

## So What?

Last Sunday we talked about being convinced that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead. This morning I want to ask and answer the question, so what? So what if he came back to life after three days? So what if God raised him from the dead? What did that mean for the disciples and what does that mean for us? What difference does it make? I can tell you it makes all the difference in the world. For instance...

**Jesus' resurrection makes clear his atoning sacrifice has been accepted by the Father.** How do we know Jesus' death provided salvation and forgiveness for us? God raised him from the dead. The apostle Paul writes, **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."** **Romans 4:25** He paid the penalty for our sins through his death and through his resurrection we are justified, i.e. pardoned, our guilt erased and we are given new life, a new beginning in Christ! Paul says we're raised with him to live a new, resurrected life! The atoning value of his death is verified and confirmed by his resurrection.

**Jesus' resurrection validates and verifies all he said and did.** If Jesus was not the Son of God, Messiah, Savior, it seems unlikely the Father would have raised him from the dead, doesn't it? I believe it was C. S. Lewis that suggested, based on Jesus' life and his claims about himself, he must be either liar, lunatic or lord. If he was a liar or lunatic, God wouldn't have raised him from the dead. But if he is Lord... The Apostle Paul writes concerning Jesus, **"...who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."** **Romans 1:4** The resurrection verifies and declares with power that Jesus was who he said he was, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Jesus' resurrection makes our resurrection possible.** Because Jesus lives, we shall live also. Paul writes, **"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."** **1 Corinthians 15:22.** Jesus said if we believe in him, even if we die, we shall live.

**Jesus' resurrection means power to live a new life in Christ.** His resurrection is not just about securing our resurrection and future home in heaven, rather it's about power to live an overcoming life here and now. Paul writes, **"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."** **Romans 8:11** The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us and gives life to us, quickening us, leading us, empowering and enabling us to live lives of obedience to Christ right now.

The list could go on in answering the “so what?” of Jesus’ resurrection. His resurrection is essential to our faith. We said last week there is no Christianity without the resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central point of Christianity. But let me continue to answer the “so what?” of the resurrection from a first century standpoint. What did the resurrection mean to the disciples, beyond what we’ve already mentioned?

To understand what Jesus’ resurrection meant to the disciples we need to understand the prevailing concept of resurrection among Jews of the first century. The majority of Jews believed in a future resurrection of the dead at the end of all things. Remember when Lazarus died and Jesus told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” John 11:24 Martha, like the majority of Jews believed at the last day the dead would be raised, God would judge the righteous and the wicked and administer judgment and justice. At that time God would sort everything out and there would be a new order of things. This was what was often referred to as “the day of the Lord” or the “last day.” The resurrection would precede the age to come, the final restoration of all things. This would be the day the prophet Isaiah and others spoke of, that final day when the Messiah comes and he will right all the wrongs, the lion will lie down with the lamb and “they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.” Isaiah 11.

This is what they expected of the resurrection, at the last day. What stunned them about Jesus’ resurrection was not that God could raise the dead, but the timing! What was supposed to be happening at the last day happened then, in the present day. What did this mean for them? What did it mean to them?

Stephen Seamands in his book *Give Them Christ* writes, “God’s new world, the new heavens and new earth, had come into being through the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The promise of a renewed covenant, which Jeremiah (Jer 31) and Ezekiel (Ezek 36) described, where sins would be forgiven and death would be no more, had actually begun. The transformation of the whole cosmos, the new creation, foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Is 60-66) to happen at the end of time, had already started. The resurrection of Jesus was therefore not only one miracle – extraordinary no doubt – among others; nor was it simply the final guarantee of life after death. Rather, it was the decisive start of the general resurrection, God’s final redemption of all things!”

Understand, Christ’s resurrection was not the completion of final redemption, it was the beginning. N. T. Wright in his commentary on the book of Acts writes, “The gospel is all about

God putting the world right – his doing so in Jesus, his doing so at the end, and his doing so for individuals in between, as both a sign and a means of what is to come.” **Jesus’ resurrection is a sign and the means of what is to come!** God is putting the world right through Jesus. He will do it completely, finally, totally someday, but in the resurrection of Jesus, this is a sign of what is to come and it is the means by which it will come! The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead gives resurrection life to our spirit now so we can serve Christ and live for him and that same Spirit will give resurrection life someday to bring us out of the grave!

By means of Jesus’ resurrection, the future resurrection of all God’s people at the end of time, has been split in two. We now have a foretaste. Jesus has been raised, Paul says, as the “firstfruits” of all who will be raised. First Jesus is raised and then, when he comes back, all will be raised. This is the beginning, the first fruits of all Jesus purchased and secured for us at Calvary and at Easter. Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, through his resurrection the life of the age to come has already dawned and we are given a foretaste of what will be.

Do you get what I’m trying to tell you? This is one of those sermons where I feel the truth of something and the importance of that truth but I just can’t communicate it. With the resurrection of Jesus, something new begins. Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. He gave signs and miracles to point to what that would look like. He taught us in the Sermon on the Mount about another way of viewing life, another way of living life, forsaking the selfishness of sin and living for Christ and for others. He told us the kingdom was near and then, in his resurrection, here is the ultimate sign and the means by which it would come, his victorious death and resurrection. Now, by his resurrection the kingdom is here among us and with his Spirit within us we are bearers of this new life. We are agents of this new kingdom, living out the sermon on the mount, the ethics of his kingdom where the meek inherit the earth, where those hungry for righteousness are satisfied. We are bearers of this resurrection life where we show mercy and make peace, where we forgive those who sin against us and turn the other cheek, where we live out the commands of the risen Christ.

N. T. Wright wrote, **“Because the early Christians believed that resurrection had begun with Jesus and would be completed in the great final resurrection on the last day, they believed that God had called them to work with him, in the power of the Spirit, to implement the achievement of Jesus...Those who belonged to Jesus and followed him and**

**were empowered by His Spirit were charged with transforming the present, as far as they were able, in the light of the future.” N. T. Wright**

Transforming the present in the light of the future. I love that. Jesus is risen. The kingdom of heaven is at hand and the expectation is we will live like citizens of that kingdom, transforming the present in light of the future, fully submitted to the risen Lord of life.

Jesus is risen and that knowledge, that reality, should make us rush out of here to tell everyone, “It’s happened and it’s happening! God’s promises are coming true in Jesus. God is keeping his word. There will be a resurrection and a final day of judgment and God will make all things right and new and here’s how I know: Jesus is risen from the dead!” His resurrection is the sign and the means, remember?

Understand his resurrection does more than just make it possible for us to go to heaven after we die. His resurrection effects how we live now because it’s tied to his Lordship in our lives. Look at this.

We quoted earlier from the apostle Paul. **“[Jesus] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 1:4** From the beginning, the church declared Jesus was Lord in conjunction with proclaiming his resurrection. On the Day of Pentecost, after telling them **“God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact.” Acts 2:32** Peter then tells them, **“God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36** Jesus’ resurrection is a clear declaration he is both Lord, Messiah, and Son of God. His resurrection shouts to us, He is Lord of all.

By declaring the Lordship of Christ the church has always put itself at odds with the powers of the world. By acknowledging Jesus as Lord, the early church placed themselves in jeopardy because the Romans insisted that Caesar was Lord! To say “Jesus is Lord” meant Caesar wasn’t and it was considered high treason, punishable by death. If Jesus is Lord, that means Caesar and the Roman government would have to bow to him and be judged by him and they weren’t going to do that.

It’s not just nations or Caesars that do that. If Jesus is risen then he is Lord and if he is Lord then we all need to bow to him and submit to his Lordship in our life. Maybe that’s why so many people want to deny the resurrection, so they can avoid the question of Lordship in their life. If he is risen, he is Lord!

Walter Kunneth was a theologian and member of the Confessing Church in Germany that stood against Hitler during the 1930's and 40's. In his book *The Theology of the Resurrection*, he wrote about the Lordship of Christ in light of the resurrection. He suggested three distinct areas of Lordship. Jesus is Lord means he has **Cosmic Lordship**, i.e. he has power over all created things. **"... all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together."** Colossians 1:16-17

Jesus as Lord means **Moral Lordship**. He is Lord of our lives and that means he has the right to place moral demands on us. That involves every aspect of our life -- ethically, how we treat others, how we behave, how we view ourselves, our sexuality, our values and choices, all are submitted to his moral lordship.

Jesus as Lord means **Community Lordship**. He is the head of the church and he exercises lordship over his body. **"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."** Colossians 1:18

Jesus is Lord means he has an absolute claim on us. As the firstborn from among the dead, as the one God raised from the dead in triumph, as the Son of God and Lord of Life, He has the supremacy in everything. He is to have no rivals, no other Lord in our life. Kunneth wrote, **"His lordship is valid for every sphere and all ages; nothing can evade its claim."** **Walter Kunneth** Christ is risen. He is declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead and that means he is both Christ and Lord. That means he is Lord over all! Is he Lord over all in your life? We used to sing, "He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and he is Lord." In light of the resurrection he is Lord of all.

We said as the risen Lord he has the right to make moral demands upon our life. The truth is, each one of us will have to answer to him someday. He calls us to repent and believe, to surrender our lives to him, making him Savior and Lord. Each of us, whether we believe it or not, will someday have to answer to him. Paul said at some future day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Stephen Seamands wrote, "Ultimately the question will not be, Who do you say Jesus is? but, What will Jesus say about you?"

Paul told the people of Athens, **"God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."** Acts 17:31

Jesus is Lord and he is the judge. God proved it by raising him from the dead. Someday Jesus the Lord will come again and as the creed says he will judge the living and the dead. All will stand before him. What will Jesus say about you when he comes as the judge?

But Jesus isn't only the judge. Jesus is also the justifier. Romans 4 says "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." Romans 4:25 He was put to death because they accused him of being a sinner, a blasphemer, but we know it was our sins he carried. But when he was raised to life, it proved to everyone that he was innocent, he was just after all. Justified by the resurrection. And if you put your faith in Christ and repent of your sins, he will declare you justified as well. Jesus the resurrected one is judge and justifier. Which do you prefer?

Jesus is risen. So what? The question is, so what do I do now? Call upon him. Turn to him in faith. He died to save you and rose to justify you, to give you new life, a new beginning with the guilt and shame and sin of the past all gone. Do you want to experience that new life?

Finally, remember Christ is risen, a sign and a means to a whole new way of living. It's happening. Christ is risen and that means God is keeping his word. He is going to make all things new and you can trust him. Jesus' resurrection proves it. Even if everything is messed up right now, someday He will come and make everything right. The resurrection is proof that no matter how unfair life can be – like even getting unjustly crucified – God is going to make things right. Be encouraged. It's because of Jesus' resurrection that Paul can say, **"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** 1 Cor. 15:58  
Keep serving the Lord, laboring for him, transforming the present in the light of the future!