

Lordship

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . . " (Acts 16:31).

"If you confess that Jesus is Lord . . . you will be saved . . . Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"
(Romans 10:9,13).

We have discussed again and again what Scripture means by the word, "believe." But in those lessons we've also assumed that we all understand what the word, "Lord," means. Maybe we need to think carefully exactly what Scripture means by "Lord." It seems from these verses (as well as many others) that salvation hinges on (a) our knowing that Jesus is Lord and (b) living based on that knowledge. "Lord" is not merely a title of reverence for Jesus.

In the Greek Scriptures, the word translated as "Lord" occurs more than 700 times. In the entire Bible, the word for Lord occurs many thousands of times. Let's say that the Bible is, in essence, all about "the Lord." In certain places, the word is used to show respect. But mainly, overwhelmingly, in Scripture the word refers to God.

The earliest Christians referred to Jesus as Lord. Thus, for example, Peter's Gospel invitation climaxes with, **"Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"** (Acts 2:36). Jesus has absolute dominion over all creation. He is the sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth. All humanity one day in the future will have to acknowledge this, **"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"** (Philippians 2:10-11). As **"King of kings and Lord of lords"** (Revelation 19:16), Jesus rules over all the earthly kings and dictators and emperors and presidents who exist or ever existed, as well as over all the invisible principalities and powers that govern the Gentile nations from heaven. The unique Person Jesus is God. He is glorious beyond our imagination, beyond anything we can conceive. When He confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, His glory was more intense than the noon-day sun. The glory blinded Saul requiring a miracle to restore his vision.

Now let's think, What exactly does this mean for us? We dare not be presumptuous about the Person of Jesus. Just because Scripture states that Jesus loves us doesn't mean we can ignore His lordship over us—something that many of us thoughtlessly do. We are creatures of a God who is good, but who is also dangerous. I find five items to discuss.

First, Jesus has authority over us. This means, we are obligated to obey Him, to make His teachings our life, to fear ignoring Him. His revealed will for us is not something optional but is a demand He makes on us. We're responsible to fulfill His will, His commands, His teachings. No one in his right mind ever should be indifferent to His Word, for He has the right to judge and to punish. Who can read Revelation chapters 2 and 3 without sensing fear of offending Him? We should tremble at the very thought of incurring His displeasure, His indignation. He is not—again, NOT—a benign, loving, close friend and older brother to us, someone we simply need to know about, someone who forgives us when we fail, someone who is kindly disposed toward us no matter how we are or what we do. Such is not the Jesus of the Bible, but a Jesus of our own imagination. The theology we hold notwithstanding, how we live, and what kind of person we are, betrays our understanding of the Person of Jesus. Let's get this: As God, as Lord, we owe our existence to Jesus; we are but creatures dependent on Him for each breath and each heartbeat. And we are to be in total loving, grateful, fearful submission to Him.

Second, the Lord Jesus dwells in and rules over a different realm than this world that we experience. Yes, as Lord He rules over all creation. Yet, He stated clearly, **"My kingdom is not of this world"** (John 18:36). The realm we inhabit is saturated with sin, governed by a hierarchy of wicked spirit beings, and it is already condemned. Jesus invaded this realm not to reform it but to take individuals *out of it* and into His Kingdom. The Gospel invites us to participate in a new Exodus, a vastly greater exodus than what Israel experienced leaving Egypt for the promised land. We are saved *from* this world of sin, violence, hatred and suffering to a realm of **"righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"** (Romans 14:17), the Kingdom over which Jesus is Lord.

Post-millennialism has poisoned our understanding of Lordship. We don't believe in Jesus in order to have forgiveness of sins and then continue living as we always had been, according to our own lights, however we please. No way! We believe in Jesus in order to *abandon* this world that's under judgment and enter into and live in a new realm under the

Lordship of Christ. As His obedient subjects, as His Body, we in the Church continue Jesus' mission by infiltrating, invading this corrupt world to find those who will believe in Jesus and prepare them for life in the Kingdom. Yes, the Messianic Kingdom is future, but we dwell in it now in a proleptic sense.

Third, in God's perfect character, to rule means to serve. Thus Jesus is the great Servant of God. And to rule means also to love. Jesus thus is the Servant who is Messiah and King, the Ruler who uniquely loves His people. And out of love for His people, the Servant obediently suffers horribly on their behalf, because sin made that necessary. And we love Him because He first loved us. So Lordship means lovingly and obediently serving God according to His will, regardless what suffering it may entail. As subjects of the King, as members of His Body, as followers of the Lord who identify with Jesus, we also serve God as He has revealed we're to do that. Servanthood is not merely an option for certain ones who sense a "call." Servanthood is an essential and necessary way we express belief in Jesus as Lord.

Fourth, as Lord, Jesus can be trusted with our lives. To most of us, we merely trust Jesus that we'll be in heaven when we die. (As if there are lots of other options! Self-righteousness is a joke.) But if we're submitted to Jesus as Lord, we trust in the infinite goodness and wisdom of His teachings and so we adopt them as truths by which we live. We derive a worldview from His Word and seek to live it to His ultimate glory. We trust that He'll see our lives and reward us for seeking to exalt Him in all we think, say, and do. And we take risks in serving Him, trusting His sovereignty and authority over whatever consequences result, trusting Him to vindicate us some future day. The life of faith is a life of continual trust in the One who is Lord of all.

Fifth, our consuming desire in life should be to want to know ever more deeply this Lord of lords and King of kings, who condescendingly, humbly offers Himself to us. To know Him is life. And knowing Him, we should desire with ever greater passion to be with Him, to see Him, to hear Him, to marvel at His perfections and beauty, to enjoy Him. And to be like Him. This desire should flow naturally, spontaneously from our understanding of who He is. If this isn't our desire, something fundamental is very wrong.

Dear Readers: The great issue, the insuperable problem, that confronted people back then when the New Testament was being written was, How is it possible, even conceivable, that this man, clearly a human like all the rest of us, could also be the Creator God? So Scripture authors referred to Him as the Lord Jesus, emphasizing that he really was the God-man, deity in human form. Because unless He's both, He cannot save anyone. To be saved, we must understand this and believe it and commit to it.

Thus Paul writes, "**No one can say 'Lord Jesus' except by the Holy Spirit**" (1 Corinthians 12:3b). What this statement means is, In that context of confusion as to who this man is who claimed to be God, who demonstrated that He was God, who demanded obedience to His words as God, it's only by the empowerment of the Spirit that we understand that this man *really is God*. But do we need to know this only so we have correct theology? What does it *mean* to us that the man Jesus is God? Doesn't it mean that we're to obey Him, trust Him, serve Him, fear Him and be loyal to Him?

I dare to take this verse further: It's only by the enablement of the Spirit that we identify with Jesus as Lord and live accordingly. The indwelling Spirit of Jesus makes it possible for us creatures to submit to His Lordship. But that's only *if we want to*. We can quench the Spirit. We also can be hard-hearted, worldly, selfish, proud, and idolatrous if we want to. We *are* what we want to be. God allows us to go our own way, to be foolish, to live apart from His Word, but all to our ultimate loss. We either humbly pursue a life that is committed to the Lord Jesus and is empowered by the Holy Spirit, or we don't. We're transformed into the character of Jesus by the Spirit of Jesus using the words of Jesus, or not.

Now, I am not—do you hear me? *not*—arguing here that we must commit to the Lordship of Jesus to be saved. Nor even be 'willing' (whatever that may mean) to commit to the Lordship of Jesus in order to be saved. We're saved by grace, thru faith, *period*. But salvation is a life-long process that includes growth and maturity and sanctification and service and more; so it's in this sense that Lordship salvation is biblical. Submission to the Lordship of Jesus is what results from being regenerated ('born again'). Repentance, sanctification, discipleship (learning), and servanthood all require effort (and sacrifice) on our part; there's nothing passive about the Christian life. And as growth and sanctification occur progressively during our time on earth, so our submission to the Lordship of Jesus occurs progressively. Lordship is the evidence of salvation. It's what glorifies God.