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Luke 10:17-20 – Supporting Kingdom Work Means Keeping Kingdom Focus
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In these coming days, chances are you will see plenty of children standing at attention with their hands over their hearts. If you see something like that, you'll most likely make the connection that Independence Day is coming and these children are reciting the pledge of allegiance or singing the national anthem. That's a way of showing patriotic pride for something that means so much to us, for something that has been such a blessing to us for so many years. Living in the United States of America is something we *should* thank God for and something we should teach our *children* to thank God for as well, because there are so many opportunities and freedoms that come with it that haven't been a given in many other parts of the world.

In the early Christian church, however, if you saw children standing at attention with their hands over their hearts, that might have a completely different meaning. I've heard it said that when parents or pastors would teach their children the Creeds and they got to the part about the resurrection of the body, they would teach them to put their hands over their hearts (or cross their hearts) to reinforce the point. What I believe isn't just words. It isn't just a point of information or a mental exercise. I believe *this* body will be raised up again one day because my Savior Jesus lives in *this* heart by faith. No matter where I live, no matter what I do, no matter what happens to me now, I'm going to live a real, honest-to-goodness, flesh-and-blood existence in Christ's Kingdom forever.

See, living in the USA and being a proud American is a wonderful thing, but it's by no means the only key to having a joyful and fulfilling life. There are plenty of frustrations and difficulties, plenty of imperfections and uncertainties that come with living in present-day America, too. But having certain hope for the resurrection to eternal life, for a perfect heavenly existence with Jesus and all our fellow believers one day – that's a perspective that changes our lives and everything in them, and it's that same kind of perspective that Jesus shares with us today in our Gospel lesson. See, Jesus had sent 72 of his followers throughout Israel to preach the Gospel and do amazing miracles in his Name. But he needed them to know that their work and their life wasn't all about them in the here and now. The people they amazed and all the slaps on the back – that's not what was really most important, because those things would

come and go. What was really most important wasn't the work they did for Jesus; it was the work Jesus did for them. It was the fact that their names were written in heaven, signed and sealed in Jesus' blood, and through their evangelism Jesus wanted to put more and more signatures onto heaven's rolls right along with them. What Jesus taught them that day and what he still wants to teach us today, friends, is that supporting kingdom work means keeping kingdom focus: doing God's work is important and needed, but being God's child is best of all.

And that was an important perspective to keep not only when things were going well, but also and especially when they weren't. See, when Jesus sent out his 72 followers in pairs to preach the Gospel and to proclaim the coming of God's spiritual Kingdom, he wanted them to know that they wouldn't always be met all that kindly because this fallen world had a king already. It was the devil, and he held all of us captive under sin, the fear of death, and the threat of hell. The devil kept sinful humanity in slavery and there was nothing we could do to get out or to fight back. Until Jesus came. When Jesus came to fight the devil and win back the people he made for his glory and fellowship, he brought with him all the forces of good to destroy all the forces of evil.

And that battle raged as the disciples went from town to town, doing the Lord's work and carrying out his saving mission in this world. They carried with them the unmistakable message: this world can only have one true King, and the Savior is here to take what is rightly his. And as the 72 went along sharing that Gospel, that great Sword of the Spirit that the devil and his demons can never stand against, that battle played out invisibly, right in their midst. See, the coming of the Gospel of Christ through the mouths of even sinful mortals like these 72 and like you and me meant that Satan himself, once perched so high and mighty as self-proclaimed ruler of this sinful world, was falling like lightning right before their very eyes. Our King, the Lord Christ, was victorious over theirs. And even sinful mortals, armed with the simple Word and faith in Jesus our Savior, were overcoming all the forces of evil and bringing them into submission in the name of our Lord.

Who would've guessed it? Who would've expected it? Certainly not the 72. *“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ [Jesus] replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will*

harm you.” While the disciples were marveling at the amazing new things they could do, Jesus had to bring them back into perspective and remind them what was really going on here. He was really the one who had won the victory over Satan, and these smaller victories the disciples were experiencing were really just byproducts of his ultimate victory. See, Jesus defeated Satan first of all in their 40-day temptation showdown in the wilderness when Satan couldn’t get him to crack. Then one day soon, just like he promised all the way back in the Garden of Eden, Jesus would crush Satan’s head by giving his perfect life on the cross and rising again on Easter morning. And just as surely as he came the first time to win our salvation and freedom from Satan’s evil clutches, so also Jesus will come again one day to forever destroy the devil and his work so he can never hurt us again.

And that word “hurt” is an important one here, because for Jesus’ sake, that’s the worst the devil can do to us now. See, the devil and his demons may still scare us and intimidate us sometimes. They may still tempt and threaten us like snakes and scorpions and anything else that might cause us pain or take our lives in this world. But that’s all they can do to us now is *hurt* us – not harm us, not injure us, not do any permanent damage to us. Yes, we “trample on snakes,” as Jesus said, in the same way that Christ crushed the serpent’s head on the cross – not physically, but spiritually.

So when’s the last time you did it? When’s the last time the demons submitted to you in the Lord’s name? Maybe you didn’t even notice, but that’s because our battles, too, are invisible and spiritual. But the demons submit to you, you trample snakes and scorpions, you overcome the power of the enemy every time you say “no” to the devil’s temptations in this world. Every time you prioritize God’s Word and worship when you could be doing other things. Every time you take a bold step in your life to serve Christ faithfully with everything you’ve got, no matter what the rest of the world has to say about it. Every time you give offerings to support Gospel ministry and advance Christ’s cause that you could’ve otherwise spent on yourself. And every time you keep your cool when your kids make it hard or every time you love your spouse like Christ would even when they aren’t very lovable. With God’s help and with the power of his Word working in your heart and in your life, you too can make even the demons submit and overcome all the power of the enemy.

See, if you actually stomp on a snake here in this world, you might get bit and you might have to suffer for it. But though it might hurt your body, it can never harm your soul. With Christ’s love and care always surrounding you, nothing will harm you or ever rip you out of his hands. And even if by chance you do fall to the scorpion’s sting or finally lose the battle with mortality in this world, then still by faith you can rejoice as you open your eyes in God’s heavenly Kingdom, “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:55, 57).

I mean ultimately, it’s just like Jesus said, isn’t it? “*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*” There is a definite comfort and assurance that our greatest spiritual enemies, the ones who hate us and want to harm us the most, can’t anymore. And that’s not because we’re so great. It’s because by God’s grace our names are written in heaven and our eternal future is secure. When Jesus poured out his blood for us on the cross, that was the ink he used to reserve our place next to him in Paradise. When those baptismal waters washed over our heads in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Jesus marked us as God’s redeemed children and heirs of heavenly glory – true princes and princesses in his Kingdom! And when we come to the Lord’s table, Jesus is promising that there’s a place set just for us with our name on it at the great banquet feast of the Lamb. Yes, as much of a privilege and thrill as it is *doing* the Lord’s work here in this world, for us nothing can ever compare to *being* the Lord’s child.

So like the disciples, let’s keep that proper perspective about our place in God’s kingdom. The most important thing for them wasn’t doing miracles or exorcising demons, and the most important thing for us has nothing to do with our efforts or accolades, either. Yes, God has done wonderful things in and through us individually and as a congregation for which we can be forever grateful. But the #1 way we can best celebrate our place in his kingdom is by remembering that it’s not about *our* accomplishments. It’s all about *Jesus’* accomplishments for us. Supporting kingdom work means keeping kingdom focus, so God grant us the grace to always rejoice most of all that through faith in Jesus Christ alone our names are written in heaven. Amen.