

As Of First Importance

I usually like to take the first couple of Sundays after Easter to focus on the implications of Jesus' resurrection for us. We celebrated his resurrection, He is alive and ascended, seated on the throne in heaven, but what does that have to do with us? How does that affect us? How does that make a difference in how we face the coronavirus pandemic of 2020? Here is the key: His resurrection is forever linked to his Lordship in every area of our lives. Look with me...

I quoted this passage of Scripture last Sunday and as I prayed about this message, I kept being drawn back to this verse. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, Gentile believers for the most part. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul writes, **“Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born...Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Look at this important and powerful passage for a moment. Paul says it is on this gospel you have taken your stand and by this gospel you are saved. I like that phrase, “taken your stand.” I have taken my stand on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Regardless of what happens, this is truth, this is where we stand, this is what determines my choices in life, this is what informs every decision and guides every step. This is what I believe! This is where I live or die. Have you taken a stand? Paul tells them they need to hold firmly to the word he had preached to them, the gospel he had proclaimed. Apparently false teachers had tried to lead the believers in Corinth away from the truth of the gospel. A number of false doctrines had begun to spread. Some called into question Jesus' divinity, suggesting he was not fully God and fully man, that he only appeared to be a man. Some questioned the bodily resurrection of Jesus, or whether there would be a final resurrection of the dead.

In these opening verses, Paul clarifies a few things for us. 1) Christ died. It refutes any false teaching that Jesus only seemed to be human, or that the divine part of him somehow left the body of Jesus before his suffering and death on the cross, or that he didn't actually, physically die. The early church councils settled this fact that Jesus was fully God and fully man and Paul says Christ died. It was a literal death. 2) Christ died for our sins. It was an atoning death. He was the substitute that took our place. John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus paid the penalty we owed by his own death on the cross. He died for us and for our sins. 3) Christ died according to the Scriptures. Paul repeatedly says this, referring of course to the Old Testament Scripture. Passages like Isaiah 52-53 and Psalm 22 that obviously speak of Jesus and his sacrifice. Paul affirms the validity and accuracy of God's word. You can take your stand upon God's word. 4) Christ was buried. Paul is saying Jesus literally died and was buried. 5) Christ was raised on the third day. His resurrection as well as his death were according to the Scripture. 6) Christ's resurrection was verified by multiple key eye-witnesses. Peter, then the Twelve (as the disciples were called), then to 500 at the same time, then to James (Jesus' half-brother), then to all the apostles, i.e. the followers and leaders, and finally to Paul.

Then Paul says, this gospel, what I preached to you and passed on to you, this is as of first importance! In these verses Paul lays out the fundamentals of our faith: the genuine humanity and divinity of Jesus, fully God and fully man, his atoning death for us and for our sins, his bodily resurrection from the dead and the authority of the Scripture. Here is the gospel in a few words and Jesus' death and resurrection is the heart of the gospel message. You can take your stand on these truths, on this gospel!

As of first importance. It starts here, with his resurrection, because if Jesus is dead, it's all over. He has said everything he is going to say and he is just one more footnote in history, just one more person who lived and died. But if Jesus is risen, if he is alive, then his message is alive, his work continues, hope continues for us, for everyone, he is still speaking, still acting, still changing lives, miracles are still possible and still happening, his kingdom is still growing, advancing, influencing us. You can see how his death and resurrection are of first importance, can't you? Everything looks to this, everything flows from this, our life orients itself from this truth. Christ is risen. Christ is alive. Everything is viewed from the perspective of our faith in the resurrected Christ. In the face of trouble and trial, in the face of pandemics and covid19 and

fear and uncertainty and death, we look to the one who lived and who died and who conquered life and rose from the dead and who lives forevermore. Look to the resurrected, saving, living, loving Christ! In the face of all that is going on, I'm determined to orient my life by looking to him. I'm going to get my bearings for life from him; I get my direction for life from him, the risen Savior and Lord. And that word, "Lord", is equally important for us to understand.

Jesus' resurrection does more than just make it possible for us to have life after death, for us to go to heaven when we die. His resurrection effects how we live now because it is tied to his Lordship in our lives.

Jesus' resurrection verifies and validates his identity as both Lord and God. Remember in John 20, Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter Sunday while they were hiding behind locked doors. They were all there except Thomas. He had gone to get pizza for everyone, or something (we don't really know where he was) but when he returned the disciples told Thomas Jesus had been there. Risen! Thomas said he wouldn't believe it unless he could touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and his side. A week later Jesus showed up and Thomas' response was to say to Jesus, **"My Lord and my God!" John 20:28** That's part of what Jesus' resurrection does. It verifies and validates the fact he is Lord and God. It's hard to argue with the resurrected Christ.

Paul, formerly known as Saul, was persecuting the church. He would have mocked the idea of Jesus being the Son of God, considering it blasphemy and he would have doubted a resurrection before the final resurrection of all the dead at the end of time. But after his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, the bible says **"At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Acts 9:20** The resurrection verifies, validates, testifies that Jesus is Lord and He is God! Lord and God are tied together in the resurrection. Let me say it again, his resurrection means he is Lord!

The bible says, **"[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** Both Lord and Messiah. Jesus' resurrection is a clear declaration he is both Lord, Messiah and Son of God. One writer (Stephen Seamands) pointed out that Jesus' Lordship and

his divinity, made plain by his resurrection from the dead, were “like two columns of a magnificent arch” and “are therefore inseparable and dependent on each other.” The whole thing falls if you take either one away. He is fully divine. He is God the Son. He is Lord and we know this because he is risen from the dead! We used to sing the chorus, “He is Lord, he is risen from the dead and he is Lord.” That’s our preaching. That’s our testimony! That’s the truth. He is risen and He is Lord. That fact, that truth, changes everything in our lives!

He is Lord and He is God. His divinity is made plain for us. Jesus is God the Son. The bible declares. “...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” **1 Corinthians 8:6** The Father and the Son are one and He is Lord over all. Listen, this is why the resurrection is such a big deal. This is why Paul says this is of first importance. Jesus died, rose again and is Lord. That means Lord over all, that means Sovereign over us and over our lives and our choices and all we do and all we are! His salvation, his Lordship are to be of first importance for us!

Some years ago I ran across a reference to a book written in the 1930s by Walter Kunneth. Kunneth was a theologian and a member of the Confessing Church in Germany that stood against Hitler during the 1930’s and 1940s. In his book *The Theology of the Resurrection*, he wrote about the Lordship of Christ in light of the resurrection. I shared this in part a couple of years ago in another message. Let me say it again: Jesus’ resurrection means he is Lord and He is God the Son. The fact he is Lord and God means he is Lord over all and what does that mean?

Kunneth says the Lordship of Jesus includes **Cosmic Lordship**. The bible says of Jesus, “**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**. That means he is Lord over creation, Lord over nature, Lord over pandemics. Nothing is beyond him or his control. Nothing is beyond his timing. With great confidence you can submit yourself to the cosmic Lordship of Christ knowing that he rules and reigns, that in him all things hold together. The world isn’t unwinding any faster than Jesus in his timing and Lordship over all will allow. Trust him as you submit to his Lordship. He is Lord of all!

The Lordship of Jesus includes **Moral Lordship**. He is Lord over the conscience of every human being. He has the right to place moral demands on us, on the whole human race because he is Lord. This means his Lordship involves every aspect of our life and even what we

do with our physical body. “Doesn’t God just care about spiritual stuff?” The bible says, **“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” 1 Corinthians 6:13-15** Paul is saying that because Jesus had a physical body and God raised him from the dead, then what we do with our physical body matters to God, including our sex life. Ethically, how we treat others, how we behave, our sexuality and how we express our sexuality, whether within the boundaries of God ordained limits and design or not, our values and our choices, all that is done in this physical body is to be submitted to his moral lordship, his moral authority in our lives. It matters to God how we live in this body of flesh. Submit to his Lordship!

The Lordship of Jesus involves **Community Lordship**. He is the King over Israel in the Old Testament and he is Lord and head of the church in the New Testament and today. The bible says, **“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.** He is Lord over his church so we are to submit to his plans, his purpose, his mission, his calling for us. When he chooses to purify, to detox or to discipline the body, we should willingly submit because we understand what he is doing is for our best, for our spiritual health and growth! Maybe that’s part of what is happening during this time. We need to look to Jesus and submit to his Lordship over the church. How can we best serve Him in this time? How can we best advance the cause and Kingdom of Christ today? What is he asking of us? He is Lord over the church!

His Lordship means he has an absolute claim on us. We are talking about **Absolute Lordship**. Quoting from Stephen Seamands, he writes, **“Lordship, therefore, extends over every sphere of creation, every knee and tongue, every height and depth. No cosmic, societal, communal or personal space stands outside of it. He is Lord of all, period. Consequently, as Abraham Kuyper declares, ‘There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’”**
...Stephen Seamands

Let me say it again, Jesus’ claim on us is absolute. He is Lord in all things and in every situation and that means he alone is Lord. There can be no other. He alone is risen Savior, He alone is one with God, he alone is the maker and ruler of all, he alone is worthy of our praise, he

alone is worthy of honor, he alone is worthy of us submitting and devoting our lives to him, he alone is Lord. Have you surrendered to the Lordship of Christ over your life? Through the cross and his resurrection, he lays claim to us. We belong to him. It's right for us to cry in response, "Yes Lord, I'm yours! All I have, all I am. I belong to you and you are Lord of my life!"

The risen Lord alone has the right to make moral demands on our life and the truth is, each of us will have to answer to him someday. The apostle Paul said at some future day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Once again, the resurrection verifies and validates Jesus as the Son of God and Lord of all. And in addition, the resurrection declares he is the one who will judge the world. The apostle 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 All will stand before Jesus some day and as the Apostles Creed says, he will judge the living and the dead. What will Jesus say about you when he comes as Lord and judge?

The good news is, Jesus isn't only our judge, he is also the justifier. The bible 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 blasphemer, a sinner, but we know he was the sinless Son of God. It was our sins he carried. But when he was raised to life, it proved to everyone that he was innocent after all. He was declared "just". "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 and his resurrection means he is living, still at work, still redeeming, still speaking, guiding, still able to touch you and change you and make you whole. Jesus is risen and that means he is the Son of God. Jesus is risen and that means he is Lord of all, absolute Lordship. So let me ask you, is he Lord of your life? Have you surrendered your heart and soul and life to him? Or are you still living in rebellion against his Lordship?

There is a freedom that comes with submitting your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Some of you have been in a tug of war over the control and destiny of your life. You think you know best, but so far, all you've gotten is beaten up or beaten down at just about every turn. Tired, suspicious of everyone and their motives because you've been taken advantage of or disappointed by just about everyone. And Jesus is calling to you today. This risen Savior and

Lord of life is calling you to surrender your life to him. Ask him to save you. Ask him to be the Lord of your life. I'm serious when I tell you there is a freedom, a release that comes as you commit your life to Jesus! Today is the day!

In the midst of all the disappointments and trouble, Jesus' resurrection reminds us that out of ultimate loss or injustice, on what appears to be the worst day ever, God steps in to bring life, to make things right, to bring victory instead of defeat. In the end, God will triumph! How do I know? Because Christ is risen! Orient your life by looking to and trusting in the risen Savior and Lord and make him the Lord of your life!

I want to pray for you today. Why not ask Jesus to take control of your life today? Carrie Underwood sang "Jesus take the wheel." Ask him today to take the wheel, to take the helm of your life. Surrender to him and submit to his lordship. You may be watching today as a single person. Right there, take a moment to bow your heart before the Lord. Tell him you believe he died for you and that he rose again. You believe that his resurrection from the dead means he is Savior and Lord and God. Ask him to save you and be the Lord of your life.

Perhaps you are watching with your family. Why not gather them around and together surrender your lives to him, submit your lives as a family to the Lordship of Christ. From today on we pledge to serve the Lord and live for him. Let's pray.

If you've prayed and asked Jesus into your heart and life, reach out to us. Email us at cagtulsa.com or go to our website or our Facebook page, or call the church office during business hours. We want to connect with you. We have some online resources we would like to make available to you to help you in your new walk with the Lord.

We love you and we are praying for you. Stay safe and stay in touch. Till next time,

"May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen."