HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD

Matthew 28:1-10

Reports confirm what we already know – church attendance is higher on Easter than on any other day. In 2023, for example, about half of U.S. adults planned to attend church during Easter.[1] People gather for worship on Easter to remember Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. While that might sound like a gruesome memorial, a celebratory mood marks the day because Jesus did not remain in the tomb – he returned to life "on the third day"[2] (*Acts 10:34-41*). The New Testament writers called Jesus' resurrection "good news" (*Acts 10:36*) and explained its significance to their readers through the letters they wrote. We believe the Good News about Jesus, and we celebrate times when people think about Jesus. Therefore, we will use this Easter service to focus on the good news about Jesus' resurrection, reminding ourselves of its meaning for our lives.

The Good News of Jesus' resurrection

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul dedicates a lengthy chapter (58 verses) to exploring the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Given the emphasis the Paul (and the other New Testament writers) placed on this event, the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection seem surprisingly brief, lacking the detail one might expect for such a crucial event. For example:

- Matthew recounts Jesus' resurrection in only fifteen verses (*Matthew 28:1-15*).
- Mark dedicates eleven verses to Jesus' resurrection (*Mark 16:1-11*).
- Luke dedicates twelve verses to Jesus' resurrection (*Luke 24:1-12*).
- John records Jesus' resurrection in eighteen verses (*John 20:1-18*).

Even more curious, the gospels devote more time to recording Jesus' appearances to his disciples than to his resurrection. However, Luke notes that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of forty days, "speaking about the kingdom of God" (*Acts 1:1-3*). The stories about his appearances seem limited when placed against Luke's mention of forty days. Consider:

- Matthew offers a very brief, four-verse account of one of Jesus' appearances in Matthew 20:16-20.
- Mark's gospel concludes with an eight-verse account of two of Jesus appearances (*Mark 16:12-20*).
- Luke records two of Jesus' appearances in Luke 24:13-52.
- John records a series of appearances in John 20:19-21:24.

[1] https://wifitalents.com/easter-church-attendance-statistics/

[2] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

While the gospels might not seem to contain narratives that reflect the significance of Jesus' resurrection, the epistles, written decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, record the disciples' maturing understanding of the event. But rather than *outlining* every aspect of their developing understandings, the epistles present readers with messages *shaped* by the authors' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Consider the following three connected messages repeated in the epistles:

Jesus' resurrection exalted him to a position of authority

Acts 1:1-11; cf. Daniel 7:13-14
Matthew 28:18-20
Ephesians 1:15-21

Jesus' resurrection creates unity

Ephesians 1:10
1 Corinthians 15:24-28
Ephesians 2:1-22
Galatians 3:26-28

Jesus' resurrection introduces a new creation

Luke 24:1; 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:7, 21; 24:46
Colossians 1:15-20; 3:9-10
1 Corinthians 15:20-22; Romans 5:12-21
2 Corinthians 5:17

Applications

- Jesus, not politicians, not militaries, not nations, rules.
- However, Jesus does not exercise his rule like politicians, militaries, or nations; he governs through the lives of individuals who submit themselves to His rule.
- Jesus' resurrection gives us a new life in the present and in the future. However, it requires us to learn how to live out our new life in the present.
- Jesus exercises His rule to create real and lasting unity in a divided world by transforming the lives of those who submit themselves to his rule.
- Jesus' power to transform individual lives evidences his power to transform our world, offering real hope in a world seemingly filled with brokenness, conflict, and hopelessness.