

## I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Pathway. Our promise to you is simple: here you will discover a God who is better than you ever thought before, and a life more amazing than you ever imagined before.
- B. My message today is part 11 in our summer series called: **What's the Difference?**
- C. Week by week, we are looking at different faith systems and asking one question: What is the difference between historic biblical Christianity and these other beliefs?
- D. We are doing this with respect and love. This is not a "we are better" series. This is a "grace is different" series.
- E. My title today is: **How Cults Shrink Your Potential by Robbing You of Christ.**

## II. Why Robbery?

- A. It is 2:37 in the morning. The world is dark, and your house is completely silent. Your roommates or family are fast asleep. The neighborhood is still.
- B. While you are sleeping, someone is lurking by your car. He quietly tries the car handle. It opens with a soft click. He takes your sunglasses, your wallet, the chargers, and the garage remote.
- C. With that remote, he is inside. Now it is not just the car. He takes your bike, your tools, your laptop on the counter, and the keys by the door. Going in and out, he quietly places each treasure in the back of his old pickup, one by one.
- D. Then he vanishes into the night.
- E. By sunrise, you are starting your morning coffee. It takes a minute, but you realize something is missing. Then something else and something after that. The sick feeling in your stomach grows as you figure out all you have lost.
- F. What makes you sickest is realizing you were home the entire time.
- G. You were right there, but you were asleep.

## III. Scripture

- A. *"Beware lest anyone cheat you [rob you] through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."* (Colossians 2:8)
- B. In the original language, "cheat" is stronger than it sounds. It means to be plundered, carried off as spoil. God is warning against getting robbed while you're spiritually asleep.
- C. But why would the Bible use the language of robbery? What treasure is getting stolen?
- D. Jesus said:
  - 1. *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10)
- E. Jesus has an abundant life for you. Not a shallow life of hype and ego, but a deep life of grace, truth, courage, agency, sonship, calling, and joy.
  - 1. **God created you with a potential so massive, so beautiful, and so fulfilling in Christ that you would barely believe it if you saw it clearly.**
- F. Jesus has a vision for you: an abundant life of dominion and agency. He wants you to become the truest, richest, most beautiful version of who God made you to be, in Him. That is your most precious treasure.
  - 1. And I have a suspicion Jesus believes in you more than you believe in yourself.
- G. But we live in a broken world. There is a gang of spiritual thieves waiting to rob you of your identity, your calling, and your joy as a royal son or daughter of God.
- H. And one of the ways they do it is through counterfeit versions of Christianity... that some people call cults.

## IV. Defining the Term

- A. Now, I want to be careful. The word cult can be weaponized. Sometimes people use it as a lazy label for any religious group they do not understand or do not like. We are not doing that today.
- B. A cult is a truth problem. It is a group that uses Christian words, quotes the Bible, and talks about Jesus, but quietly swaps out the core definitions of those words. Same vocabulary, different dictionary.

## V. Core Spiritual Truth

- A. This is the heart of the matter:
  - 1. **CORE SPIRITUAL LAW — No person ever rises higher than their conception of God.**
- B. Whatever God you believe in becomes the defining factor in everything else: your world, your purpose, your identity. Your sense of self always flows downhill from who your Father says you are. That's what sets your ceiling. It caps your courage, your potential, your relationships, your future.
  - 1. When your conception of God is corrupted, your identity is instantly damaged.
    - a) If God is a cosmic auditor checking your metrics, your identity becomes an exhausted employee hiding your mistakes.
    - b) If God is an exalted man you must climb a ladder to replicate, your identity becomes a self-improving striver constantly measuring your worthiness.
    - c) If God is an impersonal principle or distant force, your identity becomes an isolated wanderer with no Father to hold you.
- C. That is the ultimate theft of cults. They do not just steal historical facts.
  - 1. **Cults dump an avalanche of error on your sense of God, and that dumps an avalanche of dysfunction on your sense of self.**
    - a) If a system convinces you Jesus is a created angel, they've told you God didn't love you enough to come Himself. He sent an employee. And if God sent an employee, you are less than an employee to Him.
    - b) If a system tells you to perform, keep secrets, climb ladders, and earn heaven, they've turned your Father into a landlord. You're not a son or daughter. You're a tenant, and your lease is always up for review.
- D. But God declares:

1. "You are complete in Him." (Colossians 2:10)
  - E. Do you hear that? Complete.
  - F. Complete. No ladders. No secrets. No performance reviews. Not because anyone tried harder, but because the Son of God bled for you on the Cross and walked out of the grave. When you see the true, infinite Christ, the ceiling shatters. You're not an employee impressing a boss. You're a royal heir, richly blessed, highly favored, deeply loved.
- VI. The Security System for Your Soul
- A. So today we are installing a security system for your soul.
  - B. When you evaluate any religious system, preacher, prophet, book, organization, or midnight video your friend sends you, ask three questions.
    1. First: Who is Jesus?
      - a) Is He eternal, uncreated God, or is He a created being? Is He fully human, or only appearing human? Is He the Savior who paid it all, or merely an example you must imitate?
    2. Second: Who has final authority?
      - a) Is Scripture the final word, or can another book, prophet, organization, governing body, or revelation override what God has already written?
    3. Third: How am I made right with God?
      - a) Is salvation a free gift received by faith because of what Jesus did for me on the cross? Or is salvation a ladder of worthiness, rituals, secrets, rules, progress, and institutional loyalty?
  - C. Three questions. If a group gets even one wrong, the alarm goes off, no matter how sincere, clean-cut, or generous the people are.
  - D. Now let's turn on the alarm and test three systems.
- VII. Three Case Studies
- A. **Case Study One: Christian Science and Scientology**
    1. MODERN ORIGINS
      - a) Christian Science was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the late 1800s.
      - b) Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard in the 1950s.
      - c) Both sound modern, scientific, sophisticated. Both appeal to the hunger for mental mastery and self-improvement.
    2. KEY TEACHINGS: Matter is evil.
      - a) Eddy's textbook, *Science and Health*, teaches that matter is "mortal error" and that sickness, sin, and death are ultimately illusions of the mind.
      - b) Jesus was a man who perfectly demonstrated the "Christ principle," a state of consciousness.
      - c) Scientology teaches that you are not a creature made in the image of God; you are an immortal spiritual being called a "thetan." There is no personal Creator to save you, and Jesus is irrelevant.
      - d) Salvation is not rescue from sin; it is a technique for clearing your own trauma and unlocking your own power.
    3. THE ANCIENT ERROR: Gnosticism
      - a) Look at their names. "Science" and "Scientology" both claim supreme knowledge. The Latin word for knowledge is *scientia*. The Greek is *gnosis*. That tells you exactly what we're dealing with. These aren't spiritual breakthroughs. They are modern reinventions of the oldest robbery in church history: Gnosticism. The Gnostics taught that matter is evil, the body is a prison, secret knowledge sets you free, and Jesus only seemed to have a physical body.
    4. CHRISTIANITY'S ANSWER: The Apostles' Creed (from 140-390)
      - a) This is why the early church gave us the Apostles' Creed. Not to replace Scripture, but to guard Scripture's truth.
      - b) The creed begins:
        - (1) **I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried...**
      - c) The first line confronts the idea that matter is an evil mistake. God made the physical world, and He called it good.
      - d) The next lines lock in the real incarnation. Jesus did not merely appear human. He had a real human mother. He suffered real physical pain under a real Roman governor. He died a real physical death and was buried in a real physical grave.
        - (1) "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)
      - e) The Word did not become an idea.
      - f) The Word became flesh.
    5. THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS
      - a) If your body is an illusion, your pain stops mattering because your body stops mattering and you stop mattering.
      - b) If God becomes an impersonal principle, then you spend your whole life trying to become something other than human.
      - c) But the gospel says something better.
      - d) Jesus did not come to help you escape your humanity. He came to redeem it.
      - e) The Apostles' Creed ends by confessing
        - (1) "I believe... in the resurrection of the body."
      - f) Your body is not a prison. By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ will redeem it and glorify it forever.
  - B. **Case Study Two: Jehovah's Witnesses**

1. MODERN ORIGINS: Founded by Charles Taze Russell
  - a) An international organization arising from the Bible Student movement begun by Charles Taze Russell in the late 1800s.
  - b) Their publishing body is the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
  - c) Let me say this with deep respect: we critique systems, not souls. Sincere, moral, family-oriented people belong to this movement. I'm not here to mock anyone. I'm here to honor Jesus Christ and say what's the difference.
2. KEY TEACHINGS: Jesus is not God, God is not a Trinity, Salvation is not by grace through faith.
  - a) Run Question One. Ask a Witness who Jesus is, and you'll hear that He is high and holy.
  - b) Their official website states that Jesus Christ is "the first creation of God." Before His earthly life, they teach, He was Michael the archangel. Highest of all created things, yet still created. Between Creator and creation, Jesus sits on the created side of the line.
3. THE ANCIENT HERESY: Arianism
 

"There was a time when he was not."

  - a) The alarm goes off, because this is not new.
  - b) In the early 300s, a popular, charismatic preacher named Arius convinced thousands of the same thing: Jesus was the greatest creature God ever made, but not eternal God.
  - c) Arius' slogan was, "There was a time when He was not."
4. CHRISTIANITY'S ANSWER: The Nicene Creed (325)
  - a) In A.D. 325, church leaders from across the known world gathered at Nicaea, in modern-day Turkey. They didn't invent a new Jesus. They installed a guardrail on what they always knew was the Bible's teaching and on the correct definitions of words.
  - b) The creed. The Nicene Creed declares:
 

**(1) Jesus is "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."**
  - c) In plain English: Jesus is the Creator, not a creature. Whatever the Father is by nature, the Son is by nature. He was not God's first project. They were only following Scripture:
 

(1) *"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."* (John 1:3)

*"For by Him all things were created... And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."* (Colossians 1:16-17)
  - d) Follow the logic. If everything created came through Him, He cannot be one of the things created. He is not Michael the archangel. He is God in human flesh.
  - e) THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS
 

Because a finite Savior cannot offer an infinite salvation.

    - (1) Why does this matter on a random weekend at Pathway?
    - (2) Because a finite Savior cannot offer an infinite salvation.
    - (3) If Jesus is a created being, His death was a finite death for a finite number of sins.
    - (4) But if Jesus is fully God, His deity adds infinite value to His payment: deep enough for all your sins forever, wide enough for the sins of the whole world.
    - (5) Shrink Jesus and you shrink grace.
    - (6) Shrink grace and you can consider your whole life robbed.
      - (a) If Jesus is created, He cannot give you uncreated life.
      - (b) If He is less than God, He cannot bring you all the way to God.
      - (c) Your salvation becomes insecure.
      - (d) Your good works become perpetually inadequate.
      - (e) God becomes a Auditor.
      - (f) You become the Exhausted Employee.
  - f) **You cannot count on a Savior any smaller than the God-Man Jesus Christ, and you'll never find a Savior any bigger.**

### C. Case Study 3: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

1. MODERN ORIGINS: Joseph Smith
  - a) This movement began in the 1830s through Joseph Smith. Many know it by the older nickname Mormonism; today they ask to be called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
  - b) And you should know that the Latter Day Saints are undergoing an intentional rebranding to sound and look more like evangelical Christians.
  - c) Again, I am not here to beat anybody up... but I am here to hold up the standard of God's truth and ask what's the difference.
2. KEY TEACHINGS:
  - a) Christ — Jesus is a separate, exalted god-being created by the Father, not of one nature with Him.
  - b) Trinity — The Godhead is three different Gods united in purpose, not one Being in three Persons.
  - c) Scripture — The Bible is supplemented by the Book of Mormon and other books, each with equal authority.
  - d) Exaltation — Faithful Latter-day Saints may progress to become gods, eternally married, creating spirit children and presiding over their own world in the celestial kingdom.
3. THE ANCIENT HERESIES:
  - a) None of these teachings is new with Joseph Smith. The early church dealt with all of them.
    - (1) Arianism: Pulling the one God apart into separate pieces is an old move.
    - (2) Pneumatomachians taught that the Holy Spirit was a created power, not a person of a Trinitarian Godhead.

- (3) Apollinaris taught that Jesus wasn't fully human because He lacked a human mind.
- b) The nature of God was being fractured from every direction.
- 4. CHRISTIANITY'S ANSWER: The Creed of Constantinople (381)
  - a) In A.D. 381, leaders gathered at Constantinople and locked in the biblical boundary.
  - b) This creed declares Jesus to be "of one essence with the Father," and the Holy Spirit "the Lord and giver of life... who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."
  - c) One eternal essence. Three co-equal Persons. Not three separate gods, and not a God who had to earn His way up.
  - d) And once that baseline goes, watch the other sensors trip. Question Two: Latter-day Saint teaching adds three books of scripture and a living prophet who can override the Bible. Question Three: salvation becomes a ladder of eternal progression, temple rituals, worthiness, and institutional loyalty. The word grace survives, but emptied, shrunk to a footnote.
- 5. THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS: If a god is an exalted human who earned His way to godhood, you will never be able to rest.
  - a) Always climbing. Always measuring. Always afraid you haven't done enough. Never complete. Always under construction, and your Father is a demanding landlord.
  - b) But God has declared:
    - (1) "You are complete in Him." (Colossians 2:10)
      - (a) Not incomplete until you achieve exaltation.
      - (b) Not incomplete until an institution approves you.
      - (c) Not incomplete until you climb high enough.
      - (d) The gospel is not your self-powered ascent into deity.
      - (e) The gospel is God's loving descent into your humanity.
      - (f) You do not need a ladder to climb into heaven.
      - (g) You need the Savior who came all the way down from heaven to bring you home.
    - (2) That is the difference.
  - c) Latter-day Saint theology may use Christian words, but it gives a different account of God, a different authority structure, and a different path of salvation.
  - d) Same words. Different meanings.
  - e) And different meanings create different lives.
    - (1) If God is not the eternal, uncreated Father revealed by Jesus, then you will not know yourself as a freely adopted child.
    - (2) If Jesus is not the eternal Son who fully saves, then you will keep wondering whether you have done enough.
    - (3) If grace is not truly grace, then your spiritual ceiling becomes your own performance.
  - f) But if Jesus is enough, then the ceiling vaporizes.
  - g) You are not trying to earn a place in the Father's house.
  - h) You are learning to live as someone who already has one.

## VIII. Conclusion

- A. Let's go back to 2:37 in the morning.
  - 1. The world is dark. The house is completely silent. But this time, you are not asleep. You hear the soft click of the door. You hear the footstep in the hallway.
- B. This time, you stand up, turn on the lights, and look the thief right in the eye.
- C. Because you finally know what they came to take.
  - 1. They did not come for your car keys. They came for your crown. They came to steal your identity. They came to shrink your destiny. They came to replace your Father with a demanding landlord. They came to trade your status as a child of the King for the exhaustion of an employee.
- D. Look at the difference between the scam and the truth:
  - 1. The thief says, "Keep climbing," but the Savior declares, "It is finished."
  - 2. The thief says, "Perform to belong," but the Savior declares, "I have saved you so you already belong... and you will forever."
  - 3. The thief says, "Earn your grace," but the Savior declares, "By Myself, I purged your sins... and eternal life is your gift."
  - 4. The thief says, "You're a nobody," but the Savior declares...
    - a) "You are more than a conqueror... You are perfect in my sight... You are richly blessed... highly favored... deeply loved."
- E. Rise up to your full potential. Take your stand in Christ. Do not be afraid. Do not shrink back.
  - 1. You have a birthright... lay hold of it.
  - 2. You have an identity... step into it.
  - 3. You have a power... plug in to it.
  - 4. You have a future self... send blessings to it.
- F. The alarm is ringing. Jesus is calling. He gave you Himself. He is the eternal Son who came all the way down so you never have to sweat your way up. He forgave your sins. He crushed the devil. He made you new.
- G. And then... He sat down.
- H. He did not sit because He was tired.
  - 1. He sat because the contract was signed. The debt was paid. The work was completely done.
- I. You are complete in Him. Complete.
- J. So wake up. Take back your crown. Take back your dignity. Take back your identity. And step into your world tomorrow with your head held high and your faith unafraid, as a son, as a daughter, royal and regal in Jesus Christ.

K. Closing Prayer

1. Father, thank You for the finished work of Jesus.
2. Thank You that we do not have to perform, strive, or climb to reach You.
3. You came all the way down to bring us all the way home.
4. Right now, I pray over every single person in this room.
  - a) Let them feel the weight of their true identity as Your royal sons and daughters.
  - b) Break the spirit of exhaustion and smash the lie of the spiritual ladder today.
5. And Father, we celebrate and bless the thirty-three people taking the step of baptism.
  - a) This water is not them trying to earn Your love.
  - b) This is a public declaration that they are already Yours.
  - c) As they go under, we thank You that their old, defeated identity is buried forever.
  - d) As they rise up, we celebrate the resurrected, unstoppable life You have given them.
6. Bless their families, protect their futures, and seal their faith today.
7. In the mighty and matchless name of Jesus we pray.
8. Amen.