



Kyle is away, taking the Word to the heathen in East Texas. I think Chris is his backup, but Chris is also out of pocket. So, I guess that makes me TJ Yates. Actually, the situation may be more like Kerry Collins taking the place of Peyton Manning. Or trying to.



THE “ZOMBIE SERMON”

I’m Joe Gill. And just like Kerry Collins used to quarterback, I used to do this stuff all the time. I was a pastor for seven years in Northern Virginia, about a mile outside the Beltway. So, I preached a lot of sermons, maybe 300-350. As Kyle said, I shouldn’t get nervous today because I’ve done this before.

Now if you follow me on Facebook, first of all, good for you. But if you do, you know I have in fact been feeling anxiety about what to say or how to say it this morning. First of all, it's been a while. It's been ten years since I was preaching regularly. And more than that, one of the first things we learned in Seminary was that there's a tension between how you might want to preach, and how the group who is listening might reasonably expect you to preach.

When Kyle asked me, more than a week ago to speak, the first thing I thought about doing was throwing out Ephesians 2 and preaching my second favorite sermon which is about Stephen and is from Acts. This is my most practiced sermon, and in a lot of ways, my safest. It's what we in the churchy-church business call a "pocket sermon"—one that you can deliver on short notice, with a minimum of preparation. You just pull it out of your pocket and deliver it.

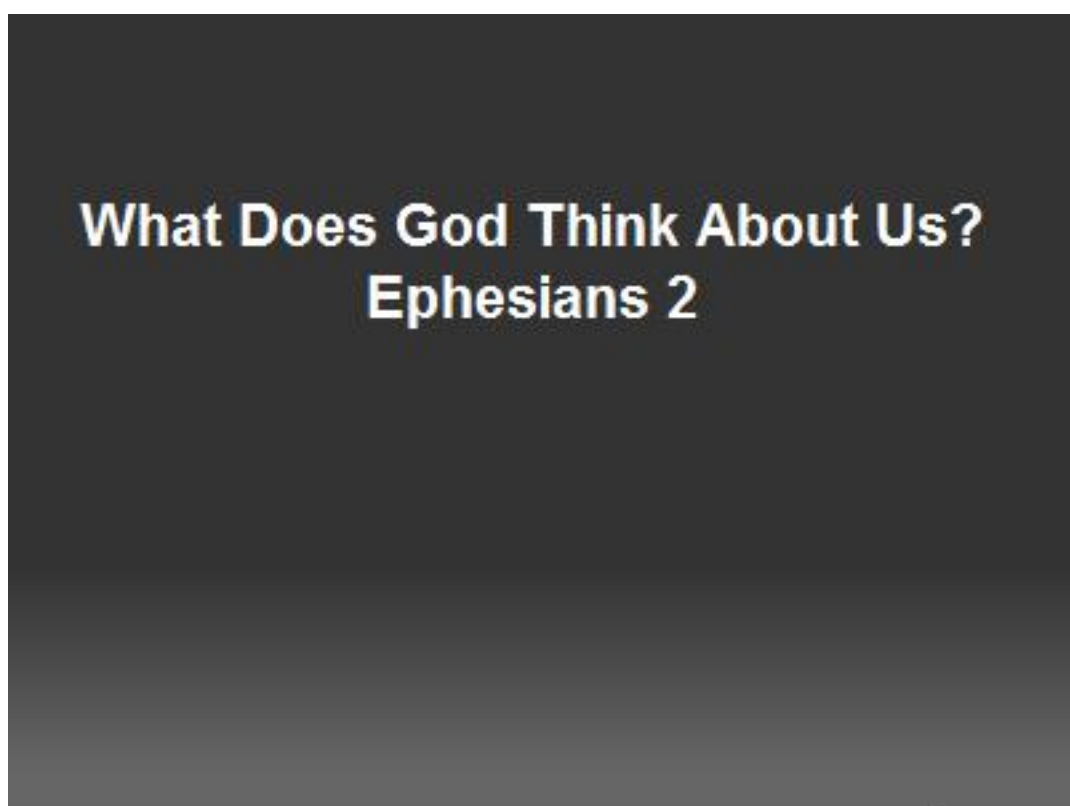
That sermon begins with the confession that I am an approval addict, but that my life is made much more complex because I hate to conform in order to achieve approval. So do I stick with safe this morning? Do I jettison what we had planned to cover and go safe with Acts 6? I have permission to do just that. When I have substitute-preached, which I have done a little of since we moved to Texas, not much, I have found that the best way to win approval has been to preach that safe sermon. And the times I have preached a more risky, more cutting edge sermon, I have had some people get mad, and in a couple of cases, get up and walk out.

The mind-blowing paradox is that this "safe" sermon is about a guy who preached a very unconventional sermon, and how this ended up getting him killed. And the other thing is, it's only my second favorite portion of scripture to draw a sermon around. Guess what my favorite passage to preach from is? Ephesians 2. When I dream, as I frequently do, of beginning an Internet Church, with blogs and discussion boards and sermons posted on Youtube, the sermon I dream of presenting first is

one drawn from Ephesians 2.

So, though it is less safe, I decided to with Ephesians 2. The next thought was: I'll still be okay. I won't compare the United States to the Titanic like I did when I preached that one time in 2004. I won't show the Michael Jackson Thriller video. Instead, I'll imitate Kyle's style as closely as possible. That, too, would be safe.

Here is what I came up with:



Slide 3 is a slide that is my best guess of how Kyle would deliver this sermon. If Kyle were here, this is the slide he would use. The introduction takes the form of a provocative question and also points to the material that will answer that question. So, right at the outset, we know that the subject matter is

going to be this, and the answer is going to be found here.

Unfortunately, I spoke to Kyle yesterday, and he said that he was sorry he wasn't going to be here, because he would really like to see and hear what my style of preaching was. *My style.* The uniquely Joe Gill way of speaking about Bible stuff on Sunday mornings. He has the expectation that I'm going to be avant garde in some form. And the chief difference which I will be unable to conceal if I honor his expectation is that while Kyle tries to limit himself to one GEEK reference per sermon, one analogy that's non-traditional and inherently risky because it's drawn from popular culture, where he limits himself to these references once per sermon, I struggle to limit myself to one GEEK reference per paragraph. It is how I think and experience reality and view the world. It is, as Lancelot's servant says in "Monty Python and The Holy Grail", my particular "idiom".

Back in the Day, I preached a sermon about human nature and quoted the Terminator from Terminator 2, when the young John Connor while watching two small children fight with their plastic toy guns, says "We're not going to make it, are we? Humans, I mean." And the Terminator says, "It's in your nature to destroy yourselves." And that was a powerful, poignant moment for me, and I thought it helpful to show this problem we have as recognized by James Cameron. And, you'll recall, the subtitle of Terminator 2 is "Judgment Day".

When I speak, I speak not as the shepherd patiently guiding the faithful sheep to their eternal green pasture but as the Shepherd out beating the bushes for the lost goats. The Lost Generation is who I primarily spoke to. The Lost Generation is the people whose parents went to church but who have dropped out of church. They were raised in church but they no longer attend because they don't think they belong. One of the Lost Generation came up to me after that sermon about the nature of humanity and said, "You quoted my favorite German philosopher." And I said, "Nietzsche?" And he said, "No,

Schwarzenegger.”

A few minutes later a woman named Randy who was not too much older than me came up to me and said, “That movie you mentioned: wasn’t that an R-rated movie? What was I thinking, making mention of an R-rated movie in the House of God?”

That was and is my dilemma. Pop culture is an avenue to truth for some, and a source of alienation to others. How do you reach out to some when those avenues of invitation may set off alarm bells in many of the others?

So, if I were to meet him in the middle, this would be my opening slide.



Here I’m borrowing from Kyle by posting a provocative question. If you are a typical member of a typical church, this question is not going to make sense to you. Part of my faith in you today is that you

all are atypical. Can I hear an “Amen”? And my remaining faith in you is that you, if this question doesn’t make sense to you, will ride it out with my assurance that it might make more sense to the person sitting next to you, or on the end of the row, or on the other side of the room. And the less church culture experience you have, you more this question might be compelling to you. But that’s more than enough about how the sausage is made. We move now to the sausage itself.

When is Z-Day going to occur? What will cause the Zombie Apocalypse to occur and what can we do about it?

In Zombie movies there are two (actually three) categories of causes for why the dead walk around and terrify the living. The first is human agency. The government creates a weaponized virus like in 28 Days Later or Resident Evil or a cancer vaccine is too quickly approved by the FDA, like in I Am Legend. There’s some scientific mishap which is bungled and then the contagion is released on the world. Zombieland is a variation on that, because the zombie infestation is caused by Mad-Cow disease.



(SLIDE 5) Here's Jim wandering around a deserted London before he first encounters zombies in a church. (Think about that for a second. **I went further when I delivered this sermon, but I don't remember what I said. Something about the reversal of worldviews. The World outside views Christians as bringing death, not life.**) There are a couple of things by the way that are positive about a Zombie Apocalypse: plenty of parking, and no traffic.

The second cause of a zombie outbreak is when something falls from space as in *Night of the Comet* or the 1978 remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with Donald Sutherland, Jeff Goldblum and Leonard Nimoy. It's a zombie movie in that people die and come back to life but in a de-personalized, empty and aggressive state. I also count *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as a "Zombie film because the idea of waking up to a world transformed by the walking dead is very common in Zombie films: in 28

Days Later, the main character awakes from a coma, as does the police officer in Walking Dead, Ana in Dawn of the Dead wakes up just before her zombie neighbor kills her husband, and the girls in Night of the Comet wake up to a changed world. Even in the satire, Shaun of the Dead, the Zombie Apocalypse reaches critical mass while he is sleeping, and you have the comic scene of Shaun going through his morning routine without realizing that Zombies now rule the earth.

The final cause of a zombie apocalypse is something supernatural, beyond comprehension or simply left unexplained. I don't believe the cause is revealed in the TV Series, Walking Dead, though I haven't seen it. (Now that I have seen it, the scientist gives a speech in the final episode of Season One about how they don't know what it is.) Finally, in the epic 2004 Dawn of the Dead, it's never explained why the dead are becoming reanimated, except that a preacher on tv states that "When Hell is full, the dead will walk the earth." So, while the infection does spread by biting, unlike the original, there is a dying sequence that occurs before reanimation. (Also note that the "Evangelist" only brings news of death, despair and damnation.)

According to Paul in Ephesians, however, the Zombie Apocalypse is not something that will occur in the future as the result of technological mismanagement, and it's not something that will occur when we are invaded by the Damned as a prelude to the end of the world.

Instead, Paul says that the Zombie Apocalypse has already occurred. (SLIDE 6)

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest,

we were by nature deserving of wrath.

You were dead in your sins...in which you used to live. At some previous point you were like zombies, both alive and dead. You walked around, you pursued what you wanted like an animal, but you were no more than an animated corpses. To paraphrase Captain Barbossa in Pirates of the Caribbean, "You best start believing in zombie movies, ladies and gentlemen. You're in one."

Or maybe it's a zombie video. (SLIDE 7).



Here's an ironic image. This illustration has drawn objections before, but can you think of a more meaningful representation of an empty, doomed, tragic existence than Michael Jackson? You can love the art, and we do love his music, don't we Jeffrey? But the life of the artist was empty. He was alive but his life was a living death, and destruction was inevitable.

Or maybe it was my dancing that people really didn't like. You know. (Do Michael Jackson's dance)

I mentioned Shaun of the Dead. In one of the early scenes of that movie, he is on a bus or a subway car, and he's surrounded by these pale commuters with blank stares and open mouths. And this is prior to anyone becoming a zombie. The message is underscored in the advertising for Shaun of the Dead...

(SLIDE 8)



...which asked the question, "Ever felt you were surrounded by zombies?" Zombies are dead on their feet. They go through some of the motions of existence, but they are rotting away inside as they lead their meaningless lives. And there's an emptiness to Shaun's existence that is only resolved when he has to fight to save those he loves.

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<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13JXfTUn-UGSXPfR03P7wXEwAi43uOYeYQdAsuXxER3Y/edit>