

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Christmas at Pathway.
- B. Just like last time, I have a fun challenge for you. Let's see how fast you can identify five traditional Christmas movies. I'll show the picture, you say the movie. But this time there's a twist. Last time, I showed you a main character from the movie. This time, I'm not. I'm going to show you a relatively unimportant character. Let's see how well you do.
 1. **Rudolph and the Island of Misfit Toys**
 2. **How The Grinch Stole Christmas**
 3. **It's a Wonderful Life**
 4. **Miracle on 34th Street**
 5. **Home Alone**
 6. **Scrooge/A Christmas Carol**

II. Christmas

- A. We celebrate Christmas because that's the day Jesus was born.
- B. We celebrate the day Jesus was born for two huge reasons.
 1. The first one is that Jesus is God coming to earth as a human. Christmas is when God became human without ceasing to be God. He did this by being born of Mary, in the most wondrous and humble and counterintuitive way possible.
 2. The second reason is that he is the Savior of the world, and especially of everyone who receives him.
- C. Let's go back to the original story as it is written in the Bible.
 1. *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.'" (Matthew 1:18-21)*
- D. Our theme at Pathway this year is Joy.
- E. Most people, and I'm including most Christians, don't really understand how important JOY is in the Christian message.
- F. When the glorious angel informed the Virgin Mary that she would bear the Savior, he told her to rejoice.
 1. *"And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!'" (Luke 1:28)*
- G. Before Jesus was born, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Mary was with child; she would give birth to Jesus. Elizabeth was with child; she would give birth to John. When pre-born Jesus walked in the house, pre-born John leaped for joy in the womb. Pretty cool.
 1. *"For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." (Luke 1:44)*
- H. In that epic moment when Jesus was born, the angels described it in terms of joy.
 1. *"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.'" (Luke 2:10)*
- I. When the Wiseman from the east took their epic quest to find the savior, they saw the star above Bethlehem, and they couldn't contain their joy.
 1. *"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." (Matthew 2:10)*
- J. Joy is a central part of the Christmas story. But it goes beyond that. Joy is a huge part of the Christian message and the Christian worldview.
- K. There has never been a system of faith and teaching as dedicated human joy as the faith of Jesus Christ. True Christianity is about human flourishing. So my main idea today is: **Every ingredient for human flourishing and joy is wrapped in the Gift of Christmas.**

III. The Deeper Reason

- A. I believe that you are here today for a reason. Yes, you made your choice and you came here. But I think it's deeper than that.
- B. I think you're here because God brought you here. He brought you here because he loves you.
- C. You being here on this day is not an accident. You probably don't know it, but we've been praying for you.
- D. We've been asking God to do something very special this Christmas.
- E. We've been praying that this Christmas would be your first Christmas where you are officially a member of the family of God, and you actually know it because you have made it official.
- F. I want to show you how to do that. That's coming at the end of my talk.

IV. The Circle of Joy

- A. I picked these six movies specifically. Each movie represents a key ingredient of joy.
- B. I'm not saying that you will always be happy. I'm not saying that God will erase your heartaches and take away your pains.
- C. What I am saying is that when you put these ingredients together, you will have a recipe for a kind of joy that undergirds your life.
 1. It's a joy that lasts even when good times are a distant memory.
 2. It's a joy God gives you, even when you're licking your wounds and grieving your losses.
 3. It's a joy you have when joy makes no sense, because the only reason for it is God.
- D. Here are the six indispensable ingredients in the Circle of Joy:
 1. **IDENTITY - Rudolph and the Island of Misfit Toys**
 - a) I picked Rudolph because he represents IDENTITY. That's the first ingredient.
 2. **FREEDOM - The Grinch**

- a) I picked the Grinch because he represents FREEDOM. Every kind of freedom, including freedom from the darkness in our hearts, the second ingredient.
- 3. **MEANING - It's a Wonderful Life**
 - a) George and Mary Bailey from It's a Wonderful Life... they represent MEANING. Having meaning in your life. Ingredient 3.
- 4. **WONDER - Miracle on 34th Street**
 - a) I'm using Miracle on 34th Street to represent ingredient number 4. That is a sense of WONDER. There's more to this world than meets the eye.
- 5. **LOVE - Home Alone**
 - a) Number 5 is LOVE. Kevin McAllister in Home Alone... Everything is a struggle until he's safe in the arms of love.
- 6. **COMPASSION - Scrooge**
 - a) The last ingredient in a life of joy... Old Ebenezer Scrooge represents the opposite of the last ingredient, which is COMPASSION.
- E. Identity, freedom, meaning, wonder, love, compassion. It is what we were created for. This is what every heart is searching for.
- F. I am arguing that when it comes to producing joy, there is no competition to Jesus Christ and a life with him.
 - 1. No philosophy even comes close. No religion can compete. No scientific, secular worldview even offers a rational basis for joy.
- G. When Jesus came to earth that first Christmas day, he brought heaven's joy with him. Now, he wants to give it to you.
- H. He said so:
 - 1. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)
- I. Here you have God, Almighty, in the person of Jesus, offering to put divine joy in your heart. And not just a little bit. But the full amount. Running over. Overflowing. Pure joy.
 - 1. Is there anything more desirable than that? Where else will you ever find that?
- J. This is why I'm going to invite you today to bring your life to Jesus Christ.
- K. That is my call to action for you. We'll get there in just a few more minutes.
- L. Identity, freedom, meaning, wonder, love, compassion.
- M. I talked about the first three last time. Today, I want to wrap it up by talking about the last three.

V. THE CIRCLE OF JOY

A. Wonder - Miracle on 34th Street

- 1. Miracle on 34th St. is one of my top two or three Christmas movies. Kris Kringle comes to town and ends up being the Santa Claus for the flagship Macy's. He is unlike any other Santa. There's something about him. Some thing almost magical. Some thing wondrous.
 - a) Mrs. Walker who works at Macy's has her doubts. She is a rationalist, with a fully secular mindset. She is raising her daughter Susan to be completely science-based all the time.
 - b) She gets in a tiff with her neighbor, the lawyer Fred. He is introducing young Susan to Santa. The mom intervenes. None of that nonsense for her kid.
 - c) Fred says, "No Santa Claus, no fairy tales, no fantasies of any kind?"
 - d) Mrs. Walker says, "That's right. I think we should be realistic and completely truthful with our children; and not have them growing up believing in a lot of legends and myths, like Santa Claus, for example."
 - e) I'm not going to get into Santa and all of that. We raised our kids talking about Santa and we had a great time. You might do a differently, that's great. Don't email me.
- 2. What I am saying is that the human heart craves wonder. We have a profound desire for transcendence. We want to know that there is something greater than us. Something beyond chemistry and physics and science and math.
 - a) CS Lewis, one of the greatest thinkers of the modern era, and a committed Christian, wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*. There's a world beyond this world, there's a fierce and lovely lion named Aslan, there's a world infused with something beautiful and transcendent and magical.
 - b) JRR Tolkien, a friend of CS Lewis, and also a committed Christian, wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. With elves and dwarves and orcs and hobbits and kings and queens. A mystical magical story-world where good triumphs over evil in the most unlikely way with the most unlikely hero.
- 3. The Christmas story from beginning to end overflows with wonder.
 - a) Angels in the night sky. A virgin birth. Ancient prophecies being fulfilled. The Star of Bethlehem. God incarnate laying in a manger. And none of this is written in the form of mythology or fiction. It is as historical as King Herod, shepherds out in the field, and a manger field with straw.
- 4. Contrast that to the sterile, supposedly factual, secularism of the day.
 - a) I'm going to return to a quote from last time. It comes from William Provine, a respected scientist and a long time professor at Cornell, said this:
 - (1) **There is no evidence for God, no life after death, no absolute foundation for right and wrong, no absolute meaning for life, and no free will. ~William Provine**
- 5. This is what happens when you subtract any transcendent element from the universe. I want to zero in on the last one, he says there is no free will. He's not the only one who says this.
 - a) Richard Dawkins famously said:
 - (1) **We are survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve selfish molecules known as genes. ~Richard Dawkins**
 - b) Carry that out to its logical conclusion, and you get this, from Dr. Jerry Coyne, a professor at the University of Chicago.

- (1) I am a determinist. I basically believe that at any one point in time it is completely the configuration of molecules in the universe, and in particular in your brain that mandates what you do and that you could not have done anything other than what you did. In other words, you don't have any choices. You think you do, and it looks like you do, but you don't really. ~Jerry Coyne
6. Say goodbye to love. Friendship. Meaning and purpose in life. Getting married. Having children. Caring for aging parents. Generosity. Kindness. Prayer. Faith. Hope. It's all nothing but long, complicated chains of molecular cause and effect. We are all just parts of the giant impersonal chemical/energy machine called the universe.
 7. This seems so sad to me.
 8. The Christian worldview gives you answers radically different than any other system.
 - a) **In the Christian worldview, WONDER is REVEALED by a Creator God and Father greater than our space-time-matter-energy existence.**
 9. I'm going to say that secularism and atheism require at least as much faith as Christianity. Actually, it's a bigger leap of faith.
 - a) I would rather believe that my life came from God in heaven who is my father and who loves me, than believe that I am an accident of random chance.
 - b) I would rather believe I have the nobility of being created in the image of God than believe I am an inch higher on the evolutionary plane than primates.
 - c) I would rather believe that I have agency and dominion from the sovereign hand of God than believe my life is a pre-determined sequence of molecular accidents.
 - d) I would rather believe in wonder and angels and heaven and Jesus and miracles and grace and hope and peace and love than believe in atomic structures and math any day.
 - e) I would rather believe in heaven and be wrong than in nothing and be right.
 10. I am telling you that if you want some wonder in your life, and if you want to live with true beauty and awe and the miracles of existence, then try Jesus.
 11. Receive him today. Come to the one who came for you. And find your joy in him.
 12. I'm going to walk you through it in just a couple more minutes.
 - a) Joy = Identity, freedom, meaning, wonder, love, and compassion.
- B. Love - Home Alone**
1. Home Alone revolves around Kevin McCallister, an eight-year-old troublemaker who is mistakenly left home alone when his family rushes off for their Christmas vacation in Paris.
 2. The rest of the story is about his mom, Kate, frantically trying to get back home to her son. And about Kevin, fending off two burglars named Harry and Marv.
 3. Kevin is a genius. He heats up a doorknob and burns Harry's hand. He swings a full paint can into the criminals' faces on a rope. He gets out his pet tarantula and places it on Marv's face. He ices the stairs.
 4. All throughout the movie, the theme is love.
 5. Kevin can't be at rest, and his parents can't be at rest until they are safely united in the arms of love.
 6. It's an awesome Christmas story of love.
 7. But it doesn't compare with the love in the true Christmas story.
 8. No verse sums it up like John 3:16:
 - a) *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16)
 - (1) **For God... the greatest giver.**
 - (2) **So loved... the greatest love.**
 - (3) **The world... the greatest number.**
 - (4) **That he gave... the greatest sacrifice.**
 - (5) **His only begotten Son... the greatest gift.**
 - (6) **That whosoever... the greatest invitation.**
 - (7) **Believes... the greatest simplicity.**
 - (8) **In Him... the greatest Savior.**
 - (9) **Should not perish... the greatest deliverance.**
 - (10) **But... the greatest difference.**
 - (11) **Have everlasting life... the greatest possession.**
 - b) The heart of the biblical message is that God loves people because of who and what he is, not because of who and what we are. We do not make God love us. His love existed in his own heart long before we do anything to draw it out from him. "God is love"
 9. **In Christianity, LOVE originates in the heart of God, is offered to all, and received by all who believe.**
 - a) I am saying that there is no joy without love, and that the ultimate source of love is Jesus.
 - b) So that if you want Joy, you need Jesus.
 - c) And you can have that today. You can put your faith in him and receive him as your savior today. I'm about to show you how.
 - d) One more movie. One more ingredient in the divine recipe for joy.
- C. Compassion - Scrooge**
1. I don't need to say much about the age-old classic *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Ebenezer Scrooge, a big bully and famous tightwad, gets visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future.

2. He finally gets it. He's miserable because he's missing the one ingredient for joy that ties all the rest together... Compassion.
 - a) To make evolution the driving principle of your cultural system is to create a whole society based on survival of the fittest.
 - b) How is survival of the fittest as a core philosophy going to make the world a more compassionate place? Isn't compassion for the vulnerable and weak the opposite of survival of the fittest? Shouldn't we just take out the weak, and help evolution along? In fact, that's exactly what's happening today.

(1) In Christianity, COMPASSION in every category is the counter-cultural outflow of a life with Jesus.
3. We are most joyful when we are most like Jesus, and there is no more compassionate and generous person who has ever lived than him.
4. His followers got the message.
5. No force on earth has given the world as much hope as Jesus. From day one, he launched his followers on a worldwide mission to alleviate human suffering.
6. Subtract Christianity's influence, and the world slinks back to the yesteryear's theater of cruelty.
7. What have Christians given to society? Here's a partial list.
 - a) The Church is the largest single supplier of healthcare and education on the planet, mostly in places no one else will go.
 - b) Social work... Christians started that, going back to the age of Constantine.
 - c) Poor houses and orphanages... Christians started that in the first century AD.
 - d) Child labor laws and prevention of cruelty to children... Christians started that.
 - e) The world's largest orphanage system... an evangelical Christian started that.
 - f) Help and outreach to prostitutes. Establishment of an age of sexual consent for minors... Christians first pushed for that.
 - g) Abolishing slavery in the western world... Christians did that.
 - h) Care for the elderly and disabled... Christians invented that.
 - i) Prison reform. Christians were the first to fight for that.
 - j) The creation of Braille for the blind. A Christian created that.
 - k) The first university for the deaf. Founded and funded by Christians.
 - l) The first society for the prevention and treatment of cancer... founded and funded by Christians.
 - m) Habitat for Humanity... founded by Christians.
 - n) The Salvation Army... founded by Christians.
 - o) Free public education... started by Christians.
8. Christians were the first to fight cruelty against animals, led the way in the education of women, have done more to promote global literacy than any other group, are the first to serve destitute children and adults in poverty stricken areas of the world, are leaders in the struggle to heal and prevent AIDS, invented micro-finance for third world enterprises, and founded life-changing organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Amnesty International and more.
9. An amazing record for the flawed followers of the perfect Son of God.
 - a) Are we perfect? No.
 - b) Have we always lived up to Jesus's standards? No.
 - c) Do we have an unblemished record? No.
10. But who does?
11. I'm just saying if you want a proven record for self-sacrificial compassion in the world, you're not going to find a better outfit than Christians, as messed up as we are, we have massively changed the world for good.
12. I can testify to this personally. When I was a kid, it was Christians who gave me a second family. Christians who went out of their way to pick me up for Awana and Sunday School, and then drop me off at the end of the night. They took me out for hot dogs and ice cream. We played baseball and floor hockey. We learned the Bible. We prayed. We made friends.
13. That was Christians. They embraced me. They gave me a place to belong. They prayed for me. They answered my questions. They affirmed me. They accepted me. They taught me.
14. And one day, on a sofa in a house down the street with a Sunday School teacher we all called Aunt Alice, this little Italian boy prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior, I have never been the same.
15. That, to me, was the greatest compassion of all.
16. And now, I'm hoping it's your turn.

VI. Prayer

- A. Enough talk. We're going to pray.
- B. Actually, I'm going to ask you to pray. Silently. In your heart, straight to God.
- C. I'm going to talk to you through a prayer to receive Jesus.
- D. I'm going to ask you to bow your head, and to close your eyes. We do this to create a quiet space for you, and to extend that courtesy to the people sitting around you.
 1. **ADMIT.** God, I admit I need you. There is a gap between me and you. I feel it in my conscience, I feel it in my heart. I am fallen. I am sinful. I cannot reach you by myself, and never will.
 2. **BELIEVE.** But I believe that on Christmas day, you sent Jesus into the world. I believe he is your son. I believe he offered the one sacrifice for all my sins, once for all when he died on the Cross. I believe he rose again. God, I don't get how all this works, but I'm telling you as best as I can, that I believe in Jesus as my Savior.
 3. **CHOOSE.** So right now God, I choose to trust in Jesus as my Only Hope. I choose to believe in him. I'm telling you God, as best as I can, that I'm believing in Jesus and receiving him as my Savior and my one and only Hope. And I ask you right now, because of Jesus alone, please save me. And please make this Christmas my first Christmas as your child forever.