

Written in Heaven

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Date: 22 March 2026

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[0 : 00] Alright, well, last Sunday we heard about how Jesus sent 72 guys on a ministry tour. And they were to go in pairs from place to place, preaching about how the kingdom of God has come near.

And Jesus told them to heal the sick in those towns. Well, today we pick up the story and we find out a little bit of what happened to them. We pick up the story in Luke chapter 10.

And we're in verse 17. And this whole next chunk, until we get to the parable of the Good Samaritan, is kind of a debriefing conversation that Jesus has with them after this ministry tour. I originally had thought that we would get through all of these verses right down to 24. But then there was just a lot in these first few verses here. So we'll maybe take it a little slower.

So, picking it up in Luke chapter 10, verse 17. The 72 returned with joy and said, Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.

[1 : 09] So they're excited. They're rejoicing. They went from town to town. They did as Jesus said. And it's almost like they're surprised that they were even able to cast out the demons.

Remember, these 72 were 72 others. They were different guys than the 12 that Jesus sent out on the first trip. Before this trip, they weren't able to heal people or to cast demons out of people.

But now, in Jesus' name, powerful evil spirits are obeying them when they command them to come out. And this is the cause for this joy that they have, this excitement.

Well, from here on, this passage becomes a little more difficult to understand. And sometimes that happens when we're reading our Bibles. We just get to a part where it raises more questions than it seems to answer.

And that's what we get in these next few verses. Let's look at this next thing Jesus says. And I think we'll see that pretty quickly here. Jesus replied to the 72. He said, So the disciples give their report that the demons obey them in Jesus' name.

[2 : 42] And Jesus responds with this. I saw Satan fall like lightning. From heaven. And here's where the questions start. What does that mean?

When did Jesus see this? Why did he fall from heaven? And Christians have put forward numerous suggestions about what Jesus meant here.

Some suggest that Jesus is actually reflecting back on what he saw even before he came to earth. When Satan was thrown down to the earth. Way, way long ago. Others suggest that when Jesus says, I saw Satan fall like lightning.

It means that Jesus had a vision. Similar to how the prophets had visions. Like the apostle John. Others try and locate this fall of Satan in the future.

And relate it to what John describes in Revelation. Where the devil is hurled to earth. We read about that in Revelation. That he's seeing what will happen very soon.

[3 : 53] And some take this quite literally to mean that while the 72 were out and about casting out demons. Jesus actually, with his human eyes, saw Satan fall to the earth.

And it looked like a lightning bolt. And if that's the case, we're wondering, why did he fall? At this moment.

And why was he up in heaven in the first place? Was he thrown down to earth by God? Or did he come streaking down of his own initiative when he saw these disciples winning victory over his underlings?

Casting out his forces? It kind of raises more questions than there are answers. Jesus doesn't answer any of these questions. One thing that seems certain, though, from these words.

Is that as these disciples go out and cast all these demons out. Jesus seems to be saying that a decisive blow has been struck against Satan.

[5 : 00] Up until now, it may have seemed that his rule was uncontested. Nobody could touch these evil spirits. We heard about how they possessed people.

The demoniac comes to mind. And how afflicted he was by legion. Forcing him to do terrible things. Hurt himself. We heard about that earlier in Luke.

But now, that rule, that control is being threatened and challenged. As Jesus sends these guys out. In verse 19, Jesus explains that he has given these 72 guys authority to do these things.

He says, I have given you authority. And we shouldn't skip over those words too quickly. Isn't it a miracle?

That Jesus is able to just give ordinary men the ability to do the same miraculous things that he does. To cast out demons.

[6 : 07] And to heal people. And what surprises me about all this is that it's not primarily a matter of power.

It's not as though Jesus just gives them, you know, touches each one of them and gives them a sort of healing touch. That now they can kind of transfer it. And do great things.

You know, when I imagine this transfer of power, I can't help but think along the lines of electricity.

Sometimes there's, you know, you got something that's charged up.

And then something that's got no charge. And so you connect the two and it charges up the thing that's got no charge. Now there's power over here. Now this thing has the power to do stuff. But this is not like that at all.

This has more to do with authority than power. I have given you authority to do these things.

[7 : 10] This is more like having, and this is not a perfect example either. But it's more like having authority to withdraw from a loaded bank account that's not your own. You're not the owner of the account.

But if your name is on the account and you are authorized by the owner, then you can take money out of it. And the people at the bank, they have to comply with your request to withdraw.

Because your name is authorized on the account. Maybe there's a little bit of that happening here.

It's as though Jesus is saying, you guys are surprised that the demons listened to you.

Well, they had to. Because I authorized you guys to give orders to them. And they have to listen to me. If I tell them to listen to you, they have to listen to you.

Now, the details, as Jesus explains this, again, raise more questions. We read in verse 19, I've given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy.

[8 : 23] Nothing will harm you. Is Jesus speaking literally or metaphorically when he talks about trampling on snakes and scorpions?

That's the main question here. Is he talking about how they will step on actual snakes and scorpions and even sometimes maybe be bit or stung? How they will face all manner of physical dangers, but miraculously they will not be harmed?

Or is this metaphor, is Jesus referring to the demons? Are they the snakes and the scorpions that they will trample on?

It's interesting that this language of trampling, and even of trampling snakes and scorpions, was used before in the Old Testament.

Psalms 91 says this in verse 9 to 13, If you say, Could Jesus even be alluding to these very verses?

[10 : 02] Maybe for you, as you heard the trampling on snakes, you even went back further than that and thought of what God said to the serpent all the way back in the Garden of Eden about how his head would be crushed.

I think, personally, I lean towards the metaphorical understanding. Not that the disciples will be able to endure snake bites and scorpion stings without harm because of their authority, though there is that time where Paul was bit by a snake and was unharmed.

But the real dangers, the greater threat, is the spiritual forces of evil. Their sting and their bite is far more deadly.

And the authority given by Christ, I think, is to trample over them. We also see that statement right at the end.

Nothing will harm you. And I think we need to be careful with those words that we're reading them in the context here. The disciples will endure many things. Some, like Trophimus and Epaphroditus, we read about how they get sick.

[11 : 19] Others, like Paul, will be beaten and stoned, even, on one occasion. Many of them will later be killed for their faith in Jesus.

And so this statement that nothing will harm you, I don't think it means that you'll be invincible as you go forward. You won't suffer anything. It may mean simply that the evil spirits that you run across from now on will not be permitted to do anything to you.

Evil men, on the other hand, they'll still be able to oppose and threaten and harm, but the devil and his demons? No. I'm taking that away from them.

Finally, in verse 20, Jesus sort of wraps up this conversation, or at least the first part of it, by pointing their attention to something far more significant. Verse 20, Jesus says, however, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

We might read this account and go, wow, wouldn't it be awesome to be able to just go around and cast demons out of people and heal people?

[12 : 39] And it was awesome for these 72 guys. But there's a far greater, a far more important thing than having authority over evil spirits and even doing miracles.

And that's having your own name written in heaven. And what does that mean? To have your name written in heaven.

Well, if you've been a Christian for a while and have read through the Bible, you probably know what that means. But maybe you're here today and you've never heard about this.

Throughout the Bible, there are about a dozen references to a book that God has. Specifically, a book in which the names of his people are written.

We first hear about it in the days of Moses and the Exodus. The people of Israel sinned against the Lord. They created this golden calf idol and began to worship it.

[13 : 44] And God was very upset. And Moses kind of comes into the gap and he tries to intercede for the people and bargain with God in a sense, using his own life to save them.

In Exodus 32, we read this. Moses says to God, But now please forgive their sin. But if not, then blot me out of the book that you have written.

And the Lord replied to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. So we hear about this book that God has much later on in the days of Daniel, the prophet.

We hear mention of this book again and names that are written in it. Daniel's being told in a vision about what will happen in the distant future. And this is the words that are being spoken to Daniel. At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

[14 : 57] But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

So there, again, there's this book that God has with names written in it. And it seems connected to who will be delivered, who will be saved, and to who will rise to everlasting life, and who will rise to everlasting contempt.

It's mentioned again in Philippians chapter 4, verse 3, and this is just kind of casually offhand as Paul is speaking to the Philippian believers in the church.

He's talking about disagreements that they've had. And he says, yes, I ask you, my true companion, help these women who've been fighting with each other since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul seems to use it to refer to those who have salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And then finally, in the very last book of the Bible, God gives a vision to the Apostle John about how everything will come to an end.

[16 : 32] And it's a mysterious vision. It's kind of like a dream that's full of symbols, and those symbols correlate to future realities.

And in this vision, there are about six mentions of the book of life. And it's called the Lamb's book of life because of the Lamb in John's vision who very obviously represents Jesus.

He is the Lamb of God who was slain to atone for His people's sins. And at the very end of Revelation comes the final judgment.

It talks about the final judgment of all the living and the dead. And John tells us what he sees in Revelation 20, verse 12. He says, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and

books were opened.

Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

[17 : 36] The sea gave up the dead that were in it. And death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. And each person was judged according to what they had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. These are sobering words. This book of life has names in it. And whether or not your name is written in the book of life corresponds to whether you are thrown into the lake of fire or not. The implication here in this passage in Revelation is that all are found guilty. When the books are opened up it's seen that we have all sinned against God. We are all guilty. But those whose names are not written in the book of life they get what they deserve.

[19 : 01] And those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life are spared. Well what happens to them? If we keep reading in Revelation the next chapter talks about a new heaven and a new earth and a new city of Jerusalem where God will live with his people forever.

It reflects those who will the language we use is go to heaven or enter the kingdom. And it's a picture of a glorious city where there is no more sadness pain or death where God will live in close relationship with his people forever.

And it says there in Revelation 21 verse 27 nothing impure will ever enter that city nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And so the book of life is God's register of those who truly belong to him. Those who have faith in him. It reflects those who will as I said before go to heaven or enter the kingdom.

The names there are those who will rise from the dead to eternal life with God. The names there are those whose sins have been forgiven because they trusted in the Lamb of God who died to atone for them.

[20 : 47] And so back to Jesus and his conversation with the 72 do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Far more important than what these disciples were able to accomplish and the authority that they had and the victory that they experienced as they had all these encounters with the demons far more important is the reality of where each of them stands with God and whether their names are written in heaven in the book of life.

When you compare the two of those things side by side the things that they did versus where they stand with God one is not worth rejoicing over and one is.

And I think Jesus is being a little bit he's using hyperbole here to make a point of course they were right to celebrate that the demons submitted to them in the name of Jesus.

But what he's saying is that compared to that that's not even worth celebrating compared to the reality the more important thing of where you stand with God and if your name is written in the book of life that is true cause for joy.

[22 : 16] almost nothing is as important as this and maybe this is where some of our brothers and sisters have lost a little bit of perspective. Some are out there saying that real maturity in the Christian life is when we come to have faith like these 72 guys such that we can now cast out demons and go out and do miracles and signs and wonders in the name of Jesus.

And really what they're doing is they're making the things that we do for Jesus into the great thing and where we stand with Jesus is kind of down here and it's less important.

Jesus just flips that whole thing upside down. Far more important than what we might do for Jesus is where we stand with Jesus.

Whether our names are written in heaven, in his book, work, that's what's worth rejoicing over.

That a person has just gone and cast out a bunch of demons and healed a bunch of people in Jesus' name in comparison, that's not worth rejoicing over, says Jesus. And now we see why as we look at that description in Revelation.

[23 : 37] Revelation the final outcome for those whose names are written in God's book versus those whose aren't is that's there that we see why this is so important.

It's the difference between who belongs to God and who does not. It's the difference between who will get what they deserve for their sins and who will not.

It's the difference between being thrown into the lake of fire and entering into God's glorious kingdom to live with him forever.

The big question is, is your name written in heaven? Is your name written in the book of life? God's name written if you're unsure about it, I just want to put these words of Jesus in front of you. This is the message Jesus proclaimed as he went from place to place.

[24 : 51] The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. And to repent just means to turn away from our sinful life and to turn to God.

God's It's a relational thing. It means to seek forgiveness from him. To admit the things we've done wrong and ask for him to forgive us. That's all it means.

The good news, which I say a lot, but you can never really rejoice over it enough, is that God sent Jesus to take the punishment we deserve for all the sins that we've committed to atone for us. That's what his death on the cross was all about. It was a sacrifice of atonement. The good news of Jesus is that if we simply trust him and believe in him, we will be saved.

We will be spared on that day when the books are opened. Our names will be in the book of life. Listen to these words of Jesus, some of my favorite.

[26 : 08] He said, Very truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Do you hear the words of Jesus? Do you believe God and the words that he speaks through Jesus? If so, the promise is you have eternal life. You will not be judged. You will not be condemned on that day. Your name will be found in the book on that day.

Maybe you're here and you've known for a long time that your name is written in the book of life. Sometimes we can get fixated on what's going on in our world or the troubles that are happening in our own lives and we find ourselves down and discouraged.

Jesus says that this is a reason for rejoicing that our names are written in heaven.

[27 : 35] If your name is in God's book we're looking forward to heaven. We're looking forward to being with God forever.

We're looking forward to walking those streets of gold in that glorious city in that wonderful kingdom. That'll be the end of all of our troubles.

And it's easy to lose sight of that sometimes isn't it? One way that we can be reminded of the goodness of heaven is just to open our Bibles once in a while and flip to those last two chapters of the book.

Revelation 21 and 22 and just read what Jesus said it will be like. If you're feeling down or discouraged I want to encourage you maybe even this week to just open up to those two chapters and spend some time just reading and reflecting on what Jesus said heaven will be like.

And it really is cause for joy. to know that because our names are written in the book we will be there. Let's pray.

[29 : 01] Father in heaven I ask that you would work in each of our hearts and that you would press into our hearts this great question of whether our names are in your book and that you would speak the truth to us.

The truth we need to hear. Give us assurance and comfort if they are. And give us an unsettled conviction if they're not. And a clear understanding of what we need to do to be sure that they are. Help us to view everything going on in our lives with this forward looking faith in what you have promised.

Thank you that you have a plan. And that you are going to bring it to pass and that there will be a great victory at the very end of our world story no matter what we face today.

I pray that you would encourage all of us that you would fill us with joy. We ask this in your son's name. Amen. Amen.