

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Looking for Life

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Luke 24:1-9

BIG IDEA – JESUS IS ALIVE & ONLY HE CAN GIVE YOU TRUE LIFE!

Good morning. Happy Easter, Two Cities Church. If you're new, welcome. We're the church for anybody, but we're not the church for everybody. No matter why you're here, where you came from, or who invited you, I want to let you know we're glad you're here. Here's the message of Easter: not just that Jesus *lived* but that Jesus *lives*. The story of Sarah we hope will be *your* story, where you meet Jesus and are made into his disciples.

I know it's Easter. I know that at Easter we're all over the spiritual map in here. Some of you, maybe many of you, would say you're a serious Christian, and you've been listening to your Spotify playlist this week, hoping Donovan was going to sing one of those songs. Is that you? That's okay.

Others of you are not a Christian. I know you're not a Christian. You know you're not a Christian. The person who brought you knows you're not a Christian. Here's what I want to tell you: I used to be where you are. I didn't become a Christian until I was 16 years old. Here's what this means. If you're here today, and you're in church, and you're not a Christian, one day you could be a pastor. Something to pray about. You're like, "This isn't very encouraging."

Some of you are unchurched. *Unchurched* just means (we're glad you're here) you never go into a church building. Why would you? Right? If it's a funeral, if it's a wedding, if it's Easter, if it's Christmas... Those are the only options you're coming into a building. But when you pulled up here, you were thinking bells and smells and steeples and pews, and you're like, "Okay, I can do this. Crate & Barrel for an hour? I can do this." This is what it looks like. Yeah.

Others of you are de-churched. *De-churched* means you had a bad experience with church at some point. You got hurt. You got busy. Maybe COVID happened to you. You

didn't really want to come today because you've had some bad experiences. You offered to guard the Easter baskets and not come. We're glad you're here. Some of you are me-churched. *Me-churched* means you've been in church your whole life, but you've thought it's about you, and you haven't realized it's all about Jesus.

Now, here's what I know about all of us, no matter if you're seeker, skeptic, atheist, or agnostic...no matter who you are. We're all doing the same thing. We're all looking for life. I don't mean life like NASA is looking for life on Mars. Not like biological life. I mean *life* life. You might use words like *fulfillment, satisfaction, joy, peace, success, and significance*. We use a lot of different words, but we're all looking for life.

What is this whole "bucket list" thing that came out 20 or 30 years ago? Everyone starts talking about their "bucket list." That's what you want to do, the life you want to experience before you die. Right? We look for life in all different kinds of places. Some of us look for life... We hate to admit it to ourselves. Church is nowhere to be honest, but let's just be honest for a second.

We look for life in *superficial* things. We care way too much about what other people think about us, and it shows up in social media. I hate to tell you on Easter Sunday that I still care way too much about how many views my sermons get. What's wrong with me? We care too much about the goofy shows we watch.

Was anyone else way too excited about *Ted Lasso* season 3? Thank both of you. Yes, that's right. We care too much about our goofy hobbies. I played golf in high school, and I'm still trying to get back down to a single-digit handicap. If you are a member at a country club, I would like to talk to you after service. (I'm just kidding.)

Guys, sometimes we find life in superficial things. Sometimes we find life in *sinful* things. You're like, "This is going to get awkward." Yeah. In other words, there are things we're ashamed of that we secretly find life in. That's why we do them. That's why we lie about them. That's why we keep hiding them. That's why we keep going back to them.

Sometimes it started out as something that was just an enjoyment, but it became enslavement. You didn't know you were going to begin to work your whole weekend and your whole life around your alcohol consumption, but that can happen. All of a sudden, you hate to admit that's where you find life.

Or pornography. What I've noticed is that even rappers who rap about all of their sexual activities never rap and boast and brag about pornography. Why? Because they know it's not the heroic path. They know it's inherently shameful, and they're embarrassed that that's where they try to find life.

Some of us try to find life in superficial things. Some of us try to find life in sinful things. Some of us try to find life in *spiritual* things. That was Sarah's story. Did you hear her? She went from sinful (drug use, and all this kind of stuff she shared about) to going into meditation and mindfulness and yoga and crystals.

We are the generation that says, "I'm not religious; I'm spiritual," which means, "I would like to be spiritual in a selfish way." That's what that means. That's what it's code for. What the Bible teaches is that not all spirituality is the same. Something is unique about Christians and Christianity.

At the center of Christianity isn't a program. It's not principles. It's not a philosophy. It's not a place. At the center of Christianity is a person and what he did. If you'll type to or turn to Luke 24, we're going to see the main message of Christianity is *Jesus is alive, and he gives life*. That's the message of the resurrection. That's the message of the empty tomb. That's the message of Easter.

If you'll turn with me to verse 1 of chapter 24, we'll dive right in. It says, "***But on the first day of the week, at early dawn...***" Back then, they didn't name days; they numbered them. We do "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday..." They just did, "First day, second day, third day..." So, kids were always asking, "Is it fifth day yet?" "Is it Friday yet?" That's kind of what would happen.

Now, to understand the first day of the week, which is Sunday... It's the reason Christians worship on Sunday. It was the day on which Jesus rose. To understand the first day of the week, you have to understand what happened the previous week. Jesus had a ministry for three and a half years, a teaching, preaching, and healing ministry, and he had 12 best friends.

In fact, some people say the greatest miracle Jesus did was be a guy in his 30s with 12 close friends. You're like, "I don't know any of those." So, he has these 12 close friends. One denies him. One betrays him. The other 10 abandon him. Then he faces an unjust trial. He's condemned. (This all happens in one week.)

He's condemned by the religious and political leaders (they were kind of intertwined) of his day. He faces an unjust trial, and then he's killed in front of his mom. That's a bad week. He dies the most painful... The word *excruciating* literally means from the cross. To this day, we know, this is the most painful way you can die. Jesus died it.

So, he dies. They put him in the tomb, and then in verse 1, it says they go to look for him. "***But on the first day of the week, at early dawn...***" That's between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. "***...they...***" We'll talk about who *they* are. "***...they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.***"

The *they* are women, and it's important to say that, because in all four of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the final people at the cross and the first people at the tomb are women. You go, "Why is that important?" Well, think about this. If you're Luke or John or Mark or Matthew, the guys writing the accounts, you are trying to write this account because you want to explain the legitimacy of the empty tomb.

Here's the problem. Why would you put women as the first ones at the tomb if you were going to make up a story that was going to try to legitimize the empty tomb? Back then, women couldn't testify in court. Their words didn't matter, and their testimony couldn't be trusted. That's how the culture viewed them.

So, why did he put women at the tomb? Answer: because they really were there. I want you to know something. Maybe you're just checking out Christianity, and you've thought, "Is Christianity based on fable and fiction and fairy tale and myth and speculation?" No. It's based on historical events and historical facts.

The reason we have women at the tomb is because that's who was at the tomb that morning. Look at what it says they were taking: spices. That's because they didn't have essential oils back then. This is why they took spices. Some of you go, "Oh, this makes sense."

The Bible is many things. The Bible is historical (it's telling us the historical facts, the events) and the Bible is honest. Those are both important. It's telling us that these women were in a mindset of mourning. Their hearts were sad. They were grieving. The reason they brought spices was they were expecting to find the dead body of Jesus.

Why do you go back to the grave or the tomb of those you love? This is what humanity has always done. The reason the tomb or the grave is so meaningful to people is it's the last place of human contact with the body. To this day, people go back to graves to pray over them, to talk, to leave flowers, to remember birthdays...all that kind of stuff.

01 THE RESPONSE OF FIRST DISCIPLES AT THE TOMB (PERPLEXED)

That's exactly what's happening here. They're going back to the grave, and they're surprised at what they see. Look at verse 2. "***And they found the stone...***" This is a massive stone. "***...rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.***"

There are kind of two main symbols of Christianity. Part of my job on Easter is to make things as simple as possible. There are two main symbols in Christianity: the bloody cross and the empty tomb. One is a symbol of death; one is a symbol of life. What we see here is, in verse 3, they discover the empty tomb. They were not expecting this. They were expecting to find a dead Jesus in the tomb. They find nothing instead.

That leads to... Look at verse 4. This is super important. **"While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men..."** We are told in another account they're actually angels in human form. **"...stood by them in dazzling apparel."** So, they're perplexed. Here's what this means: the first disciples were emotionally affected by the empty tomb. I want to ask you something. It may be so simple. You may be like, "Why is he asking us this?"

Have you ever been emotionally affected by either the bloody cross or the empty tomb of Jesus? I think it's possible, maybe even very probable, that you were able to grow up in the Southeast, if you grew up here, or you were able to grow up in a church, and you were able to be part of even a Christian home, and you had Christian parents, and you know all of the right answers, but you don't feel anything.

I'm worried about my kids. I mean, they're good kids. I love them. But they're 11, 9, and 6, and they know every answer to every basic Bible... They're in kids' ministry three or four services. More Goldfish, more gospel. They're in there all the time. They love their teachers, and they love their friends, and they know all of the answers. I'm always looking for, like, "But do you feel?"

"Jesus died for my sins" is easy to recite. The "I'm getting emotional talking about God would send his Son to die..." Oh, "The tomb is empty" is easy to talk about. The idea that "Oh my gosh! Jesus rose from the dead, and there's hope for me, and there's life on the other side of death..." There's a different experience.

They were perplexed. *Perplexed* means confused. It's an emotional state of mind. It's confused. It's shocked, surprised, bewildered. They're asking two questions: "Where is Jesus?" and "What does this mean for me?" Those are the questions they're asking. "Where is Jesus?" Here's the theological and true biblical answer: God raised him from the dead.

We don't talk enough (sorry about that), probably even here at Two Cities, about the importance of the resurrection. We talk a lot about the cross. We sing songs about the cross. We don't talk about the resurrection. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was saying, "I accept what Jesus did for you, and I am satisfied with his death in your place."

Here's why that's important. Here's the way I think about it. This is a little cheesy illustration. I hope most of you have iPhones, not Androids. If you're an Android user, welcome. Church for anybody, not church for everybody. Here's what I love, and Android might have its own version of this. I love the iPhone because when you text other people with the iPhone, and you get the blue bubbles, not the green bubbles...

What happens when you send it? You get that beautiful thing underneath it that says "Delivered." If they forget to turn their "Read" receipt off it says "Read at 2:38." It's like, "I know it went through, and I know you saw it." By the way, that's what the resurrection is for God. The resurrection is God's "Read" receipt. "I've seen it. I've accepted it."

So, the question is...*Where is Jesus?* He's alive. The other question is really important...*What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for me?* Here's what it means: your past can be forgiven, your present can have purpose, and your future can be secure. We are the anxious and depressed generation. There are a lot of reasons for that we can't get into in great detail.

A lot of people are depressed about their past and anxious about their future. Because you realize two things. "I can't change the past." That's a hard thing to realize, because you've done things you wish you didn't do, and you had things done to you that you wish weren't done. People can get depressed about their past, and people can get very anxious because they can't control their future.

Jesus comes in and says, "I will forgive your past. I will cleanse your past. I can heal your past. I can redeem your past, and the future... I know what's going to happen. You're ultimately headed home to heaven with me, and I'm going to give you purpose in the present." That's life. That's life summed up.

If I could summarize this whole message in one sentence, either the tomb is empty or Christianity is. What he's saying is if the tomb is empty, then forgiveness of sins is possible and the breaking of addiction is possible and the reconciling of relationships is possible and all of that.

You may not know this. The Bible critiques itself. Here's what I mean by that. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul says, "Here's what's true if the tomb is not empty. If Jesus is dead, here's what's true." He says it's not good, guys. He says it means when you die, you disappear. He says it means that everybody you've known and loved who dies you'll never see again. He just walks through the implications.

"This means there is no reconciliation of relationships. This means you're never getting healed. This means we live in an unjust world and wrongs will not be made right." Then it gets personal for me, because then he goes, "And every pastor is then a

false teacher, and he's leading people astray." If the tomb isn't empty, we should stop the service right now, and I'll beat everybody else to lunch.

At the very end, he says if the tomb is not empty, let's eat, drink, and be merry, which doesn't mean be a fraternity guy. To eat too much and drink too much... If you ever meet a glutton or a drunkard, they're about as sad as anyone you'll ever meet. Here's what that means. When the Bible says, "Eat, drink, and be merry," it means live a normal life.

If Jesus isn't raised from the dead, your life should look like everybody else's life in America, but if Jesus is raised from the dead, your life should look very, very distinct and different, which is why verse 5 is so important.

02 AT EASTER...GOD ASKS US A QUESTION

Something unique happens at Easter that I want to happen this morning for each of us. At Easter, God asks us a question. Isn't that interesting? Look at verse 5. I'll show you this. ***"And as they were frightened..."*** That's the second emotional state. ***"...and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them..."*** Here's the question: ***"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"***

I find it amazing that at the empty tomb on Easter morning (and let's just do it here again today) God asks us a question, which is very interesting. We don't really like when God asks us questions. We like to ask God questions. Have you noticed that? They say somewhere around the nineteenth or twentieth century, we did what the British call... We put God on the dock. We said, "God, hold on. We'll be the lawyers. We'll be the attorneys. You get on the witness stand. We have a lot of questions for you."

Now, why do people ask God questions? Well, there are two main reasons people ask God questions. One is really good. People ask God questions because they're in pain and life is really, really hard. It's like, "Why did my brother die of cancer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why is there injustice?"

We ask these questions in a very personal, painful way. That's okay. The Psalms do that. The Psalms ask a lot of questions. But sometimes people ask questions so they can be in control. Sometimes people ask questions so you won't ask *them* any questions. This is, like, business 101 and communication 101 and sales 101. If I get to ask the questions, then I get to steer and start the conversation.

Have you ever been out with someone before...? I have found the more insecure a person is, the more questions they ask when you go to lunch with them. An insecure

person does not want you to ask... That's why they seem so friendly. They want to ask a ton of questions, and they are so afraid that if they stop asking a question for a moment, you might ask *them* a question, and it might be revealed what they don't know.

So, the first reason is we're in pain. The second reason is we want to keep God at a distance. What I love here is that God asks us a question. Now, God has been doing this for a long time. Remember when Adam and Eve, if you know the story... Adam hides behind the bushes after he sins, and God asks, "Adam, where are you?" It's not that God didn't know where Adam was; it's that Adam didn't know where Adam was.

I don't know if you've ever been asked the right question by the right person at the right time. I've had this happen to me a couple of times. Somebody asks you the right question. You're struggling in your marriage, or something, and they just ask the right question. Or it feels like, at the time, maybe the worst question, the wrong question you don't want asked. They just ask you the right question about your job or your finances. They ask you the right question about your kid.

You'll know this happens because you'll usually involuntarily cry. It's like, I sunk your battleship. B12. I hit just the right... We all know what that feels like. I've had that done to me. I've done that. I've not even tried to do that. You notice something. "Hey, I saw you were fighting in the parking lot. Is everything okay in your marriage?" B12. Sunk the battleship. "No. In fact, we fight all the time."

It's interesting. God asks us questions because there are certain things we don't know. This is an interesting story. This is a true story. There's a lady who gave this TED Talk. The TED Talk was on being wrong. She was really smart. You know how these TED Talks are. They're all on YouTube, very famous.

At this TED Talk, she gets up, and the first thing she does to the audience... It was about a room this size. She said, "All right, guys. I want you to tell me what it feels like to be wrong." One person raised their hand. They said, "It's embarrassing." Another person raised their hand. "You feel stupid." Another person raised their hand. "You feel really vulnerable." Another person raised their hand and said, "It's kind of scary."

She said, "Gotcha. That's not what it's like to be wrong. You're explaining what it's like to *recognize* you're wrong." Please hear this. This is super important. She said, "Because being wrong and being right feel the exact same." That's worth thinking about for, like, five years. Being wrong and being right feel the same until someone asks you the right question or points out something you have been unwilling or unable to look at.

03 QUESTION: WHY ARE WE LOOKING FOR LIFE IN PLACES THAT LEAD TO DEATH?

So, what God graciously does on Easter is he asks us a question. Here's the question: "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" Translation: "Why are you looking for life in places that lead to death? Why are you looking for the right things but in the wrong places or people?" That's a great question to ask at Easter.

It's interesting. There was an article in *Forbes* years ago. I think it was 2016. It was called something like *Eight Things People Want but Can't Find*. They had interviewed all of these people who were wealthy and successful. You know, we'd look at them and go, "Okay, across these domains they've excelled," whether it was money or status or family or power or whatever.

It was about the eight things they couldn't find. I won't go through them all. Peace was one. That's interesting. They couldn't find it. Joy was one. Balance was one. Confidence was one. They were looking for the right things, but they couldn't find them. They were looking for them in the wrong places. Let me tell you five areas today where I think Americans look for life that only lead to death.

You know where I'm going to start on the first one. It's so obvious. *Money*. There's nothing wrong in and of itself with money, but why is the love of money such an issue in people's hearts? Why is money the number-one competitor for God in the human heart? It's because money does the same thing God does. It makes a lot of promises. That's what makes money powerful. That's what makes money influential.

When I first started this church, an older pastor said, "You're going to have to talk to people about money a lot." I thought, "I don't want to talk..." He said, "Yeah, I know you don't want to talk about money, and people don't want you to talk about money." He said, "But you're going to talk about sexuality, right?" I said, "Well, you have to." He said, "Well, actually, money is way more powerful in people's lives than sexuality, and they don't even realize it. So you have to talk about it."

It's hard because people want money for different things. Why do people want money? Well, the answer is actually they want life. We have to be more sophisticated about this and more nuanced than maybe we want to initially think about it. Basically, people want money for different reasons.

I have a friend, a very successful friend. He makes a lot of money. He drives a dumpy car. I was having cognitive dissonance. I was like, "I wouldn't let my daughter drive that car." Borderline unsafe. I realized as I got to know him, "Oh, he grew up poor."

He's a saver." He is a saver at all costs. His hell is not having enough money in the bank, so he would rather store up a ton of money. Some people are savers.

Some people want money because they want approval. This is a lot of young men. A lot of men feel like, "I have to make X amount or else my dad is not going to respect me. I have to make a certain amount of money for my dad to think his son is successful." Some people want money because of comfort.

What you'll find, though, if you have money, is you never have enough. Listen. They've done the studies. Everybody thinks (try this out on yourself) rich people make twice what they make. Just take your salary and multiply it by two, and that's what you think rich people make...until you make that much. Then you need twice *that* to feel like you're rich again...until you get there. Money is a great servant; it's a terrible master.

Here's how death happens with money. You think you own things; they start owning you. You're supposed to love people and use money; you start using people and loving money. It's subtle, and it happens. You wake up one day, and the only thing you can see is the financial price of everything. I mean, I've seen guys like this. That's all you can see. You can't see that your wife is dying and needs a break. No, you see the financial cost of everything.

The second place we tend to look for life is in *relationships*, and no wonder. Obviously. God is relational. We're relational. Our lives are only as good or bad as the relationships we're in, and parents are only as happy as their least happy child, as a general rule. You have to ask, again, a deeper question, and we're a shallow generation. Our souls have shrunk to the size of a TV sitcom. That's what has happened to us. So we don't ask deep questions anymore.

Why do we want relationships? Because we want intimacy, and we want acceptance, obviously. When you're young, you want friends, and when you're in high school and college, you start looking for the one, or as we often think of it, "The one, the one, the one, the one." It's the *Jerry Maguire* lie. "Who's that person who will passionately meet every one of my needs and will complete me?" Any person who's married is like, "Should we tell them?"

Then we think kids are going to satisfy us. Here's how relationships work. Here are signs that you care too much and are trying to find too much life in a relationship. *Peer pressure* is sign one. We all know this with our kids. It's like, "Oh man. They're trying to find way too much life in this relationship." I've known parents who have had to pull their kids out of a certain school.

When you get older, you move from peer pressure to *people-pleasing*. You meet people like this all the time. They value this relationship so much... They almost worship this person. That would be the biblical language for it. The worst version of this, where it goes to, is codependency.

The third place we look is in our *physical health and well-being*. We are the yoga pants-wearing, CycleBar-moving, smoothie-drinking generation. God help us. What are we doing? We are so obsessed with the external we've forgotten about the internal. I hate to break it to me and to us. We're all going to get old and ugly. Some of you are writing that down. "I will get old and ugly."

We're going to get wrinkly. It's okay. Here's what has happened. We have completely lost any value for the soul, so we became obsessed with the body. Obsessed. We're the first generation where mom wants to look like daughter instead of daughter wants to look like mom. We're the first generation where dad wants to look like son instead of son wants to look like dad.

You can nip it, you can tuck it, and you can tan it, and I don't even know what else you do with it. Not helpful. Here's what the Bible teaches. Across your life, if you're a Christian, your soul and your body move in different directions. Paul says though outwardly we're perishing, inwardly we're being renewed day by day.

Today, we value pretty and youth. The Bible values old age, wisdom, and beauty. This is why sometimes you'll see somebody and... I don't mean this in a weird way; I mean this in a biblical way. You'll see somebody who's 85 years old, and you'll be like, "She is beautiful," but it's the beauty of the soul.

Fourth, *political and social activism*. By the way, all of these can be good in and of themselves. Money has its place. Relationships have their place. Physical health has its place. Political and social activism has its place. But here's what I'm seeing. There's this obsession with finding... We're meaning makers. We want everything to be so fulfilling. This generation wants everything to be so fulfilling. They want to be part of some cause.

Could you imagine talking to your grandfather or your great-grandfather and going, "Hey, how fulfilling was your job?" He'd be like, "I worked at the railroad. I never even thought..." Your grandfather and great-grandfather never asked that question, but we are in this generation where we want to make such an impact.

Here's what I see. Most people who are obsessed with social activism are trying to focus on something out *there* so they don't have to deal with the death in *here*. "Oh, yeah, you're going to fix the economy. Mm-hmm. You're going to fix the economy. Your personal financial budget is completely out of whack. You're unable to give,

save, and spend appropriately in your little household, but you're going to fix the economy." It makes people feel good.

You're going to do world peace. Your marriage is a mess. If you took three years and tried to staple back together all of the relationships in your life, and you learned how to forgive, and you learned how to reconcile with your mother-in-law and your estranged brother, that would do the world a lot better than you trying to fix world peace. The reason we want to focus on everything out *there* is so we don't see all the death that's going on in *here*. I'd like to look at everybody else's problems so I don't have to deal with my own problems.

That leads to the fifth thing, which is *pleasure*, just physical pleasure. I mean, order anything you want from Amazon and you get it in two days. It's just ubiquitous. Whatever you want to look at, whatever you want to watch... I constantly have people tell me all of these great TV shows to watch. I'm like, "I don't have enough time!" Does anyone else feel like that? "You've got to see this show." I look at it. I'm like, "There are seven seasons!"

With physical pleasure, we've forgotten completely about spiritual pleasure. It's almost like it would be hard to explain to the average American what spiritual pleasure even is. Our physical pleasures are telling us we long for something deeper. This is why I love what C.S. Lewis says. He basically says, "If I find in myself a desire which nothing in this world can meet, maybe I was made for another world."

You think about this. You know we have problems with pleasure because... This is why some of us get in trouble. Pleasure always wants more. Your appetites always say only two words: *now* and *more*. Those are the favorite words of your appetite. So, you find yourself... "I need more of this" or "I need a new, novel version of this."

You find yourself searching the Internet for hours, and you find yourself looking at things you never wanted to look at. This is why G.K. Chesterton, the famous Christian, essentially said, "The man who knocks at the door of the brothel does not know it, but he's looking for God."

Now, how do these things lead to death? Let's just talk about that for a few minutes. We're pursuing these things, relationships, pleasure, activism, but if we're honest, they lead to death. Here's the number-one way they lead to death. You've seen this or you've seen this in your friends' lives or your dad's life or your mom's life...*addiction*.

It's very hard to even admit to yourself when you're addicted to something. You're like, "I don't want to say I'm addicted. I like it. I have a compulsion toward it." No, you're addicted. The biblical word for addiction is *slavery*. Nobody gets addicted out of duty. "I'm going to get addicted." It happens to us. This is why the Bible says sin

makes you guilty, dirty, and enslaved. *Guilty* so you need to be forgiven, *dirty* so you need to be cleansed, and *enslaved* so you need to be set free.

Here's how you know you're in the downward death spiral of addiction: you create a positive feedback loop. A classic example of this is somebody who drinks too much. They have a hangover. What's the quickest way to immediately cure a hangover? To begin to drink again. So, what you're sick with is now the cure to your sickness. Do you see this?

This is the person who feels bad about how much they eat, so they eat to cover up feeling bad for how much they eat. This is the person who looks at pornography and feels so guilty, and the only thing that makes them stop thinking about their guilt is to look at porn until it's over, and then they feel guilty again. This is the positive feedback loop, and it's the spiral down to death.

We are an addicted generation, and we are an *anxious* generation. We have all of these mental problems today. Again, I'm being careful here. Obviously, we believe in going to the doctor. We believe in taking pills. We believe in going to therapy. Hear me put all of these airbags around it. We believe people can have broken brains, just like you have broken arms. We can have a broken brain. We live in a sinful, fallen world.

But here's what I think is helpful to know. Some anxiety and depression is medical, and some anxiety and depression is moral. I don't know where else you're going to hear this. I mean, hopefully in another church, but you will not hear this in the culture. Sometimes anxiety and depression is medical. See your doctor, take a pill...all that. Sometimes it's moral.

Sometimes, when you counsel people, you have to go, "Okay. Is there anything you'd like to confess? You're depressed. Is there anything you want to confess?" Sometimes people are depressed, and they feel guilty (this is going to be surprising to you) because they're guilty. We want to just put that category... "No, no, no." There's real guilt. Sometimes people are anxious because of things they've done.

Guys, we have a conscience. By the way, all I do when I preach is I preach to your conscience. That's all I'm doing the whole time. I'm talking to your conscience. Everybody has a conscience. It's either a feeling or a voice, and it tells you when you're doing things wrong. There are massive effects... No one teaches you this in high school.

There are massive effects of going against your conscience for a decade. We don't even know what all of the effects are of keeping on telling yourself, "This is okay. This is okay. I'm okay. I'm okay. Nothing is wrong. Nothing is wrong." We wake up a

decade later, and we have all of these problems that feel a lot like we're dying on the inside.

The third way it leads to death is *relationships*. The clearest synonym or euphemism for death is *separation*. When you die, your body is separated from your soul. When someone dies, they're separated from you. That's what you feel. If anyone ever dies, you'll immediately have this feeling, "They're gone." The best word for death is *separation*.

What you'll often see is people in pursuit of life in some area... It could be a good thing that becomes a god thing. It could be a sinful habit. They will begin to experience separation and distance from the people they love the most, and they'll be creating it, often, in many situations.

There's grace for all this, but if you've ever talked to somebody who has been through a terrible divorce... If you've never been through one, I've heard divorce summarized as the exact same thing as having four years of non-terminal cancer. It's the same emotional and physical experience on your body as having non-terminal cancer for four years, because it is the ripping apart of your life. It is the fracturing of your life.

Or if you ever talk to somebody who's in their 50s or 60s, and they don't have a good relationship with their kids, and it's their fault, and they look back on decisions they made for multiple decades that created distance because they had to pursue life in some goofy area, it's pretty close to feeling like death.

You guys are like, "This is a horrible Easter message. I'm never coming back here again." There is hope. Jesus loves to save those who are addicted and free them. Jesus loves to bring peace to the anxious. Jesus loves to restore relationships. Jesus loves to show people that they've been looking for life in all of the wrong places, and he'd like to give them life.

04 TO UNDERSTAND WHERE LIFE IS FOUND WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE DEATH OF CHRIST

Let me show you how this works. Turn with me to verse 6. This is after they asked the question. "**He [Jesus] is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee...**" Here's the key verse. Verse 7: "**...that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.**" Verse 8: "**And they remembered his words...**" I love this.

By the way, Christianity is good news, bad news, good news. This is how we always preach here. Good news: God loves you and made you. Bad news: you're sinful, and

you've messed it up, and you can't get yourself out of it. Good news: Jesus loves to save you and work in your life. That's how it works. Good news, bad news, good news. We just spent a lot of time in bad news (sorry), so here's some good news.

The place we find life is in the death of Christ. That's the upside-down, inside-out nature of Christianity. I can't explain it to you. I mean, I'm going to try to for a minute. You have to have that experience yourself. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is what you see when you look at the cross.

The non-Christian just sees a Galilean peasant dying on the cross a painful death, maybe as an example. That's the human perspective. But can you look at the cross and see life? In other words, I see hope. I see forgiveness. I see reconciliation with God. I can tell you, I've seen both. I've been on both sides of it.

Some of you know this. I'm a recovering Catholic. If you're here and you're Catholic, you can call me "Father Kyle" afterward. It's okay. I grew up as a nominal Catholic. We went on and off, less as I got older. If you ever go to a Catholic church, you're talking bells, smells, pews, steeples. You're talking everything...priestly garments.

You always have a crucifix in the back. The difference between a crucifix and a cross is Jesus is still on the crucifix. So, you see him up there. I mean, you can imagine, if you've ever been in a church like that. I was 13 or 14 years old. I remember looking at it going, "I don't know what this is all about, but it looks serious. That's all it looks like. I don't know."

I remember hearing things like, "Jesus died for sinners" and "Jesus is Lord" and "Christ was crucified" and "Pontius Pilate." I'm like, "I don't know what all this means." It's almost like I had all of the pieces of the puzzle, but no one helped me put the puzzle together...until Joe came around. Joe was in my high school. I was in a public high school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Joe had had his life changed by Jesus, and Joe came up to me and started talking to me about Jesus the way I would have talked to him about my parents. He explained to me the cross in such a way that I no longer just saw death there, but I saw life there. He would say, "Do you know it's your sins that put Jesus on the cross?" It was like, "Oh, wow." I had no idea.

"Do you know that Jesus didn't just die for everybody; Jesus died for you?" When you understand, the cross becomes unbelievably personal. The only way I could describe it is it goes from being black and white to color to HD to 4K. I remember having this emotional experience. "Man! Christ died for me."

When you look at the cross and the empty tomb, you should understand them as an invitation, an invitation to life. Here's the thing. We look at the story today. What happened in the story? The first thing that happens is the women go into the empty tomb right after they experience the cross, and it says they were perplexed.

I think, today, when we look at the cross, we should be perplexed, and here's what we should say: "I cannot believe God would die for me." When you look at the cross, you should see two things. You should see "I'm a lot worse than I thought. Everything I've been pursuing, all of the places I've been looking for life... This is where it leads. It leads to death. My sin is so terrible God had to send his only Son to die in my place."

When you look at the cross, remember this: you're worse than you think. You're in more dire straits than you know. But also, when you look at the cross, you have to say *this*: "But God loves me more than I could imagine." When we're looking for all of these different things... What are we looking for in a relationship? We're looking to be known, and we're looking to be loved.

Some of us have the experience of "I've been known, and I haven't been loved because I've been known." That's painful and hurtful. Others of us have been loved, but we've not been known, and we kind of know that's shallow. "They don't really know me." In Christ, you can be known and loved.

So, this Easter, have you been perplexed and moved emotionally by the cross? Secondly, can God ask you a question? That's how you have a relationship with someone. You cannot have a relationship with someone who can't ask you a question.

So, if you want to know, "Do I have a relationship with God...?" Not just "Do I go to church?" Not "Am I a good person?" "Do I have a relationship with God?" Can he ask you questions? Maybe the number-one question he wants to ask you today is "Why have you been looking for life in things you know only lead to death?"

He wants to say, "Money can't satisfy you. I can make greater promises. There's an intimacy and acceptance in a relationship with me that you will never find in any other relationship." This is why the Bible says marriage is just a pointer and parable and picture of our relationship with Christ. Even the most intimate relationship on earth points us to Christ.

Maybe he's saying, "Today, would you focus less on your body and more on your soul? Would you focus less on physical pleasure and more on spiritual pleasure?" If you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I just want to give us a chance... I feel like I'd be remiss to not give us a chance in this moment to respond.

Jesus was the great inviter. He said, "Come and see." He said, "Follow me." Christianity is an invitation. The Christian faith is full of invitations. You may ask, "How do I become a Christian?" That's a great question. I want to make it super simple, super straightforward. How does a person become a Christian? Well, there are three things you have to do.

The first thing you have to do is *admit*. Admit two things: you are a sinner, and you need a Savior. You're not a mistaker; you are a sinner. You need to think, "Yes, I know sinful things that I do, and I need Jesus to be my Savior. A boyfriend can't be my savior. A wife can't be my savior. A kid can't be my savior. A salary can't be my savior. Being in perfect shape can't be my savior. I am a sinner, and I need a Savior." That's what you need to admit.

Secondly, you need to *believe*. *Believe* means you welcome and embrace and accept what Jesus has done for you. *Belief* means that somehow you look to what Jesus did 2,000 years ago and say, "It counted for me." So, those are the first two things. You have to admit it. "I'm a sinner who needs a Savior. I have to believe and welcome and embrace."

The third thing the Bible says you have to do is *confess*. The Bible says that Christianity is very, very personal, but never private, and that we should make a public profession of our faith. So, I want to give you an opportunity right now. If you have never trusted Jesus personally...

If you've never seen life at the cross, and today you say, "I want Jesus to save me. I want him to give me eternal life. I want to find life in him and not in things that lead to death..." If you want to do that for the first time, would you raise your hand high right now? Just put your hand up wherever you are across this room. I see that hand. Yes, thank you.

We pray for these people, Lord. We thank you that people just put their faith in you, Lord. I pray for the rest of this room. I know there are people all over the map. There are people who are afraid to raise their hand. There are people who still have questions.

Then there are many of us, Lord... I confess myself. The longer I'm a believer, the easier I find, in every stage, for me to go back and try to find life somewhere else. Would you remind us today that Jesus is alive and he came to give us life and life abundantly? We ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.