



Pastor Kyle Mercer
He Is Not Here

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Series: Easter at Two Cities
Matthew 28:1-10, 16-17

**BIG IDEA – WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THE RESURRECTION, IT
SHAKES EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE**

Good morning and happy Easter, Two Cities Church, and welcome to all of our guests and visitors. I know some of you had to park in Davie County. We're glad you guys are here. Welcome, guys. If you have to leave early, I want you to know the main message of Easter, which is the main message of the whole Bible. It's that your past can be forgiven, your present can have purpose, and your future can be secure.

Here's what we're celebrating today. We are celebrating the most important event in human history done by the most important person in human history, Jesus Christ, and that's what we're going to celebrate today. But before we celebrate that, I'm going to celebrate a couple of other things.

I want to remind you of the video you just saw, because in a room like this... We have a lot of guests. We have people sitting all over. I know that in a room like this, we always have three types of people. We have the skeptic, we have the seeker, and we have the saint or the Christian. So, if you are here and you are a skeptic, raise your hand. I'm just kidding. Don't do that. I know; this is your Easter gift to whomever brought you. We're really glad you're here.

The best preaching advice I've ever received is someone told me (and this will hit you parents), "Preach as if your 20-year-old son who left the faith sneaks into your church, sits on the back row, and is giving Christianity one last try." So, I want to say, if you are a skeptic, we're glad you're here. I also want to say, if you are a skeptic, guess what? I used to be a skeptic too, so you might one day get to be a pastor. Wouldn't that be amazing? Welcome.

Seekers. The *skeptic* leans out; the *seeker* leans in and says, "I don't know if Christianity is true, but I want it to be true, and I wish it were true." If you are a seeker, we're glad you're here. To the rest of us, those who are Christians, I hope this deepens your faith today.

So, I have to celebrate just three quick things. The first one I need to celebrate... I'm looking right at you, Lexington Campus, launched today. Woo! We love you guys. We are rooting for you. This is incredible. I was down there Monday night. I was down there for their last community gathering they had down there. We are officially one church in two locations. Happy Easter, Lexington.

Also, if you're new... You're like, "Okay. You launched a campus." Yes. We also today planted a church in Mocksville. We sent 93 people. Here's a picture of us sending 93 people. We were like, "Get out of here." We sent them all the way over to Mocksville, and today, with Johnson Waterer, they are launching King's Cross Church.

Two weeks ago, we had Compassion Sunday. Compassion is a ministry that helps release children from poverty in Jesus' name. The first time we did Compassion we sponsored 439 kids. I got texts at the end of this week, and they said, "Hey, your church sponsored another 700 kids exactly."

If you're new, and you're like, "I want to sponsor a kid. I want to learn about this," you can text to the number on the screen. So, let's pray, and then we have a lot of work to do. I need to get you out of here because we have another service as well, so let's pray.

Lord, I just thank you. We are so excited about Easter, to celebrate the most important person, Jesus Christ, and the most important event, the cross of Christ and the resurrection. Lord, I just pray, whether they are skeptics, whether they are seekers, or whether they are saints, that you would meet every person. We'll see this in the text today. You meet every person where they are, but you don't keep them where they are. We thank you for that. In Jesus' name, amen.

All right. I don't know where you were last Sunday, but I know what you should have been doing last Sunday afternoon. Who here watched the Masters? Raise your hand if you watched the Masters. That's right. Don't tell me golf is boring. I love to play golf. I love to watch golf.

I have my wife, and then I have a 13-year-old, an 11-year-old, and a 9-year-old. They weren't really excited about watching the Masters. They were like, "It's like watching grass grow or paint dry." I said, "Get over here. We're going to watch the back nine." (Don't worry. This is going to connect to Easter eventually. The old pastor joke is

"I've got a great illustration; I'm just looking for a text." No. This is going to connect to Easter.)

So, Rory McIlroy. If you don't know golf, I'm going to catch you up. Rory wins the three biggest tournaments you could win by the time he's 24 years old, but he can't win the Masters. He came in second one time, but who wants to come in second? No one grows up and says, "I want to be vice president." Right?

So, here's Rory, and this is the neat thing about Rory. So, he can't win the Masters, and he comes in second. On Sunday, he's finally ahead, but you know what everybody is saying on social media. "He's going to mess it up. He always loses. He never wins. It's going to be a disaster." Well, he's up, and I'm really excited for him. I'm thinking he's going to win. Then on 13, he hits it in the water.

I'm like an armchair golfer. I'm like, "Come on, Rory!" Then on 18, he hits it in the bunker. Here's the whole thing. He bogeys the last hole to go to a sudden death playoff with another guy. I just look to my family, and I'm like, "Rory is going to lose." But he hits these two amazing shots on 18 to put the ball within a few feet. He makes the putt to win the Masters to complete his fourth major, and they take *this* picture.

Now, Rory is Irish, and Irish people are not the best at sharing their emotions. He had bottled up everything all day, and then he collapses on the green, gets up on his knees, and celebrates. You can see behind him all of the people are celebrating. Okay. What does that have to do with Easter? The resurrection is God celebrating. If I could state the obvious, the resurrection is God winning. It's God winning and celebrating.

Turn to Matthew 28. We're going to spend time in about 10 verses. Let's just read it, and then we'll talk. ***"Now after the Sabbath..."*** Sabbath was on Saturday, and they didn't visit the tomb on Saturday because good Jewish people do nothing on Saturday on their Sabbath.

In fact, when I was in Israel a few years ago, you'd go down, and every day at the hotel they'd have this amazing buffet breakfast, but then we woke up on the Sabbath and went downstairs, and nobody was there. All of the food had been made the night before and was put out on heaters. Nobody works on the Sabbath.

"Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn..." Literally, fourth watch. This is between 4:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. Some of you go, "I've never been awake during that period of time." Well, it's a real time. ***"...of the first day of the week..."*** Now, this is interesting. They didn't have names for days of the week; they only had numbers, which made it really easy for little kids to remember the days of the week. ***"...Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb."***

Okay. Here's why I want to talk about this. At this moment, when we pick up the first Easter morning, nobody is celebrating, and it looks like Jesus lost. Like, if you don't have the Bible and don't know all of the things I'm going to talk about today, and you just look at Jesus Christ hanging naked on the cross, it looks like Jesus lost.

Have you ever had a bad week? Sometimes we can look over a week or a day of our life and go, "That was it. That was the worst week of my life. That was the worst day of my life." Listen to what happened for Jesus. In one week, he is betrayed by Judas. He is denied by his best friend. He is left by all of the disciples. He faces an unjust trial.

All crucifixions, if you don't know this, were done naked, so there's no loincloth. He's humiliated. He's spit on. He's flogged. Oh, and then he dies in his prime at 33 years old in front of his mom. The cross of Christ is the worst thing in the world happening to the best person in the world. This is the week before, and it looks like Jesus lost. So, they head to the grave.

Now, I want to talk to the seeker and the skeptic for a second. It says there were real people, Mary Magdalene and this other Mary. It says it was a real day, the Sabbath, the first day of the week. It tells you they went to the tomb. It tells you a place. It tells you a time of day. Here's what I want to encourage all of us with: the Christian faith is not based on blind faith, myth, or fable; it's based on historical events and what they mean.

Now, why did the women go to the tomb? The women went to the tomb for the same reason... They didn't think Jesus was risen from the dead. If you've ever had anyone close to you die, you want to go visit their graveside. The reason people want to visit their graveside is it was the last place they had contact with the body.

So, nobody is expecting a resurrection, which is interesting, because Jesus repeatedly said, "I'm going to die, and after three days I'm going to rise." But for some reason, even though the disciples heard him say that... I don't know if they weren't taking notes during the sermon. I don't know if they forgot what he said. I don't know if they didn't believe him, but nobody is expecting a resurrection.

This is why verse 2 is so surprising. Let's go to verse 2. ***"And behold, there was a great earthquake..."*** By the way, there's an earthquake in chapter 28 at the empty tomb. There's an earthquake in chapter 27 at the cross. ***"...for an angel..."*** Don't worry. We'll talk about him in a second. We're all interested in angels.

"...for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men."

Notice this. They get to the tomb. They realize it's empty. There's an angel there, and the first two things we're told are that the ground shakes and the guards shake. Here's the first big thing I want you to learn at Easter that I want us to remember together: *When you understand the resurrection and the empty tomb, it shakes everything in your life.* You're shaken to your core.

You see yourself differently. You see Jesus differently. You see death differently. I had this new realization, at least for myself, this week. Every time I talk about the resurrection, I have to talk about death. You don't need a resurrection if there's no death. But nobody wants me to talk about death. No one wants to talk about death. We always use euphemisms. Right? Like "kicked the bucket" or "passed away."

A friend of mine in the funeral home business told me that funerals are becoming more casual, more celebratory, and involving a lot more alcohol, in large part because people don't know what to do with death. You don't really want me to talk about death, but I think it would be foolish for me not to talk about something that's definitely going to happen to all of us. None of us are going to be here in 100 years.

Some of you are like, "This is the worst Easter message I've ever heard." "Happy Easter. You're going to die." You're like, "I already knew that." So, I want to talk about this, because I want you to understand the resurrection is important because of what happens when you die.

So, here's what I want to do. I want to talk for a few minutes about... There are only three options. And you can test me on this. I have one more service after this, so come talk to me, and we'll talk about it. There are only three options when you die. I'm going to give you the non-Christian options and the Christian option.

Here's the first option: you die and disappear. We're not super encouraged by that. This is the logical conclusion of Darwinian, atheistic evolution. This is secularism. I remember I was in college, and this young college girl said, "This life is all we have, and I know when I die it's all over, but I'm going to go live on in the hearts of those who love me." I was like, "No thanks." I want to live. I mean, yes, I want to live on in the hearts of those who love me.

The whole idea is consciousness is all you have. This is all a big mistake, and it's all random. You know, "Get all you can. Can all you get. Sit on the can." That's your life. YOLO, you only live once. That's a non-Christian understanding, and I don't think people have really thought through that. That means you're never seeing your dad again. That's what that means.

The second option is reincarnation, which says you get recycled and come back here. Now, one of the things I like to do is occasionally try out my sermon ideas on my

children, because I'm like, "If my 8-year-old gets this, I think we're good." So, I was talking to my kids about reincarnation. You could see how confused they were, especially my youngest. He was like, "So, could we potentially come back as a bug?" I was like, "We don't believe in any of this. No."

He said, "Dad, does anyone...?" An 8-year-old says this to me. "Dad, does anyone really believe in reincarnation?" I said, "All of Hinduism, all of Buddhism, and the whole idea of karma are based..." If you don't know this, in other places in the world, entire caste systems exist. It's like, "If you're in the lowest caste, deal with it. It's because of how you lived in another life. If you're high in the caste system, deal with it, because it's the result of living a great life in another life."

So, the first option is you die and disappear. The second option is you die, are recycled, and come back here. The third option is you die and spend eternity somewhere else. I think the average American believes the third; they just don't know where that is.

The Bible says when we die, it's appointed for man to die once and then face judgment. We will stand before God. What's going to make the difference between whether we spend eternity in heaven or in hell is not going to be what we do but understanding, embracing, and believing in what Jesus Christ has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection.

So, I want you to understand. That's why we talk about resurrection. It's because of what's going to happen to each of us when we die immediately after. But I want to go back to the angel. I want to look at something else the angel says. So, the angel comes. Let's go to verse 5. The first being to speak at the empty tomb is the angel.

"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.'" Okay. Let's talk about angels for a minute. This is not a sermon on angels, but I want to tell you something interesting.

Did you notice that the first person to preach the gospel after the resurrection at the empty tomb is an angel? No human yet believes it, so an angel has to tell them. Do you know the last being to preach the gospel? Revelation 14. It says the final gospel will be preached by an angel. So, the first gospel is preached by an angel. The last gospel is preached by an angel. Every gospel in between is preached by humans.

Now, I thought about doing this, but it would have been weird. I thought about if I had sat in the lobby with a microphone before the service and asked some questions about the Easter story, I wonder if you would have gotten this question right. Here's the question.

We all know the angel rolled away the stone on that Easter morning. If I were to ask you beforehand out in the lobby... If I were to just pull people and go, "Hey, listen. Why did the angel roll away the stone?" I wonder how many people would say, "He rolled away the stone because Jesus was resurrected and Jesus needed to get out of the tomb."

This is the great thing about reading the Easter story again and again and again. You see new things. He rolls away the stone to say, "He's not here. He has already risen." Okay. This is what I want us to all understand. This is a big deal. The angel rolls away the stone not to let Jesus out but to invite you in.

I want to encourage you by this. The Bible says to love God with your mind, your heart, your soul, and your strength. There is a reasonableness to the Christian faith. Here's what the angel is saying: "Come and see." Well, come and see...what? There's nothing in there. Exactly. By the way, let me just speak to the Christians in here. I know we're not all Christians in here.

What the angel does is what every Christian should do with the people in their life who are far from God and close to them. They explain the gospel, they remove the barriers they can, and then they say, "Would you please examine the evidence for yourself?" That's interesting. All the angel is saying is, "I want to invite you to investigate the truth claims of Christ. I want to encourage you to examine the evidence. I want to recommend that you do your own research." I love that.

I have a friend. She's a former Mormon, now a Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christian, and she's always telling me these updates about the Mormon church and Mormonism. One of the things she recently said to me was, "Kyle, do you know why so many Mormons are deconstructing their faith?" I didn't know why. She said, "The Internet and social media."

She said up until really recently, Mormons didn't really know what they believed. They didn't know the history of Brigham Young, they didn't know the history of Joseph Smith, and they didn't know the history of the founding of the Mormon church. For the first time in human history, with the Internet and social media, people can actually investigate the claims of Mormonism, and they're found wanting. What's interesting is we're seeing the exact opposite with Christianity. We're seeing more and more people come to Christ now that they can investigate the claims for themselves.

Joe Rogan is the #1 podcaster in the world, and he recently had on Wes Huff. You can go watch Joe Rogan interview Wes Huff. Wes Huff is a Bible-believing Christian who defends the Christian faith for a living. Joe Rogan has him on to ask him a bunch of questions about the Christian faith.

One of the most amazing things for me about this is, in kind of a throwaway comment, Joe Rogan looks at Wes Huff while he's interviewing him and says, "Hey, before you came here, I watched 20 hours of your videos." I thought, "Does Joe Rogan not have one person in his life to tell him about Jesus that he has to go online and watch 20 hours of video and invite in a guy he doesn't even know to talk to him for three hours?"

I believe the average American has not rejected Christianity, and they've certainly not received Christ. I think they've never researched it for themselves. So, maybe the application this Easter for some of you, whether you're seeker or skeptic, is to come and see. I love that Christianity begins with an invitation for you to personally look at the claims of Christ for yourself.

So, that's what the angel says. I want you to see the next thing. Here's the key thing, actually, in verse 5. ***"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid...'"*** Now, this is actually going to be repeated by Jesus. We'll see this in verse 10. He's going to preach the gospel, but the exact first phrase he says is "Do not be afraid."

Here's what's interesting. I think we live in a time where the average person has never struggled so much with anxiety. We have all different types of fears, all different types of phobias. Claustrophobia is your fear of tight spaces. There's fear of heights. There's fear of flying. There's fear of spiders.

Do you know that one of the biggest fears is the fear of elevators? If you think about it, it could be scary to somebody. They watch somebody walk in, the doors completely close, they open back up, and the person has disappeared. You're like, "What happened?"

I want to talk about fear, but I want to take you to a very deep place in talking about your fears, because if you study fear, you realize there are actually only five fundamental fears. I'm going to give them to you. There's the fear of humiliation, the fear of isolation or rejection, the fear of mutilation, the fear of limitation, and the fear of extinction. I'll unpack these.

All of you are going to struggle with these fears to some level. Some of you go, "I'm not afraid of anything." Then why do you always have to be in control? Control is the first cousin of fear. Let me talk to you for a second. First of all, let's talk about public speaking. Obviously, I do this for a living. A top-three fear for people is the fear of public speaking.

Normally, someone will be like, "Well, I'm an introvert" or "I'm not good with words." Here's what the people who study fear would say. Actually, what you fear is

humiliation, because whenever you speak for a living, people look at you, and they decide whether you're good-looking or not. They decide whether you're smart or not.

They decide whether you're a good storyteller, whether you know the Bible or not, whether you're funny or not, and then they email you. In all seriousness, the reason people are afraid to get on a stage, and the reason that a reoccurring dream for you is to be somewhere where there are a lot of people and you're in your underwear... It's the fear of humiliation.

The second is the fear of isolation or rejection. This is why some of you are afraid you're going to be single forever. This is why some of you are afraid you're going to raise your kid and your kid is not going to like you. Think about this. The worst thing we do to the worst criminals in the world is put them in solitary confinement.

If you are the worst criminal in the world, you are male (almost 100 percent), and you are already antisocial. All of the worst criminals are men and are antisocial, and they can't stand to be alone. What does that say about you and me? We have the fear of isolation or rejection. We have the fear of humiliation.

We have the fear of mutilation. Do you know what the fear of mutilation is? It's that you're going to find a lump somewhere and there's going to be no pill and no surgery that's going to help you. The fear of mutilation is you're going to have some type of chronic illness that's going to affect the quality of your life.

There is the fear of limitation. The fear of limitation is the fear of loss of autonomy. It could be the fear that you would get paralyzed. It could be, more likely, the fear that you're going to have your terrible dead-end job with your two weeks of PTO and your terrible boss forever. That's real for people. "I don't want this. I don't want to be limited by this." It's the fear that every aging person has, that they're going to get old and are not going to be able to take care of themselves anymore.

Finally, there's the fear of extinction. The fear of extinction is the fear of death. The book of Hebrews tells us that everybody fears death. Think about this. Seriously. This is not a joke. This will give you mental illness if you think about this too much. Everybody you know and love will die or *you* will die, and then you will say goodbye to everybody you know and love. That can drive people mad. That's why no one thinks about it. It's a horrible thought.

Our only hope for all five of these fears is the resurrection and what Christ has done for us. I'm actually going to return at the end and show you how Christ experienced all five of those fears for us on the cross so we don't have to fear them anymore. Before we do that, we need to pick up one more thing. Look with me at verse 7.

This is the angel speaking now. They see the empty tomb. He says, "Come and see." Then look at verse 7. ***"Then go quickly and tell..."*** If you're new, I want you to understand Christianity has two parts to it: "Come and see" and "Go and tell." The Sunday service is "Come and see." The rest of the week is "Go and tell."

"Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.' So they departed quickly from the tomb..." Look. They still have fear. ***"...with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."***

How do you deal with your fear? One of the ways you deal with your fear is you cultivate even greater joy in what you're about to experience. Some of you are afraid to get married, and that's normal. Maybe you're afraid to get married because of what you saw with your parents or something like that.

Here's one of the ways you overcome that fear. You go, "I'm afraid to get married." And who wouldn't be if you're looking at... Some of you go, "I don't have faith." If you got married, you have faith. You have no idea. Yeah, you're high school sweethearts. You have no idea who this person will be in 20 years.

You have no idea if they're going to get sick. You have no idea how much money you guys are going to make. You have no idea what your kids are going to be like. It's all faith. So you go, "I'm afraid, but I'm even more excited." People are afraid to have kids all the time. Yeah, you should be, but you should be even more excited to be a mom and dad.

Now, I want to encourage a couple of us on this. Again, I want to speak to the Christian. I want you to see how quickly a brand-new believer in Jesus is told to tell somebody else about Jesus. They're still full of fear. They still have a lot of questions, and they're told, "Go! Go and tell other people about Jesus."

Listen. You just tell people what you know. You don't tell them what you don't know. You tell them what you've experienced. That's it. I know what it's like to feel like, "If I talk to people about Jesus, they might ask me questions that I don't know the answers to."

Some of you don't know my story, but I spent four years doing college ministry at Duke, which meant I was the dumbest person on the campus for four years. Literally. I didn't want to tell anyone where I went to college or any of that. I remember talking to this one guy one time. I'm like, "Where did you go to school?" He's like, "Andover." I'm like, "I never heard of it." He goes, "It's where George Bush went."

So I went home and Googled it. It's like \$48,000 for kindergarten. I'm like, "Ah!" I remember I was talking about the gospel one time with this guy, and he looks at me and goes, "Do you believe in Noah's ark?" I was like, "I did until right now." They trap you with these questions. I want to encourage you guys just to go with what you know, not with what you don't know.

Now, they have to deal with their fears. I want to talk about this for a second. Verse 9: **"And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!'"** So, they're running to go tell the disciples, but Jesus met them. **"And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid...'"** He says the same thing the angel said to them, so this must be the main message of the resurrection, of Easter.

"Do not be afraid..." Now *he* says, "Go and tell." "Go and tell again. You've come and seen. Now go and tell." **"...go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."** I want you to understand what's unique about Christianity. It's that Jesus meets us where we are *as we are*.

They weren't looking for Jesus; Jesus was looking for them. To borrow a line I heard another pastor say, Jesus does not love some future version of you. I don't know if that's something you just feel the longer you're a Christian and the more you're like, "I am in the same place. Ah!"

We all have this idea... We would never tell anyone, but there are two or three things that you feel like, "If I stopped doing these things, Jesus would love me more," and there are usually two or three things that you're like, "If I really started to do..." I don't know what it is...read your Bible every day, pray, share your faith more. You feel like, "If I did *these* two or three things and I didn't do *these* two or three things, then Jesus would love me more."

What Jesus does is he comes and meets them right where they are, and he speaks again resurrection power and says, "Do not be afraid." Think about what fear does to us, guys. Fear can paralyze you. Fear can give you panic attacks. I want to tell you what happens technically and spiritually when you fear something. Tell me if this isn't true for any area where you fear something. It gets bigger and you get smaller. So, we need a God who's bigger and better than anything we think is bigger and better than us.

When you're in high school they call it *peer pressure*, when you get a little bit older they call it *people-pleasing*, and then if you need to go to counseling they call it *codependency*. It's the same thing. What is it? It's people are big and you are small. You have to deal with this. Here's why. I knew a lady, and there was a certain part of 421... She could only go to this one exit.

She couldn't go past that exit anymore because she was afraid. Then she couldn't go to *that* exit; she could only go to the exit before it. Pretty soon, she could only go to one grocery store. There's a big story behind all this, but pretty soon, she couldn't leave her neighborhood. Last I knew, she couldn't leave her house. We have to face our fears. I'm going to show you how with the power of the gospel in a second.

Do you remember during COVID? Yeah, welcome. I'm going to talk about COVID just for a minute. It happened five years ago, but listen. During COVID, I remember I was sitting there, and I was on my iPad, probably like many of you, and I was scrolling social media. This was, like, week one of COVID. I know you think you've figured out COVID now, but this was when none of us knew anything about COVID and we all were like, "What *is* this?"

I remember them making this announcement. "Hey, guys. The Mercy ship and the Comfort ship will be coming to LA and New York City because we don't have enough beds in the hospitals." I was like, "Am I in a dystopian movie? What is happening here?" I went and sat by myself on the back deck, and I was like, "How many people are going to die?" I didn't know. None of us knew.

See, two things happened in COVID. We realized we were going to die, and we realized we weren't in control. Guess what? That's still true today. Remember how weird Christians got during that time? We all immediately started praying for the return of Christ. We were like, "Jesus, please come back soon, and please bring toilet paper and hand sanitizer. We have none of them here." Right?

I want to talk about how Jesus... They worship him. They grab his feet. He speaks "Do not fear" to them, and here's why. Let's revisit those five fears for a second. It doesn't matter what order we take them in. Jesus experienced all of them on the cross.

Think about humiliation. Jesus was humiliated. He was mocked, he was spit on, he was made fun of, and he was publicly shamed. I told you all crucifixions were done naked. We're told that even the other people... One ended up coming to Christ, but the two people who were hung with him hurled insults at him. Jesus experienced humiliation so we could experience acceptance from God.

Think about isolation or rejection. That's the second fear. Jesus experienced rejection from his disciples. They left him. He was denied by Peter, betrayed by Judas. Most horribly, the Bible says that at the cross, God forsook him. It hurts your head. What does that mean? It means God turned his face away from Jesus and poured his wrath on Jesus and treated Jesus like your sin. Jesus was isolated and rejected so God could welcome us in.

Jesus was mutilated. If you've seen Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, it's rated R for a reason. It's real. You see the physical pain Jesus endured so that, what the Bible says is true, by his stripes you are healed.

He experienced limitation so you and I could be set free. He was forced to carry his cross. He was chained at the trial, and he was nailed to that cross. Here's the truth, though. He was held there by those nails, but also, he willingly did that. He willingly died in your place for your sin so you could be set free to love and worship God.

Finally, extinction. Jesus Christ died. It hurts your head. I don't understand it all. God died. Theologians call it the *death of death in the death of Christ*. Jesus Christ died. We talked about how we're going to have to go through death and resurrection. Jesus goes, "I'll go first." He goes through death and he's raised.

I want us to end by looking at this final interaction. The final episode in a five-series Netflix show would be verses 16 and 17. We're going to skip over verses 11-15 only because it's the guards going back, saying, "Hey, his body is gone," and they say, "Well, go tell everybody it was stolen. Go tell everybody the disciples did some kind of Chuck Norris thing and took it."

I want us to end in verses 16 and 17. I think you're going to be encouraged. I want to show you this. Here's what it says. ***"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted."***

I told you this earlier, but there are multiple things in this passage that I've been reading that I got wrong. I thought the angel rolled away the stone so Jesus could walk out, but I read it more carefully, and I was like, "That's not what happened." I read *this* verse wrong. In fact, I've preached this verse wrong.

I have a file of every verse I've ever preached on. I've preached on this passage before. Last time I got to this verse, I said, "Guys, read that text. It says, 'Some people worshiped, and some people doubted.' Are you going to worship or are you going to doubt?" But guess what? That's not what it says. It says the eleven disciples go, and it says they *all* worshiped and some doubted.

Here's why that's encouraging to me on Easter 2025: you can worship God even if you have doubts. The opposite of faith is fear, not doubt. If you have doubts... And who doesn't have doubts? If you have doubts, you might make a great disciple, because the first doubters are disciples. The first skeptics are the eleven disciples who are left.

Remember Doubting Thomas? How would you like *that* nickname in heaven? It's like, "Guys, come on. He's right there." By the way, we only doubt the things we already

believe. So, I want to encourage you. Wherever you are and whatever you're dealing with, you can trust God in the midst of your doubts.

There was a pastor who, in a very tragic story, lost his son to suicide. About a year later, he finally came and publicly talked about it. He had a great summary statement. He said, "When my son committed suicide, I realized I had two options. I could walk away from God and think I had all the answers or I could walk with God and still have my questions."

If something terrible happens, here's what you can say: "Well, this is all meaningless. We're all going to die and disappear. This is all an accident, and that explains everything." Or you can walk with God and go, "God, I am still trying to understand how something like this could happen if you're a good, wise, and all-loving Father."

Guys, I want to close this Easter by talking about how a person becomes a Christian, because, at the end of the day, what Easter is about is we worship the one who won for us. That's what it is. That's how they end. They worship. They worship with their doubts. I want to talk to you about how to become a Christian, because I grew up for 16 years as a nominal Roman Catholic, and I did not know how to become a Christian.

Someone told me the number-one reason people don't become Christians in America is nobody ever personally invited them to become one. So, I want to give you the *ABCs* of becoming a Christian. Here's the truth: *being* a Christian is hard, but *becoming* a Christian is simple.

The first thing you have to do is *admit* you're a sinner who needs God to save you. You have to admit, "God, you know what? I'm afraid." Some of you, by the way, are afraid that something in your past is going to show up in your present and ruin your future. You can just say, "God, I am a sinner, and I need to be saved." Here's what I want you to hear. If you only hear one last thing I'm going to say today, I want you to understand this. Good people don't go to heaven; forgiven people do. So, you admit, "God, I need you to save me. I admit I need to surrender to you."

The second is you *believe*. You go, "What does *believe* mean?" Well, the synonym in the Bible for *believe* is *come*. I'll quote Scripture. Jesus said, "He who believes in me shall never thirst, and he who comes to me shall never hunger." Wait a second. So, believing and coming are the same thing. Yes. Believing is I transfer trust from myself to Jesus Christ.

Here's what you do when you believe. You go, "God, I give you my sin, and I give you myself. I believe that what you did 2,000 years ago on the cross when you screamed out your last words, 'It is finished...' I don't understand it all, but I believe it all. I believe that somehow that counted for me." If you do that, you're going to have the

experience that Carol had. You're going to go, "Wait a second. I think I just became a Christian," which is the third thing.

The Bible says *confess*. Though our faith is unbelievably personal, it's not meant to be private. We're meant to have a public faith. The Bible says if you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved.

So, if you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I just want to give us a moment. This is why I do this. I'm not going to give you some magical formula. I'm going to give you a moment, because you're about to have Easter brunch, you're about to pick up your kids, you're about to get on your phone, and this is it. This is a moment for you. I feel like my job, the job of a pastor, is to just set up the meeting, so that's what I want to do.

I want to give you a moment, and in your heart I want you to answer this question: Are you a Christian? I didn't say, "Did you grow up going to church?" I didn't say, "Are your parents Christians?" I didn't say, "Are you religious?" I didn't say, "Are you moral?" or "Are you a good person?" I want to ask you...*Are you a Christian?* If the first answer to that question is "I don't think so" or "No," my next question to you is: Do you *want* to be a Christian? Do you want to worship the one who won a victory for you?

If you would say, "I know when I die I'm going to stand before God, and I know that if he were to make a judgment on my life, I'd be going to hell. I know I am a sinner justly condemned. I admit that freely, but I also believe that what Jesus did 2,000 years ago counted for me and can make a difference in my eternity..."

If you want to repeat after me in your heart, you can just say, "Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross. Thank you for forgiving me of all of my sin. Thank you for giving me your perfectly righteous record. Thank you for rising from the dead in my place. Thank you for being my great hope. Would you come into my heart? Would you change my life? I want to be a Christian. I want to surrender to you."

Let me just ask you in this moment... If you would say that today, for the first time, you prayed to receive Christ and became a Christian, would you just raise your hand up high? I want to see it. Just raise your hand up if you would say, "Today I gave my life to Jesus." Thank you. Let's pray for all this.

We worship you, Lord. We celebrate a greater victory than winning a golf tournament. We celebrate that death is defeated, that forgiveness has been offered, and that Satan, sin, and death have been victoriously overcome in the person and work of Jesus. Let's sing to him. In his name, amen.