

Luke 10:13-24. Jesus is in the middle of speaking to the seventy, and sending them out to every place that He was about to go. He explained their purpose and expectations, and made sure they understood that God would provide for their journey. In this passage, He finishes His speech to them, they go out and return, and then Jesus has a conversation with the Father, and with the disciples. And so we see Jesus rebuking the impenitent cities, then Jesus reassuring the seventy who returned, and finally Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit.

First, we see Jesus rebuking: He names three cities: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. All by the sea. All places that He visited frequently. For the first two, He makes a very curious statement. "If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago..." And not just any repentance, but a repentance in sackcloth and ashes. Now what are Tyre and Sidon? I'm sure we've heard the names of those cities paired up like this, but what exactly happened in them? And what happened to them? Ezekiel 26-28 tell us all about it. Let me read a little bit about them from there.

26:3 – "...because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.'" v7 – "Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, with chariots, and with horsemen, and an army with many people." And he goes on to spell out its destruction in detail. What about Sidon? 28:24, after he prophesies against Sidon: "And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all who are around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord God." So they were similar to Tyre. They were consistently fighting against Israel, against God Himself. And on top of it all, they continued to exalt themselves and get puffed up; God declares that's He'll break them down and humble them, just like Jesus says about Capernaum. Throughout these prophecies, He repeats that last phrase several times, "they shall know that I am the Lord." He declares that He will be glorified in these cities through the fulfillment of these prophecies.

So that's who they are. Now what does Jesus say about them? They would have repented if these mighty works I'm doing in your cities were done in those cities. Now I really had to wrestle with this one, for a few reasons. First from man's perspective: it sounds like Jesus may be saying that mighty works and miracles can garner a response that the simple word can't. That somehow seeing signs and wonders makes the gospel more persuasive. As intuitive as that idea sounds, it's not really consistent with the rest of the Bible (and I'll explain in a bit), so there must be more to it than that. Secondly, from God's perspective: it sounds like God could have saved two cities by simply doing a mighty work there, but chose not to. And we know that God desires all to come to repentance. So what's really going on here with? What does this statement actually mean?

Again, I'll start with man's perspective: throughout the Bible, and throughout history, there are plenty of examples to show that a person's response to the gospel is not dependent on their response to the mighty works of God. This is most clearly spelled out in a parable that Jesus gave about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The rich man is in torment after dying, and he looks up and sees Lazarus with Abraham. So he says, "Abraham, please send Lazarus to my five brothers, so they don't end up in this place of torment." And Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And the rich man says what anyone would naturally think, right? "Look, they're not listening to the word. But if they see someone rise from the dead, they have to believe, right? They'll definitely repent!" And Abraham laid it out for him: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." It's not their response to a mighty work that determines their faith.

Do you recall the centurion with his men at the cross? Matthew 27:54 tells us that “when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened [the temple veil being torn, the rocks being split, the graves being opened], they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” Sounds great! They acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. What did they do with that information? I don’t know. Did they ever get saved? I don’t know. Were they saved at this point? Is it enough to believe this much, that Jesus is the Son of God? No, it’s not enough. The demons believe the same thing, and they tremble. I hope, and I can only hope, that they went and asked somebody about this. Most of the apostles had run off, but John was there, and there were women who ministered to Him looking on from afar off. I hope that these men would have said, “Now what? This Man was the Son of God! What did He say? What did He mean when He said, ‘Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they do.’ What did we just do? What does He want us to do?” I can only hope they did that. Because having this sort of response to the mighty works being done around them isn’t enough. And to this day it’s still not enough. People can see a miracle, and respond positively: “Wow, that’s amazing.” Or, “Wow, that’s supernatural. That’s gotta be from God.” Or even, “Wow, you’re right. Jesus is everything He says He is.” But when it comes to making Jesus the Lord of their life, the King on the throne of their heart, they don’t want Him. They want to live their own way, and just ignore all these things that they acknowledge. So it’s not enough.

Then what’s the point of the mighty works? It seems to me that their purpose is to accompany the word, only to draw attention to it. I believe they’re meant specifically for those who have a hunger for truth, but don’t know where to look. Do you recall the Philippian jailer in Acts 16? Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns, there’s a great earthquake, the prison doors open, and the chains are loosed. The jailer wakes up, and he thinks everybody’s escaped. He clearly believes that God’s involved, ‘cause he ends up trembling before Paul and Silas in a bit, but at this moment his response to this great miracle is that he wants to kill himself to avoid the punishment of the Roman leaders. If all he had was this powerful sign, he would have killed himself, and that would have been the end of it. When did he get saved? Verse 32 says, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” The work drew his attention to where the truth may be found, but he and his household were ultimately saved by their response to the word, not to the work. In fact, Luke 6:17 tells us that “a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and [listen to this] from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases.” These same cities who were judged by God now have the opportunity to hear and be healed by the Son of God. Again, it’s the works drawing attention to the word, but the word being the final authority.

We may often wonder (and Pastor Al even brought it up last week), why were these mighty works so prevalent during and right after Jesus’ time, in the early church? Why do they seem less so now? And it’s not just about the time period. Why do they still seem so much more prevalent in other parts of the world that are impoverished, and seem less so in a country like this? I believe one of most telling reasons is how easy it is to access the truth here. I can pull out my phone, and within seconds be reading the Bible, in any language, in any translation within those languages. I can find a dozen commentaries on any verse. I can look up archived sermons on any passage or topic I’m interested in. And if I’m in a more rural area and don’t have internet access, I can walk a few steps to my neighborhood church and get a Bible there. I can ask to speak with somebody, and they’re willing to. In fact, I’m convinced that if I just walk down the street and tell random people, “Hey, I want to start reading the Bible. Do you know where I can get one?”, that within half an hour, someone will have given me a Bible, and probably told me where I can find a good church nearby. All of this is to simply say that if someone wants to seek the truth in this

country, they're going to find it with or without seeing a mighty work. The only barrier to truth here is a person's desire to seek it. Most areas of the world have much greater barriers. People live there who want the truth, but have no idea where to look. Or they know where to look, but aren't allowed to look there. And when they see these mighty works, it draws their attention to where the truth might be, just like it did for the centurion and his men, and the jailer, and those who saw Jesus and his disciples in the early church. I could go on and on. Pharaoh saw the plagues in Egypt and then some, but his heart was hardened. The Pharisees tried to explain away every miracle Jesus wrought. And so on. The point is that the ultimate determining factor is how they respond to the word, not to the work. So Jesus isn't saying that Tyre and Sidon would have repented simply because they saw the work. He's telling Chorazin and Bethsaida that if Tyre and Sidon had the same direct access to the truth that you have with Me, they would have paid attention. They would have actually sought the truth, found it, and repented.

Now about God's perspective: If He wants everyone to be saved, why not do the work in Tyre and Sidon? Is there any precedent for something like this? One that comes to mind is Ninevah. It's not a perfect analogy, but I think we can learn something from it. It was a great city full of sin, similar to Tyre and Sidon. And also like Tyre and Sidon, it was prophesied against. How many mighty works were done in it before they repented? None. We don't read of any. In fact, we barely read of any words that were spoken. Yet the entire city of one hundred twenty thousand people repented. Why? Because eventually there was a prophet who obeyed God, reluctant as he may have been. God went to a lot of trouble to make that happen. Not a lot of trouble for Him, of course, but a lot of trouble from an earthly stance. He stuck with Jonah until he finally went, because God wants all to come to repentance.

So why didn't God feel the same way for Tyre and Sidon? Who's to say He didn't? In fact, in Ezekiel 27, He says, "Now, son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyre..." A lamentation? God, You're pronouncing Your judgment. You want to also take up a lamentation? Yeah. Because I don't delight in this. Contrary to a popular belief about "the God of the Old Testament," I don't enjoy declaring and enacting judgment on the wicked. God doesn't send forth His judgment until it's absolutely necessary. Countless times in the Bible, God delays His judgment upon sin to give the person or people time to repent. But we never, not once, read of God delaying His forgiveness upon repentance. Or delaying His grace. His mercies are renewed every morning, without fail. But He won't strive with them forever. When does He say, "enough is enough"? I don't know. I can't speak to that, 'cause I'm not God. I don't have the whole picture in front of me. But I do know this: that God never delights in the destruction of the wicked. Ezekiel 18 tells us that. So when His judgment is finally poured out, I can rest assured that it's the right time for it to happen.

And what's more: God still cares for Tyre and Sidon, despite this judgment. How do I know that? In addition to the verse I read earlier about people coming to Jesus from there to hear Him and be healed by Him, we also read in Matthew 15 that Jesus "departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon." Just for a rest. And while He was there, a woman from that region begged Him to heal her daughter from severe demon possession. And Jesus, being fully aware of, and even playing on, the condescending view that the Jews had for the people of this region, not only healed the woman's daughter, but commended her on her great faith. Isn't that fascinating? The only two times we read of Jesus commending a person's great faith are with a Roman centurion, and with this woman here. Usually with Israel, and His disciples especially, He's either rebuking or lamenting their lack of faith, even though they've seen such mighty works. There's something to be said for an outside perspective. I think that it's healthy sometimes to step outside ourselves, forget our own circumstances and our own upbringing, and just marvel at God's greatness in

the moment. I think if the people of these cities (or the rest of Israel, for that matter) had done that more often, they probably wouldn't have gotten into as much trouble as they did.

Second, we see Jesus reassuring: The seventy that He had sent out now return with joy. What are they joyful about? They're saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." They're rejoicing in their authority over demons in Jesus' name. But what's Jesus' first response to this? "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." It actually has two meanings that are both applicable here. One is positive, and one is negative. But they're both correct, and they're both necessary. And both are explained in the next two verses.

In a positive sense, Jesus is confirming to them His power. He was there when Satan fell. He saw it happen. No demon could ever take Him by surprise, and He's not amazed at the power He has over them. The disciples are amazed when they see the demons obeying them. Jesus' statement here assures them that He has timeless, limitless power over Satan and his entire kingdom, and therefore so does everyone who acts in Jesus' name.

Then there's the negative sense, and this one's a bit more involved. Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning." What was Satan's crime? What caused him to fall? We can harken back to our buddy Ezekiel again. Chapter 28 begins by telling us about a character called the "prince of Tyre", or the "king of Tyre." It tells us this person was the in Eden, the garden of God. He was the anointed cherub. He was on the holy mountain of God. And eventually, this person declared himself to be a god. And he was thrown down into the pit. It's direct allusion to Satan himself. Isn't that something? Jesus just got through talking about Tyre and Sidon, to put His disciples in an Ezekiel frame of mind, and now He talks about seeing "Satan fall like lightning from heaven." He's saying, "Look, Satan's downfall came when he got puffed up about his own authority and position. And here you come rejoicing that you have authority and position over him. There's nothing wrong with having this authority; I'm the One Who gives it to you. And there's nothing wrong with being glad that you have this power. But I want you to make sure you don't fall into the same trap that Satan did by trying to attribute this power to yourself." There needs to be a balance. And that's why Jesus gives both sides. Remember, this isn't just one person speaking. There are seventy here. They could potentially be at all different points on the scale. Some may still be shocked that demons are listening to their friends. Some may have a healthy joy in the power Jesus gave them, with a humility and acknowledgement that it all comes from Him. Others may be beginning to get puffed up by it. Who knows? Jesus certainly did. And I think that's why He gives both sides. For those who are still a little insecure about commanding demons, He assures them they have the power. And for those who are becoming proud of the fact that they are among those who have this power, He warns them that a fall is in their future if they continue.

And He closes the section by saying, "rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." This is the awe-inspiring fact. This is the wonderful truth. "You think it's really cool that you can command demons? That's easy. That's nothing. Demons commanded in My name have no choice but to obey." That centurion I mentioned earlier understood that. In fact, Jesus tells us that there will be people who cast out demons in Jesus' name, but their names are not written in heaven. For our names to be written in heaven: now that's something special. That's not an easy thing to accomplish. It's easy for us. We just have to repent and believe. That's the easy part. But only because Jesus did the hard part. The fact that God would love us that much, that He would send His Son to pay our punishment, in order to make it possible to have our names written in heaven: that's worth rejoicing over. Not the ranking structure in

spiritual realms, but the saving sacrifice of God. This should make you joyful. This should make you rejoice.

And speaking of rejoicing, the section concludes with Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit. What does that mean? He “rejoiced in the Spirit.” It means that this is no earthly joy. This is not the kind of joy you get from a good meal, or a sum of money, or the end of a hard day’s work, or some other kind of success. We can be sure that as a fully human man, Jesus had times like those as well. Remember, He was a carpenter before He was a Rabbi. He felt all the things we feel, and that includes taking pleasure in material things. There’s nothing wrong with that. But this is different. This is a spiritual joy. The kind that transcends any earthly joy because it’s rejoicing over something that lasts forever. What exactly is He rejoicing over? He says, “that You [the Father] have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.” Now I get the “revealed them to babes” part, but why is He rejoicing that it’s been hidden from the wise and prudent? Don’t You want everyone to know these things? This brings us back to one of our first questions. “Don’t You want everyone to be saved?” The answer to both is a resounding “yes”. And that’s why He’s rejoicing that the so-called “wise and prudent” haven’t seen it. That sounds a bit paradoxical, right? Let’s follow this through.

When He says “the wise and prudent” here, I don’t think He’s talking about the true, God-given wisdom. Or else it wouldn’t make sense; He’d be hiding things from people He reveals things to. He tells us to ask for wisdom, and He’ll give it freely. That’s why I believe He’s talking about those who appear wise in society. Those who hold positions of wisdom. What generally tends to happen whenever God reveals spiritual truths to these people? What did King Solomon do with it? He amassed great wealth and pleasure, only to conclude that all was vanity. What did Nebuchadnezzar do with it? He was specifically warned not to get puffed up. What did he do? He got puffed up. What about Saul of Tarsus? He was a Pharisee, right? When he responded correctly to the truth of God, what happened to his status? It went from fervent Pharisee to fleeing fugitive. We can’t reconcile the truth of God with a desire to have our own wisdom revered by society. If we want true wisdom, we have to humble ourselves. And we want selfish wisdom, we’re only going to regress in the kingdom. More relevant to Jesus’ time, what did the Pharisees and scribes do with all the spiritual truth God had revealed through Moses and the prophets? They exploited them, lorded it over the people, and lived a life of selfishness. So now when it comes to spiritual authority over demons, Jesus thanks the Father for revealing to “babes”. What’s the distinguishing factor of a baby that Jesus here applies to these disciples? It’s their sense of wonder at even the simplest truth. You recall, as I mentioned earlier, when the Pharisees saw Jesus casting out demons, they weren’t in awe. They tried to explain it away. They couldn’t receive it as a child because they believed their minds to be fully formed into adulthood, at least on spiritual matters. Here the disciples are rejoicing. They’re in awe at the power of God, and the power He commands through them. I pray that whenever God does a work in or around us, we would be like the babes that Jesus mentions here. Instead of parading ourselves, acting like we have all the answers. Like we know everything about God. Like we’ve already seen everything. That we would never lose our sense of wonder at God and the things He says and does. This has been a really challenging passage to study. I don’t have anywhere near all the answers. But I’m finding, as I try to glean whatever I can, that I’m consistently amazed by Who God is. That’s why we harp so much on consistently studying His word, alone and in a group.

But if God and His word are so infinitely deep, and our minds are so infinitesimally small by comparison, how is it that we can even attempt know Him? I’m glad I asked, because Jesus answers in the next portion. “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father.” Yes, it’s true that all things belong to Jesus, but I

think here the emphasis is on all truth being delivered to Him, based on what he says before and after this. In other words, Jesus knows everything about the Father. And He knows Who He is. He's the only One Who knows Who He is. "No one knows Who the Son is except the Father, and Who the Father is except the Son, [listen to this] and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." How can know the Father? Only through the Son. How does the Son reveal the Father? There are many ways. He's not bound to any particular way. He's used dreams and visions. He's used people's actions and examples. He's used miracles. But the most obvious, the most clear, the most detailed, the most accessible (usually), the most simple way that He chooses to reveal the Father is right here through His word. And I'm not just talking about Jesus' words in red (although there's plenty to learn about the Father from them). But Jesus is present in every single portion of the Bible. And every part reveals something to us about the Father.

Then He says to His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it." Now on the subject of hiding things, does God ever hide truth from someone who sincerely seeks it? If He did, He'd be contradicting His own nature. "If you seek Me with all your heart, you'll find Me." "Ask for wisdom; I'll give it to you." So why didn't these prophets and kings see and hear these things, even they desired them? I believe there are two possibilities here. For some of these prophets and kings, a desire to see these things didn't equate with seeking God. You recall when Herod told the wise men to come back and tell him where the Child was. God warned them not to do it. The desire to see where Jesus was born is in itself a noble one. But the intention was far from noble. So they didn't tell him. We need to make that distinction for ourselves sometimes. When I'm searching for answers, when I'm seeking truth, why am I doing it? Is it just to appease my own curiosity? Is it so I can feel better about myself? Am I looking for someone to tell me everything's okay; I don't need to change anything? Or am I truly desiring to seek God's face, and further His kingdom through whatever He reveals to me? That's one possibility.

Now the rest of them I'm sure had good intentions. They truly wanted to see the Messiah, to be in awe at His words and works, to glorify God for all that He would do in His mission to redeem humanity. But it just wasn't the right time yet. "Blessed are your eyes", because your desire to see these coincided with the timing for these things to be revealed. And that's truly a blessed thing. We don't always get the answers we were hoping for, and God doesn't owe us all the answers. But when we seek the truth in the time that God's revealing it, it's such a blessing. How do we know the right time? We don't! So when should we be seeking the truth? When should we be seeking God? All the time! Without ceasing! I pray that our spirits would be sensitive to these things. When we start to do anything with intentions other than seeking God, that flags would go up in our minds and we would check ourselves before we do something foolish. Jesus is giving his disciples here a lot to think about. So many of the patriarchs of the Old Testament desired to see these things. People the disciples here think very highly of. They have the utmost respect for them. Yet Jesus is telling them here, "Blessed are your eyes, as well as any other eyes that see these things." As much as you think of the great leaders and warriors and kings and prophets of the Old Testament, you have an even greater blessing because you get to see these things. And now we get to see these things. As we walk day by day, let these things never fade from our sight.