

**SESSION #3150 GOLDMINE: THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES OF THE FOUR
GOSPELS**

ROOM W203-C

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SOME BASIC WORKING POINTS

1. The works and deeds of Jesus were passed down by believers in an oral format or formats.
2. The writing of this "Good News" or Gospels extended from about 65 AD through 100 AD.
3. Each Gospel is an attempt to present the historical Jesus in what we might call a unique theological or catechetical perspective.
4. The Resurrection accounts of each evangelist can only be understood when joined to the preceding Passion Account.
5. No direct account of the Resurrection appears in revealed Scriptures.
6. The Gospel Resurrection narratives take two forms: empty tomb accounts and appearance accounts.

MARK:

TIME AND PLACE: The first of the four Gospels, it was written in Rome at a time of persecution of Christians but before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

MARK'S THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: Jesus has come to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God, once and for all in history, by performing signs and wonders in the name of his Father. He renews the promise of the New Israel by the re-establishment of the Twelve Tribes of Israel through his own intimate circle of the Twelve. He reveals the cost of discipleship as his followers fail to comprehend or dissolve in fear. His crucifixion is the highlight of the Gospel, the moment of utter abandonment but complete surrender to his Father.

MARK'S RESURRECTION NARRATIVES:

(1) Mark 16: 1-8 (Empty tomb narrative)

Amazingly, the original text by Mark devotes all of eight lines to the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene and two other women discover an opened tomb with a young man seated, dressed in white. He announces that Jesus has been raised, and that the women are to gather Peter and the other brethren for a journey to Galilee to meet him. Mark 16:8 ends the Gospel with the remarkable report that the women, overcome fear, tell nothing to anyone! The Scripture scholar Francis Moloney comments that the pattern of rejection is now complete; even the loyal women are no longer faithful.

(2) Mark 16:9-20. (Editorial summary)

It seems that the abrupt end of this first Gospel was disconcerting to the early Church. A second author composed a list of appearances in which the women are exonerated, the male followers come grudgingly to faith, Jesus breaks bread with his followers, scolds them for their hardness of heart, and then commissions them for a worldwide mission to proclaim the good news and baptize. Although this passage was added later, the Church has generally included it in the Markan Gospel as inspired text.

(3) The Shorter Ending: your bibles will generally contain a two line summary under this title, another attempt to soothe the jarring ending of 16:8

(4) *The Freer Logion*: a fourth or fifth century paragraph in which the disciples excuse their infidelity as the influence of Satan. Possibly this piece, stored in Washington, D.C., may have been inserted here to restore the reputation of the Twelve and by consequence the authority of bishops, including the bishop of Rome.

MATTHEW:

TIME AND PLACE: Matthew's Gospel was probably composed between 80 and 90 A.D. Its place of origin is not clear except that there is evidence of close contact and "fraternal enmity" between followers of Jesus and their Jewish brethren.

MATTHEW'S THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: Jesus is the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, and the Kingdom of God is imminent.

MATTHEW'S RESURRECTION NARRATIVES:

(1) Matthew 28: 1-7 (empty tomb narrative)

As in Mark's Gospel the women approach the tomb. But Matthew differs from Mark in describing an early morning earthquake and the appearance of an angel who rolled back the stone and sat on it. The angel's appearance is described in similar language as Matthew 17:2, the Transfiguration narrative. The guards are terrified. The angel gives the women the identical instructions reported by Mark, to tell the Apostles and to go to Galilee where Jesus would be seen.

(2) Matthew 28: 8-10 (appearance narrative)

The women follow the angel's instructions (unlike Mark's account) though with fear and apprehension. Suddenly we have the first actual encounter with the risen Jesus, whose ministry here is reassurance of the women. Jesus basically repeats the instruction of the Angel. Two curious points: (1) Jesus allows the women to embrace his feet (unlike John's account), and (2) nearly all empty tomb and appearance narratives are marked by fear or apprehension: were his followers afraid of reprisal for abandoning Jesus to his arrest and death?

(3) Matthew 28: 11-15 (empty tomb narrative)

This is a very curious report unique to Matthew. The guards report what they experienced—the earthquake, the Angel, the seal of the tomb broken. Ironically, Matthew's Passion narrative ended with the chief priests' visit to Pilate over concern about mischief at the tomb, that the disciples might steal the body and proclaim a resurrection. (Matthew 27: 62-66) Now their worst nightmare has come to pass. The chief priests bribe the soldiers into silence. Matthew observes (28:15) that this conspiracy continued "to the present day." Matthew's text purposefully reinforces the obtuse and bankrupt nature of temple priesthood and addresses present day attacks upon Christian faith late in the first century.

(4) Matthew 28: 16:20 (appearance narrative)

Word for word, this is one of the richest texts in the New Testament. The disciples gather to meet Jesus in Galilee on a mountaintop. Jesus must have been clearly visible, for even the doubters come around to pay him homage. However, Jesus' physical appearance is not discussed by Matthew, who prefers to place emphasis upon Jesus' words. Jesus announces that full authority in heaven and earth is his; clearly both the Messiah and the Kingdom of God have arrived, the entire purpose of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus commands a world-wide mission to Jew and Gentile alike; the content is "everything that I have commanded you," most likely the Sermon on the Mount and the content of this Gospel. Jesus assures his disciples that he will be with them all days, though how is not addressed. There is no discussion of the Holy Spirit in Matthew's Gospel. This and other questions will be addressed in the Resurrection narratives of Luke and John.

LUKE

TIME AND PLACE: Luke's Gospel was written in Antioch (Syria), then the third largest city in the Roman Empire. The date of composition is generally set at 80-85 A.D.

LUKE'S THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: Given the fall of Jerusalem and the persecution of Christians, can God's promises and purposes truly be trusted? Luke provides a new framework for understanding the plan of God for Jew

and Gentile alike, perhaps nowhere better exemplified as in the story of Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-36),

LUKE'S RESURRECTION NARRATIVES

(1) Luke 24: 1-8 (empty tomb narrative)

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke reports on the women going to the tomb but omits the dramatic scene of Matthew. The stone is rolled back and the women actually enter the tomb. Apparently still in the tomb, the women suddenly behold two men in dazzling garments. Luke has expanded the conversation, as the men ask the women why they are looking for the Living One among the dead. The speaker then begins to provide pieces of the interpretive puzzle, reminding the women that Jesus had predicted his fate of falling into the hands of sinful men, suffer crucifixion, and rise on the third day. Luke comments that "with this reminder, his words came back to them."

(2) Luke 24: 9-12 (empty tomb narrative)

Unlike Matthew's account, the women (a sizeable number, it seems) do not encounter the Risen Christ but return to inform the Eleven, minus Judas, "and others" whose identities are unclear. Although Luke recounts that the men regarded the report as nonsense, Peter alone goes to the tomb. He finds "nothing but the wrappings" and he returns from the tomb in amazement. Clearly Luke is establishing Peter's role in this drama, possibly to enhance the importance of the Bishop of Rome in Luke's own time.

(3) Luke 24: 13-36 (appearance narrative)

In this lengthy narrative we have a significant window on two critical points for the Church's life: (1) the gradual process of how the early believers, the early Church, came to gradually understand the meaning of the death of Jesus, and (2) how the Church would experience Jesus among them until the end of time—the sacramental experience, if you will.

Two disciples are making a journey of seven miles on foot. They are walking away from the main body of Jesus' followers. In an exchange Luke describes as "lively" (argumentative?) they are discussing the death of Jesus and, as we come to learn, the empty tomb. Luke says that they were "restrained" (by lack of faith?) from recognizing the arrival of Jesus as a fellow traveler. In fact, Cleopas is downright rude, accusing Jesus of being out of touch with major happenings in Jerusalem.

For the benefit of his readers, Luke has the two disciples lay out the state of a primitive community in considerable disarray about its identity and the bigger picture of things (24: 19-24). The disciples do indeed have all the facts at hand about Jesus' life, death and the empty tomb. What they seem to be missing is the interpretive key. This Jesus proceeds to do for them, opening with the observation that the disciples have missed the meaning of the Old Testament prophets. With literary hyperbole, Luke reports that Jesus interpreted every passage from Moses (the Pentateuch) and the prophets which referred to him. We can draw from this text that Luke is describing a longer "catechesis," so to speak, as the young Church grew in maturity and understanding.

The two disciples respond with enthusiasm. They ask this stranger to sup with them. In 24:30 Jesus "took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them." Luke's original readers would have recognized this ritual as a reference to their early Eucharists of their own time. Luke observes that "their eyes were opened" (to see Jesus as he is) but he vanished from their sight. Left unspoken is the obvious fact that the bread (Eucharist) remained. In short, the Church was coming to see that the Risen Lord lived among them in sacramental experience. The two disciples return to the brethren where they learn that Jesus has in fact appeared to Peter, an appearance unreported elsewhere in the text. We can surmise that it is Luke's intent to designate Peter (and not the women) as the first to behold the Risen Savior.

(4) Luke 24: 36-49 (appearance narrative)

When Jesus does appear to the eleven, he sends the disciples into "fright and panic." Luke says they thought they were seeing a ghost, which was in fact an early heresy by the year 100. Jesus brings them peace and continuity; he goes to great lengths to assure them he is a real person, so far as to ask for a meal. Jesus then in essence repeats his instruction of earlier in the day, this time for their benefit. In 24:49 he tells them to wait in Jerusalem for "power from on high."

(5) Luke 24: 50-53 (appearance narrative)

Jesus leads the disciples outside of Bethany, where he blesses them and was taken up into heaven. Interestingly, in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke repeats this account somewhat differently.

JOHN

TIME AND PLACE: A general consensus of scholarship places composition between 90-100 A.D. in Asia Minor. The author assumes a Christian readership familiar with the earlier Gospels.

JOHN'S THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: The author seeks to establish a clear understanding of the full divinity and humanity of Jesus, in response to misunderstandings within the Church and attacks from without.

JOHN'S RESURRECTION NARRATIVES:

John 20: 1-10 (empty tomb narrative)

Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb alone and finds the stone removed. She reports to Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (possibly John) that "the Lord has been taken from the tomb." The two disciples literally run to the site, with the second reaching the tomb ahead of Peter. There is a deference shown to Peter, who enters first. Peter observes the burial clothes which have obviously been arranged. This is a marked contrast to the Lazarus story, where Lazarus hobbles out of the tomb still bound in his burial cloths. (John 11: 1-44) The second disciple "saw and believed." The two disciples leave while Mary Magdalene remains.

John 20: 11-18 (appearance narrative)

In shades of Matthew's narrative, Mary Magdalene, after a discourse with two angels in the tomb who apparently have recently materialized, encounters Jesus, though she originally mistakes him for the gardener. Jesus tells her not to cling to him, "for I have not yet ascended to my Father." Mary is instructed to tell the disciples that Jesus is ascending in glory to his Father.

John 20: 19-23 (appearance narrative)

On the evening of the same day Jesus appears to the ten. (Judas is dead and Thomas, as becomes evident, is absent.) In John's account the disciples are more afraid of the Jews than they are of Jesus. The disciples rejoice as Jesus shows them the scars of his crucifixion ordeal. Implied here is the act of touching, something Mary Magdalene had been forbidden to do (see 20:27). Jesus commissions the disciples and then breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, empowering them to forgive sin.

John 20: 26-29 (appearance narrative)

Jesus appears in the same fashion to the disciples a week later. A recalcitrant Thomas has refused to believe his brethren that Jesus lives. Jesus addresses himself to Thomas, inviting him to touch him and probe his wounds. Evidently Jesus has already ascended to the Father. Thomas professes his faith. Jesus replies, "Blest are they who have not seen and yet believed."

John 21: 1-23 (appearance narrative)

This is a "second ending" to John's Gospel, though it has always been considered inspired by the Church. The chapter seems to address loose ends on several matters of current concern to the Church of John's time, specifically the roles of Peter and probably John. In this chapter Jesus appears to the disciples as they are fishing, and again there is at least a momentary restraint in recognizing him until he miraculously produces a huge catch of fish.

After the meal, Jesus three times asks Peter if he loves him, and three times commissions him to feed his sheep. Again the author is singling out Peter's unique position among the disciples. Peter, oddly, asks about John's destiny, which Jesus replies is not Peter's concern.

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