

I. Pain Machine

- A. This fallen world is a morally broken Pain Machine. I am very conscious of this truth. Every time I stand before you, I know that everyone comes with some problems. Everyone comes here with pain, with struggles, with hardships, with opposition, and sometimes with sorrows too great to bear.
 - 1. The stories are real. The pain is right there, right at the surface. For some, the tears are ready to fall.
 - 2. No one gets a pass from the Pain Machine.
- B. If I did not believe there is an answer, I would feel overwhelmed. I could not do what I do.
- C. But I believe with all my heart there is real and genuine and authentic hope.
- D. I believe a better day is coming.
- E. I believe there is an Answer to all the badness we see.
- F. I would love to introduce you to the Answer, because the Answer is more than a philosophy or an idea or a program or a pill. The Answer is a person, and His name is Jesus.
- G. Jesus offers us a God who did not look away from the Pain Machine, but who felt the fullest measure of human suffering, a Savior who comforts us in our suffering, a global mission to alleviate suffering, final justice for those who cause suffering, and a coming world that abolishes suffering...
- H. There is no one like him. Jesus is the answer.

II. Baptism Sunday

- A. We're doing things a little out of order today, because something super special is happening.
- B. What's happening is one of those things that ties us back to the most ancient days of Christianity. Since the very beginning, Christians have gathered at lakes and streams, tanks and pools, to practice the mysterious ritual called Baptism. And that is what we are doing today.
- C. Last week, we had surprise baptisms, and it was one of the most beautiful moments I've ever seen. Agreed?
- D. The joy. The love. The tears. It was amazing. To see men and women in jeans and outfits and women with hairdos and makeup and nice outfits... all go get baptized was really courageous, and beautiful, and heartfelt, and very touching. You could just see the Spirit of God and the truth of God at work through jitters, and through the smiles and through the tears.
- E. But last week, we only baptized adults... so today, we're going to baptize students... starting at junior high through senior high. Nobody younger today than sixth grade, please don't ask. So that's coming in a few minutes.
- F. But there's also a surprise that's coming too, because we might be opening this up to a few more people.
- G. So hold on tight.

III. How God Meets You

- A. I am hoping, and we have been praying, that God would meet you and the you would meet God in a special way, right here today.
 - 1. This is not a vision, not an audible voice, not a cloud or any other manifestation.
 - 2. This is a choice you make by faith, to accept God's love and be saved.
- B. That's what I mean by meeting God. And you can do that today.
- C. Here's a story from the Bible.

IV. The Ethiopian Ruler

- A. *"As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, 'Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah." (Acts 8:26-28)*
 - 1. The story starts with a man and an angel.
 - a) The man is named Philip. Philip was a leader in the earliest days of Christianity.
 - b) Then, there's an angel. Can we just pause here on the angel? I think it is awesome Philip is told by the angel to go to this place, where he will meet this man, and this man has no idea that God set it all up through an angel.
 - 2. I think it's perfect because the fact that there's an angel pushes everyone out of their rational, logical comfort zone. This is supernatural.
 - 3. This is how every person who meets God meets God.
 - a) There are the intangibles and uncontrollables and indefinables and unexplainables...
 - (1) and it's okay, because God is bigger than the mental boxes we try to stuff him into.

4. So here's an angel coming down from heaven, telling Philip, don't take Interstate 5, instead take 273, and head south.
 5. Over here is a very high ranking official in the palace of Ethiopia. This palace official had traveled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. This is a 2,500 mile journey.
 - a) By air, this is 4 hours. By car, it's an 81 hour drive. On foot, it's 60 days. Google Maps doesn't say how long if you're riding a camel-powered carriage. But ChatGPT said 31 days.
 6. The beautiful thing is he is trying hard to meet God.
 - a) He's on an epic quest. He tried religion. He tried idols.
 7. He knows those things can't satisfy his soul. He has turned away from them and he went on this epic quest to meet the invisible Creator God.
 8. But even after all his epic quest, he still hasn't met God, and now he's going home.... But he's still searching...
 9. So an angel came down, and pre-positioned Philip to show him how God meets a person.
 - a) I have never seen any angels, but what if God pre-positioned our church (or this video) and me and you so you could meet God today? Please let that possibility in.
 10. The answer Philip gave the Ethiopian is the same answer I want to give to you today.
 11. And I'm hoping and praying you'll do what he did.
 12. I want to show you exactly how today. I want to walk you through it. It will be a little weird, but I won't embarrass you.
 13. So Philip is in the right place at the right time to meet the Ethiopian on his long journey home. Then what happens?
- B. *The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah; so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?" And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his generation? For his life was taken from the earth." (Acts 8:29-33)*
1. So we are reading in the book of Acts in the Bible. If you were to take a Bible, and turn back, to the left, you would find the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah writes about eight hundred years earlier than Acts.
 2. The Ethiopian is reading an ancient prophecy about Jesus. Specifically, it is a prophecy about Jesus being crucified, and why why he died.
 - a) All of this, was being read, out loud, by the Ethiopian when Philip just so happened to bump into him.
- C. *The eunuch asked Philip, "Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News [the Gospel] about Jesus. (Acts 8:34, 35)*
1. This good news about Jesus is called **The Gospel**. This gospel is presented all over the Bible.
 - a) It is the instructions for how to meet God through the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - b) Here was a man was looking for a way to meet God.
 - c) He just so happens, by coincidence, to be reading about it.
 - d) And Philip just so happens by coincidence, to be there to explain it to him.
 - e) Just like you just so happen to be here today, by coincidence, taking about them, talking about the exact same thing.
 - f) It's all by coincidence.
 - g) If by coincidence, we mean God.
 2. Here is that Gospel.
 3. Jesus said,
 - a) "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)
 - (1) All those burdens, all those pains.
 - (2) All that sadness, all that fear.
 - (3) All the guilt, and all the shame.
 - (4) All your addictions, all your traumas.
 - (5) All your secrets, all your rage.
 - (6) All of your sins, and all the sins others have done against you.
 - (a) Those are the burdens that wear you out.
 - (b) Jesus said come to me. Bring them all to me.

- (c) Philip explained that to the Ethiopian.
- b) He explained that Jesus carried all those heavy burdens when he was nailed to an old, rugged Cross.
 - (1) Jesus absorbed those burdens from you.
 - (2) Jesus dealt with them. He balanced the scales of justice. He gained eternal forgiveness.
 - (3) He suffered your sufferings. He spilled his blood. He payed your price. He died your death.
 - (a) This is a love too big for words.
 - (4) Whatever punishment, whatever condemnation, and whatever hell you deserved, Jesus took into himself, so you don't have to. You don't have to carry those burdens even one more day.
- c) And when you come to him, and bring your burdens to him, he gives you rest.
 - (1) The battle is over to prove your worth to God.
 - (2) The work is finished to feel clean and acceptable inside.
 - (3) The striving and the anxiety about God is over.
 - (a) This is the gospel.
 - (b) This is the good news.
- 4. Philip explained all this, and the man believed all this, and accepted it for himself.
- 5. And I am inviting you to do the same thing day.
 - (1) It's how you have your sins forgiven.
 - (2) It's how you're brought into God's family.
 - (3) It's how you receive everlasting life with God in heaven.
 - (4) It's the end of that epic quest to meet God that every soul is on.
- D. Philip climbed into that carriage and told him the same good news I'm telling you today. And when that man heard the good news, he made a choice. It's like Philip opened a door and the Ethiopian man walked through it.
- E. Here we are. Here is an open door.
- F. Will you walk through it?
- V. Invitation
 - A. So we're going to pray. I have a little more of my sermon, but let's do this right now.
 - B. I would like to lead you in a prayer of salvation.
 - C. I'll say one line at a time. And then I'll pause... and during that pause, you can repeat that prayer silently to God. No pressure. No messing with you. Just an invitation and an open door.
 - D. I'm going to ask you to bow your head and close your eyes. We do this to create privacy for you and to extend that courtesy to the people around you.
 - 1. ADMIT: God, I admit I'm like Zaccheus, out of touch with you, in trouble with you, spiritually dead. I want to come back to you. I want that spiritual life with you. I want you to forgive my sins, and to make me whole.
 - 2. BELIEVE: But God I believe you sent Jesus to fix all this. I believe he is your son. I believe he died on the Cross for me. I believe he rose again for me. I believe he calls me to come to him. So I say yes. I believe. God, I don't get how all this works, but I'm telling you as best as I can that I believe in Jesus.
 - 3. CHOOSE: So God, right now, I say yes to your salvation. I say yes to Jesus. Right now I choose Jesus as my Savior. I'm trusting him as my only hope. I'm making it official. I'm asking you as best as I can, because of Jesus, please save me. Please forgive me. Please make me your child forever.
 - a) [RESPONSE, WELCOME TO GOD'S FAMILY d.v.]
 - b) The story ends with one more scene:
- VI. *"As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?' He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him."* (Acts 8:36-38)
 - A. He got saved first, and then, afterwards, he got baptized. That's been the pattern for 2,000 years.
 - B. Getting baptized never saved one single person. But upon their confession of faith, they were saved, and like this man, after that, they were baptized.
- VII. Baptism
 - A. We have a lot of awesome students are going to be baptized right now, today.
 - B. But that's not all. You might have been here last week, or maybe you missed. And you wanted to come down and get baptized, but you held back.
 - C. And now you regret it. You've been kicking yourself all week long, because you missed your chance.
 - D. So I have good news for you today.
 - 1. Today, we are doing surprise baptisms, again, right here, today, for you.

- E. Let's do this.
- F. No more delays. No more excuses. No hesitations. In just a couple more minutes, I'm going to have you get up, and go out those doors in back if you're willing to be baptized.
 - 1. Get ready... not yet... but when it's time, don't hesitate. Just go.
- G. You will be met by one of our leaders, who will ask you if you're saved and for a 30 second profession of faith. And then it's time to get wet.

VIII. Logistics

A. You might say: I didn't dress to get baptized today.

- 1. That's okay. You'll dry off. We have towels. We'll give you one. Plus it's nice out.
- 2. You will be getting baptized just as you are - in your clothing. No need to change. Just come as you are.
- 3. Leave your stuff, wallet, watch, purse, with someone you came with. If there's no one, bring it down, and we'll take care of it. You come.
- 4. If there's a modesty issue with how you're dressed, we will help you.
 - a) There is NO REASON TO NOT BE BAPTIZED TODAY.
 - (1) We've thought of everything. We will take your picture. We will give you a baptism certificate.
 - (a) It's all taken care of.

B. If you're a minor, you have to at least be grade 6 and one parent/guardian needs to go out with you to check you in.

- 1. And then, after that, mom and dad, I need you to come back in here to watch... it's just too crowded for parents to go with.
- 2. Because this really has to be their thing... their decision and their act.
- 3. Also please, don't even ask about younger kids, because I want to honor our team back there.

C. You might say, I was baptized as an infant. Does that count?

- 1. I would say, you should be grateful for a mom and dad who wanted to give you a head start. That was THEIR choice.
- 2. But now you need to own that choice. You need to make it your own. You need to be baptized as an act of your own free will.
- 3. You come. You be baptized today by your own choice.
- 4. Same thing if you were baptized in some way that wasn't you, or if it was in a cult. You come too. Be baptized today and do it right.

D. You might say, Bill, I'm saved, and I've already been baptized. But my heart is lukewarm. My spiritual life is cold.

- 1. You come too, but not to be baptized again. We have a prayer for you to pray. It's a prayer of consecration.
- 2. It's on this card.
 - a) These are on the stage.
 - b) They are in the back corners of the auditorium.
 - c) They are in the upper deck, in the corners and in the middle.
 - d) You come, and get this card, and go back to your seat and dedicate your life to Jesus. Sign and date this card, and tuck it into your Bible or put it in your car.

E. Finally You might say, Bill I've just received Jesus as my Savior... a minute ago. What should I do?

- 1. I say, get up and go with everyone else, but no pressure. You'll be reliving the story of the Philip and the Palace official.
- 2. When you sign in, tell them what happened.
- 3. And if you missed that prayer, it's not too late. Go back there and say you still need to pray the prayer, and we've got you covered too.

- F. I could explain more, but I think I've done enough. It's something to be experienced. What you're seeing is a symbol of a new life. Every regret, every doubt, all washed away forever.

IX. Logistics

- A. Okay... the time is here.
- B. LET'S STAND UP.
- C. When the singing begins... YOU GO. Leave your seat, and go take your stand for Jesus. Leave your seat and go get baptized.
 - 1. CLASSIC SERVICE DON'T DELAY