

WHAT IS FINAL IS NO LONGER FINAL

5 APRIL 2026

SUMMARY

This message explores the often-overlooked 50-day Easter season between Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost, emphasizing that Easter is not merely a single event but the beginning of a transformative process. The message challenges believers to move beyond simply celebrating that Jesus rose from the dead to personally encountering the risen Christ in their daily lives. Through examining the 40 days Jesus spent with His disciples after the resurrection, the message reveals four crucial elements: encounter with Jesus, His teaching and formation, restoration of those who failed, and the promise of what is to come through the Holy Spirit. The resurrection overcomes humanity's fallen nature and original sin, but believers must personally engage with this reality rather than treating Easter as the end of spiritual discipline. This season is presented as a time of formation where the reality of resurrection moves from something understood intellectually to something lived experientially.

KEY POINTS

- The church celebrates Easter for 50 days, not just one Sunday, marking a crucial season of spiritual formation
- Jesus deliberately remained on earth for 40 days after resurrection to prepare His disciples through repeated encounters
- The resurrection is presented as a series of encounters, not a single appearance, each serving to move people from confusion to recognition, fear to peace, and doubt to belief
- Recognition of the risen Jesus is often gradual and deeply personal, requiring individual encounter rather than just corporate celebration
- Jesus met the disciples where they were, providing what they needed most (peace) before giving them instructions
- The resurrection was physical and real - Jesus showed His wounds, ate with disciples, and demonstrated bodily resurrection
- After rising, Jesus taught differently, helping disciples understand what had happened rather than what would happen
- Jesus restored those who failed (like Peter) through invitation rather than condemnation, showing failure doesn't disqualify us
- Jesus gave the Great Commission but told disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit's power before going
- These 40 days represent a process of formation involving four elements: encounter, teaching/formation, restoration, and promise
- Believers are called to actively engage these 50 days rather than simply being relieved Lent is over
- The Easter season is meant to launch believers to a deeper place in God, not return them to spiritual complacency

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- Acts 1:1-5 (Primary focus - Jesus' 40 days and promise of the Holy Spirit)
- Matthew 28 (Women at the tomb, Great Commission)
- Luke 24 (Road to Emmaus, disciples in locked room)
- 1 Corinthians 15 (Appearances to 500, to James)
- John 21 (Appearance by the sea, breakfast on beach, restoration of Peter)

STORIES:

- Letter from Sister Frances Cullen, 94 years old in Ireland, facing relocation and viewing it as a gift and new beginning in surrender to God
- Bruce Downes's reflection on 28 years of ministry since the first service on April 12, 1998, acknowledging mistakes and wrong turns
- Meeting a man who offered to go to the one country (of 195) the ministry hadn't reached, willing to risk never returning
- Mary Magdalene at the tomb not recognizing Jesus until He spoke her name
- Two disciples on the road to Emmaus whose eyes were opened when Jesus broke bread
- Disciples in locked room receiving peace from Jesus who walked through walls
- Thomas requiring physical proof of Jesus' wounds
- Seven disciples fishing when Jesus appeared on shore with breakfast prepared
- Peter's restoration through Jesus asking "Do you love me?" three times
- Jesus appearing to 500 people at once
- Bruce Downes's wedding preparation as analogy for how anticipation differs from actual experience
- Meeting people at Ken's reception into the Catholic Church, including someone from Bunnings and neighbors
- Saints who died feeling disappointed or were rejected by their own orders (John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila) as examples of God protecting hearts from pride

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work during this Easter season. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

ICEBREAKER

What was your typical experience of Easter growing up? Did it end on Easter Sunday, or did you continue celebrating afterward?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding the Message

1. Before this message, what did you typically do or think about during the time between Easter Sunday and Pentecost? How does viewing this as an intentional 50-day season change your perspective?
2. Bruce mentioned that Jesus could have ascended immediately but chose to stay for 40 days. Why do you think this was important? What does it tell us about how God works in our lives?
3. The message outlined four things Jesus did during the 40 days:
 - He continued to act (in new ways)
 - He continued to reveal Himself
 - He continued to form and shape His disciples
 - He commissioned them but told them to wait

Which of these four resonates most with where you are spiritually right now?

Personal Reflection

4. Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus until He spoke her name. Have there been times when you missed recognizing Jesus in your circumstances? What helped you finally "see" Him?
5. Bruce asked: "Where do you need to meet the risen Jesus personally, right now, in your heart?" Take a moment of silence, then share if you're comfortable: What is your honest answer to this question?
6. The disciples needed PEACE when Jesus first appeared to them. What do you need from the risen Jesus right now?
 - Peace?
 - Clarity?
 - Restoration?
 - Courage?

- Something else?

Going Deeper

7. Bruce mentioned that "the resurrection doesn't remove human weakness, but it meets them where they are and transforms their experience." How have you seen this truth in your own life?
8. Jesus restored Peter after his denial by asking "Do you love me?" three times. Is there an area of failure or disappointment in your life that needs the restoration Jesus offers? How does knowing that "failure doesn't disqualify you from what lies ahead" change your perspective?
9. The message emphasized that these 40 days move us from:
 - Confusion to clarity
 - Fear to courage
 - Isolation to mission
 - Something understood to something lived

Which of these transitions do you most need to make right now?

Practical Application

10. Bruce challenged us: "What will you do in these 40 days?" What specific practices or disciplines could help you intentionally engage with this Easter season? (Examples: daily prayer walks, Scripture meditation, journaling encounters with Jesus, etc.)
11. The early disciples were told to "wait" for the Holy Spirit. In our action-oriented culture, how can we practice spiritual waiting? What might that look like practically?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Easter is not an event but a 50-day season of formation and transformation
- ✓ We are called to encounter Jesus personally during this time, not just celebrate His resurrection intellectually
- ✓ Jesus meets us where we are with what we need—just as He did with the early disciples
- ✓ These 40 days are about moving from understanding to living the resurrection reality
- ✓ Failure doesn't disqualify us—Jesus restores and commissions us anyway
- ✓ We must wait for the Holy Spirit's power before rushing into mission

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week (and consider continuing through the Easter season):

OPTION 1: Daily Encounter Set aside 10-15 minutes each day to sit quietly and ask: "Jesus, where do You want to meet me today?" Journal what comes to mind.

OPTION 2: Scripture Meditation Read one of the resurrection appearance stories each day (see list below). Imagine yourself in the scene. What would you have felt? What would Jesus say to you?

OPTION 3: Restoration Prayer Each day, bring one area of failure, disappointment, or fear to Jesus. Ask Him to restore you in that area and listen for His response.

OPTION 4: Expectation Journal Each morning, write: "Today I expect to encounter Jesus in..." and fill in the blank. Each evening, reflect on where you saw Him.

RESURRECTION APPEARANCE READINGS

- **Mary Magdalene** - John 20:11-18
- **The Women** - Matthew 28:1-10
- **Peter** - Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5
- **Road to Emmaus** - Luke 24:13-35
- **The Disciples (without Thomas)** - John 20:19-23
- **The Disciples (with Thomas)** - John 20:24-29
- **By the Sea** - John 21:1-14
- **The Great Commission** - Matthew 28:16-20
- **The 500** - 1 Corinthians 15:6
- **James** - 1 Corinthians 15:7
- **The Ascension** - Acts 1:6-11

PRAYER PROMPTS

Pray together for:

1. **Personal encounters** with the risen Jesus during these 40 days
2. **Clarity** about what God is teaching you through the resurrection
3. **Restoration** in areas where you've failed or been disappointed
4. **Courage** to live differently because of the resurrection
5. **The promised Holy Spirit** to empower you for mission
6. **The youth camp** and future ministry initiatives mentioned
7. **Each other's specific needs** shared during discussion