

Written in Heaven

July 6, 2025

Galatians 6:1-16
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”

They must have been stoked. Sent out without luggage or even a change of clothing – let’s not think about that for too long – the seventy (or seventy-two, the oldest copies of Luke don’t agree) had been told to bring peace, healing, and teaching to the villages of Galilee where Jesus planned to go. Imagine how nervous they’d have been. Will we find welcome? Will we find words to say what we’re supposed to say? Will we bring peace when we arrive? Most of all: when they bring us somebody who’s sick, will they receive God’s healing through our hands?

The answer to all of those, including the last, was, “Yes.” “Even the demons submit to us! How cool is that?”

Jesus, the great motivational speaker of the first century, then seems to have forgotten everything he knew about motivational speaking. Right? The thing to say was something like, “Well done! You’ve accomplished great things! And look, I’ve got even greater things that you can do! You know you can! Let’s go out and make Judea Great Again!”

But Jesus didn’t do that.

“You think you did great things? I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. Don’t get excited about spirits that come out when you call. That’s small stuff. Calm down. Chill out.”

I don’t think he’d have been a hit on the motivational speaker circuit.

If you want to get excited about something, rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Well, what does that mean? The phrase only appears once in the entire Bible, right here, so we haven’t got a lot of help. If I ask the question, “Whose name does God know?” the answer I give myself is, “Everyone.”

Rejoice that your name, like everyone’s name, is known by God.

Again, it’s a tough sell for a motivational speaker.

And it's exactly what Jesus said. The Good News of God's reign is not about power, even over evil. It's not about accomplishment, even of healing. It's not about me being better than you. I'm not (you probably knew that). It is about all of us being held in the heart of God.

Rejoice that you're held in the heart of God.

When I was in school, I liked to work for extra credit. I'd answer those optional questions on tests; I'd write a few extra paragraphs when invited. Those came with rewards. They'd bring up my average grade. They might even impress the teachers – at least, I thought they did.

Jesus didn't give extra credit. Even to those who'd gone the extra mile.

Your names are written in heaven. That's enough, you know. In fact, that's what there is.

It's not just school that insists on extra credit. So many parts of our lives scream out, "Here are the great ones. Here are the heroes." On the weekend of the Fourth of July, American pride in country can be earnest and unifying, but it can also be prideful and jingoistic. C. S. Lewis wrote, "I once ventured to say to an old clergyman who was voicing this sort of patriotism, 'But, sir, aren't we told that every people thinks its own men the bravest and its own women the fairest in the world?' He replied with total gravity—he could not have been graver if he had been saying the Creed at the altar—'Yes, but in England it's true.' To be sure, this conviction had not made my friend (God rest his soul) a villain; only an extremely lovable old ass. It can however produce asses that kick and bite. On the lunatic fringe it may shade off into that popular Racialism which Christianity and science equally forbid..."

We don't have any recent experience of that, do we? A combination of American patriotism and Christian belligerence that betrays the best ideals of both?

Well, maybe we do.

If casting out demons doesn't make a difference in God's love for us, then how much difference does it make to be British? Or Japanese? Or American? Or Hawaiian? Yes, it makes a lot of difference in human relationships, but are we held differently in the heart of God?

No. It doesn't seem that we do. All our names are written in heaven. That's enough to rejoice in.

We still get to participate in bringing that good news to others. Jesus asked for laborers; Jesus got seventy to go out and do the work. It wasn't complicated. It could be challenging, but not complicated. He kept it simple. Visit the village. Accept hospitality. Share your peace. Heal as God enables you. Move on to the next. It's simple.

“It's amazing how often I needlessly complicate the Christian life,” writes Debie Thomas at JourneyWithJesus.net. “‘But what does God want me to do?’ I groan. What is God's will? How shall I hear God's voice and discern God's plan?”

“Are the answers really all that hard? Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly. Pray, listen, learn, and love. Break the bread, drink the wine, bear the burden, share the peace. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

“Get off your high horse and get in the water. Sit down at the dinner table and speak peace to those who are feeding you.”

Rejoice that you, and they, have our names written in heaven. We are known by God. We are valued by God. We are loved by God.

Written in heaven.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson