

## **Rejoice! For your names have been written in heaven.**

From hearing our Gospel today, Luke 10:1-20, we see that as Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, it became increasingly obvious that a vast number of people were prospects for the kingdom of God. Samaria was an entirely new mission field. However, workers to proclaim God's message were few. Jesus makes a comparison with the harvesting of ripe grain. No matter how plentiful the harvest, the crop will be small if the workers are scarce.

To be a harvester for God's kingdom was difficult work. Jesus had laid strict demands on those who would follow (9:57-62). Proclaiming the kingdom of God called for dedication and commitment that, unfortunately, too few people had. Yet there were some ready for this task of harvesting. We are told that the Lord appointed seventy-two men and sent them out two by two into the towns through which He would be passing. Some of the Greek manuscripts have seventy as the number appointed (which accounts for the figure in the KJV). Whichever was the original number, these appointees were in addition to the apostles. The work of harvesting was not limited to just the Twelve. It was too big a job. In fact, the first assignment Jesus gives these new recruits is to pray for the owner of the harvest, God Himself, to provide more workers.

Jesus makes no guarantees to the seventy-two disciples that they are in for an easy time. There will be spiritual and physical dangers; they are bidden to travel light; they were not to spend time on the road in casual talk since their task is urgent. Jesus' instructions are very similar to those He gave to the twelve apostles when He had sent them out previously (9:1-6).

In some homes and towns the seventy-two disciples would find a ready welcome. They were to accept room and board with graciousness. However, other towns would not have the welcome mat out. The action of wiping off the dust that sticks to one's feet was a symbol of God's coming judgment against those who refuse the message of grace. Yet whether welcomed or not, the workers were to announce that the kingdom of God was near in the person of Jesus.

The thought that some towns would reject the message of God's kingdom provokes Jesus to speak out against such ingratitude and lack of repentance. Sodom was the city destroyed by burning sulphur because of its wickedness (Genesis 19:24). Yet even Sodom will be judged less severely than those cities who closed their hearts to Jesus and His messengers.

Words of woe are spoken against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. The site of Chorazin is near the Sea of Galilee. Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand near Bethsaida (9:10). He had done many mighty works in Capernaum (4:31). Jesus did no preaching or miracles in Tyre or Sidon, Canaanite (gentile) cities lying on the Mediterranean coast. He condemns the Jewish cities for their failure to repent; in fact they compare most unfavourably with the gentile cities. Far from being lifted up to the skies for being the scene of the activities of the Son of God, Capernaum will go down into the depths. The Greek word for "depths" is hades, the abode of the dead.

Jesus is deeply hurt by the failure of His ministry in the Galilean cities. There was no real change of heart, no readiness to receive His gracious message of salvation. Few were ready to take up the cross and follow. He tells the 72 disciples that they are His personal representatives and can expect the same mixed response. Jesus comes in the words of His messengers. The response to the messengers is a response to Jesus and to the Father who sent Him.

The seventy-two disciples returned from their mission and reported exuberantly that even demons submitted when the name of Jesus was invoked. They were not used to wielding such power. Jesus shares in their rejoicing and tells of a vision He had of Satan falling from heaven. This fall is compared to that of a lightning strike descending from the skies. It is a vision of the ultimate judgment of Satan and all his demons.

When Jesus speaks of the authority given to the seventy-two "*to trample on snakes and scorpions,*" we can apply this to the devil and his brood (see Genesis 3:1). John the Baptist had addressed some in the crowds coming for baptism as a "*brood of poisonous snakes,*" (Luke 3:7). To imagine that Christ today gives His followers immunity from snake bites on the basis of this and other passages of Scripture is to miss the main point. The believer's chief enemy is not some member of the animal kingdom but the devil himself.

Yet Jesus seeks to temper the enthusiasm of these returning messengers that was focused upon the works they had accomplished. What matters more than any power they had over the evil powers is the fact that their names are written in heaven. Jesus had seen the fall of Satan from heaven; His disciples are promised a place in heaven, thereby gaining what Satan had forfeited by his rebellion.

We too, rejoice that our names are also written in heaven! However, for now, we remain in this war zone, where Satan does everything he can to destroy us and halt the Gospel's advance. In Christ, however, we are protected. In Him, we cannot lose, even though we die, for in the end Christ grants us eternal life.