus is trying to redirect His disciples (and us) now at this point. Let's turn to His words there in [v. 20](#) there and read them now in full: ["Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."](#)
 1. These disciples are more enamored with what they can do by grace than with the fact that they've been given grace in the first place. They find the power that they can wield in Jesus' name more exhilarating than the fact that God knows their name.
- B. The essence of the matter, I think, is this: There is an abiding temptation we have to tether our joy, to root our sense of identity, our name, to our performance, to what we can produce, to what we can accomplish, to our gifts, our skills, or whatever.
 1. And this is a dangerous, a deadly thing. Because your performance, what you're able to accomplish, it's going to go up and down. And your joy is going to go up and down with it.
 - a. I mean, Jesus knows, this was a good trip for these disciples, but hard days are coming. O sure, nothing will not, not hurt them in an ultimate sense, but, truly, there will be much that hurts along the way. And what's going to happen to their joy on those days?
- C. When I consider my own ministry and experience, I see quite plainly my own need for this gracious redirection.
 1. Imagine I'm preaching the gospel on a given Sunday and 20 people come to the Lord, they repent and trust Jesus for salvation, they want to join our church, they're patting me on the back telling me, "I was blind but now I see, thank you pastor." How do I feel? Well, I think I'd feel on top of the world.
 2. But now imagine I'm preaching the gospel on another Sunday and, this time 20 people respond, but not favorably as before. Even mid-message they stand up out of their seats and head for the door. They're offended by what I have to say. They don't think I'm a good pastor or preacher or whatever. How do I feel? Well, I'm thinking it takes me a couple days to get off the floor.
- D. And the question I have to ask is: Why? Why am I so elated when I "succeed" and so devastated when I "fail"? Why do I feel great about myself when people praise me, but ashamed and dejected when people reject me?
 1. Isn't all of this indicating in some way that my identity, my sense of self, my hope, my joy is tethered to these things—to what I accomplish, to what I do, to the quality of my speaking ability, the breadth of my knowledge, the size of my church, the number of my twitter followers?

- E. Even for those of us who know Christ, we are always tempted to drift in this direction. We are always tempted to go the way of Babel. Do you remember the Tower of Babel? Do you remember why they gave themselves to building it? What motivated them? What drove them? [“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves . . .”](#) (Gen 11:4).
1. [“\[L\]et us make a name for ourselves . . .”](#) “We don’t have a name yet. Right now we are nobodies. But once we get this tower up to the heavens, then we will really be somebody. We’ve got to do something. Then we get a name. Then we find the joy.”
 - a. But when Jesus sees this sort of impulse at work in His disciples He stops them in their tracks. “Hold up. Then you get a name. You already have a name. And it is written in heaven.”
 - i. Christianity is the only religion where my identity isn’t achieved it’s received. I don’t earn it. I don’t make it. I’m given it by grace.
- F. I don’t know in what ways you are now tempted to try to make a name for yourself. I don’t know what sort of things you are tempted to tether your joy to.
1. Perhaps you live and die with how your job is going;
 2. Or how your kids are doing;
 3. Or whether you can still fit into that pair of jeans you used to wear back in college, but now a few babies later, you feel misshapen and unattractive and your sense of self and joy has gone with your looks;
 4. Maybe it’s even your performance in religious duties. Like I said at the beginning, you feel awesome when you’re out sharing or your having devotions, but you feel like God must be so ashamed of you when you’re struggling with doubt or fear or drive. We get high on our good days and dejected on our bad ones. It’s a slavery.
- G. So I don’t know what it is for you, but I know what Jesus is trying to move you towards:
[““Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, . . . but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”](#)

Your Names Are Written in Heaven

- A. Now it is due time that we consider what precisely Jesus means by this statement. For one thing, we must understand that Jesus is referring here to names recorded in what elsewhere is referred to as [“the book of life”](#) (Phil 4:3).
1. The idea is that of a census, where a nation or realm is compiling a list of its citizens. To have our names written in heaven, therefore, is to say what Paul says just a chapter earlier in [Phil 3:20a](#), that [“our citizenship is in heaven . . .”](#) It is a declaration from God that we, in fact, belong there with Him, that we belong to Him.

Past, Present, and Future

- A. Now, when we give ourselves to a deeper consideration of this idea, we come to find that there is at once a past, future, and present sense to it. Let me show you what I mean.

From Eternity Past

- A. With regard to the past, this comes into view when we search out an answer to the question: When exactly were our names written in this book?
- B. On this there is perhaps no more profound a statement than that in [Rev 13:8](#), where John says that these names have been “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”
1. This verse is particularly critical for our purposes here because it at once tells us both the when and the how with regard to the names written in this book.
- C. With regard to the when, we have our answer: “before the foundation of the world”—before the world ever was.
1. The idea is that God, though He knew that all men would of their own free will turn from Him in sin and rebellion, purposed of His own sovereign will and good pleasure to redeem some from that fallen mass, to pay the penalty due their sin, to ransom them from their slavery, to purchase them as a bride for His Son.
- D. Make no mistake, your name was not written in the Lamb’s book of life on the day you first believed, you first believed because your name was already written there. And it’s been there from before the foundation of the world.
- E. And lest you think that this text in Revelation is an anomaly, let me put forward two more, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses the matter might be sealed in your mind and heart:
1. “[God] chose us in him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4).
 2. “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began . . .” (2 Tim 1:9).
- F. Now, I said that [Rev 13:8](#) tells us both the when and the how. So what about the how? How did my name come to be written in heaven? The answer is found in the very title given to this book. Did you notice? “[T]he book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”
1. What kind of paradox is this? It’s the book of life. But it belongs to the Lamb who was killed.
 - a. Implication: The eternal death we deserved for our sin was exacted from Jesus, so that the eternal life He deserved for His perfect obedience could be given freely to us. “[T]he book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”

G. I know some of us think we're pretty awesome. Like God wrote our name in that book in the same way an athletic team drafts a player for their team. They don't pick the scrubs. They pick the best. So He saw your potential, He saw your skill, and He drafted you for heaven. That's not how this works.

1. Your name was not written in that book in some liquid gold or silver. It was not even written in ink. It was written in the blood of God's Son. God dips His quill, as it were, in the blood of the Lamb. That's how your name gets there. He died to put it there.

H. Make no mistake, your name was not written in the Lamb's book of life because God knew you would be holy or righteous, you are growing in holiness and righteousness because your name was already written there.

1. That's the full context of [Rev 13:8](#). Listen to it now in full: "[A]ll who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain."

- a. Why do you have faith in Christ? Why will you stay faithful to Christ to the end? Because your name is in the book, by God's sovereign grace.

To Eternity Future

A. Now with regard to the future, it's already kind of been alluded to, but, if your name has been written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world, you will be kept to the end of the world.

1. [Rev 20](#), the final judgment, the dead are brought before the throne, some books are opened, these books contain your deeds, your performance, but then another book is opened. The Lamb's book of life.

- a. And the decisive issue in the final judgment is not whether your good deeds outweighed your bad, how well you performed, no! It's whether your name is written in the Lamb's book.

B. And brothers and sisters if you are trusting in Jesus here this morning, your name is there! It has been from eternity past. It will be to eternity future.

The Present Moment

A. And that has overwhelming implications for the present moment. If your name was written in that book from eternity past and if your name will remain in that book to eternity future, how secure can you be in the love of God for you today?!

1. Can you let go of your performance and your accomplishments, of making a name for yourself here and rest, rejoice in what Jesus has accomplished for you? You are known, you are loved, you are kept by God. Set your joy down into that!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Let me close by holding before you a man who got it. D.A. Carson recounts a story from the life of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the most influential preachers of the twentieth century: “When he was dying of cancer, one of his friends and former associates asked him, in effect, ‘How are you managing to bear up? You have been accustomed to preaching several times a week. You have begun important Christian enterprises; your influence has extended through tapes and books to Christians on five continents. And now you have been put on the shelf. You are reduced to sitting quietly, sometimes managing a little editing. I am not so much asking therefore how you are coping with the disease itself. Rather, how are you coping with the stress of being out of the swim of things?’ Lloyd-Jones responded in the words of Luke 10: ‘[D]o not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’ (v. 20) (D.A. Carson, “February 24” in *For the Love of God*).