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The Value of Heaven

In the spring of 1947, an Arab shepherd boy was grazing his flock in the hills bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. Like any other boy of his age, he began throwing rocks to pass the time. Suddenly he heard a loud crash like the sound of breaking glass. Leaving his flocks to investigate, he entered a cave and there found a variety of clay jars filled with scrolls. As he was not sure what he had found, the boy took a couple of the scrolls and proceeded to lead his flock home for the night, occasionally using the scrolls to hit those animals that strayed. In the coming days he would show his find to others who didn't think very much of his discovery. In fact because the scrolls were written in Hebrew, most thought they were stolen and so they didn't want anything to do with them. Eventually—in fact, months later—one of the scrolls ended up at the American Oriental Society, which identified the scroll as a manuscript of Isaiah. Amazing, as that shepherd boy led his flock with the scrolls little did he know that he held in his hand one of the most important biblical discoveries of this century: The Dead Sea Scrolls.

I love stories like this. They compel us to be on the lookout for rare and priceless treasures like

- Van Gogh paintings at garage sales.
- Rare coins in our pockets.
- Antiques at flea markets.

After all, who of us would want to know that we let a Rembrandt slip through our hands?! And yet, we do this every day! As children of God we hold the most valuable of all possessions; heaven. And yet we live in denial, as if heaven didn't even exist! This ought not to be this way. Heaven is the most valuable of all the things that we could possess in this life.

Luke 10:1, "now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come."

During the winter of 29 A.D., with about 6 months left until He would be crucified, Christ organized those who had gathered about Him. Because the harvest was plentiful, Christ sent them out in order to prepare the way for His final months of ministry. Yet these weren't just any who would go; rather, they were men who were strongly committed to the Lord. Notice that prior to this Christ gave this message to his followers:

Luke 9:23-24, "And He was saying to *them* all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?'"

Following Christ involves our whole person. Because we have been delivered from the realm of Satan and brought into Christ's marvelous Kingdom, we are now commissioned to live our lives for God's glory, honor, benefit, and good. Thus we are exhorted to go on a death march to self! Now you may or may not know it, but this statement and moment in Christ's ministry was seminal. Christ had done many miracles and a debate began to circulate as to the identity of Jesus. Who is He? In Matthew 16, Christ brought the debate to a head with His disciples.

Matthew 16:13-16, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He *began* asking His disciples, saying, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

This was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. At this moment, the disciples went from being merely taught, to being significant co-laborers with the Lord. In fact, it was after this confession that Christ issued the calling of Luke 9, to "take up their cross and follow Him!" It was against this backdrop that Christ sent not just the twelve, but seventy of His faithful followers into the world to proclaim the glorious coming of the Kingdom of God.¹ Now, it wasn't long before the seventy returned.

The Conquest

Luke 10:17-19, "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and [for the duration of their work at this time] nothing shall injure you.'"

Currently in this world, there are two and only two Kingdoms that exist: The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. Recall the temptation of Christ:

Luke 4:5-7, "And he [the devil] led Him [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.'"

When God created the world, He established His Kingdom, His reign and rule on this earth. Yet Satan in His anger of being cast out of heaven sought to inflict a severe blow against God by getting the little kings and queens of His Kingdom to follow him willingly! This brings us to the temptation of Adam and Eve, their rebellion against God, and so their fall (cf. Genesis 3:1-7). At this moment, God's Kingdom was destroyed and so completely removed from this earth. Satan was left the sole ruler, and all power was placed in his hands. But in the greatest coup this world has ever seen, God returned. God took upon Himself frail flesh and established a foothold in this world. The message of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2)

Christ's message to this world was the same, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) When God returned to this world in His first advent, He came to re-establish the Kingdom that Adam and Eve lost in their sin! Today there remains two, and only two, Kingdoms: the Kingdom of God (which currently exists in the hearts of men, Luke 17:21) and the Kingdom of Satan (which encompasses all the nations that currently exist in this world).

Now in the end, Christ's Kingdom is going to overtake the rule of Satan, and so reclaim the planet upon which we live for "the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18)! The end will be as the beginning!

Revelation 11:15, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'"

In light of this, do you understand the nature of the call that Christ gave the seventy? Do you understand what evangelism is? It was/is NOT simply overwhelming the non-Christian with an argument that they can't answer. It was/is NOT about out-witting an opponent. Rather it was/is entering into the realm of Satan and delivering captive souls from his reign and rule! In other words, it is spiritual warfare! Dr. John MacArthur put it this way: (The Joy of a True Disciple, 2003)

Evangelism is the task of rescuing people out of the clutches of Satan, ripping them, as it were,

from the lap of the evil one. It is breaking in to the domain of darkness, it is a rescue operation.

And that is exactly what the seventy did. With the promise that they wouldn't be hurt at least not on this missionary endeavor, they went out into the world and preached Christ. And God in His sovereignty used their witness to begin His onslaught against Satan and His demons!

Luke 10:18, "And He said to them, 'I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.'"

What a glorious picture! The re-entering of God's Kingdom to this earth necessarily means the destruction of Satan's hold over this world! And that is what Christ is saying here. Yet notice the metaphor He used; "lightning" a storm at night! In Christ's day, lightening storms did not occur over a well-lit city so thunderstorms involved

- The darkening of the moon's light as clouds filled the sky.
- A resulting pitch black darkness which would have made travel impossible.
- Sudden flashes of light which illumined the world. But then sudden and complete darkness!

As the seventy went out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God and as God delivered souls through their labor, it was as if the Lord was watching a lightning storm. Against the complete and total darkness of Satan's regency, FLASH, a person was delivered by the almighty power of God. FLASH, another soul set free! In fact, that is what is meant by the disciples' "treading upon serpents and scorpions" (v. 19a). The phrase is not literal, but figurative. As the gospel is preached, Satan and His demons are conquered!² And the lightening storm continues today!

Now in this context it is important to note that Christ nowhere mentioned that the disciples should cast out demons as He sent out the seventy. In fact, at an earlier commissioning of the twelve (cf. Matthew 10), the disciples are called upon to cast out demons (Matthew 10:8), and yet they can't (Luke 9:40)! And it is this that ultimately set's up the rejoicing described here when the seventy returned from their missionary endeavor. They NOT ONLY did great things for God, BUT behold, God's use of them surpassed all expectation- they successfully cast out demons!

Can you identify with the rejoicing of the seventy? While we have not been given the calling to cast out demons nor the certainty that "nothing shall injure us," we have been charged to participate in bringing the Kingdom of God to this world!

Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

Paul lending clarity to the commission added.

2 Corinthians 10:5, "*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."

Understand the significance of the commission that rests upon each of us in Christ. In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray, "Thy Kingdom come!" From Matthew 28 and 2 Corinthians 10 we learn that the work we do in the name of Christ is a crucial part of the hastening of God's coming kingdom!

Do you understand the privilege of this calling?

So many think that salvation is about keeping people from hell; and that is an element. Yet salvation involves far more than just forgiveness. It is being charged with the glorious calling of co-laboring with God in the raising up of learners and so servants of His name! We are called to "destroy speculations and lofty things raised up against Christ." We are also charged with engaging the believer that "they might take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

Now you give yourself to this calling, and you will find yourself at times overwhelmed with joy as God uses you in the life of people. Recall the excitement of the slaves that shared in the fruit of their labor.

Matthew 25:20-21, 22-23, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave...'"

That is the joy the seventy had as they returned from their ministry.

1 Thessalonians 3:8, "For now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord."

Paul exhorts us to give ourselves to the growth and maturation of those in this body. By doing this we will find our joy multiplied exponentially! We all know of John's statement:

3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

Truly as difficult as life is in this state of sin and misery, nevertheless as we serve Christ there will be times when you are overwhelmed with excitement and joy on account of what God is doing through you.

The Caution

Luke 10:20. "Nevertheless do not rejoice [or perhaps fitting better with the intent, "Do not rejoice *primarily*..."] in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

This exhortation is short of amazing, and in fact is rather shocking! The seventy disciples have been given the incredible privilege of serving in the Kingdom of God which included these things:

- Having power over Satan and his forces, and...
- A "Super Man" status with the promise that no one could injure them as they entered into the

lair of the Beast and brought forth a host of captives!

Nevertheless, that over which they primarily were to rejoice was NOT...

- The labors of their hands.
- The privilege of being used by God to bring about His kingdom.
- The authority that they possessed over Satan.
- The fact that no harm would come to them in their service of the Lord.

BUT their possession of Heaven!

Herein is a very important principle in the Kingdom of God: It is NOT what we do for the Lord that ultimately is important, BUT what He has done for us! It is NOT so much the fruit we secure through diligent labor that is of value, BUT the Heaven He has given us in Christ! Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven

The crucifixion of Christ is a sober study. Never was justice so miscarried as it was when Christ was executed for our sin. And yet, never was grace more gloriously manifested. While Christ hung on the cross, two different stories were being worked out on either side of Him. Recall, that Jesus was executed with two other criminals who clearly deserved the sentence (cf. Luke 23:40). And though they were about to face the Judge of the Universe, both began that day in arrogant rebellion. *Rome would not get the best of them; they would not cry for pity!*

But then a third prisoner joined their group. Yet He was unlike anything or anyone they had ever seen. For some reason this man received the hatred and ire of an entire nation, yet He did not revile in return. He uttered no threats! In fact that Christ was completely different from the other criminals is evidenced by the testimony of the Roman soldiers who after watching the crucifixion from start to finish said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54b)

Now you must see that Christ's Person shames the sinner (which is why evangelism can be so difficult). And so, as Christ hung on the cross, not only did the crowd ridicule and mock Him, but so did both of the prisoners!

Matthew 27:44, "And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him."

But then something unforeseeable happened. One of the criminals was moved to pity and then regret. In fact, he not only was sorry for his sin, but he came to the defense of Christ!

Luke 23:39-41, "And one of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'"

It was at this point, that the repentant criminal looked to Christ and posed a question which brought

the most glorious answer I can imagine.

Luke 23:42-43, "And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'"

Imagine looking into the eyes of Christ this very moment and hearing Him say, "Heaven is yours!" "No matter what happens between now and the day of your death, you will be with Me in paradise!" I can think of no more amazing words than these!

This is the guarantee given to all who are saved!

Luke 10:20, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

In ancient towns, the government kept a book which recorded all the names of its citizenry who were in good standing. Alluding to this practice, Christ assured the disciples that because of the cross, they had the certainty that someday they too would be in paradise! And this is the case when it comes to all in Christ:

1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

NOT ONLY do we profess the glorious doctrine of once saved, always saved (cf. Philippians 1:6), BUT we profess that it is possible to KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE! We need not imagine what it would be like for Christ to look us in the eyes and say, "One day you will be with Me in paradise!" When you were saved, such an utterance was made to you!

- Upon what basis do you rejoice in this life?
- Or perhaps more importantly, why aren't you rejoicing today?
- What is it that has robbed you of your joy?
- Have you failed God in your labors?
- Has someone been blessed in ways that you haven't?
- Have your expectations for your relationships with others failed?
- Children, have you asked God for something and He hasn't answered as you wanted?

Oh let me ask you who struggle this day with depression or discouragement:

- Do you not realize that you are an heir of heaven?
- Do you not realize that your name is written in the book of life?
- Do you not realize that God considers you an intimate friend?... a child of His royal family?... His bride?
- Do you not realize that heaven already is your possession?

Randy Travis has a song entitled: *If You Only Knew*. The song describes a woman sitting by the bed of her dad who clearly is dying. She has in her hands the Bible in which she is reading two of David's

Psalms.

- Psalm 62 describes God as the believer's only refuge.
- Psalm 17 reflects the heart of David who called upon the name of the Lord in his trouble.

Suddenly, as it often happens when someone is about to die, her father becomes lucid and is able to speak one last time. Seeing the concern and love of his daughter who clearly doesn't want him to go, the dad says, and this is the chorus of the song:

If you only knew what lies awaiting,
If you could only see what I can see,
If you could only hear the music playin',
The angels singin' sweet victory,
Oh, if you only knew, if you only knew,
How much He loves you!

In essence, if you knew this, you'd easily let me go. If you knew this, you'd long yourself for the glory that awaits us all in Christ! Family of God, "do not rejoice in [the labors of your hand], but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven!"

End Note(s)

¹ There is an important application here. That Christ utilized others besides Himself and the twelve tells us something very important about the Work of Ministry: It's For All in the Body! Hendriksen asked, "...does not the mention of these seventy... stress the fact that kingdom work is not limited to the few; for example, to Jesus and The Twelve, but that every believer should participate?" (*Luke*, NTC, pg. 572) Truly, the work of the ministry is a privilege and so calling given to all in Christ! Accordingly, when we as children of God see a need in the Kingdom, we must not look elsewhere for the need to be met. Rather we must consider the possibility that God showed us the need that we might meet it!

² Understand, this doesn't mean that we called to go around and cast our demons. While this still occurs in the world today (demon possession), the tool God has given us in the expansion of His Kingdom is the gospel! This therefore is our calling!

Sources Cited

MacArthur, D. J. (Performer). (2003). *The Joy of a True Disciple*. Sun Valley, California.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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