

Sermon Given by

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“Jesus reigns”

In my teenage years, like some of you perhaps, I used to like making music tapes with a mix of my favourite songs at that time. One that I still play now and again is this one. I see that I gave it the title: “The Most Legendary of All Mixes”. I won’t bore you by telling you all the songs on this mix although you’d be very welcome to borrow it but one of them is John Lennon’s “Imagine”. It was a song that in my non-Christian mildly angst-ridden teenage years I loved. It’s certainly got memorable lyrics: “Imagine there’s no heaven, It’s easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people, Living for today...” It’s a wistful longing for a happy life now, with nothing beyond it to trouble us. Lennon knew that death and all its attendant uncertainties is a cloud over our lives. It’s a song that continues to appeal to many and yet it remains, appropriately enough, as its title would imply - a work of pure imagination. And as we look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what that means we’ll see why it is good news that John Lennon’s dream isn’t a reality.

First a quick pictorial re-cap on what we’ve covered so far. (Picture 1) So we’ve seen that God, represented by the crown, made the world and rules over it. He also made us as managers or stewards of the world under his authority, honouring him and obeying his instructions. He’s given us life and all the good things that we enjoy. But the problem is (Pic 2 up) that from the very beginning men and women everywhere have rejected God. We love the good things that he gives us but we ignore Him the Giver of all these gifts. We put the crown on our own heads and say no thanks to God’s rule. That’s what the Bible calls sin. And because God is a holy God he can’t ignore our sin (Pic 3 up). He calls us to account for our actions, because it matters to Him that we treat Him and other people so poorly. We say to Him “I don’t want you in my life” and he lets us have our way. God’s judgement on rebels is to withdraw from them, to cut them off from himself permanently. And since God is the source of life and all good things, being cut off from him means death and hell. The story could have ended there with us facing God’s judgement but we saw last week how in his great love God sent his Son into the world. (Pic 4a up). Jesus was born a man and he lived a perfect life. He always loved & obeyed God and (pic 4b up) yet on the Cross he willingly bore the punishment that I deserve to face for my rebellion against God. He took the full force of God’s judgement so that forgiveness and pardon might be available to us. That’s the wonderful news of that first Good Friday. We’ll be remembering it later as we share the bread and the wine. But that’s not all, (Pic 5 up) 3 days later, that first Easter Sunday, God raised Jesus to life again as the Ruler of the world. Christ is Risen! And we’re going to spend the rest of our time this morning thinking about 3 implications of the resurrection. The resurrection shows that Jesus is Lord, that He is Judge and that he ushers in the new age.

First then **the Resurrection shows that Jesus is Lord**. On the Cross, Jesus didn’t look like God’s King; in fact it would be hard to find a more pathetic picture of weakness. The resurrection reveals the true identity of Jesus. As Paul says in Romans 1:4 *“He was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Sometimes you’re chatting to people about Jesus and they say something along the lines of: “If Jesus is really that important why didn’t God make it more obvious?” And the response to

that is that he did make it very obvious by raising Jesus from the dead. That's pretty massive – what more do you want?! Jesus is the Lord – he's the mighty King of the Universe. Or as Jesus himself put it in Matthew 28:18 *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* Jesus' authority extends everywhere. Some people in this world have a great deal of authority. Take Barack Obama for example – he's got a fair bit of authority. But imagine if on a world tour he fitted in a quick trip to Little Shelford because he wanted to tell me what to do. Well I'd be polite, I'd invite him into 5 Garden Fields for a cup of tea and a crumpet or a bit of cake but if he wants to tell me what to do then he can push off – he has no authority to – his authority doesn't extend that far – it's limited. Jesus' authority is universal. What does this mean for us? It means we need to ask ourselves: Is Jesus Lord over all my life - my plans, my ambitions, my work, my possessions, my recreation, my family life, how I drive my car, how I use my money? Who has the right to tell us how to live? The world says that no-one else does but me. Wrong! Jesus says "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He has the right to be acknowledged and obeyed by everyone everywhere. If we take this on board our lives will be transformed. As the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper said: "There is not a square inch in the whole of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!" It follows then that no other authority can rival Him. If any other authority clashes with his will be it political or religious or just our own personal will then that will should bow to Him.

Jesus is Lord. He has all authority over all people everywhere and the resurrection declares this. The resurrection is, in a way, Christ's coronation – God's verdict - God the Father declaring that God the Son is his eternal King with all authority. Why do I put it like that? Well when Jesus rises from the dead all sorts of Bible Overview bells start ringing because some of God's greatest promises and prophecies and predictions from the Old Testament are being fulfilled. If you were with us last term at the 6pm service we were looking at 2 Samuel and there in chapter 7 God had said to David (v11-14) *"...the LORD himself will establish a house for you...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* An eternal King was promised. Psalm 2 God says to His Anointed One: *"You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."* As Jesus is raised from the dead these and so many other OT bells are ringing. He is the eternal King who's been given the nations. Through the resurrection, God the Father declares that Jesus is Lord.

Next and closely connected **the Resurrection shows that Jesus is Judge**. We could live for today as John Lennon suggests we should but that would be to ignore a great warning provided by the resurrection: this life is not all there is. There will be a day of reckoning – a day when justice will be done and will be seen to be done and the resurrection proves that this will happen. Acts 17:30-31 Paul says: *"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he 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."* The resurrection is God's proof to the world that judgement is coming. We probably all respond to the thought of Jesus returning to judge in a variety of different ways. On one hand it's deeply distressing particularly if like me you fear for loved ones. Positively though it gives us a real urgency in evangelism. I remember being struck when I heard how a South African Bishop called Frank Retief encourages all the clergy in his diocese to write on the front page of their diaries: "Hell is a real place and people will go there is they don't put their trust in Jesus." Oh for more bishops like that.

So the prospect of judgement gives urgency to our outreach and also it's important to say that the alternative to judgement would be appalling. In John Lennon's dream world – evil would go unpunished. That would be terrible because we all long for justice don't we? We

read in the newspapers of a job mugging an old lady and leaving her for dead with a broken arm as he runs off with her handbag and we long for justice – we want him to be punished for his crime. As we see on the TV despairing refugees or abused children we cry out “that’s not fair!” As we hear of yet another Nazi mass murder only now 65 years on being brought to trial it pains us and we ask: “Where’s the justice in that?” I don’t know if any of you are fans of Inspector Morse but in one episode Lewis turns to his boss and asks: “What do you think about God and all that?” Morse replies: “I think there are times when I wish to God there was one – a God who dispenses justice. I’d like to believe in that.” Well praise God that he is a God who dispenses justice. Judgement is coming and Jesus the Judge will be completely just and fair – no problems of cosmic unfairness will remain to haunt us. Justice will be done. As John Chapman the Australian evangelist has put it, no-one will be able to say to Christ after they’ve been judged by him, “You botched it!” His judgement will be perfect.

The resurrection shows that Jesus is Lord, that he is Judge and thirdly it shows that **Jesus ushers in the new age**. In the Old Testament the prophets spoke with reference to the coming of the Messiah as nothing less than the transformation of everything. When the Messiah came he would bring an end to this present world, spoilt by our rebellion against God and introduce a new age, in which everything would be restored to its perfection – life as it was meant to be. The resurrection marks the beginning of that new age. It proves that there is life beyond the grave. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:20 *“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”* So the new age has started and yet it will only be fully here when Christ returns. It has started though and the resurrection is proof of this. It’s the first fruits. It like seeing as we do about this time of year the first few daffodils breaking up above the earth. There may yet be some wintry days like today but when we see those first daffodils we know there is no going back. Spring is coming and in the same way the resurrection states loud and clear that God has started to restore his creation. Yes we may yet have to endure some cold and wintry days but the resurrection means that there is no going back. We are heading for the eternal sunshine of a world made new. So as believers we participate in the new age in part now. That is to say that we also have been raised spiritually with Christ - the spiritual reality of new birth or regeneration. However we still await the resurrection of our bodies. Thus Christians are people who look forward – we are those who put up with the sufferings of a sick world and a dying body because we eagerly look forward to the hope that lies before us, the resurrection of our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body. We know Christ now as we live by faith but our experience of Him now is nothing compared with what it’ll be like in heaven when we live by sight.

The best marriage or friendship in this earthly life is a mere hint, a whisper of what God has in mind for us in heaven when we the bride are married to Christ – enjoying Him. The best thing about heaven you see will not be seeing Christian loved ones who died before us again – although that will be great. No the best thing about heaven is that I will know God even as I am fully known by Him. Listen to what the American preacher John Piper says as he reflects on how much greater it will be to live by sight than by faith: “How many little children have said, ‘But Dad, I can’t see Him, I can’t see Jesus. I can’t see God! It’s hard to believe!’ In this situation Piper says, “Don’t ever as you sit on the edge of the bed, say in a quick and glib way, “Oh you’ll get over that; that doesn’t matter, it’s not important.” Piper continues “Of course it’s important – because you know what - I want to see Him. I’m not satisfied – are you?” I think that’s helpful because there is in this regards a sense in which the believer is not to be satisfied with what we have now – there’s so much more to come - we should long for heaven – for that greater intimacy with God – to at last enjoy Him fully - to live by sight and not by faith which will be better by far. And that’s why so many Christians have been able to face death with such joy and excitement at what will follow it. John Rogers

was burnt at the stake for his faith in 1555. The French ambassador witnessed the scene. He said later that Rogers had walked to his death “as if he was walking to his wedding.” We might not show that courage and joy in the face of our own death but however we feel we can know deep down that we are going to be with our Lord and to live by sight. As we share in the bread and the wine shortly that is a little pointer to the heavenly wedding banquet that is to come.

So praise God that John Lennon’s dream is not the reality – that this life isn’t all there is. Rather as C.S. Lewis famously put it, this earthly life is just the shadowlands – the reality, the best is still to come.