

# The Glory of Christ!

Isaiah 6:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

October 18, 1998

“Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart....For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Here we find the heart and soul of Paul’s proclamation of the gospel to the Corinthians and again to us yet today: Jesus Christ is Lord. Here we find what is good and true and important both universally and also for you and me right here at Grace Covenant and in our radio audience: Jesus Christ is Lord. Here we find the one thing that Christians all around the world can and do affirm that no one else can affirm: Jesus Christ is Lord. Here we find the good news that can and does continue to give us faith, hope, love, and life today: Jesus Christ is Lord.

Who is this Jesus Christ? He is the one who was crucified, dead, and buried, then raised from the dead. There are many other things that could be said, but this identifies him. He is the one who was crucified, dead, and buried, then raised from the dead. Of all the hundreds of human beings crucified, he is the one who was completely innocent. Of all the thousands executed, he is the one who was without sin. Of all the millions who have died, he is the one who has been resurrected. Of all the billions who ever have lived or ever will live, he is the one Son of God. This Jesus Christ is Lord.

What, then, is the Lord? The Lord is the creator, ruler, sustainer, judge, and redeemer of the universe. It is the Lord who made us, and we are his. It is the Lord who gives us life and breath. It is the Lord who forgives our sin, calls us his very own, and restores us to himself. It is the Lord who guides, guards, and directs our lives. It is the Lord who has called the church out from the world, who gathers us together, and who sends us back into the world. The Lord is God.

How, then, is this Jesus Christ the Lord? Jesus Christ is Lord because God chose to take on human flesh in Jesus Christ, to come to us as one of us. Jesus Christ is Lord because God chose to reveal himself in Jesus Christ, so that the love of Christ for us is the very love of God for us. Jesus Christ is Lord because God chose to speak to us in the life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, breaking the silence of the heavens, speaking to us in the wildernesses of our lives, giving us the one word we need to sustain our lives. Jesus Christ is Lord because God chose to work in and through him to forgive and to take away our sin,

to defeat the powers of evil, and to destroy that final enemy, death itself. And we see and know that Jesus Christ is Lord because he willingly died for us, taking our sin upon himself, suffering the punishment that was due us, forgiving those who executed him, refusing to return evil for evil, trusting God even when it appeared that God had abandoned him, loving us as his own to the very end. No one else has ever done that. No one else could ever do that. Jesus Christ is the Lord. And if God is for us, who is against us?

At one level, perhaps at the level of vocabulary, all of this may seem very straight forward, if for no other reason than simple familiarity. And yet, some of the most remarkable claims in the world are being made here. The universe is not self-explanatory, but instead has an origin outside and beyond itself. Human life is not self-contained, but points beyond itself. This one from whom we come and in whose hands our destinies rest has chosen not only to provide for us but also to communicate with us. The one who has made us free enough to disobey and to rebel against him has chosen, at great personal cost to himself, to wipe away the effect of our wrongdoing, by absorbing the pain and death it causes into himself. The one who called us by name before the world was made has gathered us in this time and place, into this congregation of the church of Jesus Christ, and calls upon us to live in the love he has shown us in Jesus Christ, to believe the good news, to worship God, to share the gospel with those about us, and to minister to human need wherever we find it. This is not our choice. But it is who we are. This is God's choice of us.

In the midst of all of this, Paul is intent upon pointing to, bearing witness to, and thereby sharing with others what he calls the glory of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was not on the news. He was not rich or wealthy. He held no public office. He was not powerful in the way of the world. Instead, he was a one time carpenter, a wandering rabbi, a member of a despised and defeated people on the fringe of the Roman Empire, executed on trumped up charges of being a threat to the state. What strange glory is this? And yet, Paul says that he is the single most important person in the world for you and I to get to know. Paul says that Jesus is the very likeness of God and is God, for Jesus Christ is Lord, and to know him is to know God. To miss him is to miss life itself. To know him is to know God and so to live.

What strange glory is this? If not the glory of wealth, fame, and power, it is the glory hidden under the sign, or the appearance, of the opposite. That is, Christ's glory at first appears to be unglorious, for it is the glory of a otherworldly wealth made known in his poverty, the glory of a strange strength made known in his weakness, the glory of heavenly power made known in his vulnerability, the glory of divine majesty shining forth only in his abject humility, the glory of victory that appears to be defeat, the glory of life not grasped for himself but released for us.

Christ's glory, then, is the glory of truth shining in the midst of a world of falsehoods, the glory of love shining in the midst of swirling hatreds, the glory of good shining in the midst of grim evil, the glory of life shining in the midst of death, decay, rot, and decadence. It is the glory of a baby born in a barn and laid in a feed trough. It is the glory of a wrongly executed man refusing to curse his executors. It is the glory of a crucified man asking for forgiveness for those who crucify him. This is the strange and unworldly glory that shines forth from the ungloriousness of all that is done to him.

Can you see it? That is the question for us. Can you see it? Do you recognize him? Do you realize that Jesus Christ is the Lord? Do you know that to see his glory is to see the glory of God? Can you look in, through, and past the offense of the crucifixion and know that God is with him, and in him, and so that God is for us? How can we possibly see and know this? How can we believe and hold on to it? How can we tell and live it for others?

Well, how do we know that light is light? Because we see it. There is no other way to know it. There is no other evidence that would vouch for it or could convince us of it. Either we see it or we do not see it. If we do not see it, we do not know the light. But if we do see it, we know the light, and we know that it is light.

So it is with the very gospel itself. How do we know that it is light and truth and good news? Because, when God shines it into our lives, we see it, just like light. There is no other way to know the gospel. There is no other evidence that would vouch for it or could convince us of it. Either we see it or we do not see it. If we do not see it, we do not know the light, and we live in the darkness. But if we do see it, we know the light, and we know that the light is light, and we live in the light.

The terrible, negative possibility of human life is to fail, or to refuse, to see the light. The terrible, negative possibility of human life is to fail, or to refuse, to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord. And yet, despite the terror of it all, there are people who do this every day. There are people who refuse to see the light, who reject the gospel, who say they cannot see it or hear it, whose minds are blinded, whose hearts are hardened, whose ears are closed, whose eyes are shut, and who are totally committed to hatred, sin, death, evil, and destruction. In Paul's day, they were totally dedicated to destroying the church he had built at Corinth. In every day since, including our own, there continues to be the danger that such people actively seek to destroy the congregations of the church of Jesus Christ and the ministries of those congregations.

What of these people? As Paul says, they are "perishing." Are they dangerous and destructive? Yes. Do we lose heart in face of their onslaught? No, not at all! Because in his great mercy God has given to the church the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, "we do not lose heart." Christ has not died in vain. God has not acted

carelessly. His mercy is not without purpose or effect. The gospel does not go forth only to return empty. The church has not been gathered simply to be tossed away. We have not been called here for no good reason. Jesus Christ is Lord. God's will shall prevail.

It is our job, as the church, to present the gospel of Jesus Christ. "By the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It is our job as the church to state the truth of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the gospel, then it is up to the hearer to believe or not. That is between that person and the Holy Spirit of God. Our job is to be clear, plain, truthful, straightforward, eager, and even urgent, for the content of the message is urgent and a truthful presentation communicates that urgency. But it is not our job to make people see or believe. We cannot do that. Of course, we do not want to get in the way. We do not want to suppress or obscure the gospel. We do not want to hide it in buffoonery, or in incompetence, or behind intellectual snobbery. Nor do we want our lives to belie our message. Far be it from us for anything we say or do to cause someone to stumble. So we, the church, certainly want to remove every other possible source of offense besides the gospel. Having said that and having done that, we set forth the truth as clearly, simply, and plainly as possible. Then, if people see, they see. If they do not see, they do not see. If they believe, they believe. If they do not believe, they do not believe. The difference there is hidden in the will of God.

This brings us back to the great, positive possibility of human life, the great hope, the goal that is beyond all human potentiality and exists only in the grace and power of God. The great, positive possibility of human life is that we shall see the light, we shall see the glory, we shall hear the word of God, we shall believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, our minds shall be opened, our hearts shall be converted, our souls shall be saved, and our lives shall be turned around. The great, positive possibility of human life is that we shall love God, we shall love neighbor, and we shall love each other. The great, positive possibility of human life is that we shall see, believe, know, follow, and obey. The great, positive possibility is that we shall be gathered into the great, worshipping, believing, and serving congregation of the church of Jesus Christ our Lord. For the church is not the content of the good news. The church is the result of the good news, and then becomes the agent of spreading the good news for all the world. This great, positive possibility of human life, the perceiving of the glory of Jesus Christ, is what we hold out and offer to you today and every day here at Grace Covenant and to those listening on the radio. Is it of interest to you? Can you see the light? Can you rejoice in Jesus Christ the Lord?

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has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

*To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.*

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