

The Gospel lesson for today has two parts, which are best understood in the context of the entire chapter.

First, we hear Jesus rejoicing. Prompted by his own Holy Spirit, he thanks God for hiding the mysteries of the gospel from the wise and intelligent and revealing them to little babes. He rejoices that the Son has come to show unworthy, sinful children what no one can see or comprehend with his own reason. He brings poor sinners to the knowledge of the loving Father in heaven. And he shares this joy with his disciples, telling them that they are blessed for seeing what they see in their Savior. This is something that even the most important people in the world longed to see and hear but couldn't.

Second, we hear of an expert in the Law coming to test Jesus out by asking him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the Law says. The expert answers rightly, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus then tells him to do that and that we will thereby live. But the expert wanted to justify himself. He wanted to lower the bar for himself by figuring out who precisely was his neighbor. So Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan, a parable we all likely know pretty well by now.

So what do these two parts have to do with one another? Jesus rejoices that the God's grace has come to the unworthy even as those who think they are so righteous remain blind to it. And then Jesus talks to a guy who thinks he has the law figured out. But again, we will better understand how these two episodes relate if we get a handle on the scope of the entire chapter.

At the beginning of Luke 10, Jesus sends out 72 of his disciples to every town he himself was about to go. He gave them authority to cast out demons, heal the sick, and declare that God's kingdom had come. Jesus, the true King of Israel, the Lord of lords and King of kings was in their midst. He gave these 72 men a task to declare this and do his work.

Now, this is important to note. Jesus gave these men their authority to do what they did. In the same way, God gives everyone authority to do whatever work he calls each to do, whether as a father or mother, a pastor, a manager, a worker, or whatever station God places people. He has prepared our works ahead of time for us to walk in them (Eph 2:10). So here we see the great work of the ministry entrusted to various men. "He who hears you hears me," Jesus says. The men did as Jesus commanded them, and when they came back they rejoiced. They rejoiced that the work God gave them to do actually worked. They did as Jesus told them to do, and they were amazed to see how powerful this work was. With great excitement they told Jesus, "Lord, even the demons do what we tell them in Your name!"

But Jesus taught them not to rejoice merely in this. Just as Jesus gave them their work to do, Jesus also wanted them to see what he himself sees. Jesus saw something much greater than even this. While they were proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God, healing sicknesses, and casting out demons in Jesus' name, Jesus was seeing the devil himself fall like lightning from heaven. So don't merely rejoice that you were successful in your work. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Rejoice that you are at peace with God, because the great accuser, Satan, has been cast out. Your sins are forgiven, because the Son of God has come in the flesh. By his bitter suffering and death he was bringing poor sinners into the warm embrace of the Father. He was fulfilling the law for all who are rightly condemned by the law. And because of this, we can rejoice in the work he gives us to do. Because

when we do what God calls us to do, in whatever station this might be, he gives us to see what he sees: his mercy and compassion on poor sinners.

So this is the theme of this entire chapter. God gives us our duties. He gives us our neighbor to love. He gives us our crosses to bear. These works themselves can't save us. In fact, it is in doing these works that we learn this very thing. When we strive to be merciful as God is merciful and to love as God loves, we find just how poor and miserable we are. And we see how much we need God's great compassion. It is in this way that Jesus teaches us to see in his gospel that which makes him and all the company of heaven rejoice. It is in the midst of our duties, our trials, our toil and labor when the gospel of Christ's salvation is the sweetest. So taste and see that the Lord is good. Taste and see the mercy of God revealed through his only begotten Son. And rejoice!

The disciples were rejoicing in the success of their work. This isn't a bad thing to rejoice in. But our work doesn't always seem successful. Despite the many visitations and conversations and teaching, the pastor and the congregation often don't see the full pews and consistent church attendance they hope to see. Despite your labors in raising your children on the right path, they often go astray. The wandering man you try to help often doesn't ever seem to be able to get his act together. You give your time, your energy, your goods and money, and it doesn't seem to yield much results. Sure, sometimes it does, and we thank God for this. But Jesus teaches us the true outlook on our works. He who gave us these works to do in the first place, who even prepared them ahead of time, tells us to rejoice in this above all things: that our names have been written in heaven. Satan, that deceiving serpent, has lost his power to accuse you and keep your conscience trapped in guilt and shame.

The chapter concludes with a story about two sisters whom Jesus knew. Martha invited them into her home, and she worked tirelessly to serve them food while her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to him teach. Martha was working. She was dutiful. While the disciples had been ecstatic about how successful their mission had been, Martha was just as overwhelmed and frustrated by how her kitchen work was going. So she complained to Jesus that Mary wasn't helping her. Jesus then directed her to the one thing needful. Mary has chosen the better portion, which will not be taken away from her. Here, Jesus isn't belittling Martha's work and service. Much less was he belittling the work of his 72 disciples when they were casting out demons. Instead, Jesus is again giving the right outlook on work. Rejoice in the gospel. Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you. Don't allow the toil and trials of work get you down. He who gave you this work himself invites you to see and rejoice in the one thing needful. It is that Satan has been cast down, God is at peace with sinners, and his compassion continues to draw his unworthy children to his favor through the redemption of his dear Son.

So with all that context, let's look again at our text. Jesus rejoices in God's great mercy toward sinners, and he invites his disciples to rejoice. Then some smart guy comes and tries to test him by engaging in a conversation about the law. Now, the law is meant to be done. It calls for action flowing out of a heart of love for God and the neighbor. But this man treats the law like some kind of theory. He is more interested in theorizing about who his neighbor may or may not be than he is of actually walking in the law and loving as God loves. So Jesus' parable puts things in perspective. You have a guy who gets beat up on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He's left half dead. Two smart guys walk by, guys who no doubt would have known the law very well, at least in theory. But when these two guys walk by they keep going, refusing to help the poor man. And then a Samaritan walks by. The Samaritans didn't know

the law like the priests, Levites, and other experts did. In fact, they had a lot of wonky ideas about God's Word. This is sort of the punchline in Jesus' parable. It sounds absurd. But it drives the point home. The Samaritan had compassion on the man. He tended to his wounds, put him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn, paying for whatever was needed to help that beaten down man.

Which of the three men was a neighbor to the man who fell among the thieves? The expert in the law didn't want to say, "The Samaritan." How could a Samaritan be better at following the law than he or anyone of his fellow Jews? But in avoiding the name "Samaritan," the expert ended up giving an even better answer. "The one who showed mercy," he said. This is what work is all about. It's about mercy. It's about loving your neighbor and showing compassion. So Jesus says, "Go, and do as he did."

The law can't give us life. If it could, then we would be justified and saved through the law. This is the irony of what Jesus says, "Do that and you will live." The expert thought he could do something to inherit what no man can even know unless the Son of God reveals it. And yet, there is also some great comfort hidden under Jesus' words. Of course, we can't possibly gain life from the law, since we can't perfectly fulfill what the law demands. Yet, God still calls us to walk according to his law. And it is in your station in life where God wants you to hold onto his gospel, the sure hope of eternal life.

You see, God doesn't give us our works to justify us. Yet, we naturally treat our works this way. We want to justify what we do and how much or how little we do it. "Who is my neighbor?" is the question we all ask in various ways. It's simply an excuse. And there are plenty of them. God has given you children to raise in the fear and instruction of the Lord. When you neglect to talk about God's Word at home or bring them to church as you should, you are despising these little children, as if you are wiser or more intelligent than God. By not guarding them with the Word of God, you're letting the devil and his thieving minions deceive them, steal their inheritance, and leave them dead in unbelief. When you ignore your neighbor in need, figuring that he should have done this or that differently, or when you justify why you don't need to respect your employees or employer, you're doing the same thing. It all involves justifying ourselves by coming up with some kind of excuse for why we don't need to do our duty.

But again, this isn't why God gives you work to do. He gives you work to do, because he is compassionate toward those whom he gives you to love. He wants you to strive to imitate his mercy. We all learn this in various ways. When one of your kids throws up in the middle of the night, you don't leave him to sleep in a puddle of vomit. No, you have compassion. When you take his clothes off, throw the soiled garments in the wash, spray the bed with something to get the stink out, give the kid some water, maybe a bath, and a bucket, and then you may or may not get back to sleep, is this all for nothing? Do you learn nothing by this? When you stumble upon someone in need, is this just by chance? God has prepared these works for you. And it is in the midst of these works where he wants you to learn his gospel. When your works of mercy have overwhelmed you, you are fatigued by compassion, you battle against the evil desire to just give up, and you learn more and more how much you fall short, it is the Lord himself who gives you rest in his perfect mercy and compassion. He has been a neighbor to you who were fallen in your sins. And he calls you, in whatever station he places you, to rejoice in what he sees. So taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen.