SERMON GUIDE



ALL FOR ONE

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

The Right Thing to Do

All for One | Week 46 | 2 Kings 7

Introduction

On May 31, 1889, the South Fork Dam, 14 miles upstream from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, collapsed after days of torrential rain. It sent 20 million tons of water down the valley at 40 miles an hour, killing 2,209 people. But the greatest tragedy was not the flood. For years, residents had warned about the dam's weaknesses, and when the telegraph messages arrived that day, local leaders assumed it was a false alarm and said nothing. It wasn't the flood that killed those people; it was silence.

We have the greatest Master, the greatest message, and the greatest mission anyone has ever been given. Still, 74% of Christians have fewer than 10 spiritual conversations a year. You can sin with your mouth by saying what you shouldn't, but you can also sin by not saying what you should. In 2 Kings 7, four outcasts stumbled on news that could save a starving city, and as you consider three lessons from their story, you will see why it is never right to keep the Gospel out of sight.

Key Points

1. We Must Relate to the Desperation of the Lost

What does it look like when people run out of every option? After Israel split into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom's capital, Samaria, was surrounded by the far more powerful Syrian army and cut off from every supply line. "Afterward Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver" (2 Kings 6:24–25, ESV).

Under the law of Moses, a donkey was an unclean animal no Israelite could eat. Its head was the most worthless part, yet it still sold for about two pounds of silver. A kab was a little more

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than a quart, so people were paying a small fortune for about a cup of dung. It got so bad that mothers were eating their own children.

When a woman cried out to the king, he despairingly answered, "If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?" (2 Kings 6:27, ESV). The threshing floor was where they gathered grain for bread, and the winepress was where they crushed grapes for drink; both were empty. Money couldn't buy their way out, and even the most powerful man in the nation admitted there are some problems the government can't solve. They needed a word from God and the salvation of God.

> **Your neighbors are living with marriages falling apart and children who are depressed, so before you look out the window at them, look in the mirror and remember you were once surrounded with no way out until somebody told you Jesus saves.**

2. We Must Remember Our Salvation Is from the Lord

Why would God choose four lepers to carry the news that saved a nation? Under the law in Leviticus 13, anyone with leprosy had to live alone outside the camp, cut off from family, friends, and the house of worship, so these four men sat outside the city gate with nowhere to go.

"Now there were four men who were lepers at the entrance to the gate. And they said to one another, 'Why are we sitting here until we die?'" (2 Kings 7:3, ESV). They could go into the city and starve, stay where they were and starve, or surrender to the Syrians and probably die.

So at twilight they walked into the enemy camp and found it empty, "For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army …" (2 Kings 7:6, ESV). God routed an entire army without one Israelite lifting a sword, and He did it with nothing but

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a sound. These lepers went from leprosy to luxury, stuffing their bellies with food and their pockets with gold. But they fought no battle, killed no soldier, and bought no piece of bread. Every bite was the grace of God. That is exactly where you and I stand, because we were condemned to an eternal death and have received an eternal life we never earned.

> **Every blessing you enjoy as a child of the King is a gift of grace, so thank God today for a victory you never fought for and a salvation you could never have won on your own.**

3. We Must Respond to Our Obligation to Love

What did these lepers mean when they admitted they were doing wrong? They hadn't broken a law or committed a crime, but they were sitting on the best news anyone in that city could hear. "Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household'" (2 Kings 7:9, ESV).

The Hebrew word for "good news" is *besorah*, and when this verse was translated into Greek, it used the same word that the New Testament uses for "Gospel." Essentially, these lepers were saying, "This is a Gospel day." The word translated "punishment" literally means "guilt" or "iniquity," so they understood their silence would be a sin that would catch up with them. When we keep the Gospel to ourselves, it usually isn't because we feel unqualified; it is because we don't love Jesus and lost people the way we ought to.

My friend Jay Strack witnessed to the same Bedouin tour guide on every trip to the Holy Land, and every time, he refused. He finally asked why Jay kept at it, and my friend told him how he didn't want to keep such good news to himself. The man replied, "Jay, now I understand. You do not want to commit the sin of the desert." To the Bedouins, the ultimate sin is knowing where water is and refusing to tell others.

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Because the lepers spoke, a city that starved one day feasted the next, "… according to the word of the LORD" (2 Kings 7:16, ESV), just as the prophet Elisha had promised the day before.

> **You know where the living water is, so the right thing to do this week is to tell your lost friends, neighbors, and relatives what Jesus can do for them.**

Key Takeaway

Doing the right thing begins with remembering how desperate you once were, grows as you thank God for a salvation you never earned, and comes to life when love opens your mouth for the people still starving behind the wall. It is not right to keep the Gospel out of sight.

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Reflection Questions

1. When you remember your life before Jesus, who comes to mind today who is living in that same kind of desperation?

2. What is one way God's grace has blessed the life that you have enjoyed but never told anyone about?

3. Who is the one person you will pray for and begin a spiritual conversation with this week?

Am I Following Jesus?

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Introduction

A few years ago, I went deep-sea fishing for the first time, and the only reason I went was that my grandson Harper loves to fish. And as any grandparent knows, their wish is your command. I took seasickness medicine and a big hat for the sun, planning to get in and out without falling overboard, but I fell in love with it. Somebody baited my hook, the fish kept biting, and someone else took them off the hook and cleaned them.

Every year, more than three million Americans head into deep waters and spend over $5 billion doing it. If people will invest that much to catch fish that perish, how much more should we invest to reach souls that will live forever? Jesus put it this way: "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17, ESV). As you look at three things every follower of Jesus is called to do, you will see that the number one job of the Church is not deep-sea fishing, but deep-soul fishing.

Key Points

1. We Are Called to Follow the Savior

What would you do if a complete stranger walked up to you at work and said two words, "Follow me"? "Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me …'" (Mark 1:16–17, ESV).

In that day, pupils chose rabbis, and rabbis never went looking for pupils. But Jesus turned that custom upside down by initiating the relationship Himself. He also asked these men to leave their family business, the source of their identity in that culture. The Greek phrase behind "follow me" is even stronger than our English; it literally means, "Come, get behind me," which was the place a disciple walked as he followed in his teacher's footsteps.

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Jesus offered no credentials, no badge, and no introduction, and He didn't choose a single scholar or CEO. He chose ordinary working men, because He doesn't call you because of who you are but because of who He is. Then Mark tells us what happened, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:18, ESV). "Immediately" is Mark's favorite word, used about 40 times in his Gospel, and here it means these men were gone in 60 seconds, leaving home, business, friends, and family behind.

> **The best time to follow Jesus is the first time you hear Him call, so whatever net He is asking you to drop, don't wait for a second invitation.**

2. We Are Called to Find the Sinner

What did Jesus promise to make these men into? "…I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17, ESV). He didn't say, "Follow me, and I will make you a tither, a church attender, or a Bible student." Notice who does the work: "I will make you." Your part is to follow, and His part is to make you into what He wants you to be. Jesus wanted them to become exactly what He was: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v. 2, ESV). The word "seek" means to search for something or go looking for it, and Jesus was fishing for men while these men were fishing for fish.

You have to seek before you can save. Anyone who has ever fished knows fish don't come to you; you go to where the fish are, and I have never seen anybody catch a fish on dry land. By and large, you don't find fish inside the church. You find them in your neighborhood, at your office, and in your school, which is why God put you exactly where you live, work, and go to class.

> **You are surrounded by a lake full of fish, so look around this week and write down the name of one person who is a fish and not yet a follower.**

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3. We Are Called to Fish for Souls

Not every disciple Jesus called was a fisherman, but every disciple Jesus calls is to be a fisher of men. The moment you gave your life to Jesus, He gave you the bait, which is the Gospel, and a rod and reel, which is your witness. Buildings don't reach people, and technology doesn't reach people; only people reach people.

Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16, ESV). The word "power" in this verse is *dunamis*, the same word the New Testament uses for the mighty power behind miracles. The power to save is in the message, not in the messenger, so you don't have to be eloquent or have every answer. You just tell others what Jesus has done for you and what He can do for them.

Dallas Willard spent his life answering the question of how ordinary people actually become like Jesus, and he said that a disciple is someone whose ultimate goal is to live their life the way Jesus would live if He were them. If Jesus were you, He would go fishing.

> **You don't need a gift for words when the Gospel carries God's own power, so commit to pray for one person and ask God for the boldness and the opportunity to speak.**

Key Takeaway

Following Jesus was never meant to be a casual walk; it is a lifelong fishing trip. When you answer His call, go where the people are, and share a Gospel that carries God's own power, His passion becomes your passion, and His purpose becomes your purpose.

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Reflection Questions

1. What is one "net" Jesus may be asking you to leave behind so you can follow Him more closely?

2. Who is one person in your neighborhood, workplace, or school who is a fish and not yet a follower?

3. What is the biggest thing holding you back from telling someone what Jesus has done for you?

Looking for Number One

All for One | Week 48 | Luke 15:1–10

Introduction

In just the last few weeks, I lost my cell phone, my car keys, and my credit card, and all three times I went from a panic attack to a near emotional breakdown, praying, "Oh God, please help me!" When I finally found them—one where I had been working out, one under a piece of paper on my desk, and one in a pair of pants I had hung up—my frustration turned into celebration.

It's amazing how one thing becomes so important when it's lost that you will drop everything else until you find it. That is exactly how we should see every person lost without Jesus Christ. In Luke 15, Jesus told a story to religious people who were complaining, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (v. 2, ESV). As you look at what a lost sheep and a lost coin teach us, you will discover that a heart for God is always a heart for one.

Key Points

1. We Must Be Passionate for the One Who Is Lost

Whom do you think Jesus most wanted to spend His time with? "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled …" (Luke 15:1–2, ESV). Tax collectors worked for Rome and often cheated their own neighbors, so they were despised. The word "grumbled" is an intensified form of the word for muttering under your breath, the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for Israel grumbling against Moses in the wilderness.

In that culture, eating with someone meant you accepted them, and the church crowd wanted a wall to keep these people out while Jesus wanted a bridge to bring them in. So He told them one story in three acts, which is why verse three says, "So he told them this parable" and not "parables." The one story was about a lost sheep, a lost silver coin, and a lost son. "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does

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not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4, ESV). Sheep wander off without knowing they are lost, and the shepherd only knew because he counted.

Teresa and I have three sons—James, Jonathan, and Joshua—and if one of them had been lost when they were little, I would never have said, "Don't worry; we still have the other two."

God is the shepherd in this story, and we are the sheep, and He calls us to carry His passion for the one who is lost.

> **If you had been the only person on earth who needed to be found, Jesus would have died for you, so ask Him to give you that same passion for one person in your life who is still lost.**

2. We Must Be Pursuing the One Who Is Lost

How far would you go to find something you love? "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?" (Luke 15:8, ESV). Each of those coins was a drachma, about a day's wage, and most homes were about the size of a one-car garage, with no windows, one door, and a dark, dusty floor. That is why she lit a lamp in the daytime and swept every inch. The word "diligently" appears only here in the New Testament, and it describes someone carrying out a king's command, a matter of life and death. This was no casual search.

Notice, too, the phrase "until she finds it." Neither the shepherd nor the woman stopped looking until they found what was lost. That might seem strange, because the coin was worth only about 18 cents in today's money and the shepherd still had 99 out of 100 sheep. Most major grocery stores only make about 2 cents on every dollar. They would be thrilled to keep 99 percent of what they have. So why chase one? Because the value

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of that sheep and that coin came from the love of the ones who lost them. Those who are lost aren't loved because they are valuable; they are valuable because God loves them.

> **God came looking for you, so go after your "lost one" with the same love that refused to give up on you.**

3. We Must Prioritize the One Who Is Lost

What would make Heaven throw a party? When the shepherd finds his sheep, he calls his friends and neighbors and says, "'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 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" (Luke 15:6–7, ESV). "Rejoice with me" means "rejoice together," because joy over the lost is meant to be shared. The word "repents" means a change of mind that leads to a change of direction, and the "ninety-nine righteous persons" were the very religious people listening, who thought they had no need to change at all. God doesn't throw a party when we meet the budget, but He does every time one person is found.

My friend Joby Martin was reading his Bible in a Boston gym when a dancer named Sunshine from the club across the street asked him about it. He invited her to church, and she came with her daughter. Every eye stared her down, and afterward the pastor told Joby never to bring someone like that back again. In tears, she told him, "I have never been more humiliated in my life, and I'll never be back." She had been more humiliated in a church full of Christians than in a strip club.

> **The one you are looking for won't always look, talk, or dress like you, so make room in your life and in your church for people who are still a mess, because Heaven is waiting to celebrate them.**

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Key Takeaway

A heart for God is a heart for one. When you are passionate about the lost, pursue them as diligently as God pursued you, and make room for them no matter how messy it gets, you join the search that once found you and the party Heaven throws every time one more comes home.

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Reflection Questions

1. Who is one person in your life who is lost and may not even realize it?

2. What is one practical step you could take this week to pursue that person with God's love?

3. Who would be the hardest person for you to welcome at church, and what would it look like to welcome them anyway?