

I. Introduction

- A. You know, everywhere we turn today, we see tragedies, and most of what we hear is bad news.
- B. Well, I've come to bring you some good news in the midst of this bad news.
 - 1. *"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)
- C. When I was kid in Sunday School, they called this verse the Gospel in a Nutshell. And it is.
- D. Never in all the literature of any culture in any place in this great wide world — never in all the wisdom of all the philosophers of the ages, never in the religions in all the vast panorama of human history, and never even in the Bible itself, will you find a verse that says so much to so many in so few words.
- E. Here we have the world's greatest love story, angels' greatest amazement, and the devil's greatest fear.
- F. These words are the most quoted words ever spoken, ever written, and ever sung.
- G. This verse is the theme song of the gospel and the national anthem of our faith.
- H. It's a song written in the key of B.
 - 1. **Be saved. Be forgiven. Be born again.**

II. The Series

- A. I am finishing a series of messages today on the Fatherhood of God. And today I want to think with you about two questions:
 - 1. How does God become your father? And what kind of Father is he?
 - 2. The title of my talk today is:
 - a) **Better Than You Realize**

III. How Does God Become Your Father?

- A. The Bible tells us about a man who came to Jesus at night.
 - 1. He doesn't know it yet, but this man will have the epic privilege of being the only man in history to hear John 3:16 as it was originally spoken from the lips of Jesus.
- B. The man came to Jesus under the cover of darkness because he didn't want his friends to know he was talking to Jesus.
- C. Religiously, he was good. Morally, he was righteous. Socially, he was important.
- D. He asked to speak with Jesus. And when they met, he started by flattering Jesus.
- E. Jesus cut through all of that:
 - 1. *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"* (John 3:3)
- F. This is the answer to the first question: How does God become your Father?
 - 1. The way you got your earthly father was by being born. The way you get your heavenly father is by being born again.
 - a) There is a physical birth, and there needs to be a spiritual birth. There is a natural birth, and there needs to be a supernatural birth.
- G. Jesus told him it doesn't matter how you are religiously. It doesn't matter what you are morally. It doesn't matter who you are socially.
- H. You must be born again.
- I. This is how God becomes your father.
 - 1. In theology, this is called regeneration. And the teaching of regeneration is sprinkled all throughout God's Word.
- J. Later on, in verse 16 (John 3:16), he explains how to be born again. He says being born again happens whenever anybody, anywhere believes in Jesus as their Savior.
 - 1. If you have believed in Jesus as your Savior, then you have been born again. Regeneration happened in the very same nano-second you first believed.
 - a) When you believed, you were saved. When you were saved, you were born again. When you were born again, God became your Father. It's so simple.
 - 2. If you have not believed in Jesus, as your Savior, then the words of Jesus still stand. You must be born again. This is how God becomes your Father, and that hasn't happened for you yet. Won't you be saved today?
 - a) You know that every service, we have a prayer team. We invite you to receive prayer for anything. And every week, we've had people just like you come to our prayer team and simply say, I need to be saved. And our team shows you how to do that. How to simply tell God you are believing in Jesus, and receiving him. And you can do that today.
- K. What is the cause of this gospel? Jesus told us: "For God so loved the world."
 - 1. God's love is real. It had no beginning and will have no end. It cannot change because God cannot change.
 - 2. God cannot change for the better, because he is already perfect. And he can't change for the worse, because he would cease being perfect, that is impossible for God. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.
 - 3. Jesus is real, and his love is everlasting.
 - 4. God does not love us because we are lovely or lovable. His love does not depend on our character, but on his character.
 - 5. Your father loves you, because he is love. That is his heart. He loves you not because of your character, but because of his character. And he will never stop loving you.
 - 6. God does not love you because you are valuable; you are valuable because he loves you.
 - 7. God does not love you because Jesus died for you; Jesus died for you, because God so loved you.
 - 8. This beautiful gospel, is the world's greatest love story. His love is better than you realize.
- L. Jesus takes you by the hand. He walks you through the rubble and the graveyard of all your failures and all your sins and leaves them all far behind. All those things he died to put away from you. You leave those things behind forever.

- M. And, still holding your hand, Jesus walks you into the realms of glory. Into a place of honor and beauty. He walks you to the throne room of heaven. To the very throne of God. And he places your hand into his Father's hand.
- N. And this father loves you with a love that will not let you go.
- O. This is what it means to be saved. This is what happened on the day you were saved. This is that transcendent glorious supernatural moment of salvation.
 - 1. There are a lot of question marks that swirl around your head. Do not let your father's love be one of them.
 - 2. There are a lot of possessions you have to work to maintain. Your father's love is not one of them.
 - 3. There are a lot of worries and anxieties and fears that are a normal part of life. And I am here to tell you to never worry about your father's love. Once you've been saved, you need never worry about your salvation again.
- P. The Father loved you before you were worthy. Jesus, by his cross and resurrection has made you as worthy.
- Q. So now, God is your father on good days. He's your father on bad days. He's your father when you are happy and when you are sad. When life is good, and when life is rough. And even if you stray and go prodigal, your Father will be waiting for you with arms of love open wide.
- R. I hope you're hearing good news today. I hope some of your worries are beginning to melt. I hope the Holy Spirit is healing your fears.
- S. Jesus said that when the prodigal son came home, the father threw a party. It was a lavish feast with a live band and dancing. It was a party fit for royalty.
 - 1. And then Jesus said that on the day that you were saved, the angels of heaven threw that same kind of party.
- T. How does God become your father? Through regeneration. Through the new birth. He adopts everyone who believes in Jesus and sets them in a new and eternal relationship with himself. That's how he became your father. You were born again into the family of God.
- U. When Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son, he talked of a father with two sons. One was prodigal, which means out of bounds and over the top.
- V. As Jesus tells the parable, when the party was happening, the older brother heard it, and he came to find out what was going on.
- W. I don't know if I've ever done much teaching about him, so I'm going to change that.
- X. Because the second question I want to talk about is:
- IV. What kind of father is he?
 - A. *"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'"* (Luke 15:25-27)
 - 1. There are two surprises here for this son, and neither one makes him happy.
 - a) The first was that his brother was home. This is the last thing the other brother wanted. He hated his younger brother, and wanted nothing to do with him ever again.
 - b) The second surprise is that his father killed the fatted calf for him. That fatted calf was the most expensive animal on the ranch. They were going to make a lot of money on that fatted calf. The idea that his father killed that calf, just to throw a party on his dumpster-fire brother, made him furious.
 - B. *"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him."* (Luke 15:28)
 - 1. There is a force in the universe that flows from the heart of God. It's one of those ultimate laws, like the law of gravity. One of the major reasons, sometimes I think it's the very top reason, why God gave us the Bible, is to teach and explain this force.
 - 2. The force goes by many names, but the main name is Grace. It's called Mercy, love, lovingkindness, faithfulness, tenderness, long-suffering, forgiveness, tender mercies, goodness, giving, generosity, patience, the new covenant, and more.
 - 3. But the most common name is Grace.
 - a) Grace is the kindness of God toward people who don't deserve it. Grace is the love of God for people who are unworthy.
 - b) Grace exists because the Cross exists. Grace only exists because Jesus died on the cross. When he died, he satisfied the holiness of God, so that the love of God could be poured out on forgiven sinners without God compromising himself.
 - c) Grace is radical. Grace is counterintuitive. Grace is the opposite of religion, because religion means you have to perform your way to gain God's love. Grace is the most revolutionary force in the universe.
 - 4. I've been a believer in Jesus, since I was a little boy. And I've been a pastor for most of my life. I can tell you that most churches, and most Christians, love Grace in principle and hate Grace in action.
 - a) The father showed his son Grace, and the older brother was angry.
 - 5. There's a religious instinct that is super strong. It's allergic to God's Grace. It's always pulling us back into performance mode and into fear before God.
 - 6. That's why I think something very special is happening here at Pathway Church.
 - a) It's only because we're intentionally, continually tuned in to God's radical, scandalous, truly amazing Grace.
 - b) It's the Bible's best kept open secret.
 - c) It's what got Jesus in trouble with religious people. It's what got the prophets of old laughed at, ignored, and thrown to lions.
 - d) It's been attacked by critics, ignored by theologians, and banned by clergy.
 - e) Churches water it down. Preachers mix it with law. Pastors temper it with works. Church-people hem it in with "yes-buts" and disclaimers. They pay lip-service to Grace, but they mean a lukewarm substitute for the real thing.
 - f) Real Grace is a blood-bought edifice of love and truth...
 - (1) - so beautiful it takes your breath away,
 - (2) - so complex you can't comprehend,

- (3) - so counter-intuitive you can scarcely believe,
- (4) - so simple a child can get it.
- g) Such Grace is almost impossible to find, like diamonds hidden in the earth.
- h) It's almost impossible to believe, because it feels too good to be true.
- i) It's the Good News you've been looking for, maybe without knowing.
- j) Grace is the outflow of the Cross of Christ. The free gift of Calvary Love.
- k) Once you see it, you can't unsee it. It heals the broken places in your heart. It rewires the damaged circuits of your soul. It opens the door to heaven. It truly, really, actually sets the captives free.
- 7. Grace is my theme, because is Christ's theme. It's the Bible's theme.
 - a) If John 3:16 is the "Gospel in a nutshell," the the word Grace is John 3:16 run a nutshell.
- 8. Grace is the theme of our church.
- 9. I'm saying this partly because I don't know where God's going to lead you in the future. What preachers you will hear. What books you will read. What churches you will attend. So I want to prepare you. You're going to hear Grace attacked. But the attack will be subtle.
 - a) You're going to hear a lot of people who are angry at it, like this older brother. They'll tell you you can lose your salvation. They'll warn you that Grace is imbalanced. They'll say that God does his part, but you have to do your part. They'll tell you Grace is dangerous.
 - (1) It is dangerous, but only to human pride, religion, and the devil's ambition.
 - b) That's why I am totally committed to establishing a generation, rooted and grounded in the force of nature called Grace.
 - (1) Because one day you are going to explain Grace to somebody, and the older brother is going to come and throw a temper tantrum. I want you to be prepared.
- 10. And look at what the father does. It says his father came out and pleaded with him.
- 11. This is the second time the father has come out to get one of his sons.
 - a) The first time the prodigal son is coming home and thinks he's unworthy. The father runs to him and embraces him.
 - b) The second time the older son is at home and thinks he's hyper-worthy. The father comes out to him and pleads with him.
- 12. That is the Grace of your father's heart. He's better than you realize. He's always reaching out to you. He's always pursuing you. Pleading with you. Blessing you.
 - a) You never have to go searching for God. He's the one who's coming after you.
- 13. So the angry son would not come into the party. He says that he resents his brother. And he says that it's unfair. How come his dad never threw him a party? He's been faithful! He's been a good son. Where's his party?
- 14. I think the father's reply is one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. And one of the greatest lessons, and what it means to have a father, who is better than you realize.
- C. *"And he said to him, 'Son [Child], you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.'" (Luke 15:31)*
 - 1. Two things. And they are the most beautiful, self-sacrificing gifts a child could ever want from a father.
 - 2. **My child, you are always with ME.**
 - a) I grew up in Chicago. Mom. Dad. Brother. Sister.
 - (1) When I was 20 my mom and dad decided to move to Florida. They brought my sister with them, she was 10. My brother was already married, so he stayed in Chicago. I was already a youth pastor, so I stayed in Chicago. I'm not moving.
 - (2) But I really didn't see their move coming. I wasn't ready for it. I didn't want them to go. I was so upset that I didn't say goodbye. I didn't go to their goodbye party. I didn't want them to see how hurt I was. My family was breaking up. Why?
 - (3) I missed them for years. I missed my dad.
 - (4) And I read this boy upset about not having a party. And I hear this father say to him, "Child you are always with me. You have me. You always have me. You always will. No matter what you get or don't get, no matter what you gain or lose, no matter where you go, or don't go, you are always with me."
 - (5) Can you see why this means so much to me?
 - b) My child, you are always with me.
 - (1) You might feel invisible. You might feel abandoned. You might feel alone. You might feel afraid, broken, addicted, dysfunctional, or in a place you don't belong.
 - (2) Maybe life has cheated you. Maybe the world is unfair.
 - (3) If you're still waiting for your party, if you're not getting your fair share, and if you feel that God himself has robbed you...
 - (a) Then I pray the Holy Spirit, will open your eyes to the most wonderful blessing, standing right in front of you. You have your Heavenly Father, and he became your father by grace through faith. The moment you first believed.. My child, he says, you are always with me.
 - (4) As if that's not enough, the father adds one more thing for his grace-starved child.
 - 3. **All that I have is yours.**
 - a) When someone wants to leave behind all their possessions to their children, or to someone else, they make a list of everything they have. They make a list of all their accounts and all their possessions.
 - (1) And then they write a legal document to tell their family who gets what. Help me out here. The document is called a last will and... testament.

- (2) And then the people who are listed in that testament, we're going to get some of these treasures, what are they called? Who are they? Heirs.
- (3) And then, when they finally receive those possessions, and get that wealth, what do you call that stuff? That's their what? Inheritance.
- (4) For the heirs to receive their inheritance, something has to happen to the person who owns all those treasures. What has to happen to that person before the Testament takes effect? They have to die.
- b) If you have a Bible, it's made up of two big sections. There's a new and an old what? Testament.
 - (1) The Bible describes the vast wealth, and the cosmic treasures of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He owns the mineral rights on Jupiter. He holds the patents to every invention yet to be invented. He knows the secrets of nuclear fusion. He knows the secrets of the human heart.
 - (2) His wealth is without limit. His riches transcend royalty. His glory gets greater with every passing moment. His possessions are more numerous than the stars in the sky, and the sands of all the seas.
 - (3) He has written a legal document to tell his family who gets what. You have it in your hands if you have your Bible. It is the full expression of his will, and above all it is his testament.
 - (4) He has specified the people who will receive his treasures. Those people are his heirs, and if you have Jesus, you are an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ (Roman 8:17).
 - (5) And when you put all of these mind-boggling treasures together, you can begin to see the tip of the magnificent iceberg that is your inheritance. "In him also, we have obtained an inheritance..." (Ephesians 1:11).
 - (6) For that inheritance to become ours, the testament had to kick in. Something had to happen to the one who owns all these cosmic fortunes. And something did happen. Christ died. Christ died so that now, right now the testament of our inheritance is fully in effect (Hebrews 9:15).
- c) So that now, right now, your father can gently draw you to himself, look you straight in the eyes, smile, and say to you, *my child, all that I have is yours.*
- d) He is better than you realize. Being his child is a privilege, and I wonder better than you realize.
 - (1) Everything that belongs to Jesus now belongs to you. And what makes a person dysfunctional, and addicted, and immoral, and broken, is that they don't know or they don't believe.
 - (2) I can help with the first one, but the second one is on you.
4. I want you to know your inheritance. You are richer than you think, and I want you to know it and believe it and feel it. I want you to wrap your whole psychological state around the riches of your inheritance in Christ.
 - a) Everything that belongs to Jesus now belongs to you. His authority is yours. His power is yours. His royalty is yours. His riches are yours. His glory is yours. His throne is yours. His exaltation above the angels is yours. His mission is yours. His life is yours. His spirit is yours. His past is yours. His destiny is yours. His acceptance is yours. His righteousness is yours. His wisdom is yours. His supply is yours. His provision is yours. His peace is yours. His love is yours. His joy is yours. Is everything is yours.
 - b) My child, you are always with me and all that I have is yours.
 - c) I want you to know your riches and your authority and your identity in Jesus Christ.
 - d) So we're inviting you to be part of a church-wide devotional to start absorbing your riches in Christ. It's sixty second daily devotional, a daily Bible study. You can pick this up on our church website. And you can pick this up on tables as you exit.
5. I pray for you a prayer in the Bible, "that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).
6. That you may know.

V. Holding Pattern

- A. I was on an airplane flying into Chicago at night. It was winter, and there was light snow. Air traffic was backed up. And our airplane was put into a holding pattern. We could see that we were flying in a big circle over the bright lights of city of Chicago, around to the south, back over the blackness of Lake Michigan, around and around we went. And we weren't the only plane doing that. There were about six others in that same holding pattern, all at different altitudes. We were stacked. Waiting to land. Going nowhere. Marking time. In a holding pattern.
- B. There are a lot of people who are in a holding pattern.
 1. You know you should be saved. But you're putting it off. You're in a holding pattern. Get out of the holding pattern and be saved today.
 2. Are you are saved, but you're not serious about growing in Grace. Church once in a while maybe. Maybe you pray a little bit. But you're in a holding pattern. Why don't you let his Grace soften your stony stubborn heart?
 3. Or maybe you're just not serving the Lord. You're not giving like you can be. You're not making a difference for the gospel. There is a logjam of grace in your soul. You can break out of that holding pattern today.
- C. There is a very real God Who will walk on this journey with you. That is your Father. He is right with you and near you right now.

VI. Conclusion

- A. I said that the gospel is a song written in the key of B.
 1. **Be saved. Be forgiven. Be born again.**
- B. And I'd like to add one more.
 1. **Be all in for the Grace of Christ and his Gospel.**

VII. DISCUSSION QUESTION

- A. What are two or three ways that the older brother is just like the prodigal son?