

Luke 10:1-20

Description is not prescription. So just because something is described does not necessarily mean it is prescribed for us. The Bible describes many things, such as Noah building an ark. This does not mean that God wants you to build one.

Our text is a description of a missionary journey. Jesus sends out seventy-two of His followers with precise instructions. If we take what is described here as a prescription for ourselves, we are forbidden from carrying any money with us; no baggage, no extra pairs of shoes; we are not to say “hello” to anyone we meet on the road; and we are to heal those who are sick.

But no, you and I are not among the seventy-two appointed by Jesus for this particular journey. So why bother preaching this text? It doesn't really have anything for us. Amen...let's take the offering.

But then again, maybe it does. Speak to us, that is. Even though we are not appointed to go out and build an ark, we can take some pretty wonderful things from that story, such as the rainbow. This colorful promise is just as much for us as it was for Noah. And here in Luke 10 also. There is much which Jesus speaks for us today.

And one thing He says to the seventy-two which we really, really want to be for us also, are the last words of our text: “*Rejoice,*” He says, “*that your names are written in heaven.*” *Your names are written in heaven!* This is an incredible thing to say and to hear. Jesus speaks these words not to the Twelve, but to seventy-two other disciples, the names of which we do not know. But God knows them, for their names are written in heaven.

This is as good as it gets. These men have just been told by Jesus that their salvation is certain. No “ifs” or “buts” about it. Their place in heaven is sure because their names are written there.

Imagine, just imagine that these same words are given to us; that your name is written in heaven. Why, if you and I had such a promise, we could go out and live it up, couldn't we? Do whatever we feel like doing, sinful and otherwise. And forget church. Use that time for more productive things. Who needs it anyway? Our names are written in heaven!

Maybe you laugh at this, but there are those who think and act that way. Do you suppose the seventy-two had any such thoughts whatsoever? Seeing Jesus' promise to them as a license to sin? We know they didn't. They had just returned from a missionary journey. They saw first-hand what happens when the Kingdom of God is proclaimed. Some receive it; others do not. They witnessed the expulsion of demons from people who were possessed. These seventy-two actually expelled them in Jesus' name. They were on the front lines of the battle. They were lambs in the midst of wolves. But Jesus kept them safe. The demons could not harm them. The power of the enemy is no match for the Lord. And these seventy-two, it says, “*returned with joy.*” And so these men are now, upon hearing that their names are written in heaven, going to become lazy in the faith, neglect to worship with other Christians, and switch sides altogether, joining with the demons they have just expelled?

It's just not going to happen. And yet not because they are such good and determined men. It's because of their Lord. He does not make empty promises. When He says their names are written in heaven, their names truly are written in heaven. Their salvation is certain.

What about your name? Is Jesus' promise also for you? It was for the thief on the cross, wasn't it? His name was written in heaven even while he was living as a thief. Jesus gave him this assurance before he died.

So we have two extremes here. This thief did nothing to cause his name to be written in heaven. The seventy-two did many things. They were successful missionaries. They were the reason why Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. But nothing they did put their names in heaven. Only what Jesus did for them. His comforting promise is not attached to any works that we do. His promise is given in the Gospel.

We need to be careful. Our reasoning minds get in the way of God's grace. We see Christians who work hard for the Lord, like the seventy-two did, and we assume that these Christians must have their names written in heaven. And we also see people who act in ways that are pure evil, and we just know for certain that their names are not written in heaven. One of these evil people would have been that thief on the cross. Not that we would have wished hell for him, but we would have known he was heading there. And then Judas, one of the Twelve, watching him follow Jesus for over three years of his life, faithful in hearing Jesus, we would be quite certain that his name was written in heaven. But in both cases we would be wrong. We simply cannot connect Jesus' promise to what we do, but only to what God does for us in Christ Jesus.

And so what about your name...is it written in heaven? If you and I look to our works, both good and bad, we will only deceive ourselves. We must rather look to the Gospel. Look at your baptism into Christ. This is no small thing. This was the greatest day of your life. Your baptism is God's work, not yours. And as the devil was expelled in your baptism, and Jesus came into you, His promise was given to you in these waters, "Rejoice," He says to you, "that your name is written in heaven."

Look to the body and blood of Christ on the altar. This is no simple meal. This is your Savior who died and rose again for you, giving you everything He won for you on the cross. Hear Jesus saying to you as you receive His Sacrament, "Rejoice that your name is written in heaven."

Look to the words of absolution which are given to you. These words do what they say. God forgives you for Jesus' sake. He holds no sin against you. Jesus' blood covers you in innocence. As He spoke to you through the mouth of your pastor this morning, "I forgive you all your sins," with these very words He is saying to you, "Rejoice that your name is written in heaven."

You, my friend, can live with certainty every day. Certain of God's love for you. Certain that He provides for you. Certain that your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Certain that the demons cannot harm you. And certain that your salvation is sure. You never have to wonder where you will go when you die. You never have to say, "I hope I go to heaven, but I'm not really certain." Your salvation is not tied to your behavior. It's connected to your Lord, and what He did for you is already done. It can never be revoked. You never become un-baptized. You never become one for whom Christ did not die. Your salvation in Him is certain, for He freely gives it to you in the Gospel. Therefore "Rejoice that your name is written in heaven!" Amen.