

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Pathway, and happy Mother's Day.
- B. I have a few snippets of wisdom for mom. These come from the great American poet, Ogden Nash.
 - 1. Children aren't happy with nothing to ignore,
And that's what mothers were created for.
 - 2. A family is a unit composed
Not only of children,
But of men, women,
An occasional animal,
And the common cold.
- C. Speaking of giving birth, he wrote...
 - 1. But children, hark! Your mother would rather,
When you arrived, have been your father.
- D. And finally, in honor of mothers, he wrote,
 - 1. I hope my tongue in prune juice smothers,
If I belittle dogs and Mothers.
- E. We do honor our mothers today... physically, spiritually, the heart of a mom makes this world more bearable. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for your labor of love. Thank you for incarnating grace.
- F. It's tough work, and sometimes it's discouraging. Many times, it's depressing.
- G. That is why I have good news for you today.
- H. I am hoping that God will continue a special work he has been doing among our church family now, going back to Good Friday and Easter. God has been surprising us week after week, and I'm hoping for a surprise today.
- I. Here is our key Scripture, and we will be mashing up several places in Scripture.

II. The Treasure and the Pearl

- A. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.* (Matthew 13:44-46)
- B. We have two short parables here, and I'd like to deal with them in one breath.
- C. The Treasure hidden in the field and the Pearl of great price. Jesus said that a man found the treasure. And he said that a merchant found the pearl. And in each case they went and sold everything to buy the field and to buy the pearl.
- D. I can tell you that for all the years I grew up in the church, these parables were explained in a way that discouraged me.
- E. That explanation went like this: [don't say amen here...]
 - 1. Jesus and his gospel is the treasure. Jesus and his gospel is the pearl of grace price.
 - 2. If you want what Jesus brings, God calls you to do something very hard and very costly.
 - 3. God calls you to give up everything, surrender everything, sacrifice everything you have... he calls you to pay any price and every price to receive Jesus and his salvation.
- F. That's how I heard it, and it messed with me.
 - 1. It made Christianity heavy and hard. It made faith laborious. It made God demanding, it made church depressing... and all of that...
 - 2. ...made me very guilty and very ashamed. I knew I wasn't surrendering everything, and there were corners of my heart not ready for that.
 - 3. This way of interpreting these parables places the treasure of heaven and the beautiful pearl of grace on a shelf so high they were forever out of reach for dirty, messed up, spiritual losers like me.
 - 4. That's how I felt.
- G. To me, Christianity became the message of effort, and surrender, and sacrifice, and paying any price... When you think about it, that message is the opposite of good news. It's a gospel which is actually an anti-gospel, and no gospel at all.
- H. I'd heard these interpretations so long and so often they were hammered into by brain. So God had a lot of work to do to rewire my mental circuits.
- I. Part of that he did through another set of verse in the Bible.

III. The Disciple Jesus Loved

- A. *"Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved."* (John 13:23)
- B. The scene here is the Last Supper. This was the special meal Jesus ate with his disciples just before he died.
- C. When they ate a meal in those days, they didn't sit in chairs. They reclined on cushions set on the floor.
 - 1. There was a table in the middle, set with food. That was like the hub of a wheel.
 - 2. And then the spokes would be the people. They would be on one elbow, and they would be packed in really close to each other.
 - 3. They could lean back and talk to each other... it was what you can call close fellowship.
 - a) Not a good place if you're an introvert. Or a clean freak. Everybody's so packed in, they're touching.
 - 4. Right next to Jesus was this one disciple. He was leaning against Jesus to talk to him. This was normal.
 - 5. We don't have this disciple's name, but we have his description. He is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved."
 - 6. From other places in the Bible, we can figure out that this is the disciple named John.
 - 7. This is not the only time John is described this way:
 - a) When Jesus was hanging on the cross:

- (1) "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" (John 19:26)

b) When Jesus was raised from the dead, we see this:

- (1) "Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them..." (John 20:2)

8. I won't go through all of them, but there are 5 times when the Bible calls John the disciple whom Jesus loved.

D. My Sunday school teachers taught me that. And then they said that I had to live up to that standard.

1. I had to work hard to be a good Christian, so that I could have that special love from God. That was my goal. Those were my marching orders.

E. That turned out to be another punch in the gut for me. Who am I to feel that I could ever be that special to Jesus? Who am I to merit that special affection from God? That wasn't for me. That was for saintly people. That was for holy people, pure people, really good people. It wasn't going to happen, not in a million years.

F. And the more I knew it, the more guilty I felt, and the more ashamed I felt... something happened inside me.

G. A change, and it wasn't a good change.

1. Guilt and shame because so common for me, that they became my new normal. They defined normal for my Christian life. That's just how it was. Go to church, get beat up, do some kind of emotional penance, and feel like a worm.

2. Normal.

H. That's the plan, right?

1. God loved me, but he certainly didn't treasure me. God loved me, but he didn't like me. God loved me but I was nothing special, and I never would be.

I. This was my stronghold. Guilt. Condemnation. Shame. Inadequacy. Never enough for God.

J. And it wasn't the devil, it was my church pounding me over and over again with this stuff. I do think the devil was helping.

K. Because I could not embrace myself. I could not accept myself. I could not see myself as one who is beloved of God.

L. This is what a spiritual stronghold does. It's a way of thinking that attacks your identity. It's a deeply embedded belief that attacks your view of yourself. It drives a wedge between you and God.

1. You redefine yourself as something less than worthy of honor and love.

2. You redefine God as some kind of harsh taskmaster, or as a cosmic bully raining impossible demands on our heads.

3. You make all this normal, and so you live with it and accept it, even as you hate it.

M. Honestly, I don't know why I stayed in the church. I don't know why I stuck it out. It's just grace.

IV. My Turnaround

A. My turnaround came from one glorious Bible verse. It's actually my favorite place in the whole Bible.

1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 8:1)

B. You know how you can hear a thing but not really register what you heard?

C. I heard this verse 100,000 times but it never registered.

1. It never registered because my guilt and shame cancelled it out.

2. My guilt and shame made me numb and dumb to grace.

3. I mean look at this verse. No condemnation? That's revolutionary! That's an atomic bomb in the world of religious thought. There's nothing like this anywhere. Romans 8:1 is amazing!

4. But there I was, reading these majestic these words but never letting them register.

D. But one day this verse did register, and it blew up my stronghold of guilt and shame and condemnation into a million little pieces.

1. No condemnation. No judgment. No guilt. No shame.

E. And the thing that made it register was when I read a teaching that connected this verse with the death of Jesus on the cross.

F. Do you see that word "therefore?" In one word, it gathers up into a gigantic wrecking ball everything that Jesus did to pay for all my sins... and to erase all of God's judgment against me.

G. What that means is...

1. God never frowns when he looks at me. God never shakes his head in disappointment when he thinks of me. He loves me just as much as he loves Jesus, because I am in Jesus, and one with him.

V. The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

A. Let's go back to the disciple whom Jesus loved.

B. I said that the Bible said this about John in at least 5 different places. Here they are:

1. *Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.* (John 13:23)

2. *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!"* (John 19:26)

3. *Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."* (John 20:2)

4. *"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.* (John 21:7)

5. *Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"* (John 21:20)

C. We won't go through all of them, but there's something here that jumped out at me.

D. Can you see it?

1. What do all these verses have in common? Look at the Bible references. What book do all of these verses come from? John. Who wrote all these verses? John. Who's the one who put this tag on himself? Who's the one who immortalized himself in the story of Jesus by declaring himself to be the disciple whom Jesus loved?

- a) John. John. And John.
- E. The only reason John goes down in biblical history as the disciple whom Jesus loved is because John wrote the biblical history that way!
- F. He said that. He wrote that. He declared that.
 - 1. He was no better than the other disciples. Jesus didn't love him better than the other disciples. John had no greater accomplishments than the other disciples. In fact, he was the only one who wasn't martyred for his faith. He had no greater worthiness, no greater merit, no greater claim on Jesus' love than any other disciple. Jesus holds out this offer to every single person who believes in him, and John is one of the very few who took him up on the offer!
- G. John nicknamed himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and, I'm telling you he invites you to do the exact same thing.
- H. I had an old desk with a bumper sticker that I put on it. It said, "Jesus loves you, but I'm his favorite."
- I. That was pretty close to John's attitude. His whole mindset was oriented this way. The nucleus of his self-perception was that he was beloved of God. The core of his self-esteem was that he was precious to God.
 - 1. Can you say that about yourself?
 - 2. Is that how you see yourself?
 - 3. Can you say that about yourself?
 - 4. And I don't mean in some flippant, shallow, adolescent way. I mean the confidence that you are special to God — a confidence that is powerfully rooted in the character of God and in the Cross of Christ and in the claims of Scripture.
 - 5. I mean the love of God so powerfully articulated in your own mind, to your own mind, that the devil can't lawyer you out of it, no matter how hard his demons try.
- a) What do the voices in your head tell you about the love of God for you?
- J. When the Bible called John the disciple whom Jesus loved, that was never, never, never meant to burden me. It was meant to free me.
 - 1. It wasn't a demand for performance. It was an invitation for faith.
- K. This discovery set me free.
- L. When John literally identified himself as the disciple that Jesus loved, he wasn't setting up an exhausting ladder of achievement I had to climb...
 - 1. That wasn't for saintly people, holy people, pure people. That wasn't for really Good Christians.
 - 2. That wasn't a goal to be achieved.
 - a) That was a promise to be believed.
 - b) That was a grace to be embraced and declared in this world full of confusion and pain.
- M. The devil hates this. The devil always turns it on its head.
- N. Calling yourself the disciple whom Jesus loved is kryptonite to your strongholds.
 - 1. What is the missing piece of your heart that sends you down into your dysfunction of choice... whether it be into porn, into drugs, into alcohol, into anger, into depression, into cutting, into sexual confusion, into apathy, despair, violence... and all the other dark places pulling us all down?
 - 2. What is missing? What do you need? What do you lack?
- O. I submit that the missing ingredient is love.
- P. And I am telling you that if you will embrace the title, then YOU are the disciple whom Jesus loved, just because you have been saved!
 - 1. And embracing that will begin to change your whole pattern of thinking and believing.
 - 2. It's the beginning of your wholeness and peace.
- VI. Paper
 - A. We gave you a slip of paper and a pencil when you came in. I invite you to take that out right now. I want to have you write something on it...
 - 1. **My name is Bill.**
 - 2. **I am the disciple whom Jesus loved.**
 - B. Leave space because we have a little more to add, but that's enough for now.
 - C. Embrace it.
- VII. Back to the Start
 - A. I want to go back to where we started.
 - B. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)*
 - 1. A man found the treasure hidden in the field and sold all he had to get it.
 - 2. A merchant found the pearl of great price and sold all he had to buy it.
 - C. What I want you to see is that the man here doesn't represent you. That's Jesus.
 - 1. You're not the one selling everything you buy the treasure. He is.
 - 2. You're not the one sacrificing, surrendering, paying the price. Jesus is.
 - D. He's the man who sold all he has.
 - E. He's the merchant who paid the ultimate price.
 - F. And if the man in the parable is Jesus, then I think you can see what that means.
 - 1. It means that YOU ARE THE TREASURE.
 - 2. It means that YOU ARE THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

a) Let's take them one at a time.

VIII. The Treasure

- A. Starting with the treasure. This was written in Greek, and basically every Greek word will be kind of familiar to you.
 1. Treasure - the word is *thesaurus*. Something precious and valuable. Something seen of great worth and value. That's who you are to God. You are precious to him. You are of great worth to him. He values you more than you value yourself.
 2. Hidden - the word in Greek is something like *crypto*. Your beauty is hidden. Your value is hidden. This world buries you. This world doesn't want the real you to shine forth.
 3. He sells all he has - When did Jesus sell all he had? When he came from heaven to earth, and from earth to the cross, and from the cross to the grace. That was the price he paid. For what?
 4. To buy the field - the Greek word is *agorazo*, like the agora, which was the marketplace. Agoraphobia is the fear of the marketplace, the fear of crowded public places. Jesus went to the marketplace and he paid with his precious blood, and paid the price to buy the field the treasure was in.
 5. The field - Jesus did just buy the treasure, he bought the field. He bought the dirt the field was in. He paid for it. He took care of it. He removed you from it.
 - a) What dirty thing buries you? What heartbreak? What addiction? What dysfunction? What psychological burdens? What suffocates your joy? What images fill your mind? What regrets haunt you? What losses bring tears to your eyes? What relationships have you broken? What secrets shame you? What memories mortify you? What do you fear? What do you dread? What bitterness simmers in you? What submerges the real you in a mountain of fear, or loss, or suffering or debt?
 - b) Jesus found you as his precious treasure. He adores you. You were of such great value that he not only bought you, he bought the dirt that buried you, and the price was a cost beyond words.
 6. All of this so that you can say the beautiful words ever uttered by a human voice... Jesus loves me this I know. I am the disciple whom Jesus loves.

IX. The Pearl of Great Price

- A. Again, there's something really awesome in the original Greek.
 1. Once again the merchant is seeking beautiful pearls.
 2. In other words, you are the beautiful pearl, and Jesus is out looking for you.
- B. I have said many times that I love theology, and I love the deep things of Scripture. And I believe the church needs solid food now more than ever before.
- C. I have also said many times that the purpose of good theology is to heal broken psychology.
 1. It's the truth that sets you free.
- D. And the devil clouds your mind with all these horrible thoughts.
 1. You might be saved, but Jesus doesn't want you any more.
 2. That's how I felt. That's how I saw God. Yeah, I was saved, but barely. God saved, but it was this grudging annoyance for him to do it.
- E. No... I am the beautiful pearl... and Jesus is seeking for me. He never stops seeking for me. And he never stops seeking for you too.
 1. When you backslide, he still seeks you.
 2. When you fall off the wagon, he still seeks you.
 3. When you lose it and go off on your parents or your kids, when you cross a moral boundary, when you fail again and again, when your business goes south, or you blow up your marriage... and it's your own fault...
 - a) And when the devil whispers God isn't for you, God has let you down, Jesus doesn't want you, see... look at what a mess you are...
 4. Don't believe him, because Jesus is seeking you, wanting you, looking for you, and desiring your company.
 5. He loves you!
- F. The greatest dysfunction is feeling unloved. It's the mother of all dysfunctions. It's the mother of all addictions.
- G. So here comes Jesus, seeking beautiful pearls, and he sees you, and he says, *I've found you*.
- H. So he finds sheds his blood on the Cross and pays the ultimate price for you.
- I. You are beautiful. You are his pearl of great price.
- J. I'm here to tell you today that YOU are the disciple whom Jesus loves.
 1. And the pain you carry, and the traps you've fallen into, and all the crazy stuff in your head can only thrive to the degree you've lost sight of the love of God.

X. Paper

- A. Let's just add 2 more lines to our slip of paper today.
 1. **My name is Bill.**
 2. **I am the disciple whom Jesus loved.**
 3. **I am his Treasure**
 4. **And his beautiful Pearl of Great Price.**
- B. May I encourage you today to carry this slip of paper with you. Take a picture of it. Put it where you will see it. And read it out loud every day.
- C. There's a powerful image of the love of God that I want to finish with. It's perfect for this day.
- D. The prophets long ago wondered what God's love was like, and they painted this picture with words:
 1. *Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands...* (Isaiah 49:15-16)