

The Cause For Highest Joy.

Text: Luke 10:17-21

1) Is Not What We Do For Christ's Kingdom

Suggested Hymns:

2) Is What Our Lord Has Done, And Is Doing For Us

68, 505, 156, 277, 436

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 10:17-20, ***17 Then the seventy 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 give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20 "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Many people feel that religion is something very sad and gloomy. They feel that it forces a renunciation of practically all the pleasures on earth. So they look upon someone's joining a church as a step that calls for sympathy and regret. Ask such a person to consider joining the church, and he will in all probability tell you, *"Not yet; I want to enjoy myself — at least while I am young."*

There certainly are some religions which are very sad and gloomy. When a heathen worships wood or stone or some animal, there is something very depressing about that. When some benighted soul, steeped in superstition, disfigures or maims his own body as a sacrifice to his idol, there is something tragic in that.

But the Christian religion cannot be justly accused of gloom and sadness. On the contrary, it is the religion of joy, joy even amidst the trials and cares of earth.

St. Bernard said, *"When you become a Christian, you do not sacrifice Isaac, which signifies laughter, but a ram; not your joy, but sinful brutish delights, which end in sorrow."*¹

Christians are positively commanded to rejoice. Paul cries out, “**Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.**”² “We ask God to forgive us for our evil thoughts and evil tempers, but rarely, if ever, ask Him to forgive us for our sadness. Joy is too frequently regarded as a happy accident of the Christian life, an ornament and a luxury rather than a duty.”³

Important it is, indeed, that Christians be actuated in their joy by the right motive. That is what Jesus stresses in the words of the text. Let us consider today *The Cause for Highest Joy*. It is not what we do for Christ’s kingdom, but it is what our Lord has done, and is doing for us. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Cause For Highest Joy Is Not What We Do For Christ’s Kingdom

The Lord had commissioned seventy disciples and sent them out two by two to towns and places which He intended to visit Himself. He had given them specific instructions as to how they were to carry out their work. Now, having returned, the Seventy made their report. It was a joyful report. The Seventy were elated over their success.

They rejoiced that even the demons had been subject to them through Jesus’ name. We may assume that there were some disappointments, that not all received their message. The work at times, too, must have been difficult. Yet the disciples were filled with joy over the outcome of their mission.

Our Lord has commissioned us, too, to do a definite work. We have also been sent out on a mission. We are to go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.

And we, too, must make a report. The work may have been trying at times; it did not meet with the world’s acclaim. Yet, like the Seventy, we, too, rejoice when we have been successful — when someone has been gained for the Church, or a new house of worship has been erected.

Jesus had noted the success of the disciples over Satan. In His name they had cast him out. It was Jesus who had given them the power. He conquered

Satan. And as lightning falls from heaven, so suddenly Satan had to flee before the Word of Christ spoken by the disciples.

In their success Jesus saw a token that the Church would prevail over the works of the devil; sinners would be converted. Through the proclamation of the Gospel Satan's kingdom is destroyed, and Christ's kingdom is built. Should we not rejoice over that?

The Lord had given the Seventy special power as we read in Luke 10:19, ¹⁹ ***“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.***

The Christian Church was not yet established, and they needed special credentials to show that they were divinely sent. Sinister, cunning, treacherous Satan, like serpents and scorpions, still attacks Christians, but Christ gives them the power to conquer. He preserves His missionaries in the midst of dangers. Many are the accounts of missionaries in China, India, and other countries, relating instances of wonderful preservation by our Lord and we rejoice in that.

But now Jesus sounds a warning in connection with the expressed rejoicing of the Seventy, ***“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this.”*** Jesus is not condemning their rejoicing altogether, but is speaking comparatively. There is a far greater reason for rejoicing than this. There is danger here of misplaced credit. The disciples seem to have rejoiced, not so much over the fact that Christ overcame Satan, as rather in their ability to drive him out.

They had succeeded where the Twelve Apostles a short time ago had failed.⁴ This joy was mixed with boasting, and with self-glorification. Therefore they were in danger of placing the emphasis on their work instead of Christ's. Self-satisfaction, power, prestige — that was the danger threatening the Seventy.

There is always a tendency to glorify success, to worship achievement, the getting things done; but if our joy rests mainly on this, it will be very fickle and uncertain. This is a common danger threatening Christians today.

If someone been unusually successful, or has done something special, or something outstanding by way of comparison, then pride stands ready to tempt him. The Lord sees this danger. He does not deny the disciples' right to rejoicing, but He wants to lead it into the proper sphere.

You see what it means to glorify personal success in Church work. Some may have been very faithful but can show little success. A minister in the sparsely settled country may not have large classes of converts, as his brother in the city with its teeming thousands might have. A missionary in foreign fields, who must overcome many prejudices, may work years before he has any success to record. God may never use us to perform spectacular deeds, nor is that important. But what is important is this, as we read in 1 Corinthians 4:2, ² ***Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.***

So rejoice in your work for Christ. Rejoice in conquests made for His kingdom. Rejoice in your success — it was a victory for your Saviour, and by His power. But this will not be your highest joy.

2. The Cause For Highest Joy Is What Our Lord Has Done, And Is Doing For Us

Our text says “... ***But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.***” You see, Jesus is teaching the disciples to understand that, not what they did, but what God had done for them, is the true ground for joy.

Joy over having one’s name written in heaven is so great that joy over what they had done in His name is as nothing by comparison. Christ is guarding His disciples against the question, “***What shall we have therefore?***”⁵

They are not to think too much of what they do for Christ’s kingdom. Rather should they forget themselves in serving Him. When He calls to mind their service for Him, they may answer in surprise, ‘***Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?***³⁸ ‘***When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?***³⁹ ‘***Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?***”⁶

Jesus tells the Seventy that their names are registered in heaven. That was something not they, but He had done. This fact would give them joy which no one could take away from them and which the burdens and cares of this life could not affect.

“***Names are written in heaven.***” — what does this mean? This picture is most likely taken from the register in which the names of all Israelites were recorded to show that they belonged to God’s people of the Old Testament.

In the Book of Revelation we are told of *“the book of life of the Lamb.”*⁷ To be written in heaven means, then, to have one’s name recorded in the Book of Life, to belong to those who by God’s grace are saved out of the world, out of the power of darkness, out of the death of sin, whom God has adopted as His children, to whom eternal life belongs.

Remember what it cost to have a name written in heaven. The Father had to love the world, the sinful, wicked world, so much that He was ready to send His only-begotten Son into it, have Him take on the likeness of sinful men, permit Him to suffer and die the most shameful death on the cross. We read in Romans 5:8, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

The Son had to leave His heavenly throne, take upon Himself human flesh and blood, fulfil the Law in the sinner’s stead (the Law which we, the sinner have broken), be betrayed into the hands of His enemies, submit to brutal scourging and a cruel crown of thorns, and, at last, shed His holy, precious blood on the cross of Calvary.

The Holy Spirit had to call the sinner by the Gospel, enlighten him with His gifts, sanctify and keep him in true faith. This, very briefly told, is what it cost the Triune God to have a sinner’s name written in heaven, the home of many mansions. And when your name stands recorded there, should not that be the cause for highest joy?

Hear the Psalmist rejoice as recorded in Psalm 84:4, *“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You.”* The Prophet Isaiah exults, *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.”*⁸

The Virgin Mary magnifies the Lord yet to be born, *“My soul magnifies the Lord,”*⁹ *“And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”*⁹ Paul, in spite of his earthly burdens, exhorts his fellow believers in Philippians 4:4, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.”*

Yes, *“they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”*¹⁰ Truly, “the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy.”¹¹ To know that my sins are all

forgiven, that I am at peace with God, that my name is written in the Book of Life — that is the cause for highest joy.

This is a joy which the world does not know. “One day a man went to a rationalistic, unbelieving preacher for comfort and peace of conscience. The preacher said to him, ‘Forget about those things! Go to see and hear that famous comedian who is now playing in our city and is keeping his audience in a constant roar. That man will dispel these morbid broodings of yours.’ There was a moment’s silence. Then the visitor groaned, I am that comedian.”

Shallow and artificial is the joy of the world. Many a person’s heart is bleeding and breaking while his lips are made to laugh.

Is your name registered in heaven? Can you be certain? God knew you from eternity. In time He brought you to faith in the Saviour. He has kept you in faith so far. And He promises to keep you to the end.

You can say in the words of Luther’s Small Catechism, Q 199,¹² **Are you sure that you will enter eternal life?** The answer is, *“I firmly believe that, as God has in time called me by the Gospel, enlightened, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith, even so He has from eternity chosen me unto the adoption of children and unto life everlasting, and no man shall pluck me out of His hand.”*

The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, knows you, for He has redeemed you. He has a book kept in heaven, and in that book is your name, if you are indeed and in truth a child of God. Yes, all you who are baptised; yes, little ones, too; yes, all you who have confessed Jesus before men and remain true to your confession, you are known in heaven, for your names are written there. This is the Christian’s highest joy.

If someone feels that their name is not yet written in heaven, then heed the voice of the Holy Spirit in this Word today. He is inviting you now to believe in the Redeemer, to believe that He died for your sins. Following His gentle guidance, you, too, will have the blessed assurance, ***“whoever believes in [Jesus Christ] should not perish but have eternal life.”***¹³

Not what I have done, but what my Saviour has done, and is doing, for me: that is the cause for highest joy. The knowledge that my name is recorded in heaven, this alone gives true, everlasting joy, which remains also in trouble and in death, which at last finds full fruition in the eternal joy of eternal life.

May God grant each one of us the assurance today that our names are written in heaven. May He do this for Jesus', our Redeemer's, sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Robert Leighton

² Phil. 4:4

³ R. W. Dale

⁴ Luke 9:40

⁵ Matthew 19:27

⁶ Matthew 25:37-39

⁷ Rev. 13:8; 21:27

⁸ Isaiah 61:10

⁹ Luke 1:46-47

¹⁰ Psa. 126:5

¹¹ Rom. 14:17

¹² Q199 *Luther's Small Catechism* 1971 edition, Q191 1991 edition

¹³ John 3:15