

TO THIS END - ROMANS 14:9

For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

This past week was Opening Day for the 2012 Baseball Season... Football is fine. Basketball suffices on cold nights in March. *But welcome back baseball... You're a good friend who's been gone too long...* They say soccer is the world's game. But as American poet, Walt Whitman, once said, "I see great things in baseball - it's our game, the American game." And in the spirit of Walt Whitman I see great things in a baseball... This morning I want to begin by directing your attention to this leather sphere we call a baseball.

A baseball is 9-1/4 inches in circumference - 2-7/8 inches in diameter - it weighs 5-1/4 ounces. A baseball contains a rubber core, wrapped in tightly wound yarn, covered in cowhide, and held together by 108 stitches. But here's what's amazing... A baseball contains 121 yards of 4-ply grey woolen yarn - 45 yards of 3-ply white woolen yarn - 53 yards of 3-ply grey woolen yarn - and 150 yards of cotton yarn. Stretch out the guts of a baseball and it extends 369 yards, or 1107 feet. That's nearly four football fields.

A baseball is 1100 feet of yarn packed in a 9 inch sphere... Which perfectly describes this morning's text. The scope of what Jesus Christ accomplished on Earth stretches to eternity and spans all creation. His words and deeds will be the topic of eternity. Their meaning will be forever explored and never exhausted. No one's life, before or since, has created such far-reaching ramifications as the life lived by Jesus Christ. Yet like a baseball packed with yarn... One verse, Romans 14:9, rolls up His amazing life, and winds it tightly into a single statement. *It's just 23 words, none of which are more than six letters long.* Here, the most remarkable life ever lived - and its infinite implications - gets compressed into a brief, single summation...

The Holy Spirit spoke it... the Apostle penned it... The reason God's Son came to earth, fulfilled the ancient prophecies, lived a sinless life, died on a Roman cross, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, is coming again... is explained in Romans 14:9 "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

All that Jesus said and did was to qualify Himself as Lord. He died and rose and lives to be *King of creation, Ruler of heaven and earth, Boss of time and eternity.* Jesus Christ is *King of all kings, Lord of all lords.*

Given the contents of a baseball you'd think the Braves would never get shut-out. I mean, how can you miss hitting 1100 feet of yarn? Yet you certainly can... *Especially if it's compacted and approaching at 90 mph...* And you can miss the implications of our text... That's why this morning, I'm going to slow things down, and focus on just one verse. Here's a truth you need to knock out of the park... "To this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that he might be Lord..."

Shortly after His birth Jesus was paid a visit by foreign dignitaries. Matthew tells us the Wise Guys road into Jerusalem, and asked the Jewish authorities, "Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?" These mysterious magi were Persian priests, who had been tutored by the Hebrew prophet Daniel. Daniel had predicted that a "Messiah" - a King, a Deliverer, would be born in the land of Israel. This King would rule the whole world - both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus lived His whole life under the shadow of this and other OT prophecies. *Shortly before his death* Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. On that day people hailed Him as King. Even in death Jesus' claim to royalty overshadowed Him. The plaque Pilate had nailed to the top of the cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

Understand, Jesus didn't just come to earth to *help and heal - bless and better - work miracles and show mercy...* The Son of God was far more ambitious... Jesus came *to this earth* to establish Himself as King *over this earth*. Jesus came to rule the day. The Son of God is now *Lord of every man, woman, boy, and girl*.

Yet too many of our contemporaries miss this point. Like Dan Uggla waving at a slider on the outside corner, folks today - even so-called Christians - whiff at the very reason Jesus "*died and rose and lived again.*" People think of Jesus as their very own tour guide through life. His job is to present various options so you can decide where you'd like to go - then get you around safely - and make you comfortable on the way. Folks don't mind being led around as long as they're in charge. But when somebody else sets the agenda, and starts telling them what to do - that's when they're going get off the bus and find another tour guide.

One thing is certain, the people alive in Jesus' day sure didn't miss this point. His enemies didn't whiff on Jesus' intentions. They knew exactly why He came. From the outset of His ministry, Jesus was a threat to the powers that be. He challenged their authority.

While on earth Jesus upset the apple cart... Shook the Jewish status quo... He tossed the Temple merchandizers out on their ear... Ran roughshod over legalism and ritualism to expose it for the straw-boss that it was... Humiliated the religious scholars with insightful answers to their staged-to-stump questions... Jesus called the pompous Pharisees *hypocrites, whitewashed tombs, sons of hell*. Author Jim Gillis sums up first century perception, "*No man ever made more trouble than the gentle Jesus, meek and mild.*"

Realize, Jesus didn't come to fit in, but to take over. He didn't toe the line. He drew a line in the sand. Jesus came to be boss of the neighborhood! And this made the establishment so uncomfortable they consorted with the Romans to plot His execution. Dorothy Sayers writes about Jesus, "*To those who knew Him, He had a daily beauty in His life that made us ugly - and officialdom felt that the established order of things would be more secure without Him. So they did away with God in the name of peace and quiet.*"

In fact, when the executioners led Jesus to the hill called Calvary you might've thought He was going away quietly... In reality He had a final battle to fight... Jesus took on the fiercest fiends of darkness, and triumphed over them all... *Satan He crushed. Death He defeated. Hell He conquered. The grave He opened...*

And again, what was His motive? Listen to Philippians 2, "*(Jesus) became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*" Jesus rose from the dead to be Lord of every person in heaven, or in hell, or on earth.

In Paul's NT letters he refers to Jesus by an interesting title. The Apostle calls Him, "*the last Adam.*" In the beginning, when God created the heavens and earth He gave dominion - or the responsibility to rule - to the first man, Adam. But "*the first Adam*" blew it! He sinned and

forfeited his God-given dominion. I've heard it said, "[The problem in the garden of Eden was not the apple on the tree, but the pair on the ground.](#)" In disobeying God, Adam and Eve asserted their independence. They chose to be their own god.

It reminds me of the patient in the insane asylum. The psychiatrist asked him, "[So you say you're Napoleon?](#)" "[I am,](#)" said the patient. The doctor replied, "[But how do you know?](#)" The patient bristled up. He answered dogmatically, "[Because God told me!](#)" That's when a voice from down the hall shouted, "[I did not!](#)" It's sad, but lots of supposedly sane folks live their lives as if they were their own god – their own Lord. They make their own decisions, and call their own shots - without ever consulting with the God who created them, and knows what's best for them. They forget all the problems in the world today started when a man and a woman made the very same mistake.

I once read about a family occupying a house in West Palm Beach, Florida who gave permission to a television film crew to use their front yard as the backdrop for a television episode of "[BL Stryker.](#)" It was an action-packed, cops and robbers, shoot it up series. It ended up being Burt Reynolds' swan-song.

The film crew set up in the front yard, and before long cars were crashing in the driveway - the yard got blown up - the action had begun... When out of the blue the owner of the house called from New York asking what in the world was happening to *his* house. He'd been tipped off by a neighbor. It turns out the folks who gave permission to use the house were not the owners, but merely tenants. They had no right to allow the property to be destroyed.

And this is what's happened to planet earth. Mankind has forgotten we're only tenants. We have no rights of our own. Our lives are paid for by the blood of Jesus. We've been bought with a price. *Jesus went to the cross to lay claim to you. To be Lord of your life.* We have no right to rent out the yard, or sell our soul, for our own purposes - *without God's permission.* When Jesus came to earth, it was like the owner from New York returning to his house in West Palm Beach... *He wasn't pleased with what he saw.* Jesus cleaned house. He restored order in the neighborhood!

When Adam rebelled from God and went his own way, nature followed suit. Sin stained God's creation. Without her Father God, Mother Nature went nuts! Today, hurricanes bust up shorelines. Tornados ravage trailer parks. Babies are born with birth defects. Untreatable cancers torture innocent folks, even kids.

You might say, the front yard has been shot up and practically destroyed. The world today is not what the owner had in mind. It's a world of our own making... *Don't blame it on God.* The suffering that surrounds, the pain we experience, is a reminder of our rebellion.

Yet what "[the first Adam](#)" damaged "[the last Adam](#)" came to repair and redeem. When Jesus performed miracles they were meant to prove He had the strength to one day right all wrongs, and fix a broken world. When He manipulated the molecules in the bread and fish to multiply not decay... or cursed the fig tree... He showed His ability to alter *the course of nature.* When He calmed the storm... or walked on water... He proved His power to tame *the chaos in nature.* When He healed the sick, and exhibited His mastery over disease... He proved He had *the cure for nature.*

Perhaps Jesus' greatest claim to Lordship was His ability to forgive sins. Only God can issue pardons. CS Lewis observed, "[Jesus went](#)

about saying to people, 'I forgive your sins.' Now it is quite natural for a man to forgive something you do to him. Thus if somebody cheats me out of \$5 it is reasonable for me to say, 'I forgive him, we will say no more about it.' But what on earth do you say if somebody cheated you out of \$5, and I said, 'That's okay, I forgive him?' A sin is an infraction against God - it's an assault on His authority. That's why only God can forgive sins.

And this is where the Jews took great offense. In Luke 7:49 they question Jesus, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" In other words, *Who does this Guy think He is? Only God can do what He claims!*" Yet that was exactly His point! Jesus was God. *The last Adam* took back the dominion *the first Adam* lost. The rightful owner of the Universe took back control over nature, disease, even angels and demons.

When angels appeared to minister to Jesus, it was apparent He was *Lord of heaven...* When He cast out demons, could anyone doubt He was *Lord over hell?* And finally, when Jesus conquered the ultimate foe - when He escaped the sickle of the grim reaper - the corruption of death - He proved once and for all - *by His resurrection* - that He is not a man to be trifled with... He is Lord! Jesus is the Master of the universe!

On a late night flight a airplane hit strong turbulence. Lightning flashed. It shook and rocked the aircraft. It felt like the plane was about to split at the seams. One frightened, older lady happened to be sitting next to a pastor. She shook him, "Please, can't you do something about this storm?" The pastor responded, "Sorry ma'am, but I'm in sales not management."

While on earth, Jesus demonstrated that He had taken over management. He was King of all creation! This morning, Jesus wants us to acknowledge His Lordship, and place our lives under His management. Certainly, Jesus cares about our *needs*. He's a friend *indeed*. But He's not content with just being your "buddy," or "partner," or "homey," or "the man upstairs." Jesus will never be satisfied until He's the Boss!

Jesus is da Boss, but that doesn't mean He's bossy. Jesus is in charge, but that doesn't make Him pushy. Jesus came to be King, but a different kind of King. He is a dictator, but Jesus is a benevolent dictator. He demands exclusive rights to every aspect of my life, but when I give it to Him He does all He can to *build* it up, and make it *better*, and fill it with *blessing*. Jesus is the Commandant. He commands us. But He does so with love, and gentleness, and kindness.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus invites the burned-out, the stressed-out, the bummed-out, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Have you been living under a heavy burden? Has your life become a load? Jesus invites us to come to Him. He's gentle. He'll enable us to find rest.

And Jesus instructions in Matthew 11 are simple. He says, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me...*" A yoke is a wooden harness that interlocks a pair of animals. It connects the animals to a plow. The farmer uses the yoke to steer his plow and till up his field. What's interesting is the animals used were paired together in a novel manner. Usually a young ox was yoked with an older, stronger, maturer ox. The yoke was designed to distributed most of the weight onto the older ox - while the young guy went along for the ride. The full-grown ox carried most of the burden, while the newbie learned to stay in step and be submissive.

Remember in Matthew 13:55, Jesus was called the "carpenter's son." The Greek word for "carpenter" implied a particular type - not a framer but a craftsman. Someone who built furniture or tools - even "yokes." There is an ancient tradition that says Joseph's specialty were these animal harnesses. Supposedly, a sign hung about the door of His shop in Nazareth, that read, "The Best Fitting Yokes Made Here"... Now even after Jesus leaves home He's still crafting yokes...

This is Jesus' desire for you. To come to Him is to accept His yoke. He requires us to harness ourselves to Him. The person yoked to Jesus is no longer calling his own shots - he's no longer captain of his own ship. His goal is to stay yoked to Jesus and let Him lead. Yet here's what's so beautiful... Jesus relates to us in a way where most of the burden falls on Him. The weight is on His shoulders. Our job is to simply stay in step. Just [don't spit out the bit](#) - or [choke on the yoke](#).

In Matthew 11 Jesus calls Himself "[gentle and lowly in heart](#)." Yes, He expects us to remain harnessed to Him, but He will never set a pace we can't handle. He'll shift only enough weight onto us to make us stronger - to build muscle, not cause our collapse. To know Jesus is to bow your stiff-neck and accept His yoke, but once you do He takes the pressure off you and puts it on Him. His yoke is always a perfect fit.

In Matthew 12:20 Jesus makes another statement that affirms He's the *Boss*, but He's far from *bossy*. Jesus says of Himself, "[A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench](#)." In essence, He's no tyrant. He's a kind and gentle ruler. The strategy of most kings is to crush their subjects - keep them under foot - "*rule with a rod of iron*."

This is especially true of Roman emperors *and baseball umpires*. As a Little League coach I had a run-in or two with a few umps. I offered to purchase them eyewear. I was concerned about them driving a car. It's dangerous to drive when you're blind as a bat. But it never failed, whenever I argue with an umpire, I lost! Umpires like to flex their muscle. They like to put you in your place - show you that you're not the boss. They're quick to remind you they have the power.

Yet to the contrary, Jesus is the one person with all the *power*, yet He's never *pushy with that power*. He finds the bruised reed, and rather than crush it, He props it up, and supports it, and nurses it to health! He finds the dwindling embers... and rather than let them die out, He blows on them and rekindles a blaze. Jesus finds the person who's down for the count... and rather than bury them, he loves to lift them up.

The goal of Jesus is not to keep you in your place. It's to help you find a place where you can blossom and be fruitful. He wants to heal your hurts, and elevate your status, and share His glory, and fuel your strength. He is a Lord who *blesses* - not *suppresses*. Jesus uses His power not to push us around, but to pick us up. He's [a splint](#) to the bruised reed. He's [a flint](#) to the dwindling fire. The risen Lord Jesus comes to people who are *bent over* and helps them stand tall. He comes to the *burned out* and rekindles a passion.

Jesus comes and says to us, "[I love you just as you are, but I love you too much to let you stay that way](#)." He's Lord. Jesus has no desire to make suggestions. He'll do nothing other than rule your life. He takes you, shapes you, frees you, and makes you better. *But you can't spit the bit*. Your job is to stay yoked - stay harnessed to the Master - seek to stay in step.

Once a young Dutch soldier was stationed in the jungles of Indonesia. During his tour he bought an ape. This monkey became a pet for the

entire barracks. After a few weeks though, the soldier noticed that when he touched the gibbon around the waist it winced. It was painful. Upon closer examination he noticed a raised welt all the way around the his waist. He pulled the hair apart and found the problem...

As a baby someone had tied a piece of wire around the gibbon's waist. As the ape grew up the wire had cut into his skin, and became imbedded in his flesh. That night the soldiers laid the monkey on a table and operated. They took a razor and shaved the ape's waist - then they slowly cut into his tender flesh. It was obviously painful, but the monkey seemed to understand. He laid on the table patiently, believing that the soldiers were acting in his best interests. When the wire was snipped and slid from his gibbon's skin, the ape jumped up, and danced around his owner's shoulders. From that moment onward the man and his monkey were inseparable friends.

Later, the Dutch soldier said the experience marked a turning point for him personally. At the time, he was not a Christian, and deeply mired in a lifestyle of sin. You could say, *he'd been monkeying around...* A chain of guilt was squeezing him and cutting into his happiness. He longed to be free and happy again. After some serious thought, he surrendered His life to Jesus. And the Lord performed heart surgery. He cut into his flesh. Pried out some harmful habits. It was painful, but the operation was necessary, and it released Him from His sin so He could dance again.

Perhaps you're longing for a similar release... You also have a band of guilt choking the life out of you. Come to Jesus - lay your life at His feet. Let Him snip the guilt, and set you free, and get your feet to dancing. *Jesus is the boss, Who's never bossy.*

A small boy was sitting in church with his mom as the pastor preached a sermon titled, "What is a Christian?" This pastor knew how to stir a crowd. As he spoke he kept building the intensity. Numerous times, He would pound the pulpit with his fist, and ask the question? *"Brethren, what is a Christian?"*

As the tension mounted the little boy got scared. He whispered to his mom, "Do you know? Do you know what a Christian is?" His mom patted him on the knee and said, "Yes dear, I know, now sit still and be quiet." But the boy couldn't sit still. The passion in the room was just too great. As the preacher closed his sermon his voice thundered again, "What is a Christian?" This time the little boy couldn't stand it any longer. He jumped up in the pew, and shouted at the top of his lungs... "Tell him, Mama, please tell him!"

Well, this morning it's my God-given responsibility to define for you "a real Christian." And it's a simple truth. Though the *ramifications of it* extent to the heavens the *reality of it* can't be clearer. A Christian is a person with the bit in his mouth. He's yoked to His Lord Jesus. A blood-bought, forever-forgiven, heaven-bound Christian is the person who's turned over the ultimate "say" in His life to Jesus, and embraced Him as Lord.

Too many people in church today have been thrown a curveball... They've struck out on the crucial truth... Jesus *"died, and rose, and lives again to be Lord..."* Don't assume you'll get to heaven because you walked the aisle as a child... or signed a membership card... or got baptized... or took communion... or went to confessional... or won a pin for church attendance... Or even asked for Jesus to forgive you... Of course, you should pray such a prayer and ask for forgiveness. You just need to know Jesus doesn't forgive who He doesn't control. *He died and rose and lives to be Lord!*

Baptist pastor, Vance Havner, once wrote, "I came to Christ as a country boy. I didn't understand all the plan of salvation, but one thing I did understand, even as a lad: I understood that I was under new management. I belonged to Christ and He was Lord."

The reason Jesus came to earth... and died on a Roman cross... and three days later rose from a borrowed grave... and the reason He's coming again... Is not *just* to bless us, or heal us, or even forgive us... He "*died, rose, and lives again*" to be our Lord! *Will you surrender your life to Jesus? Will you trust Him enough to take the bit? This Easter Sunday will you embrace Jesus as the living Lord of your life?*