

Eleven Called Him Lord

Exodus 12:21-27, Matthew 26:17-29

February 4, 2001

Eleven disciples called Jesus “Lord.” One called him only “Master.” Therein lies all the difference! What do you call him? Jesus said that one of the disciples would betray him. One after another, eleven asked him, “Is it I, Lord?” Then Judas, who was paid thirty pieces of silver to deliver Jesus to the priests, asked, “Is it I, Master?” One word makes all the difference. Which do you use? Twelve disciples joined Jesus to celebrate the Passover, his Last Supper. Twelve ate the bread. Twelve drank of the cup. Eleven called him “Lord.” One called him only “Master.” What do you call him?

“Lord” means ruler, not only of the disciples, not only of Jerusalem or Israel, not only of the Roman Empire, of the church of Jesus Christ, of the United States of America, of the earth, of the solar system, or of the galaxy, but ruler of the universe, ruler of all that is, ruler of all that ever has been, and ruler of all that ever will be! There is only one Lord, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, God Almighty. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to profess the faith that God is with us in Jesus Christ, to profess the faith that God is for us in Jesus Christ, and to pledge allegiance to trust in, to follow, and to obey Jesus Christ in life, in death, and in the new life beyond death.

By way of contrast, Judas called him only “Master.” The word he used was “Rabbi,” which means merely teacher. There were many teachers then. There are many now. I hope that, so long as the world exists, there will be many teachers. But it is a profound mistake and an alien faith to confuse the Lord of the universe with one more teacher. The eleven disciples who called Jesus “Lord” became his apostles, sent out to preach his gospel to the whole world. The one who called him only “Master,” as could any unbeliever then or now, betrayed Jesus and lost his place among the twelve.

Today’s reading presents Jesus as Lord, and it urges us to confess him as such. Who do we say Jesus is? What is our faith and allegiance? Do we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Do we believe and live and proclaim his gospel? Or do we betray Jesus again?

Jesus is Lord! Despite appearances to the contrary, Jesus is in control of his own destiny. He told his disciples, “My time is at hand.” Jesus knew he was about to die. He knew this would be his last supper with the disciples. He knew one of them would betray him, and he knew which one. Yet, Jesus did not run or hide. He did not let fear prevent him from fulfilling the purpose for which God had sent him. What was that purpose? Jesus was sent in human form to offer to God a life of perfect obedience, even though that cost him his life. Though Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus was not the victim of his betrayer. Though the religious establishment conspired to kill Jesus, and the government helped, he was not a victim of the system. Jesus is Lord, in control of his destiny.

The giving of the bread and the cup to his disciples portrays the giving of his own body and blood. The next day, Jesus gave his life for us. Nobody took it from him; he gave it for us. Jesus offered to God the life of perfect obedience, even at the point of death on a cross. A mere human could not have led a perfect life. The only way this makes sense is that Jesus is God, come to live with us as one of us.

What are the implications of Jesus being Lord? To confess that Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge him as ruler of the universe and ruler of our lives. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to yield control of our hearts, minds, and souls to him, and to place our faith and confidence in

him. My life is no longer my own to live howsoever I may choose; it belongs to him. The course of my life is not simply mine to set; I turn to listen to him in order to seek guidance. My own money is no longer my own money to spend howsoever I wish; all that I am and all that I have belong to him. The offerings we give to the church help remind us to use all of our income and resources to glorify God. And this faith in Jesus as Lord gives us the confidence to face life and to face the world. It seems that evil rules the world, but it will not win. It appears that death has the last word, but it does not. Decay, decline, and destruction threaten to take the day, but they will not have the last say about who we are. Jesus is Lord, ruler of our lives and of the universe, even Lord over the power of death.

What does Jesus do with this Lordship? What is the point of Christ's perfect life if that obedience means dying? What is the reason for the self-sacrifice of his life? Jesus did this for us, "for the forgiveness of sins." When Jesus gave his body and poured out his blood, he was sealing the new covenant between God and humanity. The sacrifice of his life shows us how expensive it is for God to forgive us. It shows us how committed God is to bringing us back to himself. And it shows us how surely God has accomplished the forgiveness of sins. Because Jesus is Lord of the universe, he can be our Savior and forgive our sin. Jesus saves us from our sin and for himself.

We need to be clear about what this means. We have all messed up our lives. We have hurt the people we love. We have inflicted damage we cannot undo or repair. We cannot roll back the clock and do things over again. We have said hurtful words when we should have been silent, and we have been silent when we should have said loving words. We have thought too highly of ourselves and not highly enough of God. Or, sometimes, maybe, we have thought too lowly of ourselves and not highly enough of God. God created us to be a community of free and loving creatures surrounding him with worship and praise, and God created the whole universe as an arena within which for this to happen. But we have destroyed our relationships. We have traded our freedom for bondage. We have lost our love in a world of hatred. We have exchanged our worship of God for praise of ourselves. That is why Jesus came to help us. If we had been in only a little trouble, we could have fixed it ourselves. But when it takes the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ to help us, we have to admit just how bad our situation was!

How does Jesus correct this? He has not made us good yet, because we still mess things up! We pray that we do so less and less as time goes on, but that is not always the case. What Jesus has done is to reestablish our relationship with God. In Jesus, God reclaims us as God's very own and regathers us to himself. This does not mean that our sinfulness, our gonewrongness, our hatreds, pettiness, and betrayals, are acceptable to God. But it does mean that God accepts us despite our unacceptability. Only Christ lived a life of perfect obedience, so only Christ deserves to be in such a relationship with God. But God takes that one deservingness and stretches it to fit over, include, and save all of us. God concentrated our gonewrongness upon Jesus, so that he died and suffered our condemnation. Then God amplified Christ's righteousness so that it counts for us.

It is not only that God counts us as righteous when we are not, but also that Jesus turns us around and gives us a fresh start. He captures our attention, refocuses our lives, and starts us down a new path, the long journey home. It takes a lot to get our attention off of ourselves. I am at the center of all my own consciousness and awareness. All my experience, good and bad, revolves around me. And yet, God has designed human life to be focused beyond itself, on God. Human life becomes twisted, crippled, and self-absorbed when it is self-centered. One of the things that Jesus does is to recapture our attention. The sight of Jesus on the cross calls us out of

our self-absorption. The sight of Christ's self-offering on the communion table calls us out of our self-centeredness. Jesus lifts us out of ourselves and refocuses us, as we are meant to be, upon his God and Father. For God is the source of the universe and the center of each of our lives. This sacrifice of his life by Jesus shows us how great is the love of God, and it turns us around and reorients us toward God instead of toward ourselves. This is part of what it means that Jesus is Lord and Savior and forgives our sins.

This gives us the confidence we need to go on living, and it gives direction to our lives. Being forgiven, saved, and turned around is the first step in the Christian life. Having started, we want to move on, to progress, to grow, and to mature. We do this through faith and obedience. God does not forgive us so we can keep on sinning. We do keep on sinning, but that is not the purpose of forgiveness. God forgives us so that we can turn and live renewed lives of faith and obedience. Here is another way in which Jesus is both Lord and Savior. There are many others who claim to be lord over my life. My old self would like to be the center of my life. My country would like to claim, not only the obedience and support that it deserves, but also my absolute obedience, which it does not deserve. The market forces of the economy want me to believe that it is not God who spins the planets but money that makes the world go round. The list goes on. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to rule out all the pretenders. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to set our face toward heaven, to set our direction along one path, and to forsake all others. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to pledge our allegiance to follow him, even when lesser loyalties beckon us in other directions.

After Jesus saves us from our sin and for himself, we begin to learn what it means to obey and to follow him. Having been forgiven, we are called upon and set free to rejoice, give thanks, and worship God. Having been forgiven, we are called upon to forgive each other: in church, in our homes, in our marriages, among the generations, between the races, within society, among the nations. Having been forgiven, we are called upon to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all the world. When Jesus gave the bread and the cup, it was not only for the disciples, and it is not only for us. Jesus gave his life for the world, and he wants us to bring the world here to meet and know him and to receive his wonderful gift.

Twelve disciples joined Jesus in his Last Supper. Twelve ate the bread. Twelve drank of the cup. Eleven called him "Lord." One called him only "Master." What do you call him?

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

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