

For the One Who Feels Alone

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[0 : 00] All right, if you've got a Bible, go to Luke chapter 17.

Luke chapter 17. This evening we're still in our For the One series that we've been in now for several weeks. This whole series, you remember, came out of the parable of the lost sheep. That Jesus is the kind of shepherd that is willing to leave the 99 and go after the one. And we've been describing what that one looks like. It looks like Matthew the tax collector and the prostitute that's weeping at Jesus' feet.

And Peter that has failed repeatedly to live up to his promises to Christ. And on and on and on we see that Jesus is the kind of shepherd that goes after the one.

And that is good news to us as we see his grace and his love towards us as he pursues us. So tonight we're going to continue in that here in Luke 17. And this might be it.

[1 : 12] I don't know. I'm still trying to figure out the plans in terms of a Christmas series and all of that. So this might be the last one in For the One series. But you'll just have to come back next week to find out.

So Luke 17, if you are able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's word. Luke 17 and verse 11. It says, And as they went, they were cleansed.

Now he was a Samaritan.

And then Jesus answered, Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?

And he said to him, Rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well. Let's pray. Lord, help me tonight as we look at this passage.

[2 : 41] And once again, the beauty of your grace and how you go after the one, the one that no one would have anything to do with, the one that everyone else would reject.

Jesus, that's the one you go after. And I pray that tonight you'd help us understand once again just how gracious and loving you are. In Jesus' name we pray.

And God's people said, Amen. You can be seated. If I mentioned his name, you would probably start immediately thinking of some of his famous works. Works, for example, like Hamlet.

Or Much Ado About Nothing. Or Macbeth. Or Julius Caesar. Or the romantic classic Romeo and Juliet. Who am I talking about?

That's right. The English playwright and poet William Shakespeare. But Shakespeare, who had many, many different works, wrote something that's not nearly as well known as the ones that I just mentioned.

[3 : 42] He wrote a story. He wrote a play called Timon of Athens. Anybody by chance familiar with this one? I didn't think so. Not as many know this one. But it's a fascinating story.

In fact, at the very beginning of the story, this main character, Timon, has the world at his hands. He is loved by everybody.

He is surrounded by friends and admirers. They adore him. One of the reasons is because Timon is an extremely generous person. He's generous with his time.

And he's extremely generous with his wealth. In fact, on several occasions, he uses his wealth to provide this lavish meal for everyone in Athens.

And they love him for it. But things change. Timon falls on hard times. More specifically, he loses all of his money.

[4 : 43] And when he hits rock bottom, all the people that previously loved him forsake him. He has nothing left and he has no one.

And he begins to struggle with this new life situation. And on one hand, he struggles with the despair of it, the feeling of being alone. And on the other hand, he struggles with the rage of it, of

people that he had done so much for, and yet they forsake him in this way. And he struggles how society can love you at one moment and reject you the next, giving everything you've done for them. And this despair and rage you really begin to see in one of the real famous rants of the play.

It goes like this. If thou wert the lion, the fox would beguile thee. If thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee.

If thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee. If thou wert the ass, thy dullness would torment thee. And still thou livest but as breakfast for the wolf.

[5 : 55] If thou wert the wolf, thy greediness would afflict thee. If thou wert the unicorn, pride and wrath would confound thee. And make thine own self the conquest of thy theory.

If thou wert the bear, thou wouldst be killed by the horse. If thou wert the horse, thou wouldst be seized by the leopard. If thou wert the leopard, thou were germane to the lion and the spots of thy kindred were jurors on your life.

What beast couldst thou be that were not subject to a beast? You feel the despair in that.

The hopelessness of that. This despair and rage causes him to then become isolated from all humanity. He wants nothing and has nothing to do with anyone.

He ends up living alone in a cave. Because he feels like he no longer fits in society. In fact, the final epitaph of the story as it ends goes like this.

[7 : 05] Here lies a wretched corpse of wretched soul bereft. Seek not my name. A plague consume you wicked caddifs left.

Here lie I, Tymon, who alive, all living men did hate. Pass by and curse thy fill. But pass not and stay here, thy gate.

It's a sad story. A man that once had a life surrounded by friendship, but now a life forsaken.

A man that knew relationships, friendships, and now has been rejected by all. A man who used to be on the inside now finds himself isolated on the outside.

Do you know the feeling? Do you know the feeling of being an outsider? It's a feeling that, let's be honest, many of us are not comfortable with.

[8 : 13] We don't like it at all. We don't like being left out. We don't like feeling forsaken. We don't like being sentenced to solitary confinement. We don't like being left out of the conversation. We don't like being left out of the communication.

We do not like not being included in the decision that was made or not accepted by the group. We don't like not being invited to the party.

We don't like not being allowed to play in the game. I hate, hate, hate being left out. Whether it's for a sport or like not being picked for a team or being picked for a team and then showing up and realizing that the team doesn't exist or that the sport doesn't exist.

Be honest. Be honest. We hate the feeling of being on the outside looking in. And I want you to resonate with that. And I always try to get you to emotionally feel something because that's what the text means for you to feel.

Listen to me, faith family. These 10 individuals here in Luke 17 have felt that way every day of their life. Look at verse 12.

[9 : 31] And as Jesus entered a village, he was met by how many? 10 lepers. Say this phrase with me. Who stood at a distance.

That is, these leopards like Tymon lived in isolation. They were outsiders. They were forsaken by everybody in society. They were in a very true sense alone.

And I know many of you know this. You've studied the scripture before and you know that lepers were the rejects of the rejects. You do not get worse than a leper. I mean, listen, we've talked about tax collectors.

We've talked about prostitutes. We've talked about disciples that fail over and over again. But a leper is the worst. Like Dr. Seuss said, alone.

Whether they liked it or not. Alone was something they were quite a lot. And there was a reason for that. Leprosy, as you know, was a highly contagious skin disease.

[10 : 36] And so if someone was found or even suspect to having the disease of leprosy, they would go to the priest and they would be examined. And if it was discovered that they had leprosy, this is what the Old Testament law required.

Leviticus 13. The leprosy, the leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose.

He shall cover his upper lip and cry out, unclean, unclean. He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. Why? He is unclean.

Say it with me. He shall live alone. And his dwelling place is where? Outside the camp. He's just like Timon.

Isolated from everyone. In fact, of the 61 defilements in the Old Testament law, leprosy was the second worst.

[11 : 38] Do you want to know what the first was? A corpse. Like you know you're bad shape when you come in second to a corpse. Like that's how bad. You could not touch the dead or you would be unclean.

But second to that was if you were a leper, you were unclean, unclean, and all alone. I tried to resonate, and I don't even think this comes close, but I tried to go back to the fact.

You remember when all the lockdowns were happening? Do you think you'll ever forget that? You know? When we were living in isolation and there was a lack of social contact. And there was the physical struggles that people were experiencing during COVID.

And it was like literally all the time. Well, imagine that every single day of your life times 100. That's what these lepers are going through.

They've been removed from their families. There's no butterfly kisses with your little girl. There's no throwing football with your little boy. Never again will you feel the embrace of a loved one or a friend.

[12 : 40] If people see you, they're going to run the other way like you've got some kind of disease, and that's because you do. You're not allowed in the temple. And for at least one of these chaps in Luke 17, he's a Samaritan, so he's even a worse condition.

That is, he's not only isolated physically and socially, he's isolated racially and religiously. And every time, every time somebody walks by, you're going to be reminded of the condition you're in when both you shout and they shout unclean.

That's their life every single day. And I have a feeling that there are some of you here tonight with the same disease.

I don't mean the disease of leprosy. I mean the disease of loneliness. You know what it feels like in a big way or a small way like these lepers.

You relate to that. In fact, let me tell you why I would make such a statement like this. It's because I just read a study this week from the U.S. Surgeon General that talked about how loneliness increases the risk of premature death to the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

[14 : 01] Are you hearing me? Loneliness increases the risk of premature death to the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The report said that this whole trend was happening even before COVID happened.

That half of U.S. adults reported measurable levels of loneliness. And that has led to, listen, 29% increase in heart disease, 32% increase in stroke, and 50% of dementia in older adults.

One doctor said, quote, In the last few decades, we've experienced a dramatic pace change. We move more, change jobs more. We live with technology that has profoundly changed the way we interact with other people.

You can feel the lonely even when you have a lot of people around you. Because, listen, loneliness is about the quality of your connections.

It's not how many connections you have. It's the quality of them. And this is true across all age groups. Though the most common age groups, you'd probably figure this out, were what?

[15 : 11] Young people age 15 to 24 because of, anybody want to guess? Social media. In fact, the study said they are now, that age group is now 70% less social than just 10 years before.

And the other age group, you'd probably guess that, is senior adults who feel at that season and age of life that they have been abandoned. What's my point? Here's my point.

Notice it on the screen. You may not have the disease of leprosy, but you likely have the disease of loneliness. And so you know in some way, in some part, what it's like to feel like these lepers, isolated, disconnected.

No one knows them. And so what do these lonely lepers do? They do what you and I should do. They come to Jesus.

Verse 13. And they lifted up their voices saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

[16:16] Jesus, help us. We are desperate here for contact. We are desperate here for healing. We need you to have mercy on us. These 10 individuals are beggars in need of grace.

And so are we. Amen? I mean, you know this. We've talked about this before, that their spiritual, their physical condition is just a picture of our spiritual condition. Leprosy is actually a, maybe I shouldn't say beautiful imagery, but it's a beautiful in the sense that it really connects the imagery of the gospel, the imagery of salvation.

For example, sin, just like leprosy, has isolated us from God. We are forsaken. We are alone. We are isolated. Why? Because sin has made us that way.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 13 says, In Christ, you were once far off, but now you've been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Sin has separated us from God, secondly. Sin has disfigured our life. It's impacted the words we use. It impacts our actions, relationships. You may be familiar with the concept of total depravity.

[17:25] The theological category of total depravity is not that you are as bad as you possibly can be. It means every part of you has been impacted by sin. Just as leprosy spreads across the body, so does sin disfigure our life.

Thirdly, sin has no self-cure. It has no self-cure. I didn't say it doesn't have a cure. It just doesn't have a self-cure. The wages of sin is death. And it has spread everywhere, has it not?

Do you not see the effects at the funeral, in the hospital, in the destruction of society? Sin, Romans 5, 12 says, has spread to all men.

It is everywhere in the world. And finally, sin, if not healed by the great physician, is eternally terminal. It is eternally terminal.

And that is why Jesus, we looked at it earlier in this series in Mark 2, 17, says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. That's you, brother.

[18:33] That's you, sister. We are sick with the disease of sin. But what did he say? I came not to call the righteous but sinners.

So the point is this. Don't look at the condition of these men in Luke 17 and say, gross. Look at it and say, that's me.

That's me. Rejected, isolated, and forsaken because of sin. You see, faith family, notice this on the screen. We are spiritual lepers desperate for saving grace.

And this is the question I've been asking you throughout this series. What do you do with people like this? Outsiders, rejects, diseased.

Here's what the world does. Your classmate, certainly in this generation, is going to laugh at you, make fun of you, bully you, make fun of your condition.

[19:31] Your coworkers are going to ignore you. Your family might disown you. The church may neglect you. But hallelujah, faith family, there is one in your spiritual condition that will receive you and love you.

Verse 14. When Jesus saw them. Who's the them? It's the isolated ones. It's the lepers.

It's the gross ones. It's the ones no one wants anything to do with. When he saw them, he said to them, Go, show yourselves to the priest.

And as they went, they were cleansed. It is appropriate to acknowledge what Jesus does not do. Because what Jesus does not do is what everyone would do.

Jesus doesn't go, get away from me, sicko. Gross. Don't you know you can't talk to me? Don't you know how inappropriate this is that you would even speak to someone like me?

[20:39] Jesus does not approach them the way everyone else would approach them. Jesus, listen, speaks to them. I wonder how long it had been that anyone had said anything to them other than unclean.

That someone would actually have a conversation with them. Acknowledge them. Treat them like a human being. Not laugh, yell, and run away.

And Jesus, we don't know if he does it here in Luke 17. But this is what he does. This is an entirely different situation. We actually preached on this in the miracle series.

When Jesus encounters a single leper. So this isn't a 10. This is a 1. And look what he does with this 1. Luke 5, verse 12. When Jesus was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy.

And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out his hand and, gross, touches him.

[21 : 59] Now, I don't know how long it's been since someone has said a word to them, but I can tell you it's been a long time since anybody's touched this man. And imagine what it's like. Like, I hope you're listening.

Imagine what it's like to know that Jesus cares. He really cares. About your loneliness. How you feel forsaken. Your struggle. And he says to the man, I will. Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him.

Here's what I'm getting at in faith families. This is another beautiful picture of the shepherd going after the one. Speaking to a person no one would speak to. Associating with someone that no one would come close to. Embracing a person that no one would touch. And so along with the list of prodigals and tax collectors and prostitutes and disciples that break all their promises and criminals on death row last week, you can add a reject, isolated, forsaken leper who now knows the love of God.

[23 : 06] And I've been trying over and over and over again in this series to show you this is God's kingdom. This is the kingdom of God. He's the shepherd that leaves the 99 people that think they have it all together.

That think they're perfectly just fine. That religiously are content. And he goes after the one that knows they need the grace of God. And just seeing what Jesus does here both in Luke 5 and here in Luke 17, we should just give Jesus praise for his power to do anything.

Listen to me. There is nothing that Jesus cannot do. There is nothing impossible with him. He can calm the storm and cast out the demon. And he can heal with a touch. He can speak that healing into your life. Maybe that's a physical healing. Maybe that's an emotional healing. Whatever it is, Jesus has the power to heal. But secondly, and this is as beautiful as his power is his grace.

That is, he's willing to do so. Because this is the thing I'm trying to get you to see over and over. For Jesus doesn't owe this leper anything. I mean, here's the deal.

[24 : 19] This is what gets me in trouble. Jesus, if he actually, now by the way, he fulfills the Old Testament law. So I'm not saying that Jesus is in any way sinning here.

But if Jesus is fulfilling, or if Jesus is walking in line to what the Old Testament would have you do in this case, he wouldn't have anything to do with this leprous man.

But Jesus, oh, somebody say, preach, preacher, has come to do what the law cannot. Jesus has come to do what the law cannot. And he goes after, by his grace and his love, someone he has no obligation to do so.

He could follow the law and reject this man. Or he could fulfill the law and heal him. He doesn't owe you anything, but he is willing to give you everything.

Would you come tonight and beg for mercy? Because he is the shepherd that will go after the one. And what a beautiful picture of the gospel. Amen? I mean, the man's condition, isolated and separated and out of options.

[25 : 26] The cry for mercy. The cleansing that is grace through faith. Cleansing comes in. This is the gospel story. It's their story and it is our story.

For we here at Faith Family are a leper colony who have experienced grace. Now that would change your image about church. Tonight is a Saturday night where a bunch of spiritual lepers decide to show up.

And we have one thing in common. We met Jesus. And that's changed everything. He has come after us. He has sought us and bought us with his redeeming love.

I want to focus on one more aspect of the text and then we're done. It's in verse 15. Given that this is Thanksgiving weekend. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was, Luke wants you to know, a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, were not ten cleansed?

[26 : 33] Where are the nine? So somewhere along the way, Faith Family, this one leper realizes what's happening. So I imagine it this way. Jesus says, go to show yourself to the priest.

Why? Because when you get there, it's going to be clear that you've been healed. And somewhere along the way, this cleansing, this healing happens. And the one, the Samaritan, realizes what's happened.

He realizes what Jesus has done. And he returns to express what? Thanks and gratitude and praise to God for what Jesus has done in his life, right?

I mean, no more isolation. No more leper jokes. I can now be reconciled to my friends. I have a brand new life. But what is odd, what is strange about this whole scenario is, again, verse 17. Jesus says, were there not ten? Where's everybody else? What happened to the other nine? Was the one, was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?

[27 : 42] Now, listen, Faith Family, that speaks, speaks significantly to me. And it should speak significantly to you. Here's what it means. There is a statistical likelihood that 90% of you and me think we are more grateful than we are.

There is a 90% likelihood that we are one of the nine that feel, that think we're more grateful than we actually are. And here's why I say that.

It's because if we ask those nine, are you glad you were healed? Do you think they're going to say, no, I really wish I could go back to being a leper? Of course they are thankful for their healing.

So where are they? Where are the other nine? A few things that I think tend to grab our hearts and make us far more ungrateful than we really believe.

The first is a feeling of entitlement. A feeling of entitlement. And you may say, where in the world do I get that from? Just jot down in your notes. Go back in Luke 17 and verse 7.

[28 : 53] And you can read a story that Jesus tells here about some unworthy servants. And what you'll find, this is the story that comes right before the story of the ten lepers, is that in this story, what happens is someone who does what he is supposed to do, someone who does what he's supposed to do, but he expects more than is deserved.

I did what I should have done and I expect you to give me more than what I was promised. And then these nine lepers get more than they actually deserve and they're nowhere to be found.

In other words, you have a stream of thought taking place here in Luke 6, namely, and I don't think most of us think we're this way, it's very easy for us as Christians to become entitled.

And I may get in a little bit of trouble for this, but that's okay, because some of you may work in the service industry, but I've noticed a trend that's taking place. Have you noticed this? Where there are places that you might go and order a beverage or order something to eat that are asking you to tip before there's ever any service?

Do you find that strange? Please don't misunderstand. I'm not against tipping and I want to graciously tip. I'm all for that. That's great. But isn't the whole idea of tipping based on how well of service you give?

[30 : 13] But we're living in a society, no, no, no, no, no. I get tipped no matter what I do. I could give you the worst service possible and you still should give me 30%.

Like that's the mentality. And it's very easy for that mentality to creep into Christians. God, you realize you owe me. I've been to church the last three weekends in a row.

You should tip me. Tip me before I even go next weekend because I deserve it. And of course, what have we lost sight of? The grace of God.

You don't deserve anything. And everything he has given you by his grace is undeserved.

Tim Keller, the late Tim Keller wrote this, quote, rather than being poor in spirit, many Christians are middle class in spirit. I love that.

[31 : 11] That's just good. Rather than being poor in spirit, and those, by the way, are the ones that get the kingdom, many Christians are middle class in spirit. This is when you believe God owes you some things.

He ought to answer your prayers and bless you for the many good things you've done. You feel that you've earned a certain standing with God through your hard work.

Do you have a middle class in spirit attitude? Then where are you? Then when is the last time you and I have been at the feet of Jesus?

Truly and really thankful. How heartbreaking it would be for Jesus to say of this group tonight, where are the other nine?

You think you're grateful, but entitlement has captured your heart, and you think God owes you. Be reminded tonight that everything he has done for you, he has done by grace.

[32 : 20] Second is the trap of idolatry. The trap of idolatry. It's interesting here. It's a whole other sermon, but not time to preach it, that nine are going where? To the temple to see the priest.

One is going to who? Jesus. Nine got what they wanted from Jesus. One just wants Jesus. Nine would say, this is the greatest day of my life.

I was healed of my leprosy. I got my family back and job back and relationships back. And one is saying, this is the greatest day of my life. I got Jesus. Look at verse 19.

And he said to him, rise and go your way. Your what? Your faith has made you well. In other words, I take that to mean this. All of them got healed.

Are you ready for the number? One got saved. All of them got healed. One got saved.

[33 : 23] Everybody experienced common grace. One experienced saving grace. Because saving grace as pictured by this one leper is found in coming to Jesus.

Not religion. Not the church. But Jesus. And I have preached this over and over. I preached it last week with the two criminals on the cross. It's not about seeing Jesus as the solution to your problems.

But seeing Jesus as the Savior. You're wanting him, not just off your cross. So, the feeling of entitlement, the trap of idolatry, and finally is the danger of assumption.

Again, I said this earlier. If you ask the nine, are you grateful? Of course they'd say yes. They'd say, are you kidding me? My life has been changed forever. And again, where are you?

Here's the concern tonight. As I wrap this up. Is that you can say you're grateful. You can think you're grateful. But you're not actually grateful until you express it to God.

[34 : 33] Let me say it this way. Unexpressed gratitude is ingratitude. Unexpressed gratitude to God is, well, you know, he knows I'm grateful.

Oh, God knows I love him. I don't really have to say it. I don't really need to express it to him. Yes, you do. At his feet.

Grateful for grace. That is your position tonight. If you are the one. If you are the one who truly gets the grace of God.

There'll no be walking out of here saying, well, God really knows my heart. Yeah, but where are you? Come in just a moment. And what a great place to do it. In remembrance and communion. Come to the cross. And lay it out. And let him know. And praise God. And thank him for his mercy. That he has come after you.

[35 : 35] The shepherd who's gone after the one. Listen, people who live daily in the gospel will walk daily in gratitude. Because they are constantly aware of how undeserving they are.

And how gracious God is. Amen. And so this text shows us that Jesus is for the one who is alone. He is for the one that is isolated.

And this entire series, Faith Family. This entire series has been about the question of. That was raised by the Pharisees. Do you remember the question? Why does Jesus eat with people like this? Why does he eat with sinners? The rejects? The forsaken? Why does he go after lepers? Why does he even waste his time with these people? And here's why. It's because like Timon. Like the lepers of Luke 17. Jesus knows what it's like to be isolated.

[36 : 40] And taken outside the city. Jesus knows what it's like to be rejected. By the ones he's shown nothing but grace.

He knows what it's like to be alone. And that's why he goes after lepers like us.

And God's people said, amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you once again for your grace to us. And I pray we see it. We behold it.

We feel it tonight. And I'm asking in these next few moments, both for my heart and everybody in this place, that we would not be like the nine, but that we would be like the one.

And come to your feet and praise you and thank you and express to you just how grateful we are for your grace.

[37 : 45] But even more than that, but that through your grace, we get you forever. Forever. So Lord, I pray that in these few moments, as we remember, as we look to these elements and remind us of the cross, that this would truly be, that it would not be said of anybody in this place, where is the nine?

We would not be counted in that number, but we would be the one who is praising you for what you've done and for who you are. It's in Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Abend Nab Nab