



Luke 15:1-10 *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Today is Missions Sunday. Which means naturally we're focusing on our Mission Outreach to the unbelieving world, as that is what God has called us to do. And so maybe you've already imagined the sermon that you're about to hear! Maybe you're thinking, "I know what the pastor is going to say today. There are so many people that have never heard about Jesus, you need to go and tell them all about what God has done for them." But it would be a mistake if that was all I told you. It would be a mistake if all I told you is what everyone else needs to hear and how you must tell them and what will happen if you don't. It would be a mistake if I told you all that but did not tell you about grace—not merely as a concept that you must tell others about—but as something that is personally yours. Grace, which is a blessing from God that has singled you out. And so *that* is going to be the focus of our sermon this morning, for that is what God has done for each of you. The theme we'll be considering today is:

Singled Out by Grace

I. For salvation II. For a purpose

Do you like being singled out? I guess I'd have to put some context around that for you to answer comfortably. Let's say you were at a team meeting at work, and the time came for the boss to hand out some recognition for a job well done, of course you'd want to be singled out. You'd want to be called out from the crowd so that everyone knows how hard you've been working. Being singled out for praise, for credit, to receive accolades—that's the good way to be recognized. But let's imagine you're driving on I-4, and you're going ten miles per hour over the speed limit *just* like everyone else, but as you drive past the police cruiser parked in the median, the lights flip on. In that situation you're absolutely hoping to not be singled out, then you want to blend in with the crowd. And if the officer does pull behind your vehicle and indicate that *you* need to pull over, well then all sorts of arguments start coming to mind, "Why is he singling me out, when everyone else was doing the same?"

Now, in our text, Jesus is addressing a particular group of people that loved to be singled out. He was talking to the Pharisees and scribes, who were, for the most part, self-centered hypocrites. They wore big, long beards and fancy clothes. They liked to strut around and show off how righteous they were. They prayed in the middle of the streets in the hour of prayer so that people would stop and be amazed at their zeal. And whenever anyone else failed to live up to the Pharisees' self-declared standards of righteousness, they would write them off. Thieves, prostitutes, lepers, tax-collectors, even cripples—they would lump them all together under the same term: "sinners."

We might not lump ourselves together with that Pharisee crowd, but certainly we do think like them. It comes naturally to us to justify ourselves over our failures but then not afford the same grace to others. When I go to work grumpy, it's because I had a bad night of sleep, it's because there's just so many stressful things going on! But when someone else shows up grumpy, well then, "They're kind of jerk!" When we speed down the road it's because we're running late for something really important, but when someone else is doing it, it's because they're just bad drivers and really very selfish.

You see what I mean when I say we think like the Pharisees? We often make excuses that leave us feeling rather righteous while we lump everyone else together as hopeless sinners. All such excuses must die before God our Judge. Because in His Word, God singles each of us out and not in the way that we like. We cannot blend into the crowd before God. We cannot hold up the excuse that "everyone else was doing it too!" No, in His Word, God makes no distinction between you and "those other people." He says, **"There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."** (Romans 3:10-12) God here is calling you out of the crowd, and singling you out and saying, "You are the one who deserves to die." He lumps us together with all the rest, calling us all "sinners."

And equipped with that knowledge of where we stand before God, that's what makes these parables so beautiful to hear. Because in these stories, Jesus' point is that to God you are never really just a face in the crowd; you are never "just another lost sinner." Jesus tells us that the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness to go and find the one. But it's not because He doesn't care about the ninety-nine, the parable is not about the ninety-nine. It's about that one, He's talking about you and me. Because He cares so personally, so singularly, for that one lost sheep. If He went back and found the other ninety-nine had wandered off, He'd go find each one of them too. Because He cares.

The shepherd knows His sheep, and the Savior knows you. He knows where you are. He knows how you struggle. He knows your sadness. He knows the sins you are burdened with, and He knows these things intimately because they became His. When Jesus went to the cross, that was where we see Him lifting you as the one lost lamb and carrying you home upon His shoulders rejoicing. Because on the cross, Jesus took on all the sin of the world, including yours. There He became the one who had done all the things that you had ever done wrong, so God blamed Him. He became the One, the *only* One who was singled out by God in His wrath, so that you might be singled out in His mercy and grace for Salvation. As He died on the cross with your sins upon His shoulders, it was not *His* life that flashed before His eyes, it was yours. It was you. He saw you. He didn't just see a massive crowd that no one could number, He saw each of you personally. You were the joy set before Him that led Him to bear the burden of the cross (cf. Hebrews 12:2), and you are still His joy. For that reason, as sheep that loves to wander, every time you venture away from God's flock, you can rest assured that the Lord will not give up on you. He sees when you go astray and seeks you out.

As part of that seeking out, you'll need to hear the painful reminders that you are a sinner before God and deserving of damnation. That your sin has caused you to stray and separated you from God. But God would also remind us of this simple truth, **"That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** (1 Timothy 1:15) At the beginning of our text, the Pharisees and scribes were shocked that Jesus would be eating with sinful people, and yet that's exactly what Jesus came to do. In His own words, **"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** (Luke 19:10) And that includes you. God sought you out and singled you out by grace. He picked you out of the crowd and singled you out for salvation.

Speaking of a crowd, I'm sure many of you have noticed that in the last ten years or so there have been what feels like hundreds of superhero movies. They all sort of blend together after a while, there are lots of commonalities between them all. There's the superhero, there's the villain; there's the insurmountable obstacle for the hero to overcome, there's the new villain that's more powerful than the last. Another commonality between all these superhero franchises—they all have their "origin stories." You would never be very invested in a superhero that had all these powers if you were never told where those powers came from. And so we've been shown in numerous movies that a guy like Spiderman was bit by a radioactive spider and as a result that's why he has those spider powers.

Another commonality between many of these superhero movies is that they all struggle with the same question. "Why me?" "Why did this happen to me?" They realize that they've been singled out, that they've been given these great powers, and they need to do something good with them. They'll come to the conclusion, with great power comes great responsibility.

And it's the same with you. You have an "origin story" too. It's what we just spoke of. You were singled out by God's grace. When you had wandered from the fold of God, He sought you and brought you to Himself. Now, a reasonable question to ask would be, "Why me? Why would God choose me? Why would God want to die for me?" It's a reasonable question. Each of us as individuals knows the selfish thoughts in our head, we all know the sins that we wrestle with secretly—the things we'd never want anyone else to find out about. But God knows all those things too, and still for You He died. He singled you out. God loved you even when you didn't deserve it. "Why me?" God's grace, that's all we can answer to that question. And now with great grace comes great purpose.

Because in the same way that God singled you out in love, so He has done for every person in the world. In the same way that He died personally for you, so He died for every soul. In the same way that He went searching to find you, longing to carry you home on His shoulders, so He longs and searches for every wandering sheep, every lost sinner, every confused and darkened heart.

He wants to find them, and He uses you to do it. You are the body of Christ. He has chosen to work through you in this world. He has chosen to use your lips to speak His Word. He has chosen to send you to find the ones lost in the cold. And it's only grace that gives you this purpose. It's only by knowing that you deserve death in hell but that God's given you life in heaven instead—this alone gives us the ability to go find the lost sinner. After all, consider the Pharisees and scribes in our text. They didn't consider themselves as ones needing any forgiveness, and whenever someone came to Jesus, they would grumble, "Why's He eating with that guy?" "Doesn't He know who she is?" This is what happens when hearts are not trained by grace. This is the way we would think when we think that *we* are good enough, that *we* are accepted before God because of who *we* are and not because of God's grace.

If there's ever a time that you find you don't care to share God's Word with someone, that you don't care that much about bringing lost sinners to repentance—this is why. It's because you're forgetting what grace is. You're forgetting your origin story. Grace is not for those who think they're already good enough; it's for the lost, for the wretched, for the sinner—for you and me! Grace singles you out! Grace gives you God's love. Grace gives you joy in God's presence. And now grace opens your heart and opens your lips to sing God's praise.

Consider the Apostle Paul. In the Christian Church, there's never been a greater missionary than Paul. Outside of the Savior Himself, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who had such a zeal for saving souls as the Apostle Paul did. And I don't know if there was anyone ever who valued God's grace more

than Paul. If you were to think of your favorite passages about God's grace, I bet they would almost all be from Paul's letters. He's the one who said, **"Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief."** (1 Timothy 1:15) He wrote at God's direction, **"We are justified by faith, apart from the works of the law."** (Romans 3:28) He wrote those beautiful words, **"By grace we've been saved, through faith. . . and this is the gift of God."** (Ephesians 2:8) Paul knew this so well, because he had been lost, and God found him. Paul was working hard to *kill* Christians and stomp out Christ, when God stopped his tracks. He had been singled out by God's grace, and so Paul went out to single out others too. Paul found his salvation and his purpose only in the grace of Christ.

And so do you. You don't need to be a pastor. You don't need to be a great speaker or an energetic leader. You don't even need to travel overseas to do this work. There's people all around, in this town, in your neighborhoods, in your houses, at your work that need to hear from you. And to do this you just need God's grace, and you *have* been given that. So now, just save one.

In one of those many superhero movies that have come out, there's this scene where Batman is giving a pep-talk to the Flash. I'm not sure how familiar you are with all those characters, but basically the Flash is this really fast guy, and he's extremely nervous before this final battle. He's overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation, and Batman tells him, "Just save one." "Just save one and then you'll see." Take Jesus example from our parable, and do the same thing. There's a whole world out there in the dark, a whole world that is lost. A whole world that needs to be saved, but you can't save them all. And it's not your job to do so; just save one. Think of one person in your life—one family member, one co-worker, one old friend, one person that has never known Jesus or one that used to and strayed.

Pick that person out and find them. Pray for them—every day. Be there for them. Love them. Look for ways to share the Word with them. And don't stop. Don't give up. Single them out in grace as you have been singled out. Think of the illustration that Jesus uses. You've all been there before where you lost something, and you can't find it. And how much time you spend looking for something is directly related to how important it is. If you lose the remote, you might look for a while, but eventually give up if there's other ways of operating the tv. If you lose your keys in the morning when you need to go to work, well then you're not stopping until you find them. What if it was your child that you lost? How much energy, how much desperation would go into finding that child? That's what Jesus is saying. If a shepherd would search this diligently for a sheep, if a woman would sweep out her house to find one coin, how much wouldn't God do in Christ to find you, and how much shouldn't we desire to do to find those who are lost—even just one.

Now, if all of this seems like too much of a burden, remember that it isn't really your burden to bear. I said, "Just save one," but it isn't really you that saves them. Jesus uses you as His hands and His feet and His lips, but it's really Jesus doing the finding. He's the shepherd seeking the sheep. He's the hero. He's the one who singled you out in grace, and He's the one who singled you out for this purpose. And you're well equipped for that purpose, because all you need for it is God's grace. God's grace which strengthens you when you are troubled, which lifts your spirits when you are down; God's grace which forgives you when you fail. It is this grace which can save others, just as it has saved you. May God help us to find joy in His grace, and may He help us to share it. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen

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