

Lake Cities Community Church
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Bible Numbers – Making Them Count

ONE

When I was a child, perhaps seven or eight I really wanted a hamster. Oh how I wanted a hamster. I finally persuaded my parents to buy me one and her name was Frisky and she was beautiful. And I loved her with all my heart. Here is a picture of her in her cage. And here is one of her in a train car on my model train set. I loved that little hamster. I loved her even though she was mean as a snake and would bite me when I held her with her sharp little teeth; but I didn't care, because I loved her and she was mine. Frisky was also discontent. She had a great cage, but she was an escape artist and spent most of her life roaming our house. And it broke my heart when she was gone – I would be so worried and would search and search for her until we found her – under a bed, in a closet. Oh how I loved that little, mean, discontent, beautiful hamster. And I remember the day when I found her stiff with death - her little legs in the air. How I wept for my Frisky hamster the one I loved.

Do you know today, that God loves you? Do you believe that God loves you – in spite of the fact that you are sometimes mean as a snake? Do you realize how much God loves you – even though sometimes you are discontent with what God has given to you? You belong to God, and He loves you deeply. When your name enters His mind, God is moved by the emotion of love. God smiles, and laughs and weeps and rejoices over you.

There were millions of other hamsters in the world – but that one hamster was the object of my love. There are billions and billions of people in the world – but God has never forgotten the value of one person. “God loves the world,” sure – that is easy to say and believe. “God loves the lost” – of course It is part of the gospel. But why do we find it so hard to believe that God love each one of us an individuals?

This morning we start the series I introduced last week called Bible Numbers – Making Them Count. We begin appropriately with the first number – the number ONE. As I studied Scripture I found the number one used in at least three different ways – and we will look at each of those – beginning with the first that we have already been discussing – that the number one often represents individuality.

ONE – God cares for the Individual (individuality)

Take out your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 18 verse 12. There Jesus is teaching and He says: Matt. 18:12 “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and **one** of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the **one** that is straying? The story leads the reader to think, “Ninety-nine is pretty good isn’t it? That is a pretty high percentage! Who cares for one forgettable sheep?” Well, the Shepherd does. Just like I searched for my little hamster, God searches and looks for lost people until they are found and returned home. The point of this passage is that the shepherd loves all 100 sheep given to Him and each is important to Him.

Now why - in a world of billions of people - is the individual so important to God? The answer lies deep in His character. One of the most important description of God’s essence is given in Deuteronomy 6:4 which reads. “Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is

our God, the LORD is one! God is one – He is an individual. This is the classic statement of mono-theism – we worship ONE God. Though He exists in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit – yet we confess He is one in essence.

And because God is one – when He created us in His image, he created *little ones*. He did not create the Borg – a collective society. God created Adam, then He created Eve and so forth - because being one Himself, and creating in His image - that was the necessary outcome. Our existence as individuals is a reflection of God’s image.

The value of each individual person, created in God’s image, is well documented in Scripture. Much of Jesus’ ministry centered around loving and validating individuals who had been rejected and discounted by the world – those who were mentally unstable, demon possessed, those contagious with sickness, the poor, widows, children and outcast women. Each was told they were worthless by the world – but they had great value in Christ’s eyes – because they were created in His image!

I remember in Junior High they took us to a self-esteem workshop where they pumped us up, telling us how important we were. They would put each person in front of the class and clap and holler for us – and that felt great to be appreciated and singled out like that. But it was fake!! Those kids (for the most part) didn’t care deeply for one another; and a few hours later they would be tearing each other down again. Our value is not based in how other people feel about us, not in our relative success at work, not in our weight, not in how messy or clean our house is, not in how well our children turn out, or anything else – we have value because we belong to God and he loves us dearly.

Matt Redman wrote a worship song called, “If you know you’re loved.” It reads:
If you know you're loved by the King, then sing, sing, sing. If you know you’re loved by the

King, then live for Him. Forgiven and pray How could I not say, If you know, if you know If you know you're loved by the King, then sing, sing, sing.

One - Unity

The first way the number one is used is to express individuality – the one person that God loves. The second way the number one is used is to express unity. Unity (specifically) within the body of Christ. The same oneness inherent in the solidarity of the individual can also be known by many people in the church. Turn with me to Ephesians 4. To a large congregation Paul said:

[Eph. 4:3](#) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [Eph. 4:4](#) *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* [Eph. 4:5](#) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [Eph. 4:6](#) one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

In the church we are one – your oneness and individuality is added to mine and hers and his, and together we form a large single unit. We - Lake Cities Community Church - are one church. Many members, but one body. When people in the community think of our church, they don't think of individuals – but of one church doing this and that for the Kingdom. When we will be recognized Wednesday as Rowlett's business of the month - it is our church being recognized and not any one individual. And so it is with the regional, national and universal church. The Scripture places a high priority on unity, oneness, within the body of Christ.

Why is unity so important? Well, just as our individuality is based in the character of God as an individual, so our unity is based on the unity found in the Godhead. Flip over to

John 17. Jesus is praying for the church: [John 17:18](#) “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. [John 17:19](#) “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. [John 17:20](#) “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; And all that to say this: [John 17:21](#) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Because there is oneness in the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit; so we in the church are to have unity. And here we learn why so many people do not believe in Christ. “Have unity –why?” So... that the world may believe that You sent Me. But because so many churches are characterized by evil division – people grumbling about this and that, bickering, holding grudges, fighting, taking offense at the smallest issues. Because of lack of unity people reject the Christian faith. As the saying goes, “I don’t mind Christianity, it is the Christians I can’t stand.”

You see, we come to the world and say – “Look to Jesus. He is beautiful, gentle and kind. He loves you and has come to rescue the world from itself. All the pain and injustice? Believe in Jesus – come and see Him.” And the unsaved says, “That sound pretty good – let me see.” And they come to the body of Christ – but they don’t see the Jesus you have described, but they see a fractured, ugly distortion of Jesus. And at best they feel misled and even tricked by you, and they reject your faith.

There is nothing I worry about more than Satan dividing our church, and the divided body pushing people away from Christ. The book *A Tale of Three Kings*, by Gene Edwards was written to help people hurt by divided churches, many driven away from Christ’s Church. Regarding disunity and division in the evangelical church, this is what he says just

in the preface, "Whatever it is, in over thirty years as an evangelical minister, I have never seen anything that has damaged so many believers so deeply. The wreckage appears to be universal and recovery from it is almost nil. This book reflects my concerns for this multitude of confused, brokenhearted and often bitter Christians who now find their spiritual lives in shambles and who are groping for even the slightest word of hope." Some of you know exactly what he is talking about.

Churches are funny things. They either can do great good or great damage – and the difference is the number one – Unity or disunity. Harmony or division? Unity is possible – if we commit ourselves (be diligent...make every effort) to it by overlooking small offenses, keeping short accounts, forgiving easily and holding loosely to our rights and expectations. May we be diligent at Lake Cities to maintain unity in our small congregation.

One as Primacy

We have seen so far the number one used to express individuality and remind us of God's love and attention to each and every person – no one forgotten. Second we have seen that the oneness of the one is expanded to express unity in the body of Christ – reflecting the very unity of God Himself. Now we turn to the last use of the number one – that of primacy, which means to be first in rank.

A week ago last Friday (I believe it was) Trevor and I went with a neighbor to a Texas Rangers game. It was a great day to go to the ballpark – it was a night game and rain had cooled off the weather. They were ahead most of the game 6-2; a pretty good lead over the last place Baltimore Orioles. The game was almost over, 6-2, with two outs in the ninth inning – one more out to go, and then one player got one base, and another and another -

then they hit a gram slam and went on to win the game. And that sort of thing always seems to happen to me when I go to a professional sports game.

Anyway... Here is my point – what place are the Rangers in right now in the baseball standings for the American Leagues West? That’s right first place. Four and a half games over the Los Angeles Angels. They are in the first position; they have primacy, priority over the others. And often the number one reflects this – being first.

What are we to seek first, as our first priority? Matt. 6:33 “**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.** As an act of worship – what are we suppose to bring to God? Our first fruits – Ex. 23:19 “**You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.** God gets our best – not our leftovers, but the highest quality for God. And of all the being in the universe who ranks #1 on the list? “**Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.’** (Is 44:6). And in the NT we read about Christ: Col. 1:18 **He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

God is not just one in the sense of being one God. He is not just one in the sense of have unity in diversity – But he is one in the sense of being first. I like this T-shirt that reads, “Dad is the Big Kahuna, King pin, numero uno, top brass, big cheese, head honcho, top dog, the big boss... and in parenthesis... (except when mom’s around!)”

Now how does God’s primacy relate to you and I. Do we strut around chanting, “we’re number one?” No -- Mark 9:35 **Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”** When it comes to the number one meaning primacy and being first – we seek to have last place. Last place is first

place in God's kingdom for humanity. We are to be like God in his personhood, and in his unity, but not in his primacy. He doesn't share that position with anyone because it is His glory. Satan's problem is that He also wanted to be #1; but God will not share His glory with another. He alone is worthy of first place. *And so our first is to be last.* And that is genius! Rather than becoming prideful and splitting we stay humble and gracious. Gerald Sittser in his book *Love One Another*, which the small group leaders read the past year, said something that struck me and I wrote it down. He said, "I believe the quest for power in the church causes division; the experience of suffering creates unity." (*Love One Another*, Gerald L. Sittser, p127). The oneness in unity that we seek comes directly from God's last being first standard for the Christian.

Conclusion:

We have seen this morning that God is ONE. He is one in his essence – the one true God. We have learned that God is ONE in unity – Father, Son and Spirit in perfect harmony; delighting in one another. We have seen that God is ONE in position. First place! He is the most powerful, the power glorious being in the universe. He is at the top of his division, by an infinite amount. And as beings created in God's image – we have value as individuals, we have responsibility for oneness in the church, and we find out primacy in our being the caboose and not the engine – living with humility and grace, not pride and presumption.

I would like to close with this story – Once upon a time there was an illiterate and slow boy named Hans. He was the son of a scullery maid in a far away kingdom. They worked for the King in the hot kitchens. Hans was a nobody. But the young prince, who liked to visit the kitchen for extra snacks, was kind and gracious. And he took a liking to

Hans. He protected Him from bullies and gave the boy small gifts. He thanked Him for his work, though it was shoddy and slowly done. The casual affection turned, over time, into a beautiful friendship. A prince slated for greatness and a boy who was slated for... well nothing. The prince eventually became king and made Hans one of his personal assistants. Because of his limitations, Hans could not do very much, but whatever the king asked of him, he gave it 100%.

But as so often happens, one year the King went off to war and was killed. Hans was sent back down to the kitchen where he lived out the rest of his life doing menial work and trying to avoid the evil intentions of wicked men. When he came to his old age and lay on his death bed, the priest came to administer last rights. "You have had a rough life," said the Priest. "You had nothing, and were no one special – but perhaps in the next life God will reward you." "Perhaps God will reward me," said Hans with a tear forming. "But you are wrong that I had nothing. I had joy, because I was someone special. I was special because I was loved... by... the... King."