

Both Lord and Christ!

Acts 2:22-47

June 3, 2001

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” On the day of Pentecost, with the first public proclamation of the gospel, Peter preached Christ crucified and resurrected. He started with the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. He moved quickly to the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. This led to the horror of the crucifixion and the reality of death. And yet, “God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Thus, on the basis of the resurrection, Peter made this ringing affirmation: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord and Christ. Now it gets interesting. Jesus of Nazareth lived two thousand years ago in a small village on the other side of the world, but the Lord of the universe is Lord over you and me, and the Christ is Christ for you and me. We did not crucify Christ, in that we were not there, anymore than did the Jewish men from around the world then gathered into Jerusalem. And yet, Christ was crucified for us, and for our sin, and now the one crucified on our account has not only been raised from the dead but also has been placed in authority over us. This is serious. This changes everything. This put us into a totally new situation.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that he is divine, that he is the Son of God, indeed, that he is God. The one who was crucified on our account is the ruler of the universe and of our lives. The one who paid the price for our sin is in charge of our ultimate destiny and of everything between now and then. The one who was cast aside and thrown away has now been raised in dignity, honor, glory, and majesty. The one who was shamed on our behalf is none other than God. Jesus is Lord.

At the same time, to say that Jesus is Christ is to say that he is the one long expected to come from God and for God to carry out God’s mission in the world. Are you looking for a savior? Here he is. Are you looking for help? Here he is. Are you looking for guidance? Here he is. Are you looking for forgiveness? Here he is. Are you looking for healing, health, and wholeness? Here he is. Are you looking for reconciliation to God and neighbor? Here he is. Are you looking for eternal life? Here he is. Jesus is the Christ. What difference does Jesus of Nazareth make to us?

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

The appropriate response to the gospel of Jesus Christ was repentance and baptism. Those who heard Peter “were cut to the heart.” They inquired of him, “What shall we do?” He told them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” “Been there, done that,” I can just hear you saying. Maybe. Maybe not. If you have not been baptized, I urge you to repent and be baptized. There is nothing more important you can do today or the rest of your life. And if you have been baptized, that does not mean that you are through with this, or that you are now beyond this, or that this has nothing to do with you. Even if you have been baptized, I still urge you to repent and to keep on repenting. To repent is to turn away from sin and to turn toward God. And repentance is something we never finish. This work is incomplete. We are on the way, but we always have more to do. We can always turn farther away from sin and closer toward God. John Calvin writes of this passage:

We have therefore in these few words almost the sum total of Christianity: namely, that a man renouncing himself and the world devotes himself wholly to God; secondly, that he is delivered by the free forgiveness of sins from guilt involving death and adopted into the number of the children of God. And as we can obtain none of these things without price, the name of Christ is placed before us, as the only foundation of faith and repentance. This also we must note, that the repentance that has its beginning when first we turn to God must be continued throughout our life. This message therefore must continually be heard in the Church, ‘Repent.’ Not that those who desire to be accounted faithful, and have their place already within the Church, are to make a beginning in this, but that they are to continue to proceed in it; although many take upon themselves the name of faithful men, who have never even begun to repent. We must therefore hold this order of teaching, that those who up to now have lived to the world and to the flesh should begin to crucify the old man, that they may rise to newness of life; while those who have already entered upon the course of repentance should continually press forward towards the mark.¹

¹John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas W. Torrance, vol. 6, *The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, trans. John W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B.

The appropriate response to the gospel of Jesus Christ was, and is, repentance and baptism. Three thousand people joined the church that day. They repented and were baptized. Forty-eight years ago, the membership of this congregation exceeded, for the first time, eighteen-hundred members. Some of you were here. That was a tremendous thing. And that helps us realize, when God brought almost twice that many people into the new church on the first day the gospel was preached, what a wonderful thing that was. As Billy Lowe, a Presbyterian minister friend of mine from Elberton, Georgia once said in a sermon at presbytery, “Three thousand new members is a good day in anybody’s book!”

It has been a long time since the church has seen that kind of growth. Maybe nobody preaches like the apostle Peter. Maybe the world has become hardened to the message of the gospel. Maybe the Holy Spirit has retreated from us if not withdrawn entirely. And yet, God continues to work through Christ in the reading, preaching, and hearing of the gospel. God continues to work through Christ in the hearts and minds of the men, women, and children of the world. God continues to use even the church to spread the good word to all the world. And God continues to bring new members to the church one at a time, two at a time, even a family at a time, building us up, molding us together, making us into something new and different. For this we give thanks.

The new church then was marked by four characteristics which continue to be valid and necessary components of the church of Jesus Christ today. They devoted themselves to: (1) the apostles’ teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) the breaking of bread; and (4) the prayers. The apostles’ teaching was clearly the teaching of the scripture as the word of God and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the starting point. This is the foundation. This is the basis without which there is no church. No church, and no church member, ever outgrows the need for teaching and preaching. And this is not just any teaching and preaching. It is teaching and preaching which are faithful to the scriptures, which exalt Jesus Christ, which glorify God, and which edify the church. Without this, we have nothing. We are devoted to good, right, and apostolic teaching and preaching of the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The fellowship is clearly the love and friendship of the congregation, both as directed to those within the community in terms of mutual affection and nurture and as directed to those outside the community in terms of outreach and ministry to those in need. We are devoted to Christian love and fellowship.

The breaking of the bread is clearly the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, even as we are sharing this meal today. We do this every month. This is not something we do alone. This is not private devotion and piety. This is the public, shared meal of the people of God. We are devoted to the breaking of bread together.

The prayers to which they were devoted were clearly all the other acts of public worship surrounding the teaching and preaching of the word, the fellowship of the people, and the breaking of bread. There are prayers of invocation, praise, and adoration, prayers of confession and supplication, of thanksgiving, intercession, petition, and dedication. There are prayers for illumination and prayers for healing, protection, and blessing. There are sung prayers and silent prayers and even musical prayers without words. There are glorias and doxologies, hymns and anthems. Often, even our scripture reading is a prayer, as are all of the Psalms, and always we pray the Lord's Prayer. There are prayers for baptism and prayers for new members. There are prayers before supper, during supper, and after supper. The minister prays, and the people pray, and the children pray, and the radio congregation prays, and even the spirit prays with and for us all. Thanks be to God! We are devoted to the prayers.

The result of God's grace then and of their faith and devotion was that the new church grew rapidly and regularly. Not only did three-thousand join on Pentecost, but also "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." This is the normal, natural, healthy state of affairs for the church. I realize that this may seem odd to those of us who have seen the church decline, locally and nationally, over the last fifty years. It is hard for us to realize that the church is supposed to grow. When we have people in leadership who take pride in giving offense, who take pride in emptying churches, who take pride in belittling numbers of members, who take pride in tearing down the teachings of Jesus Christ, and who take pride in immorality, it is no wonder that the church declines. But that is not the way it is supposed to be. And it is not the way it has to be. We can do something different here. When the gospel is being preached, when people's hearts are being touched, when the Spirit moves people to faith and repentance, the church grows. It grows every day. That is the way it is supposed to be. That is the way we want it to be. That is the way it has been all around the world for two thousand years, or we would not have the more than one billion Christians which we have today. And if any one congregation or community or city or nation does not want the gospel of Jesus Christ, God is always capable of raising up his church somewhere else, whether that be Korea, or Brazil, or Zaire. God is building up his church everyday, adding to its number those being saved, maybe even three thousand at a time. Do we have the faith and the courage to ask God to do that

here? Do we want to hear the gospel? Do we want to receive the Spirit? Do we want God's church to grow? It is his church!

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. He started with the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. He moved to his crucifixion and death. Then, on the basis of the resurrection, Peter made his ringing affirmation, and I join him in it: "Let all the house" of Grace Covenant know "that God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Christ." "Repent, and be baptized."

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

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Minister
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
1627 Monument Avenue
Richmond, VA 23220-2925
Telephone 804-359-2463
Facsimile 804-278-6298
goodloe@grace-covenant.org