

“Jesus Christ Is Our Lord”

Who is in charge here? When I hear that phrase, for better or for worse, I picture a room full of children. These children aren't sitting nicely like they do in church and you only notice them once in a while. This room is full of children running around, playing, fighting, climbing, and doing all those sorts of things that many children love to do. I picture a parent walking into the room, a look of horror coming over their face before they say, “Who is in charge here?” What is meant is “Who should be taking the responsibility for what is going on?” Who is going to step in when activities get too dangerous? Who is going to clean up the mess? Who is in charge here? It's an important question not just in the hypothetical crazy kids' room that I just described, but in many other instances and many other ways as well. At work, it is important to know who the boss is, who gets the ultimate decision making power and responsibility. In our society and neighborhoods, it is important that we have police officers to help control crime and maintain stability, who take charge as they need to.

But “who is in charge here?” is also an important question in a way that we don't always think about. It is an important question in relation to our hearts and our lives. Who is in charge of what I do and what I want to do?

Today we've had an opportunity to hear one answer already. It was recorded in the Bible in the first chapter, in fact the very first verses, of the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a letter that Paul wrote to Christians in that famous city, Rome. And in just the few verses that we are considering closely this morning, Paul answers the question “Who is in charge?” with the clear answer, “**Jesus Christ, our Lord.**” So today we are encouraged, along with Paul and along with the Romans, to confess “Jesus Christ is our Lord.”

In his letter to the Romans, Paul follows the traditional letter-writing format of the time period. He doesn't sign the letter like we do, at the end, but identifies himself right up front. He also identifies his intended recipients, and offers a somewhat formal greeting.

Paul follows the same pattern in most, if not all, of the letters or epistles that he wrote that are part of the New Testament. In the case of Romans, Paul seems to spend a good deal of time on his introduction of himself and on his connection to the Romans. One of the likely reasons for this is that up until the point when he wrote, Paul had never been to Rome. Most of his letters were written to churches he founded on his missionary journeys. He knew the leaders. He knew the situations. He knew the people. Not so with the Romans. Sure, he may have known some of the people there from other places or by reputation, but he hadn't really gotten to know the congregation there, and neither had they gotten to know him. No wonder he spent so much time, relatively speaking, introducing himself.

And how did he introduce himself? He said “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of Christ.” He calls himself a servant. Perhaps better yet, he calls himself a slave. As a slave knew that his master was in charge, so Paul knew that Jesus Christ was in charge of him, absolutely, completely. And his master and Lord had given Paul a very specific job. He was an apostle. He was commissioned by Christ himself to share his Word. He was “sent out,” that's what the word apostle means, with the eyewitness testimony regarding Jesus. This was vital information for the Romans. This was the reason Paul could write to them with authority. It was not his own authority, and it was not his own opinion. He wrote with the authority of Jesus, and he wrote the facts that God himself had revealed.

And while we could spend a whole lot of time digging into these seven verses and noticing many nuances and interesting concepts, both in the English translations and in the original Greek, there are two points that Paul writes, two important facts about Jesus or conclusions about him, that I would like to highlight. The first is that he was promised. Another way to say this is that people prophesied about him. Paul mentions the prophets and he mentions the Holy Scriptures that record their words. He recognizes that the Holy Spirit, God himself, gave the prophets the very words that they spoke and wrote. The Holy

Scriptures are an accurate record of God's revelation. They are reliable and worthwhile. And they, in this case what we would call the Old Testament, reveal the gospel, the good news of a Savior.

What the prophets promised, what they looked forward to, Paul knew. He had seen and witnessed it. The prophets promised a descendant of David. Jesus, as a true human being, was a descendant of David. Both his adoptive earthly father and his true human mother were descendants from that great king of Israel. The Son of God took on a true human nature, humbling himself to be conceived of a virgin and born into our world.

And the always obedient Son, when his work on earth was completed, was exalted to the highest position. He **“was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.”** True God and true man, exactly as promised, that is Jesus. He was the one promised.

And he was promised because he was needed. We heard one specific promise this morning from the Old Testament scriptures. God promised that he would bless a virgin with a child who would be called “God with Us.” And he made that promise because people needed it. He made the promise first to a wicked king who had decided that he didn't need God's direction. He refused to accept God's rule or to listen to God's prophets. The wicked king said, “I am in charge here.” And how often do we do the same thing?

What I mean is, how often do our own hearts say, “I don't care what God says.”? “I'm not concerned with what he has determined to be right or wrong. If I want to watch something inappropriate, why should I let anyone stop me? If I want to make fun of others, that's my right. If I want to ignore my parents or my teachers, that's OK. If I want to tear others down to build myself up, if I want to always believe that I know it all already and I don't need to consider anyone else's opinions, that's just fine. I'm in charge here.”

The problem is that if our own sinful hearts are in charge, then there is no room for God. He created us to love and serve him and to live in perfect harmony with his will. From Adam and Eve on, we have all been saying to him, “no thanks, I'll be in charge. I'll do it my way” And so we have separated ourselves from him. And we would be doomed to be without him forever. Except for his promise. Except for Jesus, who came to live as a human being in perfect obedience to his heavenly Father's will. Except for Jesus, who suffered the consequences of sinful hearts taking charge, who made peace where sinful hearts had made war.

That's the second point I'd like to focus on in these verses this morning. Not only is Jesus the one who was promised, he is also the one who brings peace. Paul writes, **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The undeserved love of God that we call grace is showered on us. That is what motivated God to send his Son to live and to die in our place. And that same favor is what God still shows to us in countless ways too amazing for us to even fully realize. And because he has done so, we have peace. We are no longer at war with God. We are no longer separated. We are no longer in constant danger of being lost forever into the fires of hell and its unspeakable torment. We have peace because Jesus is our Lord, because he has called us out of our sin, because he has taken charge of our lives. Not only was Paul a servant of Jesus, but he said to the Romans: **“you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”**

By his amazing love he has not only become a true human being, “Immanuel, God with Us,” but he has also become our Lord. He has put himself in charge of our hearts and our lives. Perhaps you've learned at some point the words that Luther used to explain the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, in which he describes this point. He said, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary is my Lord.” And then Luther goes on to explain what it means that he is my Lord: “he has redeemed me...purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil.”

As still-sinful human beings, we often hate the idea of someone else being in charge of us! How un-American it would be to consider ourselves slaves! But when we confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord, we are confessing that he is in charge of our lives, that we are his slaves. Only this is not an unpleasant thought for us. It is not an objectionable reality. It is our life and our peace. It is for now and forever. God became one with us in order to make us one with him. Jesus Christ is Our Lord.

The text: Romans 1:1–7 (NIV84)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.