

I. Introduction

- A. My talk today is part 8 of our series for this summer. The series is called Grace Powered Living. The goal is to get God's grace deep down into our souls... so it's more than a concept... it's an actual power and force in our lives.
 - 1. I'm changing up the schedule a little bit.
 - 2. One reason is because it's a holiday weekend.
 - 3. But the bigger reason is because Pathway is honored to have some really special guests with us today. The incoming freshman class from Simpson University. We love you, and we are here for you. Welcome to Redding. And once again, on behalf of President Hall, welcome to Simpson University.
 - 4. And every student to every school in town. We're expecting God to do awesome things in your life.
 - 5. So, that's why my talk today is a little bit out of our normal flow. We'll get back into it next time.
- B. My topic for today is:
 - 1. **God's Epic Operation**
 - 2. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)*
- C. Here's a warning. I want to shock you today.
- D. I have never met a person, a Christian, a church leader, a Bible studies major, or a pastor who gets this thing I'm talking about today right... unless they've had some kind of breakthrough with God... something they can point to and recall and remember.
- E. I want to start by drawing a mental picture of Christianity that almost every single person starts with... whether they're a Christian or not.

II. Arrows Up

- A. God is up here.
- B. You are down here.
- C. Christianity is all about stuff you do for God. So the arrow starts with you and goes up to God.
 - 1. Love God. Serve God. Give to God. Obey God. Surrender to God. Worship God. Give everything to God. Change the world for God. Bring heaven to earth.
 - 2. Do, give, obey, strive, strain, give it your all, be committed, be dedicated, do your duty...
 - a) Basically, Christianity is about stuff we do for God, arrows up.
 - b) And if Christianity is about stuff we do for God, then do you know what Christianity is?
 - c) Exhausting. Annoying. Frustrating.
 - d) Just like every other religion.
- D. Don't get wrong. Those are good things, but that's just the wrong picture.
 - 1. **1. DIAGNOSIS | The most common understanding of Christianity is a performance based message of what we must do for God. (Arrows up)**
- E. This is where the breakthrough has to come in. The memorable breakthrough.

III. My Guilt Trip

- A. God has to perform emotional surgery on our lives. I had mine just before I started college.
- B. I'm hoping you can have yours today. God's Epic Operation on your heart today.
- C. I grew up in the church. It was the best of times. My family had a lot of struggles, so church was my second family.
- D. It was also the worst of times, because I had a lot of unlearning to do.
- E. The biggest part of the unlearning was over guilt and shame. I have a really sensitive conscious. Guilt was huge for me.
 - 1. All the way from childhood through high school, I was a super hyper faithful Christian.
 - 2. And it wasn't because I loved God.
 - 3. It was because I feared him. I was terrified of judgment day.
- F. There was a Bible verse I heard a thousand times as a kid growing up: "What a man does in secret, he will one day shout from the rooftops." They said this applied to Judgment Day.
- G. I pictured that at judgment day, I would stand before God. He's up on his throne all thunder and lightning. And he has a giant plasma screen. He calls me name, and then he shows a video of all my sins to all the world...
 - 1. All the secret stuff. All the embarrassing stuff. All the choices I regret. And secrets I don't want anybody to know.
- H. In my picture, God will make me squirm and sweat, and maybe, hopefully let me into heaven.
- I. Thank you, little church, for embedding that horrible picture into my impressionable mind.
- J. There was a Bible verse they quoted all the time:
 - 1. What a man does in secret, he will one day shout from the rooftops. That's the verse that hounded me. It haunted me.
 - a) I felt guilty. I felt afraid. I felt overwhelmed.
- K. **2. SYMPTOMS | The consequence of the performance based message is guilt and shame, which leads to endless duties, which leads to faking it, which leads to just giving up on Christianity.**
 - 1. I had to do something to make God forgive me. To make God like me.
 - a) I was super busy for Jesus. I volunteered for everything... kids ministry, Awana, worship, setting up chairs for Sunday school.... I ran the youth group.
 - b) I'm not bragging, because it wasn't all that spiritual.
 - c) It was guilt and shame pounding my impressionable little Italian heart all the time.
- L. That was me. My church was a travel agent for a guilt trip.
- M. Except there's a problem with all that. There's no such verse in the Bible. It's not there.

- N. I know that know, because God performed an epic emotional surgery on my mental arrows. It was emotional. It was spiritual. It was mental. It was everything.

IV. My Testimony

- A. The setting was my cavernous high school gym. I was a senior at Chicago's massive Lane Technical High School, with a student body over 5,000 at the time. My gym coach was absent for the day, so we sat on hard wooden bleachers and used the hour as a study period.
- B. I'd brought a book with me about Satan. Little did I know that the last part of that book shined a spotlight on guilt and the Cross of Christ. Growing up with a really rigid Christianity, as I did, my arrows all pointed up.
- C. I'd heard about the death of Jesus on the Cross a million times. But this time was different. It was the first time the death of Christ really clicked with me.
- D. I suspect the reason is because the author framed the Cross within the topic of guilt—which happened to be my middle name. He explained how the devil's favorite tool was guilt. And how the devil screwed guilt into our backs as a handle to slam us around every once in a while.
- E. Who told this guy about me?
- F. My high school heart was pounding. Pick-up basketball games echoed in the background. The smell of old gym shoes, rubber basketballs, and sweat permeated my senses. My world narrowed to a single point—words on a page illuminated by God's own Spirit.
- G. There, the message of the Cross pierced my guilt and shame.
1. I learned how my sins were lifted out of me that they might be transferred to Christ.
 2. I discovered how this transfer was comprehensive—encompassing every moral failure, past, present, and future.
 3. I read in wonder how the hammer of heaven pounded justice on the head of Christ, punishing him for my sins instead of punishing me.
 4. And then I read about those wonderful words that Jesus cried out from the agonizing, bloody Cross: the words, IT IS FINISHED, the best words ever uttered on planet earth.
 - a) What was finished?
 - (1) Everything that ever had to happen to bring my sorry soul to heaven without the slightest whisper of my secret sin or shame.
- H. Suddenly, God's cosmic plasma screen shattered in a million pieces.
- I. Behind it, I saw the smiling face of God, my Father, who approved of me, and delighted in me more than words could tell.
- J. Grace was real.
- K. It was stronger, far more beautiful, and infinitely more effective than I'd ever thought it was before.
- L. That day, God converted a gym into a sanctuary, as he settled a stupendous promise into my dysfunctional soul:
 1. *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins"* (Isaiah 43:25).
- M. What a revelation!
- N. I remember sitting there stunned. I know it sounds cliché, but I felt a burden drop off my back. Like a weight was lifted away.
- O. I found the antidote to guilt and shame that day, and it was about my performance, not one little bit.
- P. God performed an operation that day. It was an epic operation on my soul, and my spirit, and my emotions, and my mind.
- Q. He took out the legalism, and he implanted grace.
 1. **3. ANTIDOTE | GRACE. The biggest, central, main, most important, top priority message of Christianity is not what I do for God, but what he does for me. (Arrows down)**
 2. Not arrows up, but arrows down.
 - a) Not my works, but God's work.
 - b) Not my efforts, but God's effort.
 - c) Not what I give to God, but what God gives to me.
 - (1) THIS is God's Epic Operation in every Christian's life.
 - (a) I believe God brought you here to do this operation on your heart, if you'll let him. If you'll be open to his Spirit and his truth. And if he can't do the whole operation today, I hope he preps you for it.
 - (2) What an amazing way to start a new year at school, or a new season of business or career, or a new relationship than to reorient your life to the grace of God.
- R. I sat in that gym, and for the first time I knew I didn't need to fear the face of God for even one more nanosecond. There will never be a giant cosmic screen. He was eternally satisfied with me, just as I was.
- S. I wanted to shout Hallelujah, but it felt weird in that setting.
- T. But God gave me a mission that day. It was a mission to tell the world of the one quality that makes Christianity radically different, radically unlike every other religious system or philosophy or even idea that the world has ever known.
- U. That quality is called grace.
- V. Do you believe in grace?
- W. Let's probe that a little.

V. GRACE

- A. People say that we have to balance out God's grace with our holiness, God's grace with our good works. They say, "It's okay to preach grace, Bill, as long as it's 'in balance.'"
1. Really? In balance with what?
- B. **COMPLICATION | People say it's okay to talk about grace, as long as it's in balance. But there is no such thing as a balancing truth to grace. Grace is its own balance.**

1. Once you put grace on one side of the scales, you can't put anything else on the other side.
2. There is no other side. It's grace on both sides.
3. *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.* (Romans 11:6)
- C. This means salvation is either by grace or by works. It's not by both. It's not 50/50. It's either all grace, or all works. If it's by works, it's no longer grace. If it is by grace, it is no longer by works. The two don't mix. If you can mix grace and works, then your concept of grace is no longer grace, and your concept works is no longer works. That is exactly what the Bible means here.
- D. Grace is the perfect intersection of justice and love. With justice, God nails your sins to the Cross, blasting Jesus for every last one of them... and with love, God binds you to his own heart. Both justice and love. Not just love.
 1. You cannot work your way to heaven. You cannot work your way to God.
 2. Grace is God's work, not yours. Everything that had to happen to connect you with God for time and eternity GOD DID IN FULL THROUGH CHRIST AT THE CROSS.
 - a) You don't help him. You don't add to his work. You don't toss in any coins to sweeten the deal.
- E. It's either grace, or it's works, but it can't be a both, not even a little.
- F. The core message of the church of Christ is all about something that God has done decisively, once for all, in Christ. No religion offers it. No other god has it. Nobody pays God back for it. It is a free gift of free grace, paid in full by Jesus Christ plus nothing.
 1. **5. SOLUTION | The grace of God balances the gift of God on one side of the scales with the sacrifice of Christ on the other.**
 - a) You don't balance it... God does.
 2. A pastor was talking to a little girl who wanted to be baptized.
 - a) Her pastor wanted to make sure he was genuinely saved, so he asked the girl how she got saved.
 - b) The girl said, "Well, I did my part, and God did his part."
 - c) The pastor asked her to explain.
 - d) God's part, she said, was to send Jesus to die on the cross for my sins.
 - e) The pastor asked, well, what was your part?
 - f) The girl said, My part was to sin.
 - (1) If you want a balance there it is.

VI. Grace Breakthrough

- A. I told you I wanted to shock you today.
- B. Let's do a little mental exercise. A kind of psychological and spiritual profile.
- C. Let's go back to the arrows.
 1. When we want to show us doing something good for God, mentally draw the arrow up, from us to God, like this.
 2. So, let's do this profile.
 3. I'm going to say eight Christian-ish, words, one at a time. I'll pause about 1 second.
 4. Keep track on your fingers. Is that word an arrow up or an arrow down?
 - a) If it's what you should do for God, call it an arrow up.
 - b) If it's what God should do for you, call it an arrow down.
 5. Count the arrows pointing up, count the words that are about what you should be doing for God.
 - a) Obey
 - b) Serve
 - c) Commit
 - d) Give
 - e) Love
 - f) Evangelism
 - g) Prayer
 - h) Good Works
- D. I'm not going to ask you results... just consider this.
- E. If you're like most people, most of your arrows point up. In fact, most of the time, you come to church expecting to be told what you should do, or shouldn't do, or do more of or do less of, because that's what church is supposed to be about, right?
- F. Let me shock you. The core idea of each of those concepts in the Bible is that it's something God does for you, way more and way before it's very something you do for God.
- G. Let's go over those eight words:
 1. OBEY: *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* (Philippians 2:8)
 2. SERVE: *"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:28)
 3. COMMIT: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* (2 Corinthians 8:9)
 4. GIVE: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...* (John 3:16)
 5. LOVE: *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* (1 John 4:10)
 6. EVANGELISM: *"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10)
 7. PRAYER: *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* (Romans 8:26)

8. *GOOD WORKS: Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Philippians 1:6)*
- H. This is why we need God's epic operation.
- I. The whole church needs an arrow reversal procedure. We need an epic shift in our whole way of thinking about God. Call it a paradigm shift. Call it repentance. You need a NEW MIND.
- J. Because the Bible is NOT the book of doing your duty for Jesus. It is not the book of your commitment, your dedication, your service, your morality, your giving back, paying it forward, or your changing the world.
1. **6. HEALING | God invites you to step into the shower of his perfect grace and his perfect provision for every circumstance of your life.**
- K. God gave you the Bible to teach you and the Holy Spirit to make real for you "the things that have been freely given to us by God."
1. God has darkened the theater of the cosmos, and aimed his dazzling spotlight on Jesus Christ - on his self-sacrificing love. God has made his own commitment to us the centerpiece of the cosmic story, rendering you and me and everybody else bit-players in the drama of redemption.
2. The Bible declares God's nature, attributes, promises, plan, gifts, blessings, mercies, kindness, goodness, benevolence, self-sufficiency, self-sacrifice, riches, and generosity.
3. The Bible tells the tale of God's grace unfolding in the real lives of morally messed up people.
4. The Bible declares the self-revelation of a God who is infinitely more committed to us than we will ever be to him.
- L. He gives, we receive. He died, we live. He sacrificed, we say thank you. He paid the price, we grow rich. He gave his life for us that he might give his life to us and live his life through us. Any other gospel is inverts the arrows. Any other gospel is not good news. Any other gospel invites God's curse.
1. Paul's whole life demonstrated a laser-beam focus: "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).
2. John announced, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).
3. Jesus called his living water "the gift of God" (John 4:10) and made the gospel challenging enough for a rocket scientist yet simple enough for a child: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).
- M. Can God be any clearer that the gospel is the story of his commitment to us, ten thousand times more than it will ever be about our commitment to him?
- N. It is all grace, without the slightest intrusion of human performance. The arrows point entirely from God to us. It is his work, his sacrifice, his cross, his effort, his free gift to an unworthy world of moral train wrecks. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every person who believes (Romans 1:16).
- O. **7. RECOVERY | When you get Calvary-centered grace anchored deep within your soul, then you can begin to reciprocate his love in service for Christ and his gospel.**
- P. Search all the world's religions, and you will never find anything like this grace, and you will never find a Savior like Jesus. Study the history books of all the religions of all civilizations, and they are all the same: arrows pointing up. Humans, by human effort seeking the approval of God.
- Q. And into that dark scene of labor and effort, explodes the message of Jesus and his matchless grace. A Savior is born.
1. Sins forgiven.
2. Righteousness granted.
3. Heaven opened.
4. Eternal life offered.
5. Earthly life renewed.
6. A pardon for criminals.
7. Power for living.
8. And hope for dying.
9. In the Gospel you have...
10. A Savior to forgive you sins.
11. A Redeemer to set you free.
12. A Regenerator, to breathe life into your dead spirit.
13. A Body Guard, to slam Satan to the mat and clear the way for your blessing.
14. A Shepherd to watch over you all your days.
15. And a Guide to bring you safely home at last.
16. This is the gospel of grace, this is who we are. This is why we are. This is what we are.
17. Grace yesterday.
18. Grace today.
19. Grace tomorrow.
20. And grace the next day.
- a) And when the sun grows dim, and our planet stops spinning, and when this old universe gets rolled up like a scroll... when the ages of eternity roll on...
- R. Every person who stepped into the shower of the matchless grace of Jesus... will be standing before him in heaven... shouting and singing and dancing and celebrating Jesus the Savior and his Amazing Grace forevermore.