

The joy

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[0 : 00] The 72 returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

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. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

In that same hour, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Then turning to the disciples, he said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

[1 : 15] Well, my aim this morning is to give us fresh enthusiasm, energy, and joy in proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ.

It's joy, which is very much at the heart of today's passage. You may well have noticed that when it was read earlier. So verse 17 of Luke 10, the 72 returned with joy.

Verse 20, rejoice. Verse 21, in that same hour he rejoiced. Perhaps immediately we're thinking, yes, I could do with some joy in January.

It's what we've promised all the time, of course, isn't it, as we are bombarded with advertising. You want some January joy? Book a holiday in the sun. You want some January joy?

Grab a bargain in the sales. You want some January joy? Upgrade your mobile phone, or your car, or, you know, whatever it is. And yet, of course, all of us know deep down, don't we, that the joy those things bring is going to be very short-lived.

[2 : 20] Indeed, in due course, we'll need another holiday, or we'll want another phone, and so on. And yet, wonderfully, in Luke chapter 10, the Lord Jesus doesn't just speak about joy, he speaks about lasting joy.

Two weeks ago, we started the second half of Luke's Gospel. Jesus has been helping us to get our bearings, if you like, at the start of a new year. We live in the great age of universal gospel proclamation and invitation.

As the message of Jesus goes out to the nations, now, I don't know about you, but I've found these last two weeks terrifically encouraging. At the start of a new year, just to be reminded of that.

Jesus, you remember, sent out 72 disciples. He sends them out on mission. The harvest is plentiful. The laborers are few. Every disciple of Jesus Christ is to regard themselves as a laborer, a worker in the harvest field.

And now here, in Luke 10, verse 17, they return for what we might call the post-match debrief, just as after England's tour, cricket tour of South Africa.

[3 : 38] No doubt when they come back, there'll be a post-tour debrief, or perhaps at work, you have a post-deal, or post, you know, whatever it is, post-project debrief. Well, here is a debrief, and we see in it what is really going on under the surface as the message of Jesus, as the gospel is proclaimed.

And it seems to me these verses are designed to give us fresh joy, enthusiasm, and energy, as we, too, seek to proclaim the message of Jesus.

And I put two headings there for us on the outline, just to show us where we're going. Firstly, rejoice. Gospel proclamation is the means of Satan's downfall. Have a look at verses 17 to 19. The 72 returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.

And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 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. [4 : 52] The mission has been a great success. But what's all this talk about demons and Satan? After all, we live in a culture, don't we, where the language of the devil and the forces of evil, it rarely features.

And yet, of course, that worldview is highly unusual in most other parts of the world. People are in no doubt at all that evil is real. I think we won't see the full significance of this until we see it in the context of the whole Bible.

So keep a finger, if you will, in Luke chapter 10 and turn back to Genesis chapter 3, right at the very beginning of the Bible. Genesis chapter 3, on page 3.

Here we are, Genesis chapter 3, where Satan tempts Adam and Eve to rebel against God.

They are going to be the ones who decide what is right and what is wrong in God's world rather than God's. What is Satan's strategy? Well, he causes them to doubt God's word.

[5 : 58] Genesis chapter 3, verse 1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

What's more, he then causes them to doubt what God says about judgment. Verse 4. The serpent said to the woman, you will surely not die.

And yet in the middle of Genesis chapter 3 comes the most extraordinary promise that one day, one of Eve's descendants will defeat Satan.

It's there in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15. We may remember it from last year when we were looking at Genesis in our Bible study groups. Genesis chapter 3, verse 15. As God says to Satan, to the devil, I'll put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Now how that then happens is then explained through the promises of the Old Testament.

[7 : 13] And now in the coming of Jesus Christ, the moment of fulfillment has arrived. At the beginning of Luke's Gospel, you may remember, Jesus is tempted by Satan just as Adam and Eve tempted by Satan and yet he resists.

Here in Luke chapter 10, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he'll die on the cross to take on himself God's judgment, the punishment for sin.

And yes, obviously here in Luke chapter 10, we are before the death and resurrection of Jesus. But remember how we said last week that the sending out of this 72 anticipates the global mission after the death and resurrection of Jesus, how the Gospel will go out to the nations.

And I think a very similar thing is happening here. It's the anticipation of what that worldwide Gospel proclamation on the back of the death of Jesus will achieve.

The point being that as the 72 have been speaking the truth into Satan's lies, as they've been proclaiming the message of peace with God and the forgiveness of sins, what's been going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm, why the defeat of Satan?

[8 : 42] Just what we read about in that second reading from Revelation chapter 12. We won't turn to it now, but it's a complicated chapter with lots of picture language. And yet the main point seems to be unmistakable.

That in the death of Jesus on the cross, in the proclamation of the message of peace with God, the power of Satan is destroyed. Now I take it that is a great thing to rejoice in, isn't it?

As we engage in the task of making Jesus' name and proclaiming the Gospel. We all went to watch Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol ten days ago, just after New Year.

It was a terrific production. They were even giving out three mince pies. When was the last time you went to the theatre and you were given three mince pies? All very pleasing indeed. The set itself was fantastic.

It all looked very Victorian, kind of Victorian street lamps and all the rest of it, lamps flickering, beautiful costumes. And no doubt behind the scenes a whole army of people who were making the whole thing happen.

[9 : 46] We got a little glimpse of them during the interval as there was a bit of kind of rearranging of the set and that kind of thing. But no doubt behind the scenes you had the make-up artists and the lighting crew and the director himself, of course, the sound desk, the costume people, most of the time completely unseen.

Well, in the same way, when the gospel is proclaimed, there is far more going on in the unseen spiritual world than we might imagine.

At one level, of course, it looks very ordinary, doesn't it, here on a Sunday morning or perhaps you're on a Christian meeting at school or perhaps in conversation with a friend or a colleague? And yet, what is happening in the unseen spiritual world as the gospel is proclaimed? The downfall of Satan. Is that not something to rejoice in?

Something to sing about, perhaps? I'm going to do that. You can join in if you like. God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.

[10 : 56] For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray.

O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy.

Well, I don't think I'm going to audition for the singing group, but it's great to sing, isn't it? Something to rejoice in that as the gospel is proclaimed, that is the means of Satan's downfall.

And yet, have a look at verse 20. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

What's the surprise? For Jesus' disciples, there's an even greater joy, the joy of knowing that your name is written in heaven, that you are enrolled as one of heaven's citizens.

[11 : 59] A few years ago, we were invited to a very smart dinner at the mansion house in the city. And having received the invitation, kind of opened the invitation, half thinking to myself, hang on a moment, you know, have they sent it to the right person and all that kind of thing?

Perhaps it went to the wrong address. And then as we approached the mansion house, very much thinking the same thing, you know, I hope they're expecting us. What if they didn't intend to invite us after all?

Well, we went in, we went through security, we showed the invitation card, and there was a list. A list of names. And amazingly, our name was there.

We were on the list, and we were welcomed in. We were expected. Jesus shows us the secret of lasting joy.

Don't rejoice, he says, first and foremost, in the ministry I've given you or the circumstances of life, but the relationship that you have with me, and the fact that one day you will be with me, welcomed into heaven.

[13 : 05] Now, I've had to apply this verse to myself over the years. I've had to apply this verse to myself when people are uninterested in the gospel or in the face of opposition or in the face of illness when life is hard.

And yet I think what is really interesting is that Jesus says we also need to do this when life's going well, when ministry is going really well. Isn't that striking?

Because, of course, that's when the temptation is to rejoice in our ministry and our service and the fact that life is going well rather than in the Lord Jesus. Many of us who are disciples of the Lord Jesus, I guess, will have known joy in gospel ministry.

Perhaps someone's come to Christ. Perhaps encouragements in an area of ministry, whether it's a Sunday club or scallywags, perhaps a conversation with a friend after a Christmas service, something like that.

But, of course, the fact is it's not always like that, is it? You know, there's the person who hears the gospel and they're hard-hearted all the week you're leading Sunday club and they just muck about.

[14 : 10] And the danger is that we tie our joy to those ups and downs and when things are going well we're on a bit of a high. When things are going less well or when they're discouraging or disappointing then we get discouraged and we're on a low.

And our joy kind of goes up and down like that, up and down like a yo-yo the whole time. Indeed, you may be feeling this morning very battered and bruised in life.

But remember, sometimes we need to have our other sources of joy stripped away from us. You know, perhaps an area of ministry, perhaps a job we really enjoy or perhaps good health or good family circumstances.

maybe that's happened. And actually, it's only really been at that point that you've discovered for yourself the truth of Luke chapter 10 verse 20.

The joy of knowing that regardless of circumstances, regardless of how ministry you're involved in is going, your name is written in heaven.

[15:14] Or of course, it may be something we need to store away for the future. For when we're serving the Lord Jesus and there's precious little fruit. Or when we get ill and frail and we're unable to serve as we used to.

As old age removes many of the things we once enjoyed. Here is something that no circumstances can ever rob us of. The joy of knowing that our names are written in heaven.

So rejoice gospel proclamation is the means of Satan's downfall. Secondly, rejoice gospel proclamation is the means by which God works salvation.

Verses 21 to 24. Last week we saw, didn't we, the Lord Jesus guarding us against unrealistic expectations. The fact that the harvest is plentiful doesn't mean there won't also be rejection and opposition.

But the fact that there is rejection and opposition doesn't mean the harvest isn't plentiful. And verse 21 explains those mixed responses for us.

[16:24] In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes Father, for such was your gracious will. people. Now I think it's the only time in the gospels that a gospel writer specifically tells us that the Lord Jesus rejoices and not just him but Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit.

What are they rejoicing in? Well the fact that God discriminates. What a very unwelcome word in our culture.

God in his sovereignty chooses to whom the truth about Jesus is revealed and understood.

Because remember this is the post-match review.

You see what explains what we saw last week in verses 13 to 15 some of those towns Chorazin, Tyre, Sidon, Bethsaida and their rejection of Jesus just as others welcomed Jesus and accepted the message.

[17:35] Well the explanation lies in the contrast in verse 21. The contrast between little children who have nothing to bring, nothing to offer, they are humble, they are teachable, small children ask loads of questions don't they?

Because they know they don't know everything. And it's to them that God delights to reveal the truth about Jesus. While those who regard themselves as wise and understanding, who won't listen to Jesus, who won't listen to the truth about Jesus, why to them the truth remains hidden.

After all, what would heaven be like if it was full of people wise in their own understanding? If it was full of people who won't listen to Jesus and who don't think they need the forgiveness that he offers?

Heaven would be hell. that leads on to verse 22. All things have been handed over to me by my father and no one who knows who the son is except the father or who the father is except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him.

All things. Jesus is sovereign throughout this great age of gospel proclamation and invitation, sovereign over both rejection and belief.

[19:05] It's a wonderful verse, isn't it? Verse 22 on the unique relationship between God the father and God the son. And yet extraordinarily notice that it's not only the son who knows the father but anyone to whom the son reveals him.

Is that not the most extraordinary thing? The most extraordinary promise? Just think about how you might try and get to know the queen. Perhaps you've been watching series three of the crown and you decide you'd like to get to know the real one for yourself.

Well, I guess you could stand up outside Buckingham Palace with a big kind of placard with your mobile phone number on it or something like that in the hope that she might give you a ring and invite yourself round for tea. I guess you wouldn't get very far because of course if you and I are to get to know the queen then she needs to reveal herself to us.

She's the one who needs to take the initiative and it's just the same with us and God. It shows the enormous privilege of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

How amazing to know God the Father as God the Son knows him. Something we pray that Benedict will come to know for himself as he grows up.

[20 : 28] And I take it verses 21 and 22 should give us great joy that as we seek to proclaim the gospel so God is at work. But notice that as he is at work it is both in rejection and belief both belief and rejection the gospel hidden from some but revealed to others.

Now I'm conscious there will be those who struggle with verse 21. In which case I think it would be good to ask ourselves the question how can I join with Jesus and join with the Holy Spirit in rejoicing in this?

And to ask at what point is my heart and my understanding so out of step with Jesus that actually here is something that he can rejoice in and which I find difficult.

Now we may find that a hard question to ask but it seems to me we mustn't ignore difficult Bible verses but instead we should learn to rejoice in them to properly understand them and to rejoice in them as the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit rejoice here.

Now of course there may well be some of us here this morning and actually we are acutely aware that we don't know God. Perhaps your assumption is that God is unknowable. Perhaps you long to know him.

[21 : 59] In which case can we see what the Lord Jesus is saying here? It is in his gift to reveal God the Father to you. So will you humble yourself?

Will you be teachable like a small child? Will you listen to Jesus? His diagnosis of what is wrong with the world? His explanation of what his death will achieve? The forgiveness of sins.

Will you receive the peace with God that he offers? Do come and chat to me afterwards if you'd like to carry on that conversation. finally verses 23 and 24.

Then turning to the disciples he said privately blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

I wonder if you're someone who's read the Bible and a little bit familiar with the Bible if you've ever thought to yourself how wonderful it would have been to have been one of the prophets in the Old Testament and to have experienced everything that they experienced and saw.

[23 : 14] Perhaps Moses leading God's people out of Egypt, witnessing the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, hearing God's voice on Mount Sinai, or perhaps Elijah and that great showdown with the prophets of Baal.

Will the real God please stand up? And he did stand up. Or perhaps you think, wouldn't it be wonderful to be one of the Old Testament kings? Perhaps David he saw God at work in establishing his kingdom and defeating his enemies.

Perhaps Solomon as the temple was built, as the Queen of Sheba and others from the nations came and they marveled at Old Testament Israel at the great height of its power and wealth and influence.

how great it would have been to be alive then. But notice what Jesus says. It's actually the other way around.

It's actually they who long to see what we see and experience what we experience. Because in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, those long centuries of preparation and promise have come to an end.

[24 : 23] this mission in Luke chapter 10 anticipates the message of Jesus going out to the nations. Already the demons are subject to the disciples in Jesus' name.

Soon the power of the devil will be completely defeated forever through Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus himself will be received up into glory far above all the heavens where he will reign forever and ever.

One day all those who trust in him will be welcomed in to the new creation and join him there. And it's all beginning here before the very eyes of these disciples.

In fact, we can see even more. We can see what these disciples couldn't see. We can look back over the last 2,000 years since the death and resurrection of Jesus as the gospel has gone out to the nations.

As churches have been established in the most unlikely places and communities, each one a little foretaste of the new creation. Isn't that something to rejoice in?

[25 : 34] Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. I wonder if there's a place that you have longed to see.

Perhaps friends have told you about it, you've seen photographs of it, you've read about it. you'd imagine yourself being there. I don't know where it would be, perhaps the top of the Empire State Building in New York or Sydney Harbour or going up Table Mountain in Cape Town.

But then you've been able to go and visit and it's completely blown you away and you've seen it, the sights, the sounds, the smells, you've been immersed in it, you've stood there and it's just amazing, you've completely taken your breath away.

Jesus says, blessed to the eyes that see what you see. When was the last time you stopped and took it all in and if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, rejoiced in what it is to be one of his disciples? The incredible privilege, the enormous blessing, not just the blessing of having our names written in heaven, but also the blessing of being engaged in Jesus' mission as the gospel is proclaimed.

[26 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.