

“Jesus Christ, the Lord”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian
Rev. Kit B. Billings, Holy Communion Sunday
February 20, 2022

Scripture

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Matthew 12:1-8

Hymns or Songs

"Building, Daily Building" 606

"Spirit of the Living God" 124

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06h3J5FYn-I>

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vo-P6Qkkq9g>

Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit."

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds."

Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on

the Sabbath.” ³ He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Insights for Worship

The Lord n. 41, 45 by Emanuel Swedenborg

We can see *that the Lord is called Lord and God* from many passages, so many that to cite them all would fill pages. These few may suffice. In John: “When Thomas at the Lord’s bidding looked at his hands and touched his side, he said, “*My Lord and my God.*” (John 20:27-28) Since the Lord alone is Savior and Redeemer, and since it says that Jehovah and no one else is that one, it follows that the one God is no other than the Lord.

SERMON: “Jesus Christ, the Lord” by Rev. Kit Billings

Over the past few weeks we have been reflecting about several key roles and ways that God in His Divine-Humanity in Jesus Christ inspired thousands of people long ago, with such beautiful spiritual depth and power that they realized He was God in His Divine-Humanity, present with them as Jesus their Lord, Savior and Rabbi all wrapped up in one person. They felt Jesus’ incredible, unconditional love and compassion, they witnessed and experienced His healing powers and they loved His engaging parables and radical spiritual wisdom. In Christ they felt truly understood, as well as wisely challenged to confront their own evils as a “log in their eye” or as “the yeast of the Pharisees.” Jesus helped them to learn, grow and change without condemnation. Because of all of these inspiring ways that Christ impacted their minds and lives, those very poor, peasant Jews and the outcasts of the Holy Land (like tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers) loved referring to Jesus as their master teacher, as their Savior who gave them wholeness, as well as another special name and title, which was...their “Lord.”

What are examples in your life of when the Lord helped you, or healed you, or inspired you so deeply that it changed your whole outlook on life, and made the Divine-Spiritual-Sun in Heaven burst through clouds of despair or confusion, enabling you to see and feel life as it truly is: as an adventure in growing love and goodness allowing you to soar like an eagle, high above your normal state of being?

We have many great examples of people in history whose lives were transformed by the Lord's Love and countenance. Helen Keller said this about the effect of the Lord's Love and Wisdom upon her life: **"Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye."** And, **"Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light."**

In our "Insight for Worship" quote that I just read a few moment ago, we are reminded of one of the most powerful spiritual moments in the life of the often maligned and less appreciated disciple within Christ's core twelve disciples. Thomas (also known as "doubting Thomas") was deeply troubled and struggling with who Jesus said He was and reconciling this with how He allowed Himself to die painfully upon a cross, murdered by Roman thugs. Huddled away behind locked doors early on Easter morning, Thomas had not yet learned that Jesus was more than an amazing sage or rabbi. Thomas then witnessed the Risen Christ walking through their locked door, displaying his marred hands and feet. Then the truth of Jesus' divinity finally sunk in and he was able to profess: **"My Lord and my God."** (John 20:28)

But what does this tremendous role and title of Jesus Christ **"the Lord"** really mean? What did it mean back then in first century Palestine where Roman power and rule was everywhere? And as one very good modern day professor of Christianity asks, have we accidentally allowed ourselves to **put Jesus Christ our Lord into a small box of meaning?** Are we using this term and title of our Divine Lord of life in a thin, emaciated and less powerful way, more as a term of convenience?

The first place we need to look to find these answers is within our Jedaean-Christian faith tradition long before Jesus the Savior was born on Christmas night. The Jewish or Hebrew faith has a very long history of referring to God or Yahweh as their "Lord." In their belief system, it was blasphemy to even try to write or say God's name as it truly is, because it is too holy for any finite human being to express. God's name in their written form came out to be the consonant letters: **YHWH**, which they could express either as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." But, to avoid this blasphemy the synonym for God's actual name was "the Lord." Strewn throughout the Old Testament we can easily find thousands of instances where Yahweh is referred to as "Lord." An easy example of this would be the beginning and end of *Psalms 23*, the Shepherd's Psalm, which begins: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters, He restoreth my soul." And then it ends saying, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in

the house of the LORD, forever.” (Ps. 23:6) These life-saving, life-giving and life-inspiring powers God has, often expressed poetically in songs or parables, makes it easy for people like us to proclaim that God truly is my Lord, my all!

Within the entire Bible (both the Old and New Testaments) the word “Lord” appears 6,790 times—which tells us that this special name and role of God in life was very popular in ancient times. I remember once hearing at a church growth workshop the statement: **“Jesus cannot just be your Savior: He must also be your Lord.”** Back in the first Christian Church era both before and after Jesus was killed on a cross by order of Pontius Pilot, the only person whom the Roman military sanctioned being called “Lord” or in their words, “Emperor,” was Caesar the Roman ruler. In their belief system everyone under Roman rule was literally owned by Caesar. Their Emperor was the Master of all under his power. So, back in Roman times, everyone understood what it meant to call someone their master or their Lord: **it meant that that person owns you.** Slaves back then often called their master’s “lord.” Students typically referred to their teachers as “master,” and workers commonly called their employers “lord” as well. One can easily recognize that for the faithful Jewish believer back then it would vex or anger them severely to be forced to call anyone Lord or master except God. For those holding strictly to Judaism, to refer to any human being as Lord, Emperor or Master was an egregious blasphemy—a very serious “No, no!”

But interestingly and amazingly, early Christians often proclaimed their faith with these three words: **“Jesus is Lord.”** It was their theological slogan, you might say. But, as Professor Diana Buttler Bass wrote in her book, *Freeing Jesus*, “In a world where millions were held in slavery and millions of others lived in poverty and powerlessness at the bottom of a rigid social hierarchy, claiming Jesus as ‘Lord’ announced one’s liberation from oppression.” (p. 119) She continues, “‘Jesus is Lord’ made sense in an empire of slaves, as submitting to His lordship amounted to spiritual freedom, especially in the new community called the church where, apparently, female slaves held leadership positions and Roman social status was upended. Baptism was the rite of initiation into this egalitarian community.” (ibid.) In fact, all believing Christians were baptized into the name of their new master, Jesus, which is evident in Paul’s letter to the Church at Galatia that reads: **“There is no longer slave or free...for all of you are one in Jesus Christ.”** (3:27-28)

So, now you can see how using this glorious title for Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Master was a severe slap in the face to any loyal Roman citizen or soldier, and most of all to the Emperor himself. Again, everything and everyone within the Roman

Empire, and all of Israel was then under Roman rule—they were owned by Rome. Only the Emperor had ultimate authority, power and control over all of the Jews, according to Caesar himself. But, we can easily understand that because the harsh reality of Rome's Caesars was painfully clear to everyone back then, when a woman or a slave chose publically to refer to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master, the one who truly owned them, to them it did not matter if an earthly human dictator professed himself as their ruler—indeed, those early Christians knew the truth, and they would have openly disagreed that Caesar was their god.

And yet, Caesar claimed lordship over all. So we can seriously appreciate that for anyone to walk around saying “Jesus is Lord” was a very dangerous political statement. One of the first century Roman governors, named Pliny, found the statement that “Jesus is Lord” to be very confusing and threatening. It was confusing because those Jewish peasants were calling a dead Jewish peasant carpenter from Nazareth their Lord, and how could a dead person be someone's Lord? To profess anyone to be their Lord other than the Emperor was treason and sedition. Saying “Jesus is Lord” clearly meant that Caesar was therefore not their Lord! This is why early on in the first three hundred years of the Christian Church movement many believers were hunted down, tortured and killed for professing Jesus Christ as their Lord. **To refer to Jesus as Lord meant that He held dominion over the lives and fates of those under His sway**, and this was something that the Romans would not tolerate.

And yet, the yearning of our human souls longs for the true everlasting freedom of spirit that only the eternal Love of God provides. Even under threat of crucifixion our early Christian leaders and followers were still very willing to freely choose to submit one's heart, mind and life to a Divine-Human God called Jesus Christ...who was Lord and leader of both Heaven and Earth. Professing Jesus as Lord meant giving one's self completely over to the One who preached: “you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and you must love your neighbor (be them Jewish, Samaritan, Roman or otherwise) as yourself.” Jesus taught, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”** (Luke 9:23) Jesus further said, **“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Mtt. 20:26-28) And again, **“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Mtt. 23:12) In short, Jesus as Lord was turning the Roman world upside down, and His truths and values continue turning life today on its head as well.

In conclusion: emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and behaviorally...our natural-unregenerated willfulness inside of us wants to go to war with God's will of humble servanthood. And the only hope we have as a Christian follower of Christ, is to understand this battle for what it is, and then to be willing to say again each morning: "Jesus Christ is my Lord, and all of His words and all of His commandments are my law and my life." Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus our Lord our Savior, for guiding us to go down ever deeper within us, where your Love lives and thrives. Help us to trust your process of spiritual growth, which involves spiritual battles at times—but we know that in you, O Lord, we find wholeness and peace, flowing from your Love. Thank you for helping us understand that no one else comes close to being infinitely loving and wise as you are, and so our hearts will only be free when willing surrender into your Love calls you our Lord—our Lord of Love, life and freedom within. Amen.

Children's Sermon "Jesus Is My Best of Friends"