

He Rose to Reign

The sermon title this morning tells you what I want to tell you: Jesus Christ rose from the grave to reign. Romans 14:9 says, *"For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living."*

Jesus Christ is alive from the dead and He lives to reign over the dead and the living, which means among other things that the relationship we will have with the Lord in eternity is one which begins now. It is a continuation and a fulfillment of the relationship we have with the Lord now.

For non-believers and serious doubters this is not true. For all practical purposes, as far as they are concerned, this life is all there is. This is why so many people are willing to let eternity slide. They figure they will cross that bridge when they come to it. They figure if there is a God surely He will be understanding. Or, they figure they will be able to make some last minute bargain or say some magic phrase or word to gain last minute entrance at the pearly gates -- "Open Sesame," "Alakazam," "God is Great," or even "Jesus." And, for their sakes, I hope they are right, but I'm afraid they are not. In Matthew 7:21, *Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* In verse 22, He says, *"Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

Now what is key here is the verb tense when Jesus says *"I never knew you."* That's past tense. It seems pretty clear that if we want a relationship with the Lord in eternity, we had better seek and find a relationship with Him in time. Our relationship with the Lord in eternity is a continuation and a fulfillment of our relationship with Him in time. In other words, if we don't know Him here, He's not going to know us there. Life with God in eternity starts here, it starts now, or it doesn't exist later. He rose to reign over the dead and the living. And if we want Him to be our Lord when we die, we had better establish a relationship with Him while we are living. Jesus says in Mark 8:38, *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

What little time we have, you see, is linked to eternity and is made

significant by eternity. If we want the Lord to be our Savior in eternity we need to receive Him as our Savior in time. Jesus was raised from the grave to be the Lord of the dead and Lord of the living.

But, what exactly does it mean for Jesus to be the Lord of the living? Or, to put it another way, what does it mean for us to have Jesus as Lord of our lives? He rose to be Lord, but what does that look like day after day?

I've been looking at some of the powerful symbols which are a part of the Holy Week and Easter drama. There are the talking stones that Jesus talked about on Palm Sunday. There is the angel who sat on the stone he rolled away from the empty tomb of Jesus. We have also seen the cross and visited the Lord's table and received the bread and wine of His sacrifice. If Jesus rose from the grave to be Lord of the living, are there any symbols to help us grasp what this means?

Listen to Luke 24:1-9: I'm reading here from the J.B. Phillips translation of the New Testament:

"But at the first signs of dawn on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb, taking with them the aromatic spices they had prepared. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on going inside, the body of the Lord Jesus was not to be found. While they were still puzzling over this, two men suddenly stood at their elbow, dressed in dazzling light. The women were terribly frightened, and turned their eyes away and looked at the ground. But the two men spoke to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here: he has risen! Remember what he said to you, while he was still in Galilee--that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, and must be crucified, and must rise again on the third day." Then they did remember what he had said, and they turned their backs on the tomb and went and told all this to the eleven and the others who were with them."

The first thing I see in this passage is the word "first," and to me this is significant. **Luke tells us "at the first signs of dawn on the first day of the week, they went . . ."** People sometimes wonder and even criticize Christians for worshiping the Lord on Sundays rather than keeping the Jewish Sabbath, as prescribed in the Law of Moses. The answer is simple: The early followers of Jesus found their Lord alive

from the dead on the first day of the week, which from that moment on

became the best day of the week, and the most important day of the week, and the one day of the week above all others when they would be inspired to worship. Contrary to what some say it wasn't because of some decree of Constantine, it was a natural consequence of the open tomb. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what happened here.

But the word "first" catches my attention for a much more important reason, and that is this: If we are to live our lives with Jesus Christ being the Lord of our lives, then He must be Lord of our time. Every week begins with Jesus, every day begins with Jesus, every hour, and every minute of our lives begins with Jesus. What we do with our time is determined by Jesus. If Jesus is not Lord of our time, how can He be our Lord at all. To say: "Jesus is my Lord" is a lie unless I allow Him to be Lord of my time.

It seems to me that one of the most telling and one of the most dangerous things we can ever say is that we don't have enough time. We would read more Scripture and pray more or help others more or come to Worship Services or Sunday School more often but we just don't have enough time. Which really means, of course, that we are using that time for something else. We are using it to sleep, to make more money, to watch TV, or to pursue some other earthly activity which has nothing at all to do with preparing ourselves or anyone else for eternity. If Jesus is to be Lord of our living then He must be first in our time. The fact that He rose on the first day of the week is a symbol for the fact that He has come to reign over our time. Would you say, **"He rose to reign," "to be Lord" "of our time."**

The second thing in this resurrection account to catch my attention is the question the messengers at the tomb ask the women in verse 6: **"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"** On the surface, this question relates to the problem of the missing body of Jesus and is a gentle reminder that the women and none of the first followers of Jesus were paying close enough attention to what Jesus had promised them. It is a kind rebuke, "If you would have been listening to what He said, you would have expected the empty tomb; you would have known that the cross could not conquer Him and that the grave could not keep Him. You should have known!"

But, this statement is too powerful for us to be satisfied with its literal

and most narrow application. Every time I read this statement or hear it being quoted, it searches me. Why am I seeking life among the dead

things of this world? Why are you trying to draw life from empty wells? Worldly recognition, wealth, the accumulation of things, winning at life's games, World Series, Stanley Cup, Super Bowl, NASCAR cup, Olympic medals, American Idol--what does it matter and who remembers when it is all said and done? In the words of the writer of Ecclesiastes, "It's all vanity, a chasing after the wind, it's meaningless." 20 years from now, even 10 or 5 years from now, almost no one will even remember who was playing. All this amounts to is something to talk about to beat the boredom at work, bragging rights if your man or your team won, competitions to bet on, but in the end it has no meaning, no lasting value. We boast in the presence of God, like a house cat puffing himself up to look big in the presence of a bear or mountain lion. God is not impressed. Why do we seek like among the dead things of this world?

Jesus rose to reign, and for Him to be Lord of our lives means He is to be first in our use of time and first in our selection of priorities. It would make sense don't you think, that the followers of Jesus should be concerned about the same things that once concerned and still concern Him. It stands to reason that we need to love God most of all and love one another as we love our selves. It stands to reason that we need to be about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and standing up for the rights of those falsely accused or imprisoned. It stands to reason that we need to be about binding up wounds, befriending the dying, comforting mourners, and proclaiming the good news found in the death, resurrection, and promised return of Jesus. Would you say, **"He rose to reign," "to be Lord of our priorities."**

Jesus rose to reign, to be Lord of our time and Lord of our priorities. A third thing which catches my attention in our Scripture lesson this morning is found in verses 8 & 9, and I love how J. B. Phillips phrases this: He says, *"Then they did remember what he had said, and they turned their backs on the tomb and went and told all this to the eleven and the others who were with them."* Do you hear what I hear? **"They turned their backs on the tomb."** Statement of fact? Sure. Symbol of what we need to do? Absolutely!

To get in touch with what is being offered here, I would suggest that each of us make a list. List everything that we generally worry about, everything we generally lust after or covet, everything we spend

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significant amounts of time doing, everything that fills our conversation. Make a list and then make a notation after each entry on the page. Put a big "E" after each item that has consequence for eternity. Put a big "T"

after each item that ends at the tomb and belongs to the tomb. And then, once you have done that--if you have the courage to do that, take a big fat black permanent marker and block out everything belonging to the tomb. Make a decision that you are going to turn your back on the tomb and invest your life for eternity.

You see, Jesus rose to be Lord--Lord of our time, Lord of our priorities, and Lord of what we actually do. And, if we are to live under His Lordship, then we will turn our backs on the tomb, and look for Jesus where He most certainly is to be found: distributing the love of His Father among those who are hungry to receive it, and we will join Him there. We will teach the children, figure out ways to feed the hungry and to help provide shelter for the homeless. We will provide community for the lonely, and proclaim grace to the guilty. We will call wandering hearts back into a relationship with their Lord and King. Would you say, **"He rose to reign," "to be Lord" "of everything we do."**

That's all I want you to hear this morning: He rose to reign. He rose to reign over our time, our priorities, and over everything we do. He rose to reign.

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Sermon for April 8, 2018

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Luke 24:1-9

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