

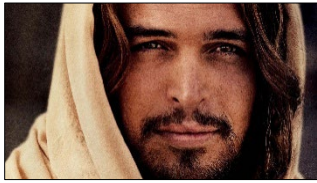
# Dead on Arrival

## Good News' Bad News

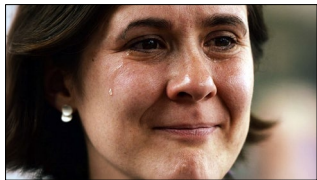
December 21, 2025



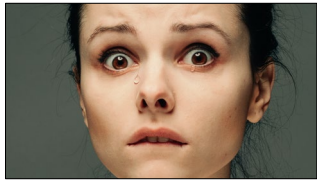
**Today we're flipping the script on *life and death*.** Cuz Christmas is all about understanding *where* and *when* the story of Jesus *begins* – and I think we *humans*, have a way of subconsciously *sanitizing* some of the *specifics* to cover the less-*likable* parts with a cuter, more “Christmas-y” context. So, before we hear the *true* story of Christmas, there's one crucial question you need to ask yourself: **Is your heart willing to hear hard truths?**



Well, ready or *not*, here it comes – cuz just like Jesus, the *truth* just can't be *contained*, *corrected*, or *killed*! And the only choice we get to make – is the *classic* question of *preference*: **Do you want the *good news* or the *bad news* first?** And *before* you answer, you should *know* there have been *studies* on what your *choice* says about your *character*.



And they've found that *most* people want to *hear* the *bad* first and the *good* last because *ending* on a *positive* note feels better emotionally. *However*, experiments have *shown* that *because* the bad-news-first approach makes us *feel* better, we're *less* likely to *act* better. Cuz it's the bad-news-last approach that *leaves* people a little *less* comfortable – and that *discomfort* is what actually *motivates* us to take action and improve.



So, since the purpose of *this* church is to get motivated to take action – **I'm gonna give you the *Good News* about Christmas *first*:**



God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 NIV



And it don't get any better than the Good News of the Gospel right there: **Jesus came to fight death so we can experience real life.** He *came*, He *saw*, He *conquered* – so we can *learn*, we can *love*, and we can *leave*! So you ready for the *bad* news?

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 NIV

And that's the *bad* news of the *Good News*: **Jesus came to experience death cuz we fight real life.** We *lie*, *cheat*, and *steal* and call it *life*; so He *died*, to *reject*, *correct*, and *perfect* our *perspective*. Cuz *defeating* death and *sharing* the secret was the only way to *prove* the *superior* power of His superior *truth*; and the only way *convince* us to step *back* from our selfish struggle to stay *shallow*! But, the moment we *get* that *empowering* perspective, we *also* see the *higher*, *uncomfortable* truth; **our gain was God's pain.** *Big time.* Yet *that's* mostly *missing* from the *sweeter* Christmas story our *human* ears *want* to hear, cuz we're *dead* set on seeing things through an *earthly* lens! And *that's* a *big* *mistake*!

Cuz when we try to understand God on *our* terms, we *reduce* Him to something *smaller, softer, and simpler* – and miss the *real scale, strength, and scope* of who He *actually is!* And that's why **we don't fit God into our lives – we fit our lives into God.** I mean, if God is God – then *by definition*, He *can't* be *changed* to fit into *our* perspective – so to *know* Him, it's *our perspective* that *must* change to fit God. Or, said another way, **we can't use earth to explain heaven; we use heaven to explain earth.**



And *until* we do, we'll stay *stuck* with the frustration of our *partial* earthly picture – *lacking the wider context* that finally makes all our *comfort, joy, struggling, and suffering* make *sense!* And one of the most *malicious* misconceptions that *earthly* eyes allow – is how we define **life and death.**



Cuz according to the default setting of our material mind, **this is living!** And it consists of things like *waking up, brushing your teeth, paying taxes, and watching the Seahawks squeak out an OT thriller!* So, **are you alive?**



And if you answer yes, follow-up question: **what happens when you die?** Cuz *Christians* like to say, **"When we die we'll be raised to life like Jesus!"** But... **if that's life, what exactly are we doing right now?**



And this *isn't* just a *Christian* conundrum – every human everywhere has heard *something* inside them whisper the *same* things that make us all *suspect* – whatever this *is*, **this ain't really living!** So, *unlike every other animal on earth*, humans *philosophize, romanticize, and spiritualize* our experience to try and find a bigger picture that *fits that feeling*. Yet the whole *rest* of the time, we use a *default* definition of life that includes *stress, schedules, work, wealth, health, and money*. So Jesus *clarifies*:

[Trust your gut!] "Life does *not* consist in an abundance of possessions." – Luke 12:15 NIV

He's not *just* condemning *greed*; He's raising the volume of *His whisper* by *correcting our vocabulary*. He's saying, **"You keep using that word 'life' – but I do not think it means what you think it means."**

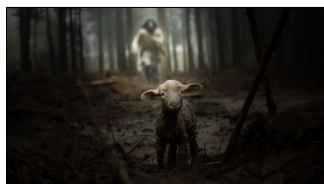
[And James drives the point home like a hammer] What is your *life*? [Cuz, to further clarify:] You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. – James 4:14 NIV

In other words: if "*life*" is simply this *earthly* existence, then you're basically fog with a watch – floating from one appointment to another until you just evaporate. And "*death*" is merely the day your heart *stops* and your body *falls off*. But from the beginning, God has rejected *that* definition too:

[Cuz remember, God tells Adam:] You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die. – Genesis 2:17 NIV

But, when they *do* – their hearts *don't* stop, their eyes get *opened* and their *citizenship* gets *revoked*. So, **what's going on?** Either God *misspoke* – or death means something *deeper* than *biology*.

[Which is why Paul says:] As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world – Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV



**That's death! It's existence without God.** And it's not a future event, it's a *present-tense* condition people suffer when "*living*" is *limited to this world*. Which means, we can be breathing, building, laughing, eating, posting, and planning, and *simultaneously*, completely and totally *dead*.

Think of it like your cell phone; it can *look* perfect with a pristine *screen*, brand new *case*, and all the *apps* your heart desires – but **if it's not connected to power, none of that matters cuz it's dead**. You can still *walk around* with it, *talk* at it, and *poke* it all you want – but it *won't* come back to *life* until it's *reconnected* to its power source. And Paul's saying *that's* the *real* death we need to worry about; cuz our earthly problems are just a symptom of the underlying condition – we're disconnected from our power source; **we're suffering from a lack of life**. And no matter *what* we do *down here*, we'll *stay dead* without a connection. Which is where our Good News comes in, not because of anything we did,

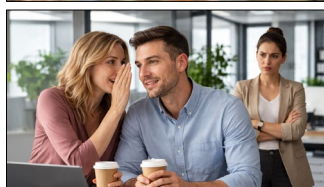
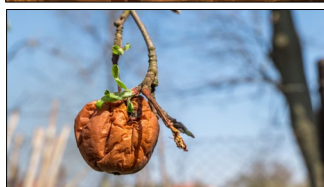
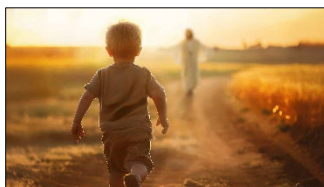
But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV

Cuz after the Garden, when we disconnected from our power source and *entered into death*, **Life itself came to us to reconnect!** And Jesus parses out exactly how His life support works:

"Whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has [already] crossed over from death to life." [Like John says:] – John 5:24 NIV

The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true ...[and that's a huge deal, cuz] He is the true God and eternal life. – 1 John 5:20 NIV

Get it? Knowing Jesus is vital, cuz **an ongoing relationship means an endless connection to life**. He's the cord that brings *power* to our *phone*, the line that brings *breath* to our *lungs*, and the *Word* that brings *life* to our *death*. But, if *death* is *disconnection* from God and *life* is *reconnection* in *Christ* – we need to *acknowledge* something *scary*: **death is the default state of this world and everyone in it.**



And believe it or not, *that's* still *part* of the *Good News* – because if this world really is the realm of *death*, then God has actually placed us in the *one* environment where our *sin* can finally be *separated* and *suffocated*. Cuz **this is the place where things come to die**: not just *bodies*, but *pride*, *idols*, *grudges*, *addictions*, and all the *fake* forms of "*life*" we've been clinging to. Theologians called it the "*mortification of the flesh*" – and you already *know* how it works if you've ever been *embarrassed*. Cuz people say, "**I was mortified**" to mean "**It felt like I died!**" Cuz you *did*, the way it used to happen to my sister *frequently* when she was a *gossip*; like the time she wrote a *scathing* text to a *co-worker* to trash talk her *boss* – but sent it straight to *him*, right before going into a big boardroom meeting... She was *mortified* because a little *sin* got brought into the *light* and **when truth touches sin, that part of us burns right off!** So, we're here to slowly *seek* and *destroy* *all* our *sin* so the *real* *us* can really *live* in the *real* *world*. **The cancer has to die down here so the child can live up there.**

We have to bring all our embarrassing *sin* into the light of life to *kill* everything *except* the love and *goodness* that can survive the perfect light of heaven. But that's a *delicate* and *difficult* process. Cuz when the cancer has spread throughout the body, it's hard to *kill it* without killing the *host*. And then, *our* job is just to be a good *patient*; **we have to develop the strength to survive the treatment.**



Which is hard for every one of God's scared kids who are facing *death* in the *dark*. So, what does a *loving* parent *do*? **They go first.** They pet the big horse, they go down the scary slide, they take the first bite, and they *shave* their head before their kid's chemo – just to prove there's nothing to be afraid of. And it works with *death* too. Which is what my loving mother proved to *me* when I was an *infant* in my *faith* about 17 years ago. Cuz *that's* when she began her second battle with cancer – which eventually took her out of this world. And while I *whined* and wrestled with *life, death, faith, and God* – she spent *four* years *faithfully* pushing *forward* as her body got *weaker*, and her *time* grew *shorter*. But while my *fear* of physical *death* came into *focus*, so did *her faith*. Her *hope* got *stronger*, her *joy* got *clearer*, and her *future* got *realer*. So, she asked me to *record* her getting her head *shaved*, she wrote people *letters*, and she asked to do the *greeting* here at His Place to *share* her experience – so *every* scared kid, including *me*, would see there's *nothing* to be afraid of.

And that's just a faint echo of what Jesus came to do on Christmas day over 2000 years ago. He came here to walk the whole process – from the *cradle* to the *grave* – in front of us. He *left* the fullness of *real* life, took on the weakness of *this* life, and then walked straight *into* the thing we're most afraid of – *publicly, on purpose* – to show us *how* it works, *why* it works, and that *in Him* it really *does* lead to *real* life. And we need to *acknowledge*: **Jesus died to life to show us how to live through death.** So, maybe we should flip the way we *traditionally* see Christmas and Easter. Christmas *isn't* the bright, upbeat holiday about life *beginning* and Easter *isn't* the heavy, solemn day about death. It's almost *opposite* from *heaven's* perspective: Easter is the joyful *celebration* at the *finish* line – when Jesus left death *behind* – and *Christmas*, *isn't* the *safe* and *sweet* start of His *story*; it's the start of His *death march*. It's the day Life Himself crossed into the land of the *dying* and the countdown to the *cross* began. Cuz **Christmas isn't about Christ coming to life; it's about Christ coming to death.** And although that sounds like enough bad news to ruin everyone's eggnog – remember, it's also the Good News of how our Father found a way to come to His terrified kids – to show them that **leaving earth isn't something to fear – cuz that *isn't* how life ends, it's how it begins.**

**[And when we understand what He did]** The righteous will never be shaken ... They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. – Psalms 112:6-7 NIV

**It doesn't say they never get bad news. It says the bad news doesn't get them,** because their hearts are anchored in Christ's Good News the way Paul explains the right perspective:

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God – Romans 8:28 NKJ

*All things.* And **if all things end good, then all this world's bad news ain't the end!** It's just the temporary treatment that God uses to separate the sin from His kids so they can come home! So, when I asked, do you want the good news or the bad news first? The truth is, you don't get to decide; *everything* ends on a *positive* note, cuz **God's Word gets the last word** – and it's always *good*.