

GREATEST. NEWS. EVER.



Greatest. News. Ever.

An Easter Sermon Series

Outlines by Andrew Turner (Director of Crossover for ABM)
Graphic design by Bronwyn Parker (Bronwyn. Design & Consulting)


crossover
Helping Australian Baptists Share Jesus



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Crossover exists to Help Australian Baptists Share Jesus and we hope this series covering Palm Sunday and Easter weekend does just that for you. We're inspired by preachers, leaders and all Jesus-followers who are constantly looking for clear and engaging ways to share the astonishingly good news of Jesus.

Advice on Attribution

You may have some misgivings about using sermon outlines that have been provided from someone else. What's the best way to go about it? You want to be transparent, but at the same time we don't want to take the spotlight off the message itself.

We therefore suggest that you use a simple phrase like this in the preamble of your messages: ***'We're thankful to Crossover for providing the inspiration for this series and also giving us the freedom to make it our own.'***

This is not because we're precious about being honoured (all that belongs to Jesus) or wanting to drop advertising into sermons. It is to protect you as a speaker and leader. If you say nothing, and then later any of your hearers discover that this series was not home-grown, your reputation will be diminished, and trust – which is so vital between speakers and hearers – will be undermined.

There is no problem with adapting and expanding on these outlines as seems best. We fully expect that you will customise these messages to suit your context and personalise them with your own stories.

Finally, bear in mind that we are all in this together as the body of Christ. There is no shame in relying on one another and serving one another! No one should be expected to 'do it all' themselves and it is healthier to model dependence on and gratitude for others rather than an individual-super-hero persona. So if using outlines like this allows you more time for other ministry in Jesus' name, we are pleased to be of service, and there's nothing to hide about that.

Please Advertise and Encourage Invitation

These outlines have been written specifically with enquirers and new believers in mind. And there are a lot of them – research by McCrindle¹ shows 25% of non-church-attending Australians are warm and open to exploring Christianity. And beyond that, we know that God also has a history of grabbing those who aren't!

Encourage your regular attenders that this will be an accessible series for newcomers, and naturally consider the other elements of the service to also be hospitable.

The artwork provided for this series (see pages 9-10) is not just for in-service, but also for advertising via social media, postcards and posters. We have provided them all in Microsoft PowerPoint format so you can easily customise them to include your church details. We do indeed have the Greatest News Ever, so why not make some noise about it?

Included in This Pack:

- Sermon outlines for Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday (Included in the following pages of this document).
- Slide templates in both 16:9 (widescreen) and 4:3 aspect ratios (PowerPoint format)
- Slides with the 'Death Curve' and 'Life Curve' for use in the Easter Sunday message (PowerPoint format)
- Promotional slides for use in weeks leading up to the series (PowerPoint format)
- Instagram optimised tile (1080 x 1080px) (Jpeg format)
- Facebook optimised tile (1200 x 630px) (Jpeg format)
- Twitter optimised tile (1200 x 675) (Jpeg format)
- A3 poster (PowerPoint format)
- A6 postcard (PowerPoint format)

¹ <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/faith-belief-australia/>

Greatest News Ever - Silence Silenced

Central Idea: *The goodness, creativity and life of God simply cannot be quenched or overcome. It all culminates in the coming of Jesus. God has spoken – and his words still echo – what will we do with it?*

Luke 19:28-40 (NIV)

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” say, “The Lord needs it.”’

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’

³⁴ They replied, ‘The Lord needs it.’

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’

‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’

⁴⁰ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’

Introduction

‘What is the best news ever?’ (We often ask ‘what’s the worst...?’) but what’s the best news that you could receive today?

A God of life and love is the Rule, the Ultimate

To answer that, let’s ask another big question: ‘What is ultimate?’

What is the ‘default state’ of the universe, and what is an aberration? What is the rule and what’s an exception?

Many people assume that ‘silence and death and nothingness’ is the rule of things. If there’s life, light and sound for a while, that’s an exception. But it all runs back to death. Your device runs out of batteries, it defaults to ‘off’. Blank screen. Zero wins.

But there IS a force that outlive, outlasts and outplays the darkness and chaos and silence: God speaks. He brings life: ecosystems, landscapes, animals, people – an incredible symphony. And He created us to be creatives – a force of creativity, composition and industry. God’s love, light and life are the rule; death, darkness and silence the exception. That’s the Greatest News Ever Part 1.

Just as Nothingness Couldn’t Last, So the World’s Brokenness Couldn’t Either.

Tragically, what was meant to be a harmonious symphony became a broken cacophony. (Music played badly: worse than silence!)

But the Greatest News Ever Part 2 is The Composer Himself steps in. We celebrate his arrival as a baby at Christmas but in many ways Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem is THE COMING OF THE TRUE KING. The one promised and prophesied and longed for for centuries. What a moment! The descent of the world into brokenness and destruction would not be allowed to go on.

When Life Breaks in, Silence Becomes Impossible

And what happens when He arrives? Celebration! It's noisy. Luke says 'loud voices'. Matthew & Mark 'shouting'. And rightly so! But the Pharisees: 'Tell your disciples to pull their heads in.' Famously Jesus says 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

And what if that's true? What if, in the universe, the most irrepressible force is the love and life of God? That simply cannot be stopped, defeated or bottled up? Silence is silenced, because God speaks.

And What Does That Mean for Us?

(1) Listen The disciples probably first grasped the enormity of who Jesus is when on a mountain-top retreat with him [briefly describe Transfiguration story]. But a voice booms out of the cloud and says "This is my Son, whom I have chosen. **Listen to Him.**" Jesus speaks life^{Jn6:68}: the first thing to do is to stop and **listen**. You cannot stop God from speaking. There's just the choice of sticking your fingers in your ears and saying 'lalalala' or of paying attention. Which one are you? 'Who has ears to hear?' [Give some practical tips on how to really tune in to Jesus]

(2) Praise If you do tune in and if you grasp even just a bit of how good and kind and noble Christ is, then it's right to raise your voice in **praise**. It's not really a discipline. When your team wins or you hear great news it's quite natural to pump your fist and cry out 'YES!' If you've understood the great news, you don't need to manufacture praise, it's just a simple choice not to hold it in!

(3) Share (I think it's the Greatest News Ever Part 3!) - we get to be a part of the life-giving, love-giving, silence-silencing voice of God when we **share the news about Him with others**. It's not so much about getting the words exactly right. No one ever has yet! The greatest theologians write 5000 pages and will still freely admit they haven't bottled it neatly. You see, you can't! The thing is to not bottle it. To let it out, and to let others in. To freely give, just as we have freely received. We have the Greatest News Ever. We've found the secret to life, the secret to love, the secret to peace, and the secret to purpose ... and that it is not a secret at all.

Greatest News Ever – Evil Arrested

Central Idea: *Jesus' voluntary death set off a chain reaction of freedom and life, arresting the spiral of evil, revenge and retribution.*

Note: This message does not re-tell the events of the crucifixion of Christ. It assumes this has been done previously in the service.

John 8:34-36 (NIV)

³⁴ Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Introduction

We've been asking, 'What is the best news ever?' What's the best possible news that you could receive today? That you've just inherited \$10 million? Would that be good news? Countless people around the world and throughout history would laugh at the \$10 million compared to the news I have. Many have considered it more valuable than their own lives: *The Greatest News Ever*.

What We Really Want is Real Secure Freedom

The \$10 million is tempting because we think it might get us to the place we really want to be. And that is a place of freedom and security. We want to be able to breathe. We want to get to a place where we don't need to worry because we are absolutely secure. Where we're truly free to be our creative selves rather than weighed down by constant obligations and the expectations and judgements of others. A place where we know that we are enough, and we belong, and that secure standing is not contingent on us meeting ongoing performance criteria, or shadowed by the possibility of getting kicked out. Could it even be possible?

But We're Stuck in Slavery

Jesus is talking precisely about this here. It comes down to slavery versus freedom. In those days slavery was common and a slave would belong to a wealthy family. But think about those words 'belonging to a family'. They would only belong to the family in the sense of being owned. Not in the sense that matters. Even if they liked their master-family – they could be flicked off at any time. So a constant performance treadmill to earn a place that has to be earned all over again next week. That feeling of having to constantly perform but never achieving security is actually familiar to most of us – long after we thought slavery was abolished.

What does Jesus mean when he says "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin"? (You might know his Story of the Lost Son) When we step outside of God's reign to live our own way, we find ourselves trapped instead of free. Empty instead of full. Lonely instead of connected. And trapped, because we can't earn our way back or operate on ourselves to fix our own brokenness. Much as we try.

Or don't try. Some attempt to cope with it by giving up all together. Why strive? Why try? If we find ourselves on the outer with God, I mean, let's just claim that He's a snobby bigot who plays favourites and who'd want to be with Him? Those who try desperately to climb out of the hole they've fallen into, and those who don't bother to scramble at the sides but make themselves at home in the hole and determine to never look up – both are still equally trapped.

Jesus' Mission is to Set Us Truly Free

But God is not a snob. He wants you back more than you want to be back – even if you're one of the try-hards. Jesus would still be one of the world's great teachers if he just observed "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." It would be one of the great truths. But it would not be the Greatest News Ever. But Jesus goes on to say that a permanent, unthreatened place in God's family IS POSSIBLE. His mission: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."^{Mk10:45}

So it's not by scrambling desperately at the sides of the hole, or by cursing God aggressively or passively with a big sulk. No, God is a rescuing God. The full extent of his love for us is before us today! "If THE SON sets you free, you will be free indeed."

So how do you get it? And why do so few people seem to have it?

We Need to Actively Receive Real Freedom

Jesus told a story about a king who forgives a servant who was hopelessly in debt. (Recap Mt 18:21-35.) Now the word "forgive" in the original Greek meant "to loose" – it's the word you'd use for untying your donkey from a post. It means **to set free**. So when that servant's massive debt was forgiven, it was meant to set off a chain reaction. He would in turn go and forgive (set free) the people who owed him money. And they would forgive others. A domino-run of chains being broken and people being released.

But instead of having the words "Your debt is forgiven" ringing in his ears as he left the palace, this one had the words "Be patient with me, I'll pay be every cent" as his mind-set. And so when he bumped into a debtor, he put the squeeze on him to get money to pay off some of his own debt. And can you see the chain reaction there too? A whole conga-line of choke-holds.

There's too much of that! People under the pump putting other people under the pump. A vortex spiralling down.

And Jesus offers a far better way. A spiralling up freedom that's like an untangling knot that gets looser and looser and easier with each step. You can be part of one or the other. Jesus offers his forgiveness openly. But you need to receive it with two open hands, so you can't be in the middle of choking someone else. Receiving God's love and loving others goes hand-in-hand and always will. Just as Jesus taught us to pray "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

And so it comes down to this: As you go out from this gathering, from considering the death of Jesus - what words will you have ringing in your ears? Going round and round in your mind? Underlying all your decision-making and conversations?

Will it be that you're insecure and inadequate and on ice and needing to prove your place? Or will it be these words: "It is finished." "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Greatest News Ever – Death Disarmed

Central Idea: *Evil, suffering and death are not the ultimate power. We don't merely have to come to terms with them. We're rightly appalled by them. We may need to suffer through them, but they don't have last say. Christ has triumphed and made a way for us.*

Note: It's recommended that 1 Corinthians 15 (at least 1-8, 12-18, 32, 51-58) is read earlier in the service as background.

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

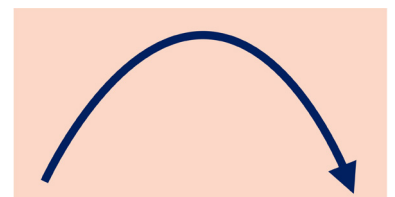
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Introduction

This week we've been asking, 'What is the best news ever?' We often ask what's the worst that could happen, but what's the best possible news that you could get today? I'm quite confident that I have it today! It's astonishingly big.

Riding on the Death Curve

Let's map out the shape that many people think life takes. The assumption is that we pop out of nowhere, have a bit of life for a while, and then decline back down and die and return to nothingness and it's over. This view is very pervasive. It underlies the way we see the world, ourselves and others, and it underlies all the choices we make. But let's take a closer look.

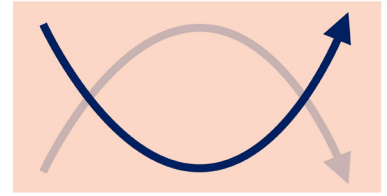


We have fun little ways of referring to this: "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) and "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out) but what they're describing and driving is a culture of hedonism and consumerism that is essentially "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we **die**." The whole thing is driven by death. It is dominated by the baseline of that graph [curve still on screen] that is the great ZERO. The assumption in this world-view is that ZERO ultimately wins. Nothingness is the ultimate lasting truth. Life is a temporary exception for a brief moment, but it runs out and back to nothing. One day the sun will run out of gas, the lights will go out, everything will die. People think death wins. Death rules. And so it shapes and dominates their lives, and they map it out like this curve.

The technical name for this world-view is *Nihilism*. It ultimately claims that everything is ultimately meaningless and pointless and is there any wonder that its rise coincides with mental illness, violence, hopelessness etc? It needs to be seen for what it is.

Or Following the Life Curve

But Jesus lived a different path. He taught it openly, and he lived it. It looks like this: He didn't pop out of nowhere but came from God (and taught us that we too are not primal accidents but created.) He didn't scramble upwards to try to maximise his life experiences and have as much fun as possible. This poem in Philippians 2 describes his trajectory. [re-read]



Do you see how it is quite the opposite? What a contrast. He pointed himself *downward* "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." And God raised him upward. It's not only the way he lived, it is the way he taught. So many times he said "Those who exalt themselves [trace death curve up] will be humbled [trace death curve down] but those who humble themselves [trace life-curve down] will be exalted.

Can you see how this is the *Greatest News Ever*? The foundation of it all is that there is a power more powerful than death and darkness and nothingness. A loving and creating and living God who *does not run out of gas* but gives life and offers eternal life.

Compare and contrast the kind of society that is formed by these two world-views. The first one creates a culture where we see each other as competitors or threats or stepping stones to be climbed over as we each try to maximise our brief time in the sun. But Jesus' way creates a community of people determined to serve one another and sacrifice for one another and put others before oneself. That cooperation and harmony bring a flourishing even in our broken world. And all with expectation and anticipation of something better and more lasting to come!

That's why Paul in his great chapter on resurrection^{1Co15} winds up taunting "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Because suffering and death are not ultimate. Like Jesus, we may need to suffer through. But it's not our destination.

Choosing to Ride the Life Curve

It's mind-blowingly great news! You have to get your head around a whole different way of seeing things. But it begs 2 questions:

- (1) Is it true? It is only good *news* as opposed to *wishful thinking* if it has historical and scientific credibility. If death can be shown to really have been overcome. That's why Paul starts his great chapter with historical facts. 'Of first importance.' 500+ witnesses most of them were still alive ('Go ask them yourself!') Many went on to give their own lives rather than deny what they had seen. Talk about credibility. And Paul says, if it's not true, disregard everything else I say.^{1Co15:14-15}
- (2) Now the other question is simply this: How do you get off the death-curve and onto the life-curve? Jesus invites all, indeed gave his life for it, so it's yours if you want it. To attach your life to Him he gave a simple ceremony – baptism, which even acts out that curve: Down, then up, and into new life full of love, joy, meaning and expectation.

Themed Artwork

(1) Artwork for digital promotion

Instagram (1080x1080px)



Facebook (1200x630px)



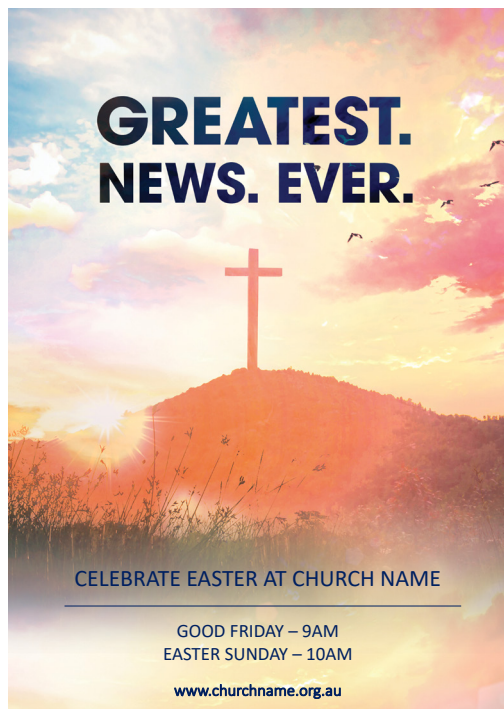
Twitter (1200x675px)



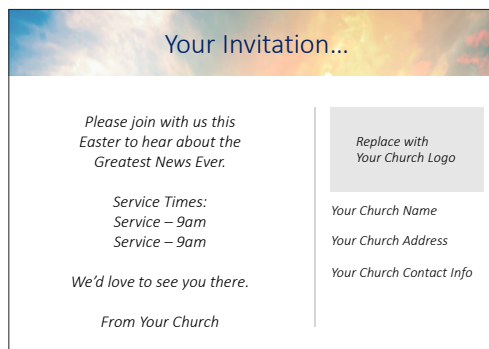
(2) Artwork for print promotion

Artwork can be edited and customised using Microsoft Powerpoint.

A3 Poster (Powerpoint)



A6 Postcard (Powerpoint)



(3) Artwork for use in service.

Artwork can be edited and customised using Microsoft Powerpoint.

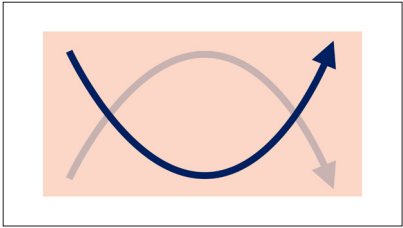
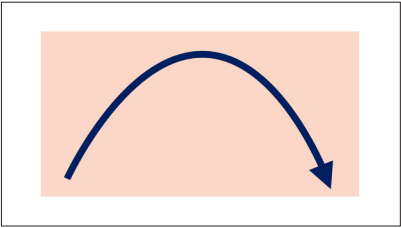
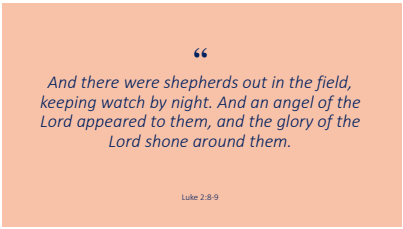
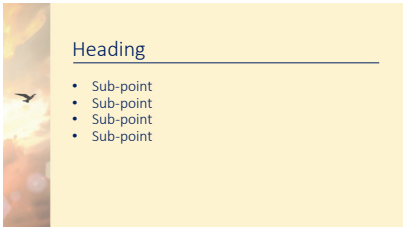
Church Promotional Slide 16:9



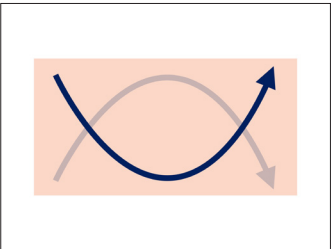
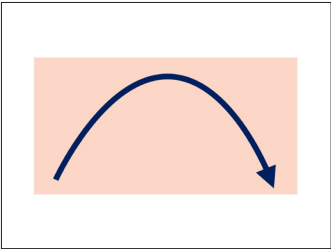
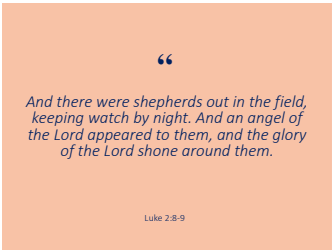
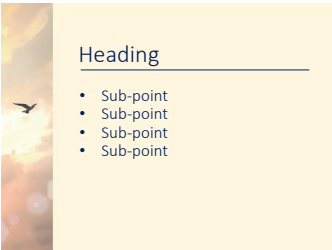
Church Promotional Slide 4:3



Church Sermon Slides 16:9



Church Sermon Slides 4:3



Thank you!

Thanks for using “Greatest. News. Ever.” to celebrate and share the great news of Easter with your community. If you’re interested in helping develop resources like this - or even something quite different - we’d love to hear from you.

Get in touch at ideas@crossover.org.au



Email: crossover@baptist.org.au
Phone: 02 9868 9236



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