

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE

Johnny Hunt | Sermon Transcript

[For context, prior to the start of the sermon, someone sang “Thanks to Calvary (I Don’t Live Here Anymore)”]

I want to talk to you this morning on this subject: One. I’m preaching on One, and there couldn’t have been a better song, couldn’t have been a better singer, couldn’t have been a better setup for what I want to share than this: Most of the people you know can’t sing that. I bet a good deal of your extended family, work associates, neighbors can’t sing it, and we’re going to talk about why today.

I’m not sure what all is entailed as to why we’re crying in heaven in one of the scenes in the Book of Revelation before Jesus wipes all the tears away. Some have suggested that when we get there and realize who all is not there. It’s one thing if they reject. It’s another thing if we never tell. I want you to just give your attention to two passages of Scripture as we think about one. I’m going to be as simple, as practical, and as clear as I know how to be to drive home a truth about what we just sang.

The Bible teaches in John 1:45, just follow along the screens if you will, Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We’ve found him,” and I know we would say he found us, however which way you say it, it’s what the Bible says. “We found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.’”

Nathanael said to him, a little diversion, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Now, he could have debated him about Nazareth, a small, obscure village, but instead he said, “Come and see.”

Would you not agree that he did not ask him to come and see until he had gone to where he was, he had to go and tell?

And then there’s one other passage that’s been in my heart, and it’s found in Matthew’s account—Matthew 1, or I’m sorry, Matthew 13:45-46. It’s called the Parable of the Hidden Treasure. It says, “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid, and for joy over it, goes and sells all that he has and buys the field.” If you don’t understand it, when Jesus says, “What shall a man profit if he gained the whole world and lose his soul?” Here’s a man who when he found Jesus, because it is a parable of Jesus, he sold everything he had. He found the one pearl of great price.

The night that I was converted, my wife and I both, together, were baptized the next Sunday night. After we were baptized, they presented us with a pocket New Testament that was called a Soul-Winner’s Edition. I trained myself by opening it, and it would say, “If you’re visiting with someone, ask them a question and read this verse.” And then it would say, “Predicated on their answer, turn to the next page.” Forty years ago, I’d been converted, I’m going to guess six weeks, and when I got converted, I had been managing the pool room, but at that time in my life, I was a substantial pool player and a gambler. But I was living in the projects. I’d not seen my dad in over a dozen years. My mother was on welfare, so I didn’t have money to gamble, but I was a good pool player.

So, Marty Lewis would ... He would put the money up for me to gamble, so this don’t sound like much, and I’m going somewhere, so follow my storyline. We would gamble on six-ball or nine-ball for \$100. That was twice as much as the average person made in 1969. So that was a big deal, gambling for your salary that you would make in two weeks. But then, all of a sudden, I’m not back at the pool room, and there’s some people to be hustled, so the calls begin to come. “Johnny, he’s here. One of the men that I used to hustle a lot of the time, he was about 6’7”, and his name was Gurney, and he would give anything to beat me. Just between you and me, he never did.

But anyway, they would say, “Gurney’s here, and others are here. Why don’t you come, and let’s play pool?” And here’s what I said, “Marty, haven’t you heard? I got saved,” and I know what some of you are thinking right now, “What’s that got to do with it?” First of all, thanks for asking. Everything. Remember the words of the song? “Today I went back to the place where I used to go. Today I saw the same old friends I knew before, and when they asked me what had happened, I tried to tell them. Thanks to Calvary, I don’t come here anymore.” See, thanks to Calvary, I’m not the man I used to be. Thanks to Calvary, things are different than before, so as the tears ran down my face, I tried to tell him, “Thanks to Calvary, things are different than before.”

So, they began to say, “So ...” And I said, “I’ve quit drinking.” That’s a surprise for a bunch of you sipping saints. I quit cussing. Charles Spurgeon said when he got saved, he lost 80 percent of his vocabulary.

So, Marty said, “I just don’t understand this religious thing. I mean, why can’t you still come and gamble? We can win some money.” So listen to what I did. By myself, I can’t believe I did this, I went to Marty’s house, opened my New Testament, you need to really hear this, and I shared with him walking through the Roman Road, all of sin comes short of the glory of God, the wages of sin is death, gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, God committed Himself toward us, and while we are sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. Whosoever has called upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, with the heart man believes unto salvation when the mouth confession is made.

And as I shared, now listen to this. It’s not my words. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. So as I shared the gospel with Marty, Marty and Betty began to weep, and they said, “What do we need to do?”

And I said, “Let’s get on our knees, and you repent and give your life to Jesus Christ.” That was 40 years ago. I was preaching at Peace Baptist Church, in Whiteville, North Carolina, about six months ago, and while I was preaching, just like I saw my friend John Hagee, and I’m assuming that must be Tom that’s with him, so I saw Marty and Betty. And can you ... Do you know what it means to see somebody 40 years later?

So, since I’m going to preach on biblical discipleship—what makes a disciple—and I went and said, “Tell me your journey.” I mean, we’ve disconnected. God called me to preach. I left town, went off to college, seminary, been pastoring in places other than Wilmington. “How are y’all doing?”

They said, “Well, ever since that night you dropped by our house 40 years ago, we’ve been living for Jesus.”

Now wait a minute. Somebody may say, “Boy, what if they’d have asked a hard question?” Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Why don’t you just say to that person that’s got the hard questions, “Come and see”? Why don’t you invite them to come and see? Because 96 percent of the people that will ever come to faith in Jesus Christ will be people—are y’all listening?—that are invited to come and see. Our friends, our relatives, our work associates, our neighbors, they will come, simply because someone said, “Come and see.”

I read this week where 20 percent of believers will invite another believer to church. Now, did you follow me? A believer will invite another believer to church, but only 20 percent—only one in five—would do that. Only 2 percent of believers, Christ followers, will ever invite an unchurched or unsaved person. See, if somebody moves in next to you, and you say, “How you doing?”

They say, “Good, do y’all know where we can find a good Baptist church? We went to this First Baptist Church in a certain city in Tennessee.”

And, “Oh, yeah, yeah. Come with me. Hey, I invited. I invited.” Only one out of five would do that, but if they’re unchurched, unsaved, only 2 percent. Ninety-eight percent of us won’t invite them.

Have y’all ever heard this name? I don’t know if you’ve heard it or not—N.W. Pridgen. If you’ve heard it, just say uh-huh.

He’s the man, the one, are you listening? One. Nathanael was one. He’s the one that invited me to come and see. How many of you know that you may be the one who invites the one, and you will become known as being the one that touched one. And the one that you invite may meet the one that will change him forever? And then that one may touch thousands. N.W. Pridgen didn’t know when he invited the manager of the pool room, that I would become the president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

I don’t think he looked at me like Jesus and said, “Your name is Johnny, but it shall be president.”

He didn’t know that I would stand and preach to thousands of you, or be on KINGDOM SAT and address 20 million people four times a day, five times a week, in Tehran, in Israel, in Jordan, in Egypt, in Algeria, in Tunisia, in Morocco. But it was just one.

Someone said, “We can’t see the forest for the trees.” The problem is, we can’t see a tree for the forest—just one.

I was in Wilmington. Scott invited me to be the preacher with the senior adult choir. I'm going with them again this year. If you've got a parent that's in the senior adults, get him to travel because I'm gonna spend a week with them. I'll straighten every one of them out.

We were at Scotsdale Baptist Church. If my memory is correct, I preached that night and gave an invitation, and only one responded. But the one was my cousin, James Ray. James Ray died a year ago. I did his funeral. I said, "While I'm here, I better go over and see his mama. She's still living, she's in the nursing home. Her name's Avi, my favorite aunt. While I'm there, y'all pray for me. I wanna share the gospel with her."

They said, "Well you can if you want to, but she knows the gospel."

I said, "When did Avi get saved?"

Says, "You didn't hear? After James Ray got saved, she went by him, and she didn't recognize him he was so changed.

She said, "Well, son, whatever happened?"

He said, "Well, Mama, I don't know how to tell you. Johnny told me."

Said, "He lives in Atlanta. Will somebody here tell me?"

And he went back and told his pastor. His pastor went and Avi got saved. It was just one!

I wrote some questions. They made me uncomfortable, but let's just be honest. Can you name one in your spiritual journey ... For me, I've been a Christian 40 years as of last Monday night. January 7, 1973, 40 years ago. Can you name one person in your spiritual journey that has come to Christ through your invite or witness? Just one. I wonder how many of you say, "I refuse to go to heaven empty handed."

I received a call from a longtime friend. We'd been friends since childhood. When I was pastoring in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Falls of the Neuse Road, Falls Baptist Church, a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, I invited my childhood friend to come and hear me on Easter Sunday. He made no type of movement in the Easter services, but about a week later my phone rang, and this is unusual.

I was on my way to the hospital. But have you ever felt like you're supposed to stay put, you're not supposed to go do something right now? I told my wife, I said, "I'm headed to the hospital."

About an hour later she came in. She said "What are you doing here? I thought you were going to the hospital."

I said, "I did, too, honey. I don't know what in the world's going on, but I feel like I'm not supposed to go yet." That's back in the house-phone days, before cellphones.

My phone rang, and it was my childhood friend. He said, "Can you come over?"

I said, "I'll be glad to."

He said, "Let me just tell you, so you can think about it on the way over. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

I went over, led my childhood friend to faith in Jesus Christ. His name, Donald Pope. God as my witness, he did not know I was gonna share today. He texted me this morning. He is the pastor of Hampstead Baptist Church, and he texted me to say, "I'm praying for God to anoint you to preach this morning."

By the way, I led him to Christ in the month of May, seven years after I came to faith in Christ. One of my lifetime friends, and what is he doing now? He is a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What did I say the gospel is? It's the power of God and of salvation. Did I forget to mention that Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

What does it mean to be ashamed? It means fear to do something, or reluctant. Why? Because of embarrassment or humiliation. We will talk about anything and everything but one.

All of you know that I'm not into sports. It may have been because I didn't have a father at home. I'm not sure. I played pool, but I didn't do anything in football, baseball or anything. So as a result, I may come to your house, if you've got wings, to watch the Super Bowl.

Can I tell you something? And don't get angry at me. I don't really care about the game. Sorry, Atlanta. But I've never heard so much talk about the Dawgs. I've never heard so much talk about Alabama, Notre Dame. Let me ask you something. Evidently, you've read all the stats so you can answer every question. "Hey, did you hear where coach so and so is going?"

I'm not being ugly, but in light of what I'm preaching, can I do a comparative study? Who won the National Championship in football this year won't matter on the other side, but who you win, who you win, the one, that will matter! Ladies and gentlemen, keep talking football. That's not the issue. But in Jesus' name, learn to talk about the one.

What's the big deal of finding a pearl of great price? By the way, pearls are found in seafood. I'm already interested. I've gone out and picked up oysters off the bays of Wrightsville and Carolina Beach in Wilmington, where I was raised.

Let me see if I can explain this. Better yet, let me ask a friend to explain it in a devotion he sent me this week. Michael Youssef, listen to what he said. In this parable Jesus shares the kingdom of heaven. It's like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

There are two things you must know about pearls to understand the biblical illustration. First of all, back then pearls were the most precious commodity. Not one of the precious commodities, but the most precious commodity, more highly valued in that day than diamonds. Pearls were greatly valued because diving for the oysters that contained the pearls was an extremely hazardous exercise. There were many people who lost their lives diving for these oysters.

Both the beauty and the scarcity of the pearl made it extremely valuable, and people often gave all their money and belongings to possess just one priceless pearl. It was on the cruel Roman cross that the only perfect God-man suffered, bled and died. It is only through His grinding death on the cross, and His ultimate resurrection from the dead, that the priceless pearl of salvation is made available. Nothing can be compared with this pearl.

Only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can we be assured of heaven. Only through Him can we find forgiveness of sin. He's the only one who provides true peace of mind, security, identity and rest for our souls. I've found the pearl of great price. If you're a Christian, you have found the pearl of great price. If God can use Nathanael once he comes to Christ, He can use you.

What I did not read in this passage of this skeptic, is the Bible says about Nathanael, just a few minutes later, "and Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, you are the son of God, you're the King of Israel.'" One moment he's critical and distracting and deferring. The next moment he is praising Him.

In this new year, my mentee's wife, Stephanie, asked me on New Year's evening, "Pastor Johnny, are you making any New Year resolutions?"

I said, "I am—one."

"Do you mind sharing it with me?"

And I shared it with her. "I wanna be a better witness. And here's the words I wanna use. I wanna be an intentional witness. Intentional."

Now, three words came to my heart that I wanted to give to you, and they've already put them on the screen. See them? I wanna witness this year with intentionality, and I'm gonna show you the difference that's made since January the first.

I want accountability, I want a partner to hold me accountable that I can share with of who I'm witnessing to, and who I'm praying for. Then, I want maturity in my life as a disciple maker. A lot of you following me on Facebook saw this week where I talked about three major things I would like to see in my life in this new year.

I was in Gatlinburg. God honored me with the opportunity to preach to 20,000 teenagers. It was January the second, we were finishing up. I had just brought the last of four messages to these teenagers. Everybody was on their way out. Listen to this story. "Excuse me. You're the man that just spoke."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Hi, my name is Ashley Claxton. I've never gone to church." She's in her late 20s. "And I am on the custodial team here. It was my duty to keep this place clean before and after, and even during, y'all speaking." She said, "Y'all have really cool music." They'd been listening to Casting Crowns, Tenth Avenue North.

She said, "I've never heard that kind of music, and I was really drawn to it." She said, "I heard you preach a couple of days ago, and I've not been able to sleep since." She said, "Matter of fact, this morning ..." and I call God as my witness, these are her words: "I don't think I have enough gas in my car to get home, but I heard you were speaking one more time, and I drove here from Sevierville to Gatlinburg this morning because there's something different about this message."

My wife was standing there, I said, "Janet, come over here, sweetheart." I began to share with her the gospel, that Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead. That the wrath God poured out on sin that I deserved, Jesus absorbed himself on the cross. And that if I would repent of my sin and believe the gospel, place my faith in Christ alone, Jesus would save me and would change my life. The whole time I was sharing with her, since that's the gospel, she wept. Then I just said to her, "Ashley, would you like this morning to repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus Christ?"

She said, "More than anything."

We prayed together there, and she asked Christ to come into her heart and save her. So, on January the second, after making a New Year's commitment—intentionality, accountability, maturity—Ashley received Jesus Christ. Those who accept Christ's identity, who He is, will also embrace His mission—sharing Jesus with others.

You see, leading others to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior is the greatest expression that we really understand who He is. So, with whom will you share Jesus today? So, the kingdom life is come and see and go and tell.

Now, I've got a challenge. It's a simple challenge, but the numbers in here this morning, there's somewhere around 4,000 people in this room. Four thousand. The next service, if it's anything like last week, it'll be somewhere around 2,700. A lot of people to listen to this challenge. If you're a Christ follower, I want to issue three challenges. Just three, and I want you to remember them by remembering this word. One. I'm gonna ask you to make a commitment publicly if you'll commit to do this. Unashamably, I'm gonna ask you to make a commitment. Here it is.

Number one, would each of you, as Christ followers, church members, invite one unchurched or unsaved. You won't make the judgment if they know God or not, but you know whether they're in church. Will you invite them to have either breakfast or lunch or dinner with you in 2013? You got 50 weeks to go and while you're there, picture this. I'm at Longhorn's, I've invited one person in 2013. While we're sitting there, I would say, "I've never told you my story, can I tell you my story?" And tell the story how you came to Jesus, and memorize some Scripture because it's the gospel that's the power of God to salvation, not your testimony. The gospel is the power of God in salvation. You got it? One, you'd invite one. Fifty weeks. If you're not intentional, the majority of our community will perish and will never know the worthiness of our Lamb.

Number two. It's still predicated on one. I wrote the message and talked about you don't need a passport if you've got a dining room table. Jesus constantly had meals with people. He even told us who to invite to our houses. He said, "Invite the marginalized, they can't repay you."

How many of you families will over the next 50 weeks, in your neighborhood, invite one family into your home? You just knock on the door next door and say, "Hey, I've been living here," for however long you have and, "my wife and I," or, "my family and I, my children and I," or, "me, I'm single. I want to invite you to come have dinner at our house."

While you're around the table, here's what it's gonna look like at our house. I've already decided. We're gonna have the family of neighbors over, and I'm gonna say, "I appreciate y'all coming, having dinner, just want to get to know you all. While we're here, I wanted Janet ..." I have the gift of delegation. I'm gonna say, "I'm gonna ask Janet to share how she came to know Christ as a teenage girl," and Janet's gonna tell her story.

We're talking about one, you have 50 weeks. We're not coming to church just to hear a sermon, we're coming to embrace the truth and to make a decision. Will you have one person to lunch? Think of that. Somebody you work with every day, you've never shared the gospel with and you take them and say, "I want to tell you my story." By the way, if you're a Christian, follow me, you have a story. If you have no story, there's an invitation at the close of this service.

Number three. One. How many of you would commit this morning to invite one unchurched or unsaved person to attend church with you in 2013? Look around you. If there's an empty seat next to you, raise your hand. If there's an empty seat beside you, raise your hand. There's hands up everywhere. All over the balcony. Matter of fact, I know the seating capacity of this room. Let me just go ahead and tell you. There's 3,000 empty seats in here. There's 117,000 people living in 35,000 homes. One hundred seventeen thousand people living in 35,000 homes that live within a 35-mile radius of this church, and just for the record sake, we've knocked on every one of those doors. Every single one of those doors we've knocked on. Last Sunday I had six guests with me. Can we get radical for a moment? If you brought, we all brought six next week. That's not the challenge, but if we did, there'd be 24,000. There'd be a helicopter over top trying to figure out what under heaven's going on there? The only thing would be you would be inviting people and that would be nothing.

We're only talking about 24,000 people. There's five million that live in the city of Atlanta. We need some Philips that will invite some Nathaniels. We need some Andrews that will bring their brother, Peter. Would you invite one person? Each one, bring one. My devotion this week I was reading by Boyd Bailey, talked about come and see, and it was January the first. He gave me three thoughts. Invite someone, and listen to this how it goes with the sermon. Now, I'd already written a sermon. Invest in someone, you're gonna have a meal with them. You invite them into your home or you go out to a restaurant, and then you're going to introduce them to Someone. It's not your business what they do with the one you introduce, but at least you will have introduced them. One of our members, I'm sure he's here this morning, came to see me this week. His father died this week, and he wanted me to pray for him. He said, "Pastor, I went to see my daddy over and over again, and the best I know, in his 80s when he passed this week," unexpectedly, they had lunch with him last Saturday. He said, "Best I know, he never invited Jesus Christ into his life." I said, "My dear friend, I can only think of one thing that would make his passing unbearable. Had you never told him? Had you never told him?"

But he said, "Oh, I told him." He said, "Matter of fact, sometimes he would get a little aggravated with me because I'd bring it up so many times. That again?"

I had rather stand at a coffin and hear the words, that again? Instead of oh, God have mercy on me for never telling. For never telling. Jesus Christ in us, is a window into the wonders of God's grace. I'm gonna do this real quick. Just let me do it real quick. Just give me your undivided attention because I want to give a public invitation. Here it is. I'm gonna follow up on this because I don't like what I'm getting ready to do, I'm just gonna do it. No I'm not, I just changed my mind. It takes a good man to change his mind. I'm not gonna do the rest. I had 10 things I wanted to give you and I'll get frustrated. Or is frustrated? How do you say that word? Frustrated, frustrated.

How many of you in Jesus' name, would make a public, unashamed commitment to be intentional to invite one to church, one to have dinner in your home, and take one person in 2013. Stand to your feet. Stand to your feet. Stand to your feet. It's not all of us, but it's most of us. All right, I want you to think for a moment. Stay standing, I want you to think for a moment. It's just about everybody. It might be everybody but, two or three is good. Don't feel the pressure to stand. No pressure here. We're gonna wish to God one day that instead of our churches being so comfortable that people can go to hell from them. We're gonna wish that somebody had turned the heat up a little so we could realize that eternity is too long to be wrong.