



REJOICE IN THIS

Where would you say you've found happiness in life? Found fulfilment; significance; self-worth? It might be:

Marriage (locating Mr or Mrs Right).

Family (fulfilling your biological imperative).

Education (either your own, or your kids').

Work (career-building or skill-using).

Pay grade (making some money).

Possessions (spending some money).

Volunteering (helping those around you).

Campaigning (changing the world).

Leisure activities (doing some fun stuff).

Organisation (managing all of the above).

Hey, it might even be church ministry!

Now, there's nothing wrong with any of these things, in and of themselves. But equally ...

There's *everything* wrong with them, if they become the no.1 focus of our lives and the things we build our happiness on.

Jesus said something similar to this, in the passage we're going to look at today. And it can be easy to over-spiritualise it all, and completely miss the point that Jesus is making:

Luke 10:1-24

Jesus sends the 72. Or is it 70? Some manuscripts have one, some have the other. Why? Here's my theory: it depends on which manuscript copies went where. If it was being read by a Jewish audience, 72 (6x12) would signify people (represented by the number 6) from every tribe of Israel (represented by 12). If it was being read by a Gentile audience, 70 would signify the nations of the world (there being 70 names listed among the descendants of Noah in Genesis 10). That's my theory, take it or leave it.

But anyway, He sends them out, as He did with the 12 apostles, on a mission: to spread the gospel. And in the process, He promises them certain things which as Christians we would probably rate quite highly:

- **Purpose:** to proclaim the message of Jesus.
- **Provisions:** food, water, clothing, shelter.
- **Power:** over snakes, scorpions, demons, etc.

And after a while, they come back, jumping for joy. Why? Because they've seen some amazing stuff happen! People healed and lives changed and demons fleeing for their demonic little lives. And Jesus says, in vs18, "I have been watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven", or alternatively, "They (as in the demons) have been watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (*etheoroun* can be translated either way).

Whichever is right (I still prefer "I have been watching"), Jesus is saying this: "Satan's downfall has begun." But then ...

He seems to throw cold water on the whole thing. How? With this:

"Even so, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in the heavens" (vs20).

Paraphrased: "Don't build your sense of happiness or fulfilment on these things, incredible though they are. Build them on the fact that your names are written in the Lamb's book of life." And who put them there? God did!

Now there's a bit of exaggeration-for-effect here, but why does Jesus feel the need to say this? It's because even God-empowered achievements can land us in some not so happy places:

1) Anxiety. What if it's not always *this* easy? If you wrap your happiness around your achievements, it might start to unravel as they become harder to come by. Or if you lose them. As Proverbs 27:1 puts it: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." The same is true of everything we fill tomorrow with.

2) Superiority. Our achievements can become a source of pride ("How successful am I!"), of competition ("I'm more successful than them!"), of judgmentalism ("They should have done better than that"). And that can

affect our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves (it's certainly not going to win us any friends!).

3) Idolatry. It can be so subtle, but the things that mean the most to us can all too easily become a snare and an idol to us. And over time, they can take us over. Consume us. To quote Psalm 135:18: "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." Again, such an attitude is bad for us. And bad for others, too.

That, I think, is why Jesus says it. And listen: there's no-one who's immune to this – such things can happen to any of us. Just ask the average pastor!

If they're honest, they'll admit it.

A Healthier Outlook

Now if this is true of something as important as mission, how true might it be of all those other things we listed? The answer is: very. And if we pass that on to our kids ... it can keep on going, and keep on growing.

And what might Jesus say in response? I think we already know:

- To those who would say, "Praise God, I'm married to the most beautiful woman / handsome man in the entire cosmos!" Jesus would say, "Even so, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."
- To those who would say, "Praise God, my children have inherited my looks, brains, and my sense of right and wrong," Jesus would say, "Even so, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."
- To those who would say, "Praise God, I got good grades, went to university, got a whole bunch of letters after my name," Jesus would say, "Even so, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."
- To those who would say, "Praise God, I have a well-paid job, a dream house, and I go on holiday at least twice a year," Jesus would say, "Even so, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."
- To those who would say, "Praise God, my church is growing, God is moving, and every Sunday is a glimpse of glory!" Jesus would say, "Even so, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

As I said earlier, there's nothing wrong with these things, in and of themselves. But there's *everything* wrong if they become the no.1 focus of our lives and the things we build our happiness on. Instead, we need to remind ourselves, each and every day: "I am in a place of grace." It's not about what Jesus is doing *through* me, but what Jesus has done *for* me.

That is where lasting happiness is to be found.