



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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**If Jesus is Lord ...**  
Dr. Jim Gilchrist

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*I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath (Matthew 12:6-8).*

The first thing we ask people when they join the church, or when they present a child to be baptized, is "Do you profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" We ask because that's the basic affirmation of the Christian faith.

It's a deceptively simple question, though, because the answer points to a whole way of life. Some people seem to think being a Christian is mostly a matter of beliefs, as if the faith consisted mainly in a handful of opinions that distinguish Christians from, say, Jews or Muslims or Buddhists. But belief is only the beginning. To believe in matters of faith is to *live by* what we profess. The point of claiming that Jesus is Lord is to live for Jesus—not just in some mental compartment where religious ideas are kept refrigerated, but in every aspect of our lives.

But the very idea of serving a lord is alien to our society and our whole way of thinking, isn't it? We live in a democracy, where everyone is said to be created equal. We have no "lords" and "ladies" in the sense that the ancient or medieval world had, or even in the rather archaic sense that they still have in Great Britain. And we live in a consumer culture too, where we buy what we want and pass by what we don't want, and the whole economy is geared toward cultivating and satisfying our own consumer tastes. "It's all about you," the advertisements tell us, as companies compete for our favor.

No wonder people find it hard to imagine living for someone else as the lord of life. Jesus as life coach, maybe. Jesus as an advisor, someone whose suggestions we can take or leave as we see fit. But Jesus as Lord? That demands a leap of imagination most of us find very hard to make. Actually, it requires more than that. It requires what St. Paul described when he said, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” To claim that Jesus is Lord, we need to be transformed. We need a kind of conversion.

That’s what happened to Paul, of course. Paul says, “I was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that’s what I did. I locked up many of the saints in prison, and I voted yes when they were being condemned to death. I was so enraged that I even followed them to foreign cities to hunt them down.”

“I was on my way to Damascus on such a mission when, around midday, I heard a voice in Hebrew saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You only hurt yourself by kicking against the goads.’ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

Do you hear how Jesus describes Paul as only hurting himself? He calls it kicking against the goads. Goads were sticks people used to drive animals forward, as with oxen pulling a cart. Jesus says, when you resist me, Paul (or Saul, as he was called then), you’re only hurting yourself. You can’t hurt me. I’m beyond all that now. But why would you hurt yourself by fighting the very one who came to save you?

If Jesus is the risen Lord, then we really are only hurting ourselves when we think we know better than he does, aren't we? But we have our own priorities after all. We want to be in charge. We think we can just call on Jesus when we need something, the way we might call on a doctor or a lawyer when we need their services.

But if Jesus is Lord, how foolish is that? If Jesus Christ really is Lord of heaven and earth, then we owe him *our* service, and even our obedience. We owe him everything, in fact, since, as Paul tells the Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

If Jesus is Lord, we owe him our whole lives. "You are not your own," Paul says, "you were bought with a price." If Jesus is Lord, we belong to him, whether we know it or not.

And if Jesus is Lord, we gather here mainly to worship him. Not to be entertained, or merely to "get something out of the service," as people say, as if church were just one more consumer experience. Our worship is not to satisfy ourselves but to please God, whom we meet most clearly in Jesus Christ. "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath," Jesus says. He stands in front of that magnificent temple in Jerusalem and tells his listeners that something greater than the temple is here. And if Jesus really is the Lord, the Son of God, then what he said was true, because even the temple has long since been torn down, but Jesus himself is alive.

If Jesus is Lord, he will be happy when we gather to hear his word, and confess our sins instead of minimizing

them, and then let his word sink in until it shapes our souls and drives whatever we do when we leave this place. If we do all that, we will have worshiped God in spirit and in truth.

If Jesus is Lord, then we are not ultimately the owners of anything, but only stewards of what belongs to him. We bring nothing into this world and we take nothing out of it, except the soul we've cultivated along the way. The notion that our self-esteem or status should depend on how much we've made or what we've accumulated is simply silly if Jesus is Lord, because he cares not about what we have but about what we do with it. If our lives are mostly about accumulating stuff and passing it on to our children so they can do the same, we've missed our whole purpose, according to the Lord who says, "From those to whom much has been given, much will be expected."

And if Jesus is Lord, we don't have to be afraid of anything, fundamentally. We don't even have to be afraid of death, because he says, "Behold, I was dead, but now I am alive for evermore; and because I live, you also will live," if we really do belong to him. If Jesus is Lord, we don't have to be afraid of death, and we don't have to be afraid of anything in life either. Not sickness or suffering or loss, because even when those things happen, Christ is with us to see us through.

If Jesus is Lord, that means no one else is lord of my life. Neither Caesar nor my own self is lord. I can honor my country and take care of myself and my family, I can use the gifts God has given me at work and play, but if Jesus is Lord then I live first and foremost for him. He sets my priorities, because no one else is wise enough or good enough to do that.

To live for someone else sounds to us like a kind of sacrifice, like giving up or losing the very self that makes us who we are. But as it turns out, something like the opposite is true. “Those who would save their life must lose it,” Jesus says, “and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” In order for us to live at all, we have to live in him—for the simple reason that, as John’s gospel says, “in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

And because Jesus, the living Word of God, is the light of all people, we can see everyone else in a new light too—as God’s beloved, sinners like us for whom Christ died, but precious in the sight of God. That’s why Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.”

If Jesus is Lord, then our whole lives are moving ultimately in the direction of joy. He says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” And he tells his disciples, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.” To follow Jesus as Lord is to live in the faith that all will be well one day.

If Jesus is Lord, we belong to him, and so it only makes sense to live for him, since he is the source of life itself. If Jesus is Lord, that’s the most important truth we’ll ever know. And as he himself tells us, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”





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