

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.

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 - it is 2 7/8 inches in diameter - and it weighs 5 1/4 ounces.

A baseball contains a rubber core, wrapped in tightly wound yarn, covered in cowhide, and it's held together by 108 stitches - really and truly always 108 stitches.

But here's what's really 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 1,107 feet. That's nearly four football fields.

A baseball is 1100 feet of yarn packed in a 9 inch sphere... Which perfectly describes our Easter 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 this amazing life and winds it tightly into one statement. *It's just 23 words, none of which are more than six letters*. In verse 9, the most remarkable life ever lived and its infinite implications get compressed into a brief, single summation.

The Holy Spirit spoke it... the Apostle Paul wrote it...

The reason God's Son came to earth, fulfilled the ancient prophecies, lived a sinless life, died on a cross, then rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and is coming again... **is explained to us 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, 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 vast contents of a baseball you'd think the Atlanta Braves would never get shut-out. *I mean, how can you miss hitting 1100 feet of yarn?* And yet, our beloved Braves are proof that 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'd like to slow things down a bit 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 rode into Jerusalem and asked the Jewish authorities, "Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?"

These mysterious magi were Persian priests. They'd probably 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 Hebrew 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 Ozzie Albies waving at a slider on the outside corner, folks today - even so-called Christians - whiff at the reason Jesus *“died and rose and lived again.”*

Most people think of Jesus as their private tour guide through life. His job is to present you 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 to 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 Jesus came.

From the outset of His ministry, Jesus was a threat to the powers that be. He challenged their authority. He set His agenda and marched to His own drummer.

While on earth, Jesus shook up the status quo. Remember when He tossed the Temple merchants out on their ear... He ran roughshod over legalism and ritualism to expose it for the straw-boss that it was...

He humiliated the religious scholars with His insightful answers to their staged-to-stump questions...

Jesus called the pompous Pharisees *hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs, and snakes, and sons of hell.*

Author Jim Gillis sums up the first century perception of Jesus of Nazareth. He writes, *"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 Paul's conclusion in 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 bombed out. It was *the first Adam bomb!* Adam 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 gods.

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 that all the problems in the world today started when a man and woman made the very same choice.

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."

The series was an action-packed, cops and robbers, shoot-it-up show. It was short-lived and wasn't very good. It turned out to be Burt Reynolds' swan-song.

Well, for this episode, 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 home called from New York asking what in the world was going on at his house. He was tipped off by a neighbor.*

It turns out the folks who gave permission to use the house were not the actual owners, but merely tenants. They had no right to allow the property to be destroyed. *And this is what's happened to planet earth.*

Humanity has forgotten we are only tenants with no rights of our own. Our lives were paid for by the blood of Christ. 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 returning to his house in West Palm Beach. *He wasn't pleased with what had occurred.* Jesus cleaned house. For 3.5 years He restored order in the neighborhood!

When the first Adam rebelled and went his own way, nature followed suit. Sin stained all of God's creation.

Without her Father God, Mother Nature went nuts!

Even 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 Jesus' point! He was God.

The last Adam took back the dominion **the first Adam** had lost. The rightful owner of the Universe had come to take back control over nature and disease and repair the broken relationship between God and man.

Jesus even let it be known He ruled the spiritual realm. When angels appeared to give Him aid, 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 night flight, an 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, elderly 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."**

Hey, 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. He says, "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 distribute most of the weight onto the older ox - while the younger ox 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 resist the yoke** - or **spit out the bit**.

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 far from *bossy*.

Jesus says of Himself, "**A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.**"

In short, He's no tyrant. Jesus is a kind and gentle ruler. The strategy of most earthly kings is to crush their subjects - keep them under foot - "*rule with a rod.*"

This is especially true of Roman emperors *and baseball umpires*. As a Little League coach, I had a few run-ins with umpires. I offered to purchase them nice 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 argued with an ump, 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 all 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."**

Understand, that as Lord, Jesus doesn't make or take suggestions. He's been around the block a time or two and knows what we need to live a joyous life.

He's been changing lives for centuries, and He's smarter than we are. He knows how to take your life, and shape you, and free you, and make you better.

Our job is to **trust and obey**. As the old hymn puts it, **"Trust**

and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Jesus doesn't need our suggestions. Our job is to stay in step with His will. Stay yoked and harnessed to Jesus.. *don't spit the bit.*

Once, a young Dutch soldier was stationed in the jungles of Indonesia. During his tour, he adopted an ape. The monkey became a pet for the entire barracks.

After a few weeks though, the soldier noticed that whenever he touched the gibbon around the waist, it winced. It was in pain. Upon closer inspection, the soldier noticed a raised welt encircling its mid-section.

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 performed an operation. They shaved the ape around its waist - then slowly cut into his tender flesh.

Their efforts were obviously painful for the monkey, but he seemed to understand. He laid there patiently, believing the soldiers were acting in his best interests.

When the wire was finally snipped and slid from the gibbon's skin, the ape jumped up and danced around on his owner's shoulders. From that moment onward, the soldiers and the monkey were inseparable friends.

Later, the Dutch soldier said the experience marked a turning point in his own life. At the time, he was not a

Christian and deeply mired in a sinful lifestyle.

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 joyous again.

After some serious thought, he surrendered His life to the will of Jesus. 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 sin, and set you free, and get your feet to dancing. *Jesus is the boss, Who is never bossy.*

A small boy was sitting in church with his mom as the pastor preached a sermon entitled, *"What is a Christian?"* And 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 his 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 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 and shouted... **"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 task.

Though the *ramifications of it* extend to the heavens, the *reality of it* can't be any clearer. **A true Christian is a person who's been yoked to His Lord Jesus.**

Have you accepted His yoke?

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 won't forgive who He doesn't control.** He died, 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 for today's Easter celebration is the same reason Jesus came to earth, died on a Roman cross, and three days later rose from a borrowed grave... And it's the same reason He's coming again...

It's not *just* to bless us, or heal us, or even forgive us. He "*died, and rose, and lives again*" to be our Lord!

Do you trust Jesus enough to yoke yourself to Him and His will? Today, this Easter Sunday, will you embrace Jesus as your living Lord? I pray that you will!