

# Resurrection And The Revolutionary Son of God

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**INTRODUCTION:** The resurrection is absolutely central to the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:17 “...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile....”). It is clearly one of the basic foundations of the faith. Therefore, in this talk we will ask three questions about it...

- What is it?
- Did it really happen?
- What does it mean?

## I. WHAT IS IT?

- To begin with, it is physically, literally, bodily being made alive after dying.
- But it is being made alive in a new way (not like Lazarus, the widow of Nain’s son, etc.)
- Jesus’ resurrection body was...
- Incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42)
- In some physical characteristics unlike our bodies (as evidenced by his apparent passing through walls [Jn. 20:19] and his ability to apparently disappear instantaneously [Lk. 24:31]).
- But Jesus’ resurrection body was still a body:
- It could be felt and touched (e.g., Jn. 24:27)
- He ate (Lk. 24:42f)

## II. DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?

- It is a “secure historical conclusion” (Wright, Resurrection, p. 710) that:
- The tomb was empty.
- Jesus met with people after his crucifixion.
- Various theories are advanced to explain these facts if the resurrection is not accepted as. Two of the more commonly advanced are:
  1. Cognitive dissonance
  2. Story made up by the early church (e.g., Bultmann, Crossan, Jesus Seminar, etc.)
- One can believe the resurrection happened, but this doesn’t mean one is a Christian. For example:
- “Some doubted” (Matt. 28:17)
- The Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide: “I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as an historical event.” (The Resurrection of Jesus, 1983, p. 15)

## III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Many implications in the epistles, the primary meaning is found in Rom. 1:2-4: “...declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead....”
- What does Jesus’ title “Son of God” mean?
- Will deal primarily in this talk with the meaning of this phrase as it was perceived in the earliest days after Jesus’ resurrection.
- There are three interrelated levels of meaning found within this phrase:

### 1. Jesus as the SON OF GOD is DIVINE:

- Most likely not understood with this meaning prior to Jesus’ ascension (Thomas being perhaps the exception—Jn. 20:28) nor in the very earliest days of the church.
- Yet it is the most readily acknowledged (if not believed) contemporary understanding of this phrase.
- This meaning was most likely discerned in the early years of the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:25-28; Phil 2:10f) and eventually codified at the great church councils of the 4th & 5th centuries, primarily at Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451). These creeds have been broadly accepted by all branches of the

church (Roman, Eastern, and Protestant) for the last 1500 years.

## **2. Jesus as the SON OF GOD is the MESSIAH:**

- “Messiah” is Hebrew for “anointed.” “Christ” is Greek for “anointed.” “To anoint,” in its most basic meaning, means “to pour.”
- The anointed one (through the custom of pouring oil on the head) is the king (a common practice throughout ANE cultures).
- The idea of a coming Jewish messiah/anointed one/king originates from passages such as 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2; Ps. 89; etc.
- No uniform belief about the messiah in 1st century Judaism, but all who accepted the idea expected the messiah to lead an armed revolt against Israel’s oppressors. This was, after all, the way Israel’s earlier leaders (e.g., Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus, etc.) had established their kingdoms or overthrown oppressive regimes.
- To a 1C Jew to say one was the “son of God” was to say one was the Messiah.
- Jesus, despite teaching the opposite of armed revolt (e.g., Matt. 6:38-48), claimed to be the Messiah, although he never directly claimed the title “Son of God.” [The claim of messiah was initially implied (e.g., Lk. 4: 16-21), but eventually made openly to his disciples. During the last week of his life he made the claim to the public through blatantly messianic symbolic actions.]:
  - Peter’s proclamation (Matt. 16:16)
  - Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11)
  - Jesus’ action in the temple (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Zech. 6:12f; Matt. 21:12f)
  - Trial before Caiaphas and Pilate (Matt. 26:57-66; 27:11)
  - Titulus: “King of the Jews” (Matt. 27:37)
- Title “Christ” given to him by early church (too numerous to cite)
- Jesus as the messiah was primarily what was understood by the term Son of God in the earliest days after Jesus’ resurrection.
- It was probably the underlying meaning of what Paul meant in Rom. 1:2-4.

## **3. Jesus as the SON OF GOD is the WORLD’S TRUE RULER:**

- Explicit in Jewish teaching that Yahweh would one day rule over all the earth (e.g., Zech. 14:9)
- Explicit in the Roman understanding that Caesar was ruler over most of the earth (and implicit that one day would like to be ruler over all the earth) and that in his position as this ruler he was also, conveniently from a political standpoint, the “son of God.” (coin engraving: “Augustus Tiberius Caesar Son of the Divine Augustus”)
- Roman emperors had their predecessor declared a god which made them a “son of god.”
- This helps explain the Roman centurion’s comment at the death of Jesus.
- The centurion would have been surprised that Jesus had risen from the dead. A Roman emperor, nor anyone for that matter, was resurrected!
- To call Jesus the Son of God in a letter written to a group of Christians in Rome (Rom. 1: 2-4) was a subtle if not blatant affront to Caesar. It cried out Jesus is the true Lord of the world and Caesar is not!
- To call Jesus the SON OF GOD therefore meant:
  - Jesus was divine
  - Jesus was the messiah
  - Jesus was the world’s one true ruler
- How did the resurrection declare Jesus to be the SON OF GOD (Rom. 1:4) in all three of these levels of meaning?
- Jesus was, after his death on the cross, a dead Messiah (an oxymoron)
- Jesus said he was the Messiah, his death said he was not.
- God reversed the verdict of death handed to him by the Roman governor, resurrected him and said, o yes he is!

- Death was an affront to God's creation. He created man with a body that did not die. Death is anti-God, anti-creation! It is counter to all that was originally placed into His creation.
- Ironically, through Jesus' death (a whole other story!) God reversed the verdict of death and began the process of creation's restoration to life with Jesus as the first fruits (1 Cor. 15:20) of this restoration.
- Jesus' resurrection declared primarily that he was in fact what he claimed to be, the messiah. As such, and as the church eventually began to recognize, he was also declared to be the world's divine ruler.

**CONCLUSION:** Jesus' call to us today is to be revolutionaries!

- The resurrection's declaration that Jesus is the SON OF GOD is a declaration of REVOLUTION!
- To the Caesar (or any pretender to Lordship, whether political as with Caesar or less blatant as with sex and fame) it says Jesus is the master/ruler and you are not!
- To the satan (the ultimate power behind any pretender to Lordship) it says Jesus is the true Lord and your ultimate weapon, death, has been defeated!