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Dear Pastor,

The following sermon outlines will fall into two categories. The first sermon is in step with the Big Invite Easter theme. The second message provides a more standard Easter message. Both messages are only a summary of content. It will be vital that you add to the message.

We encourage you to keep in mind that you will most likely have several who have not trusted in Jesus in your worship service. Give them a clear and simple gospel invitation. We recommend that your entire message be simple.

Praying for you,



Dr. Levi Skipper  
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**Big Invite Themed Sermon/Message**

**Happiness. Everyone longs for it. But how do you get it?**

There has been much research on the subject recently in places like Harvard, Berkley, and mainstream psychology. What is interesting is what some of the research indicates.

1. For example, there is a myth that happiness can be attained through money. The assumption used to be, yes; more money will make people happier. But we actually have good data on that over the past 100 years.
   1. From the 1920s to the 1950s —an era of depression and world war — there was an increase in people’s self-reported happiness as household income increased. But then the line just tapered off. Studies show that money increases happiness when it takes people from a place where there are real threats — poverty — to a place that is reliably safe. After that, money doesn’t matter much.
      1. (<https://www.berkeleywellness.com/healthy-mind/mind-body/article/what-science-happiness>).
   2. A Harvard study followed the lives of 268 sophomores in 1938 during the Great Depression. They followed these individuals for 80 years hoping to discover what caused happiness in their lives. What they found was astonishing: Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what kept these people happy throughout their lives. Those ties protect people from life’s discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.
      1. (<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>)

**But let’s think about it for a moment.**

1. If we could find happiness in money, that happiness would only be temporary, because it would be based upon our bank account. And, apparently, research tells us money really doesn’t influence your happiness.
2. Or, if happiness were derived from relationships we have in life, even those relationships can be temporary and therefore our contentment would be as well.
3. Is there a secret to true happiness? Lasting happiness?

**Jesus taught that there was indeed a secret to happiness.**

1. In John 20, we read the historical account of a remarkable event. Jesus had been tried, crucified, and then three days later resurrected.
2. Jesus had appeared to individuals afterward but there was one who chose not to believe. This man had a hang up with the resurrection concept. His name was Thomas.
   1. John 20:25 – *So the other disciples were saying to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” But he (Thomas) said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*
   2. John 20:26-28 – *After eight days, His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them, Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving but believing.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and My God!”*
   3. John 20:29 – *Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”*
3. There is the secret! Jesus said: those who believe who have not seen will be blessed. **The word blessed literally means happy.**

**So, here is the key question: What must we believe to experience the Easter Secret to happiness?**

1. You must believe that you are not an accident.
   1. You were created by God and for God.
   2. Text: Colossians 1:16
   3. Quote: “Though has made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” Augustine of Hippo
2. You must believe we are apart from God because of sin.
   1. Text: Romans 3:23
   2. Text: Romans 6:23
   3. Quote: “A thousand hot scalding showers can’t wash away one single sin.”
3. You must believe that God approached us in Jesus.
   1. No one can work toward God. Our goodness cannot gain us access to God. That is why He came to us in Jesus. He lived a sinless life. He died a death we deserve to pay for our sins. He was raised from the dead on the third day.
   2. Text: John 14:6
   3. Quote: “If you could get to heaven by being good, it makes no sense for Jesus to have come and died.”
4. You must accept Him by faith.
   1. Text: Ephesians 2:8
   2. Text: John 3:16
   3. You must admit that you are a sinner in need of God’s forgiveness. You must believe Jesus died for you and was risen. You must turn away from sin toward Jesus.
   4. Text: Romans 10:13

**There is the secret! The tomb is empty, so you don’t have to be.** Eternal happiness must be found in the Eternal Savior, Jesus. Today I want to invite you to trust in Jesus.

*Invitation to trust in Jesus.*

**Standard Easter Sermon/Message:  
A Message that Influenced the World**

**There are many messages that have influenced the world in which we live. You may have heard or know some of those messages.**

**Do you remember these and who spoke them?**

1. “In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility – I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it – and the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” (John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address)
2. “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.” (That was a speech given by Martin Luther King, Jr. casting vision for a society without racism)
3. How about this one: “When you grow up, you tend to get told that the world is the way it is, and your life is just to live your life inside the world. Try not to bash into the walls too much. Try to have a nice family life, have fun, save a little money. That’s a very limited life. Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it, you can influence it … Once you learn that, you’ll never be the same again.” (Steve Jobs, creator of the iPhone)

**While you may be able to think of messages that have changed the world in which you live, there is one message given over 2,000 years ago that still holds sway in the hearts and minds of people throughout generations and around the world.**

1. Let’s look together at a portion of this message in Acts 2:22-24 – *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*

**Key Question: What was being said by Peter in this text that changed the entire world? Or better yet, what is being said in this text that can change your entire world?**

1. **God the Father publicly declared Jesus to be His Son.** 
   1. How did He do this? In verse 22, the Scripture says, *“Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God.”*
      1. The word **‘attested’** speaks of demonstrating something as being true.
      2. God the Father demonstrated to the Jews that Jesus was His Son and the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.
      3. That is, Jesus was the Anointed One sent by God to deliver His people.
   2. Now, how did God display Jesus publicly as His Son?
      1. Peter says, *“… through miracles and signs and wonders which God performed through Him.”*
      2. Just a quick glance through the life and ministry of Jesus and we begin to see these signs and wonders.
2. **God the Father lovingly handed His Son over to be executed.** 
   1. Verse 23, *“… this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.”*
   2. Why was Jesus handed over?
      1. He could not overlook our sin and act as if we have not broken His law. If he did this, he would be both an unjust God and also an unholy God. He could not wink at sin.
      2. He had to punish sin. That is why God the Father, before the foundation of the world, determined to give His Son over as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross at Calvary.
      3. Godless men hammering nails into the hands and feet of Jesus was not a spoiled plan but an executed plan by God the Father.
      4. Raising Jesus high upon the cross to die a cruel death was not a picture of God’s dissatisfaction in His son, but rather a depiction of His holy justice being satisfied.
   3. God so desired to have a relationship with you that He was willing to bankrupt Heaven’s glory by sending His son to be mocked, ridiculed, beaten, spit upon, and crucified to suffer a cruel death as if He had committed all your sins and mine.
      1. That’s why we sing, “Thank you for the cross, Lord. Thank you for the price you paid. Bearing all my sin and shame, in love you came, and gave amazing grace.”
3. **God the Father raised His Son up from the dead.**
4. Verse 24, *“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”* Can you imagine the excitement in the voice of Peter as he proclaimed this truth?
   * 1. He had seen the resurrected Jesus Christ. This is not something that he heard through the grapevine; this was something he and many others witnessed with their own eyes.
     2. Peter states that is was impossible for Jesus to be held in the power of death.
     3. The word “impossible” carries with it the idea that death was not competent.
     4. Think of it, if an employee in the workplace can’t get the job done, we may say, they are incompetent.
5. That’s what this verse teaches you and me – death was incompetent. Death did not have the necessary skills to hold Jesus in the grave.
   * 1. Overcoming the pains of death and even the hold of death, God the Father brought His son up from the dead.
     2. It was Robert Lowry who wrote in the 1800’s, “Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Savior, He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord.”

c. The resurrection of Jesus proves to you and me that God the Father accepted His sacrifice for our sins.

1. Had Jesus not been raised from the dead, he would simply have been another person crucified that day.
2. However, His resurrection proved then and still does today, that He alone is the sacrifice for sins. No other person past, present, or future can do what Jesus has done.
3. Because no other person has been sent by God the Father the maker of heaven and earth, to atone for the sins of humanity but Jesus.

d. The Spirit indwelt Peter and with great confidence He delivered what is called the first message of the church.

1. That day, the conviction of God fell upon many people as they realized they had sinned against the Lord and rejected Jesus.
2. In such a state of guilt, they cried out, what must we do. Peter was like, “Repent!”
3. Change your mind about who Jesus is, see Him for who God declared Him to be. Your Savior who gave himself for your sins and was raised from the dead. Follow Jesus with your life and be eternally forgiven.
4. Some 3,000 people responded to this message of grace and, through prayer, gave themselves to Jesus.

This message has impacted the world. This message is still being delivered today and impacting individuals. Why? Because this message demands a decision. Like those who heard the message for the first time, they had to decide whether they would turn from their unbelief and put their faith in Jesus.

**This is the decision that you must make as well. Today, I want to invite you to believe.**

*Invitation*