

Jesus Christ Is Lord.

Text: Phil 2:9-11

Suggested Hymns:

156, 206, 219, 285, 157

1) The Conviction Of The Lordship Of Christ

2) Commitment To The Lordship Of Christ

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 2:9-11, ⁹ *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,* ¹⁰ *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,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are focussing on the section of the Nicene Creed which says, *And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*

To what do we commit ourselves when we confess these words? There is a majestic sweep in the rhythm of the phrases that carries us along in the act of public confession: *“God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.”* Yet the very majesty of these words seems to stifle thought and defies human understanding.

Are we caught up, one might say, by the rhythm and sound of the familiar language and carried beyond ourselves into a feeling of kinship and communion with all who have ever spoken these words before us, or speak them with us now?

These words were not written to be a kind of mystic incantation for the creation of a mood. Rather they are the expression of basic Christian conviction and the sign of personal Christian commitment.

Our theme today is *Jesus Christ Is Lord - Christian Conviction and Commitment*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Conviction Of The Lordship Of Christ

Each of the phrases of the Nicene Creed can be traced back to a long history of controversy and debate whereby the church of the early centuries learned to confess Christ in language that is clear and unmistakable.

Never, however, did this confession advance in substance beyond the simple form of the earliest Christian creed as we find it in the New Testament — only words two in the original Greek, and just three words in English, “*Jesus is Lord.*”

We can hear this infant creed when St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3, ³ *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* In a variant form the title “Christ” is added: “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

In our text Paul writes, *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

“*Jesus Christ is Lord,*” confessed the first generation of Christians. “*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,*” confesses the church of all generations. It confesses Jesus Christ as the one Lord in a world that offers many competing lords. And it validates this majestic claim with the ultimate assertion that this Lord is “*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*”

To be a Christian means, first of all and above all, to share, not a mood, but to share that conviction, *Jesus Christ is Lord.*

Let your minds go back to the origins of this astounding confession. Think of the young Man Jesus physically, mentally, spiritually fit and healthy — a young Man standing on the seashore at Galilee, talking about God as His Father and the coming of His kingdom. The bright eastern sunlight fell on His face, but His eyes shone with a light from within.

Around Jesus were ordinary people — fishermen, farmers, villagers — looking at Him and listening to the wonderful news. A few days later He called some of them to follow Him, even though they were mostly uneducated people of no social or political influence, and without any qualifications except that Jesus had opened their hearts to Him.

They did not hesitate. They became His disciples. The life Jesus was living was infinitely appealing. The words He was speaking opened to them new and undreamed possibilities for life and for service. This, they must have thought, is what God meant life to be.

Those early days must have been astounding. Crowds gathered wherever they went. The sick were made well. Darkened hearts saw light. Sin-bound souls found freedom and release. Even the dead were raised.

But slowly shadows began to fall, and the gloom deepened. In dark corners enemies plotted to destroy this Man Jesus, who was a threat to life as they lived it.

The followers of Jesus must have thought that One with such remarkable powers would not permit Himself to be taken. They had no fears for His safety. What enemy power could overcome a life backed by such resources?

Yet at last it became apparent that Jesus would permit Himself to be taken, that the life that began with such promise would end in tragedy. Even He could be defeated by death. And He was.

Then, when despair was blackest and hope extinguished, there came a rumour: ***“He lives!”*** The rumour was followed by the evidence of personal experience: ***“Indeed, He lives!”*** They came out of their dark hiding places and discovered that the grave was empty and that the world was full of His presence.

They could not turn anywhere where Jesus did not meet them. They felt a new glow of the heart, a kindling of the mind, and a reinforcement of the will. And they went out to preach the good news, which is still new and fresh today: ***“Jesus Christ is Lord!”***

We need to reaffirm as a personal conviction this assurance of the “Lordship of Christ.”

Sadly, Jesus is too often pictured as a weak and anaemic person. But let your minds dwell on the words you confess: ***This Jesus is Lord.*** He is not merely a human person who after a number of strange experiences was revered and honoured with a kind of divinity. No. He is God Himself translated into the terms of human life.

We make much of His gentleness, His meekness, and His compassion. And we should. But these attributes are not just the model of His humanity: they are the mark of His divinity. They signal the incarnation of the divine mind and heart, which loves us to the point of absolute identity with us in our helplessness and our need.

It is a modern sort of heresy when people dwell on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His divinity. It is a heresy as old as our creed, as old as the New Testament times itself.

When he wrote to the Colossian Christians, Paul had to refute a heresy that denied the sole Lordship of Christ and reduced Him to one among the many lords whom people chose to serve.

Paul responds in Colossians 1:15-17, ***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.***

Can you imagine the amazed wonder at such an assertion? Was this not a carpenter of Nazareth? Can we not fit Him neatly into a merely human picture? Do we not know of His sisters and brothers? And was He not put to death by the Roman authorities like a common criminal?

If we think of Jesus as a weak, wishy-washy, sentimental dreamer who talked about birds and lilies and held little children on His lap and laid hands on the sick and died a hero's death in defence of a dream, then we need to correct that idea with the New Testament.

We need to assert the basic Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord. ***“All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”***

Has the significance of this penetrated your hearts? Let the power of the mighty mountains stir your thoughts, and then say of Christ, *“He made them.”* Hear the waves of the oceans pounding on a thousand beaches, and then say, *“He controls them.”* Consider the Milky Way, which baffles scientists, millions upon millions of worlds swirling and chasing their orbits into traversed space. Then tell yourself. *“That is the Lord’s handiwork.”¹*

The Christ whose Lordship was experienced at Easter and who has been continually available to the church through the experience of His Spirit is that kind of Christ. What Paul says in inspired language, the church learned to confess in its Creed. *“Begotten, not made,”* it says: *“Of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.”*

Note that the pronoun “whom” is not referring to the Father but the one Lord Jesus Christ. *“By Him all things were made.”* We read in Colossians 1:16, *“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”*

Christ is Himself the Word which God spoke when at the dawn of the first creation He said, *“Let there be light.”* Christ is the Word which God spoke when at the dawn of the new creation He said, *“Let there be new light, new life, and new hope.”*

If we go back to that remarkable passage of Colossians and observe how Paul continues, we note that this new life is what the Lordship of Christ is all about. It concerns not so much His claim over the old creation as His gracious power over the new creation.

We read in Colossians 1:17-20, *“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”¹⁷ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.¹⁸ For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,¹⁹ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

This is the ultimate paradox in the Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is a lordship established on a cross. People thought it then and still

think: “Would such a mighty Being as this, have permitted Himself to be put to death by a handful of men? Why did He not assert His power?” Can you in faith confess once more your conviction that Christ did assert His power for you precisely in His death?

Yes, Jesus Christ has destroyed death and has destroyed in you the power of guilt and of sin. He made peace for you with His Father by the blood of His cross. In the sacrifice of the cross and in the life reclaimed on Easter, Christ has made available for you His own divine power for forgiveness and for newness of life.

2. Commitment To The Lordship Of Christ

With that we move onto the final portion of our message. The confession that “*Jesus Christ is Lord*” is more than basic Christian conviction; it is also basic Christian commitment.

When we confess the words of the Nicene Creed, we not only say something stupendous about Christ; we say something vital about ourselves. For a confession is always a boomerang. It reaches out as a public statement of faith, but it then comes home to rest in our own hearts, there to make a total claim on our lives.

Let us recall the Gospel lesson for last Sunday. Luke 14:16-20, “*A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, ¹⁷ “and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ ¹⁸ “But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ ¹⁹ “And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ ²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’*”

Total commitment. Is that not the point of the Gospel lesson just read? What else are the excuses of the invited banquet guests except many accusations of our own half-hearted commitment to the Lordship of Christ?

They want “*Jesus Christ is Lord,*” but at a safe distance, with major territories left free and open, for their own royal instincts. They want “*Jesus Christ is Lord,*” but not all the way, not at least for the moment. They want

“Jesus Christ is Lord,” but only one among many lords, of whom I myself am first. The Gospel thus poses the sharp challenge: *“Do I really believe in one Lord Jesus Christ?”*

In the Berlin art gallery there once hung a picture by Menzel, an unfinished picture of Frederick the Great talking to his generals. There was a small bare patch in the center of the picture, where a charcoal sketch indicated the artist’s intention. He had painted in all of the generals, but he had left the king to the last. That is so life-like for so many of us.

People carefully put in all the generals but leave the King to the last, with a hope which grows ever more faint that some day yet they may get the King in the centre. Poor Menzel died before he had finished his picture. Get the King into the centre of the picture now, and His kingdom in your heart.

We need commitment now and forever. In the Revelation of John a trumpet sounds, and loud voices from heaven declare in Revelation 11:15, *“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*

That may be regarded as a prophecy of future triumph. But it must also be received as a declaration of present fact. We too readily forget that Christ has not abdicated His throne. He rules and continues forever as Ruler. Other rulers come and go, but His kingdom is and abides forever. Other kingdoms have their little day and are gone. Thus the rise of any earthly kingdom is but the early proclamation of its fall.

The Roman Empire - “Eternal Rome” they called her — drove an iron fist through the early church. The fist withered, but the church lived on. Likewise many other rulers, dictatorships and kingdoms have come and gone.

At a given moment in history it may seem that the rulership of the world is not in the hands of God and of Christ but in the hands of selfish and brutal men. Caesar sits securely on his throne, but Christ perishes on a cross. So it appears. But it is not so.

Every time Christ’s name is confessed, He reasserts His claim to Lordship. He reasserts it in us today as we again make our commitment to Him. He will assert it through us as we live out that commitment in lives of loving service to

Him and to the world of men for which He died and for whom He rose again to reign.

The world was made by Christ, and the world is remade by Him wherever the Word of His grace prompts people to confess in personal conviction and with personal commitment: ***“Jesus Christ is Lord.”***

So let us conclude with the text, Isaiah 9:7, ⁷ ***Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever.*** Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 19:1