### Love Reigns

**Week 1:** Easter Sunday

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:32-42 and Matthew 28:18-20

**Write Up:** As Jesus was being crucified, the soldiers mocked him by placing a crown of thorns on his head and placing a sign over his head that read “King of the Jews.” They did not see him as the true King who rules and reigns. After Jesus’ resurrection, he revealed himself to his disciples and because he defeated death, he claimed all authority over heaven and earth. It was Jesus’ love for us that held him on the cross. His love reigns in our lives when we put our faith, hope, and trust in him.

**Think:** Jesus is the true king over everything. He proved his authority by resurrecting from the dead.

**Feel:** Do I see Jesus as the authority in my life? Does his love reign over the way I live?

**Do:** Repent of our desire for control and allow Jesus to take control.

**Introduction**

He is Risen! (**He Is Risen indeed**) Happy Easter everyone. Today we join with churches from all across the world, and throughout the centuries, in celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It WAS the love of God that caused Jesus to come to earth and to offer himself as a sacrifice on the cross to forgive the world of its sins. It IS the love of God that continually offers us new life through this risen Savior. So, today we celebrate.

Today we worship the risen Jesus!

Not only is today Easter Sunday, but it is also the beginning of a powerful sermon series called Love Reigns. Together, for four weeks, we will be discovering all the ways that God’s amazing love transforms our past, present, and future.

**Story:** Many people underestimate the power of love. I would argue, however, that it is the most powerful force on earth. Many men in the room may be able to relate to the kind of things that love drove them to do in order to win the hearts of their girlfriends or wives. I remember when I first met my wife, I was unsure how to start a conversation with her in the restaurant she worked at. When I finally worked up the guts to speak to her, the only thing I could think to say was, “Look at my spider bite”, pointing at a recent wound on my arm. Needless to say, she was not very impressed. But I broke the ice and the rest is history. I have heard harrowing stories of men risking total embarrassment to try and impress the ones they love. (*Consider telling a story about the great lengths you have gone for the love of a spouse, parent, friend or child.)*

Love is the driving force behind our sacrificial actions toward our family and friends. We will gladly pay any price in order to demonstrate how much we care. Love is powerful, and it moves us to do amazing things. Before there was ever an Easter Sunday, there was a Good Friday. Before there ever was a resurrection, there first had to be a death.

**Main Teaching**

**POINT 1: THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE KING**

For 33 years, Jesus Christ walked the earth while serving the hungry, healing the broken, and delivering the oppressed. He announced the coming Kingdom of God and the restoration of all things. He claimed to be the Son of God, and many believed him to be the true King of all things. This kind of thinking and teaching caused a lot of conflict in the area that Jesus served in. You see, at that time, the ruler of the Ancient Near East was Rome. Rome had installed a vassal king named Herod the Great to keep things in Israel under control. Herod was a tyrant and was constantly afraid that his authority would be undermined. Another potential king would be a threat to Roman rule and therefore, had to be eradicated. Both Herod and Jesus could not reign over Israel.

So, the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman centurions worked together to have Jesus arrested. He was brought to trial for his claims to be God. He was convicted and beaten, nearly to death. He then was forced to carry a rugged, wooden cross all the way to the hill that he would be killed upon.

**READ Matthew 27:32-42**

The crucifixion of Jesus is marked by ridicule and disbelief. The soldiers mocked Jesus by placing a sign over his head calling him the King of the Jews, even though they did not believe it. Those who passed by mocked Jesus by telling him to save himself if he really was the Son of God. The priests and the teachers mocked Jesus by telling him to get off the cross if he really was the King of Israel.

None of them understood that the true test of Jesus’ power and authority was not in his ability to save himself from crucifixion, but in his ability to overcome the death that the crucifixion would result in. Sometimes we miss the proof of Jesus’ lordship because we are expecting him to prove himself in certain ways, and he does something different.

Many individuals have decided in their hearts that they will never trust in Jesus unless he meets their expectations. Unless Jesus heals their relatives, gives them a job, stops world hunger, or writes something in the sky; they will never trust him and obey his authority in their lives.

They can never allow themselves to see him as King unless he does what they want him to do.

I am afraid this kind of mentality is the same kind of struggle that plagued those who were there at Jesus’ death. It’s also the same mentality that drove Herod to be a part of the death of God’s son. When we demand Jesus to prove himself on our terms, we rob ourselves of seeing His work in our lives.

Herod was not the last one to be threatened by the Kingship of Jesus. He was not the only one to struggle with the idea of Jesus being in charge. The truth is that this is still an idea we have a hard time with today.

**Illustration:** (*Have a chair on stage with you to demonstrate the Lordship of Jesus*.) In our lives, there can only be one king as well. It has been said that on the throne of our hearts sits the one who reigns in our lives. We must choose whether that will be Jesus or whether it will be ourselves. (*Sit in the chair*.) When we are on the throne of our hearts, we make decisions based on what we want. We often live selfishly. The other choice we have is to put Jesus on the throne of our lives. (*Get out of the chair and leave it empty*.) When Jesus is on the throne of our lives, love reigns. We listen to his leading. We put others first. We live sacrificially. So, when it comes to the way you speak, act, and live...There can only be one king.

If Jesus is dead, then none of this matters, but if he is risen from the dead; that changes everything! He is King.

**POINT 2: LOVE OVERCAME DEATH**

Three days after Jesus was crucified and laid in the tomb, to everyone’s shock and amazement, he appeared in bodily form to many of the disciples and others. This had never happened before. They had seen him killed. They knew he was dead and now he was eating with them, walking with them, and talking with them. Jesus’ love for humanity had overcome death and defeated evil once and for all. His resurrection is the proof that he was indeed, the true King over all.

**Story**: The renowned artist Paul Gustave Dore (1821-1883) lost his passport while traveling in Europe. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to one of the guards. Giving his name to the official, Dore hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass. The guard, however, said that many people attempted to cross the border by claiming to be persons they were not. He needed proof.

Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. "All right," said the official, "we'll give you a test, and if you pass it, we'll allow you to go through." Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch several people standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was indeed who he claimed to be. His work confirmed his word. (Our Daily Bread January 6. 1993)

Jesus’ work confirmed his word as well. Though many doubted him and mocked him, death did not have the last word and final say. Love did. The scripture tells us this is true in one of the most famous passages of all.

**READ John 3:16**

God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to live and to die. When we put our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we will be saved. This is why we celebrate today. We have been given an opportunity for eternal life. We know that because of Jesus, the worst thing that will happen to us will not be the last thing that happens to us because we will experience resurrection and new life.

After Jesus had resurrected, His final words to his followers reveal to us the truth behind the Easter story.

**READ Matthew 28:18-20**

Easter is the day that Jesus was given all authority on heaven and on earth. No matter how many doubted, he is the King of the Jews. No matter how many mocked him, He was able to rescue himself, and the entire world, as well. No matter how many questioned his power, he did defeat the cross, once and for all. The love of God was the authority and was now reigning over the entire world and our lives as well.

His final instruction for all of his followers was to go into the whole world and make disciples. He told them to spread the good news of his resurrection and love to all who would listen. We have been invited to teach the way of Jesus because it changes the world.

**POINT 3: LET LOVE REIGN IN YOU**

Today, if you consider yourself a Christian, this instruction has been given to you as well. You are to be a part of making disciples. The Greek word used in this passage for disciple is a form of the word *mathetes*, which means learner or student. We are to allow ourselves to be students and learners of the way of Christ and to help others become learners and students as well. It holds with it a feeling of progression. To be a disciple is to be in a life-long process of becoming more like Jesus. Over time, we learn to live generous lives, we learn to forgive, we learn to serve others, we learn to practice self-control, and we learn to be people of peace. When we submit to the love of Jesus in our lives, we are compelled to live life like him and to invite others to join us. This is what it means to let love reign in us.

**Story**: I became a believer when I was very young. I was not fully aware of the decision I had made, but I knew that Jesus loved me and had died and rose again for me. I wanted to give him my life. Since the time that I prayed for Jesus to live in me, I have seen my life change in so many wonderful ways. I have spent 30 years of my life allowing God to have more and more of my life. I am a better husband, father, friend, and pastor because of the decision I made to be a disciple. (*This story needs to express a personal experience with discipleship*.)

**Conclusion**

The final reminder that we are given by Jesus before he ascends into heaven, is that he will always be with us until the very end. Maybe today you feel like God has forgotten about you. I want to remind you that you are never alone. Jesus lives and dwells inside of those who trust him by the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that no matter what you go through and no matter what you face, you are not alone.

I am convinced that in the room today there are two types of people. **One**: there are some here who have never made the decision to let love reign in their lives and to follow Jesus. Maybe you have been waiting for Jesus to prove himself to you and it has not happened yet. Maybe you don’t want to give up control of your life and so you have never submitted to Jesus. Today, I want to invite you to give your life to Jesus. I want to invite you to offer him your heart and to become a disciple and a student of his for the rest of your life. To do this is very simple. Let me lead you in this prayer.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, I confess that I have lived my own way and under my own authority for far too long. I have sinned against others and sinned against you. I am sorry and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe that you died and you rose again for me. I welcome your spirit to work in my life and to obey you above everything else. I want to join you in sharing the good news of resurrection. Thank you for promising to always be with me for the rest of my days. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer today with a sincere heart, you are now a Christian and you are a disciple of Jesus. Strive to live each and every day under the reign of Christ’s love.

**Two**: there may be some here today who have trusted in Jesus before but have grown tired of obeying him. Maybe you have strayed from Him and have lived for yourself. Easter reminds us that we can once again repent and obey. If this is you today, I want to remind you that Jesus promised never to leave us. He still loves you and is still with you. Commit once again to live for Him.

This Easter, may you see the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the proof of his love, and may you let that love reign in your life. May you join God in spreading this good news with the entire world. He is risen. Happy Easter!