

I Believe in Jesus Christ as Lord

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Life's Biggest Questions: What Do I Believe? Sermon Series

Scripture: Romans 10:5-13

For those of you who may not be too familiar with the organization and structure of the United Methodist Church, you may be unaware of just how laborious and extensive of a process it is to become ordained as a minister in our tradition. Presently, I am what's called a "provisional elder" in the church, which means that I am not yet fully ordained. God willing, I will be ordained this May at our Annual Conference meeting - granted the rest of my interviews, required essays, and projects are approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry. But right now, I'm kind of like a Doctor in residency. I don't quite have tenure yet. But if we go all the way back to when I first felt like God was calling me to serve as a capital "M" Minister in the church, it has been an 11-12 year process of growth, discernment, education, and training to get me to this point. And now, I'm almost there.

But one of the tasks I had to complete in order to be commissioned as a provisional elder was answering a list of 17 doctrinal statements, explaining of some basic tenets of the Christian faith. And one of the questions I had to answer was, **"How do you interpret the statement Jesus Christ is Lord?"**

Oh man! What a question! Because that might just be the most important question ever asked in the history of the universe. And that's our challenge today: **"How do we interpret the statement: Jesus Christ is Lord.?"**

By virtue of Christianity's namesake, clearly Jesus Christ is the most important component for understanding the faith. But what we are supposed to understand about Him? Do we talk about how, as the divine, he is the pre-existent Logos, the second person of the Trinity, through whom all creation was made? Do we talk about how he assumed a human nature and a physical body - being born as a baby? We believe he was and is completely human and completely God. Okay, yeah - there's some very big, very deep, cosmic stuff that we could talk about when it comes to answering the question of "Who Is Jesus Christ?" **But what does it mean for us to claim that Jesus Christ is Lord?**

In our scripture today, it's important for us to remember that the Apostle Paul, when he originally penned this letter, was not necessarily trying to write what would later be called the Holy Bible. He was writing a letter, to regular people, in a community. These were some of the earliest followers of Jesus at the church in Rome. And in this community, you had people who were Jewish, just like Jesus, and **God promised that through their obedience to His law, he would bless them. How does Jesus fit into that story?**

And yet there were also a bunch of Gentiles, which means "not-Jewish" in this church that knew about the death and resurrection of Christ, and were following his teaching. But since they weren't Jewish, how could they have the same inheritance and blessing as the Jews? **How do they fit into this story?**

So let's talk about that story. In the beginning of creation, everything was in order. God made the Heavens and the Earth and everything in the earth and said, "This is all really good stuff." And so humans lived in perfect harmony with God and all creation. But then humans

said, "That's not enough God. We think you're holding out on us." And so we turned a story about God's abundance into a story of scarcity. We wanted the one thing that was not blessed for us. That's what we call "The Fall." Hell is unleashed and Sin and Death, like two monsters, come smashing through the world. But don't worry. God had a plan. And, in God's usual counterintuitive way, it started small. It started with one family.

God singled out one man, Abraham, and told him that through him and his family, He was going to make everything right. He was going to put everything back together again. And so Abraham said, "Okay. Well then I guess I'm with you, God."

Generations later, through a series of unfortunate events, Abraham's family ended up becoming the slave labor in Egypt. But God chose a member of Abraham's family, named Moses, to lead the people out of slavery. When they were on the run, they found themselves trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian military. The people of Israel thought all was lost. But God made a way through the sea, and they were able to escape. **This is the defining moment in the Old Testament.** Because here we learn that God is a God who delivers us from slavery.

Later, the people came to a mountain where God provided them with the Law. It was like a new operating system on how to be humans. Through it, God set this people apart. He basically said, "Not only am I your God, but you are my people. And everybody's going to know who I am, because of how I interact with you." And these people, this family, began a journey to the land where they could become a new nation.

Over the course of several centuries, these covenant people of God live in the Promised Land, and then get conquered and exiled from it, and then return again several times. Eventually it was the Romans who were left standing in control. The Jews were allowed to live in their own Promised Land, but they had no king, no control, and they might as well have still been living in exile.

That's when we get to the story of Jesus. It's into this dark and hopeless world that the baby Jesus was born. As a man, Jesus healed the sick. He raised the dead. He taught about the kingdom of God. He ate with the poor and the "sinners." He challenged the institutional religion. He drew a following that wanted to make him king. And all of that got him killed. He was nailed to a cross. God in the flesh, and when we met him, we killed him.

But three days later, Jesus was raised from the dead. **Jesus rose from the dead.** And the course of human history was forever changed. That's the moment the tide turns. The chaos of Sin and Death reverses course back towards the order of God's good world all over again. This is God's answer to his promise to Abraham, that through his family, God would make the world right again.

In verse 4 of Romans 10, which comes right before our passage from this morning, Paul wrote: **"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."** Paul didn't mean that Christ was the conclusion or termination of the Law. What he meant is that Christ was the *Goal*, the *purpose* of the Law. The Torah, the Law given to Israel as their covenant charter, leads the eye forward along the story line from Abraham all the way to the Messiah, who is the goal of the Torah.

But have we become so familiar with this story, and is it so far removed from us that we forget the magnitude of what's being said here? God has been at work in the history of the world to bring about redemption and to set things right since the beginning of time. And Jesus

Christ is the ultimate proof that this is all *for real*. Whether you choose to follow him or not doesn't change the fact that this guy came back from the dead. And if a guy comes back from the dead, I'm inclined to listen to what he might have to say. How can people claim to believe this and not want to follow him?

I grew up in the church. And as a young man, I rationally assented to the idea that there was this guy named Jesus and that he is God and that he is good. And I agreed that it was a good idea to be a good boy like Jesus was, and to do good things like Jesus did. But I could never really say that he was Lord over my life. I grew up thinking – well, I'm basically a good boy. I am an Eagle Scout and a contributing member of society. So my prayers usually went something like this, "Dear God, I want or I need x,y, or z. So please help me to have those things."

But there was a moment where I realized I was looking at it all wrong. To say that Christ is Lord over my life isn't about what *I* want or need. It's about changing my prayer to, "Lord, what are *you* doing in the world, and where do I fit into your plan?" If Christ is truly Lord over my life, it means that I must be willing to give up *my entire life* to enact his will on Earth as it is in Heaven. For Christ said in Matthew 16: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

To confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord means that you are willing to announce to the world that you serve one master. And that you will stop at nothing until the will of that master is accomplished. And you'd better have the actions to back it up. You tithe your income. You serve the sick and lonely. You stand up against injustice. You share love with the unlovely. And you find ways to share the Good News and to make more disciples.

To believe in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead means that you are no longer manipulated by any power on this earth. You are set free. You are healed. All of the brokenness in your life, all of the mistakes you've made. Your addictions, your lust, your pursuit of fulfillment in anything other than the will of God. All the hurt in your life – Christ understands. He was murdered by the very creatures he came to serve. And he still chose to forgive us. And now he says to us, "I'm not going to let *you* stop *me* from loving you. I overcame death and sin. So come now, and follow me. Together, we'll make heaven on earth."

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Jesus is Lord. And there will be a time where every knee will bow and every tongue confess. When we're on the fence, it doesn't affect him – it affects us. And for those of us who have heard the truth, we've got two options – we can either accept it or reject it. What's holding you back? Will you confess it, church? Do you Believe it? I'm talking to each and every person in this room. Oh church, the time for lukewarm faith is over. Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. And by following him, together we will transform the world. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved. In Jesus' name – Amen!