

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five weeks, we've been visiting the cross to listen again to the Final Words from the Cross. Today we're going to consider words that continue to shake our world: The first words from the tomb. These words were spoken by angels to the women who had arrived at the cemetery expecting to prepare the corpse of Christ with additional burial spices.

Cemeteries can be spooky places. I heard a funny story about a guy in Scotland we call Ian McGregor. After a long evening in the pub, Ian took a shortcut to his house that took him through a dark cemetery. He accidentally fell into a freshly dug grave. Ian tried to climb out, but discovered the hole was too deep, so he just decided to wait until the morning when someone would come to help him out. So, he sat in the corner and covered himself with his coat, and went to sleep. Sometime later he was awakened by the sound of another guy who fell in the front of the grave. The second guy didn't see Ian in the corner. Ian watched as the man tried and tried to climb out of the grave. Finally, Ian said, "Stoop your tryin' Ya canna' get out." But you know, that guy jumped all the way out of that grave!

Because of the resurrection, we don't have to be afraid of the grave. In fact, I'm glad we have our Easter Sunrise Service in a cemetery. It's our way of looking into the face of the grim reaper and singing, "na, na, na, na, na, na, hey, hey goodbye!"

Let's go to the tomb on that first Easter morning and hear these first words from the tomb:

Luke 24:1-6. "On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'"

As I prayed and meditated over this portion of God's Word, I kept being drawn to the question that the angels asked the women: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The women went to a cemetery expecting to find a corpse, but what they found was a living Lord. The angels said, "He is not here, He has risen." People are still looking for the corpse of Jesus. Have you noticed over the past few years that just as we approach Easter, there have been sensational attempts by savvy marketing gurus to release controversial claims to refute the message of Easter? Twenty years ago the movie, "The Last Temptation of Christ" was released just before Easter. A few years ago, *The DaVinci Code* book was promoted, and then later the movie. I remember last Easter, it was the discovery of the spurious Gospel of Judas. This year, of course, the Titanic movie director, James Cameron created a titanic media stir with his claim that he had found the remains of the body of Jesus in a cemetery outside Jerusalem. The angels could have asked James Cameron, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Don't worry church, the gospel is a solid anvil that has worn out thousands of hammers throughout the centuries.

The question of the angels is one that we should be answering in 2007: Why are so many people

looking for life in dead places? As I thought about that question, an old country song that came to my mind. Johnny Lee sang it and it’s called, “Looking for LOVE in all the wrong places. The chorus says, “I was looking for love in all the wrong places./ Looking for love in too many faces/ Searching their eyes, looking for traces/ of what I’m dreaming of. Hoping to find a friend and a lover/ I’ll bless the day I discover/ another heart, looking for love!” I’d like to change word in that song because I think that people are looking for life in all the wrong places. The women on the first Easter morning were doing that, and millions of people today are looking for life - but they’re searching in dead places. So will you consider this personal question: Are you looking for life in all the wrong places?

We are part of a generation of people who are desperately trying to really live it up but they are looking for life in all the wrong places. Let me share three dead places where people look for life, and then I’ll talk about the only place to find real life.

1. You won’t find life in more possessions

Some people are looking for life in the graveyard of money and possessions. We are a consumer-driven culture. We want to keep up with the Jones’ ...but the Jones’ just refinanced for the third time with Ditech!

We have so much stuff we have to store them in self-storage facilities! Our materialistic thirst has created a new profession. Today there are over 3,500 full-time “professional organizers” who make lots of money by helping people manage their stuff. Jessica Duquette is both a psychologist and professional organizer who helps people deal with rampant overspending. She writes, “Some people theorize that our urge to hoard stuff has its roots in our ancestors, when their survival depended on their having everything they needed in their immediate environment. I suspect that nowadays, our compulsion to ‘have’ is a mutation of a misguided emotional survival tactic we have come to confuse the feelings of security and love with the presence of things and so we try to fill the void we feel inside with stuff. Often, we believe we can change our insides by buying something—we soothe ourselves by purchasing the latest ‘thing’—a self-help CD, status symbol or gadget. I have seen people who have dozens of items still in the package or the tag still hanging!”

Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15) Jesus said there is so much more to LIFE than an abundance of possessions. Money can buy you acquaintances, but it can’t buy you friends. Money can buy you drugs, but it can’t buy you health. Money can buy you a house, but it can’t buy you a home. Money can buy you insurance, but it can’t buy you peace-of-mind. Money can buy you a bed, but it can’t buy you sleep. Money can buy you fun, but it can’t buy you happiness. The Beatles were right when they sang, I don’t care too much for money, ‘cause money can’t buy me love.” If you’re looking for life in money and possessions, you’re looking for life in a dead financial graveyard.

2. You won’t find life in seeking thrills

So many people today are bored with their lives, so they are seeking thrills. People are paying

thousands to experience a new thrill. There are now companies that offer adventure vacations. Instead of taking vacations where you rest, these are experiences that give you an adrenalin rush. They include adventures like hiking a rain forest, to climbing the Rockies, skydiving, hang gliding, or a motorcycle tour of the California coast. These aren't cheap thrills, because they will cost you an arm and a leg, sometimes literally! The problem with seeking thrill is that once you experience one thrill you have to find something that is more thrilling than the previous adventure. Once you climb Mt. Everest, what else is there to conquer?

Pleasure and thrill seeking is a tomb of unfulfilled desires. In 1 Timothy 5:6 Paul writes about certain women who are seeking lives of pleasure. His words apply to men as well. He wrote, “She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.” If you're looking for life in cheap thrills, you'll never be fully satisfied.

3. You won't find life in manmade religion

Religion is an old weathered tombstone. Man is religious creature and from the earliest records man worshiped the sun, moon, and even living creatures. Go to Egypt and see the Pyramids. They are religious graves. The Taj Mahal in India is actually a huge tomb. The massive tombs of the Chinese Emperors outside Beijing are testimony to the religious fervor of mankind. Religion is man's attempt to find God. Christianity is God's attempt to reach down and redeem His creation. Religion kills, but Jesus gives life. We saw the destructive power of religion when terrorists flew those jetliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11. That's religion. The pilots of those jets were highly religious men who bowed toward Mecca and prayed five times a day. Manmade religion has a form of godliness, but it is void of a personal relationship with the living God. The Bible says, “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

This past week I was in Albuquerque conducting a revival at First Baptist Church where my friend, Michael Cook is pastor. Albuquerque is a beautiful city, but only a tiny fraction of the residents know the Lord. One evening we ate at the Route 66 grill in downtown Albuquerque. Our server was a young girl named Skye who was wearing dozens of silver and turquoise bracelets. When I commented on them, she mentioned that her mother was part Paiute Indian. I asked her if she attended church anywhere and she said, “No. I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious. I love to read the Bible, and I love Jesus, but I just can't take church.” When she returned with our meal I said, “Skye, we have something in common. I am spiritual, too, but I don't like religion. Sometimes I can't take church either, because churches are made up of imperfect people. But I have a relationship with Jesus Christ and He has made an amazing difference in my life.” She smiled and said, “I like the way you said that.” While there, I saw a bumper sticker that expresses what many Americans feel. It said, “Jesus, save me from your followers.” Many churches have turned something that is life-giving into a set of dead, dull rules, regulations, and rituals. You won't find life in the mausoleum of manmade religion!

4. You will only find real life in Jesus

Everybody is searching for life. Each of us has a God-shaped hole in our hearts, and it can only

be filled with Jesus Christ. Trying to fill that hole with anything else is like putting a square peg in a round hole. The Apostle Paul was searching. He had tried education and religion, but he was still empty. Then one day he met Jesus and he wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). Paul existed before he met Jesus, but he wasn't talking about mere existence. He was talking about life—really living. To Him, life was found in Jesus.

I heard about a man who was playing the cello. He kept his finger on one spot on the neck and kept playing one note. Somebody asked him, "Why don't you move your hand up and down the neck like other people?" He said, "They're all looking for the right note, and I've found it!" Everybody is looking for life, and those of us who know the Lord have found it! What do I mean when I say that "To me, to live is Christ?"

(1) Jesus is the source of my life

According to the Bible, life doesn't begin at 40, life begins with Jesus. Death is not the separation of the soul from the body. Death is separation of a soul from God. Life can be found only in Jesus. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and THE LIFE. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Millions of people simply exist, but they aren't really living. Jesus is the source of real life. The Bible says, "He who has the Son has life."

That's what makes Christianity different from other religions. Other religions are a creed, a code, a cause, but Christianity is Jesus. You can take Buddha out of Buddhism and still have Buddhism. Islam exists without Mohammed. You can take Confucius out of Confucianism and still have Confucianism. But Christianity cannot exist without the living presence of Jesus. If you are married you had a wedding ceremony. But at the ceremony you didn't get a wedding, you received a person, a husband or a wife. When you are saved, you don't receive a religion, you receive Jesus. Christianity is not simply following the teachings of Jesus, it is receiving the person of Jesus. It is "Christ in me, the hope of glory." He is the source of my life.

(2) Jesus is the satisfaction of my life

People are looking for things to satisfy them, but they come up frustrated. A few years ago, Bono with U2 sang, "You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains, carried the cross of my shame, of my shame, you know I believed it...but I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

Nothing in this world can fully satisfy. Adam and Eve were in paradise and they were still unsatisfied! They had all their needs met, and they were still seeking more. Jesus is the source of true satisfaction. As the old song says, "All that thrills my soul is Jesus, He is more to life to me; and the fairest of ten thousand, in my blessed Lord I see." (Words by Thoro Harris)

Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Jesus is not only the source of life; He is the way to abundant life. But the only way you'll know Jesus is the true satisfaction in life is for you to surrender your life to Him. Once you do, nothing in this world will appeal to you.

Suppose you've just finished eating a great meal of a huge filet mignon, baked potato, and a wonderful salad. Then someone comes up and offers you a dirty, old moldy crumb of bread and says, "Here, eat this." You're going to say, "No thank you. I'm already satisfied. I'm full." The Bible says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8) Once you've feasted on the manna of Jesus, you'll never have an appetite for the moldy crumbs of the devil. Snickers satisfies you for few hours and then you want another one. But Jesus satisfies forever!

(3) Jesus is the strength of my life

We all face so many demands that we often find we lack the strength to do everything we're required to do. The secret to life is recognizing that Jesus is the strength of life. The Bible says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). Some people are reluctant to become Christians because they think if they became Christians they would be unable to live like a Christian. They're right. I can't live the Christian life in my strength and neither can you. The Christian life isn't hard; it's impossible. Only one person can live the Christian life and that is Jesus. And He wants to live the Christian life in you! He never said you could you live it and He always said He would live it in you!

It's like this glove. I can pick it up and tell it to pick up this Bible, and it can't do it. I can fuss at it and even demonstrate how to do it, but it still can't do it. But when I put my hand in it, that's when it becomes alive and can do anything I do. That's a simple but profound picture of the Christian life. Galatians 2:20 says, "Not I but Christ lives in me." Jesus can give you the strength to do anything. God says to love your enemies, and we don't have the strength to do it, but Christ in you can love your enemies. God tell us to give thanks in all things, but we don't have the strength to do it, but Christ in you can do it. He is my strength and I can do all things through Christ!

(4) Jesus is the sustainer of my life

The Bible says in Colossians 1:17 that through Jesus "all things hold together." Jesus' power is sustaining the entire universe. Without His sustaining power, the planets would rip out of their orbits. Without Jesus' sustaining power, the electrons orbiting the protons in atoms would zip off on their own, and matter would disintegrate. In the same way, Jesus sustains our lives. When it seems your life is falling apart, Jesus can sustain you.

In Isaiah 46:4 God says, "I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you." Without Jesus' power, I couldn't be living at this moment. And without Jesus I wouldn't have a chance of living in the future. At the tomb of Lazarus Jesus spoke these words to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

Knowing Jesus isn't only a matter of life. It's a matter of life and death. If the Lord tarries, we're all going to die. I like the story about a preacher who was preaching on this subject and he said, "Every member of this church is going to die!" And a kid on the front row giggled at that remark. The preacher didn't like it, so he repeated his statement again with more intensity, "I said, every member of this church is going to die!" At that point, the kid on the front row

laughed out loud. The preacher stopped and said, "Son, what's so funny about that?" The kid said, "I'm not a member of this church." Whether you're a member of this church or any church, you will have to face death.

CONCLUSION

Are you looking for life in all the wrong places? Everybody is living for something or somebody. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." As we get closer to death in this human flesh it seems we tend to talk about death in terms of loss. You've heard the expression that someone "lost their life" in an accident. Or we say, "I'm so sorry you lost your grandmother." Humanly speaking, if we live long enough we start losing things. Some people lose their health, others lose their memories, some people lose their teeth, or others lose their eyesight or hearing. It reminds me of the elderly married couple who both wore hearing aids. One evening, the wife looked at her husband and said, "I'm proud of you." He said, "Oh yeah, I'm tired of you, too!" But when the Bible speaks of the death of a Christian, it doesn't use the word loss, it uses the word *gain*. The Bible says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." For a believer it's HEADS I WIN...TAILS I WIN!

As I conclude this message let me ask you to fill in this blank for your life: For to me to live is _____. Go ahead fill in the blank. You don't have to tell me, but be honest with yourself. If you say, "For to me, to live is money," then you have to say, "and to die is loss," because you can't take it with you. If greed is your creed and gold is your god, you'll lose it all when you die. If you say, "For to me to live is pleasure," then you have to say, "and to die is loss." When you die, you won't even have this body to feel pleasure, so you'll lose it. There is no thrill or pleasure in a Christ-less eternity. If you say, "For to me to live is religion," then you've got to say, "to die is loss." If religion is your thing, you'll lose it at death because there won't be any church buildings or sacraments to perform in heaven.

So how do you complete that equation? For me to live is education? That's a noble pursuit on earth, but there won't be a need for education in heaven, so to die will be loss. For me to live is my job? Sorry, no factories or office buildings in heaven. As one wise physician observed, "I've watch a lot of people die, but I've never heard a person say on their deathbed, 'I wish I had spent more time at my job.'" You may be thinking, "I don't live for money or pleasure, for me, to live is my family." That's a wonderful pursuit, but if you make that your top priority and neglect a relationship with Christ, then you have to say, "To die is loss." Even in heaven, we won't have the same kind of family relationships.

According to the Bible, if you want to gain more at the time of your death, the only person who can fill in your blank is Jesus Christ. When you say, "For to me, to live is Christ," then you can say, "And to die is gain!"

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Jesus is risen from the dead and He is here. "He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." Come on, live it up with Jesus!

We live in a changing world. But the Bible says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever more.

Years ago on a sailing vessel, the captain instructed a young helmsman to steer by the stars while he went below to sleep. That evening, there was an amazing meteor shower. The young helmsman was alarmed and rushed below to wake the captain saying, "The stars have all fallen from the sky!" The patient captain went on deck and showed the helmsman the North Star and said, "Watch that star. If it falls, then you come and wake me. Otherwise watch it and keep on sailing." Friend, Jesus is the bright and morning star. He will never fall nor fail. Long after the planets and stars have been plucked from the sky, He will still shine on. Don't look for life among the dead. Look for life in Jesus Christ!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes