

## LIVE AS IF JESUS IS THE LORD

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11; ROMANS 10:9-10;  
MATTHEW 7:21-23

His name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a young German Lutheran pastor poised on the threshold of worldwide fame as a brilliant, gifted theologian. He was one of the few people in Germany who realized very early on that Nazism was thoroughly demonic in origin and intent. He vigorously denounced Hitler and his rise to political power in Germany. He had many opportunities to leave Germany once World War 2 began, but he deliberately decided to cooperate with the resistance movement that was trying to defeat and remove Hitler from power. He was arrested in 1943 and ultimately executed just a few days before Allied troops liberated the prison camp where he lived.

Bonhoeffer's most well known book is entitled The Cost of Discipleship. In that book he referred to something he called "cheap grace." He wrote, "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace is grace without price; grace without cost. Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without a cross, grace without Jesus Christ...."

I believe Dietrich Bonhoeffer put his finger on a problem that continues today – well over 60 years later. Many people want Jesus to be their Savior. They want Him to forgive their sins, meet their needs, save them from hell and prepare an eternal place in heaven for them. Who wouldn't want that? But fewer people really want Jesus to be their Lord. Only a few want Jesus to have absolute authority over every area of their lives or who desire to give Him control of every conceivable nook and cranny of their ambitions, desire, thoughts and plans. Only a minority welcome the idea of being accountable to Jesus for how they use their time, talent and treasure. When you just want Jesus to be your Savior, but you're not much interested in His Lordship, do you know what you want? Cheap grace. It's the grace you give to yourself. It has nothing to do with God.

How to have the best year yet! That's our four week theme. God is the owner. Jesus is the Lord. You are a steward. And you are a servant. My friend, if you want to have a truly great and wonderful year, you will ask the Lord to help you understand and experience these four simple, foundational truths about life and living. Today, I want to think with you about the second of these four basic truths. It's perhaps the most central truth in all of the Bible: Jesus is the Lord. Let me say three things about Jesus' Lordship.

### JESUS' LORDSHIP IS PERMANENT

In one of his several letters in the New Testament to the very first Christians, the apostle Paul wrote, "But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life." (1 Corinthians 8:6 NLT) The Greek word he uses for "Lord" is *kurios*. It was a common enough word in

Paul's day and time. It could be used as the equivalent of "Mister" or "Sir" – like "Kurios Smith" or "Lord Johnson." But *kurios* could also refer to someone who had great power and authority. Later on, it became the title for the Greek gods as well as the Roman emperor. When the Hebrew Bible – what we call the Old Testament – was translated into the Greek language, *kurios* was the name used for God. The first Bible that Greek-speaking Christians used was this translation of the Old Testament. Christians began to call Jesus by the same name or title that was given for God Himself – *kurios*.

We know from history that the two earliest Christian statements of faith were these: Jesus is risen and Jesus is Lord. Now by calling Jesus Lord, a person was confessing that Jesus was and is equal to God. Jesus deserved obedience and worship because He is God. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead pointed to Jesus' Lordship. Both of those ancient confessions depend on the other. Jesus is risen because Jesus is Lord. By the same token, Jesus is Lord because Jesus is risen. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, doubted the resurrection initially. But when he saw the risen Jesus for himself, he immediately understood what it meant. He knelt down and said, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28 NLT) As you read through the New Testament, you can only conclude that the earliest Christians believed that because of the resurrection the Lordship of Jesus is permanent, eternal and never ending in its duration. Let's consider our first text. That's a wonderful description of Jesus' Lordship – His permanent Lordship. Jesus has the ultimate claim on every human that life that lived, is living or will live.

Now if Jesus is Lord permanently, it also means that Jesus is Lord right now – not one day in the far future or when we're spending eternity in heaven. When you look around at this sinful, fallen world, it's easy to wonder how Jesus can be Lord of all the mess that we see. You might ask, "In what sense is Jesus the Lord? Lord of what? There's evil, corruption, disease, pain, wars and rumors of war everywhere. How is Jesus the Lord?" The best answer is to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord but admit that His Lordship is not universally recognized or obeyed yet. It's recognized by Jesus' followers right now. We trust Him for salvation. We value His authority over our lives and His power in our lives. You can point to the Lordship of Jesus now by how you live your daily life, by the integrity of your words and actions, by how you treat others, and by how you seek to lead others into a personal knowledge of Jesus. The passage we read also teaches that a day is coming when every person will recognize that Jesus is Lord even if he or she doesn't particularly want to do so. One day, every knee will bow to Jesus willingly or not. One day, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord willingly or not. Jesus' Lordship is permanent. Now here's a second thought.

## **JESUS' LORDSHIP IS PERSONAL**

To the degree that the Lordship of Jesus becomes something profoundly personal to you, to that degree it will make a difference in your life and how you live it. It's one thing to believe certain truths about Jesus. It's quite another to so internalize and personalize those truths that your innermost being – your values, your priorities, your ambitions - get changed from top to bottom. That's what happened, by way of example, to one of the

greatest Christians of all time – Martin Luther. He’s the man who kicked off what historians call the Protestant Reformation way back in the 1500s. He believed in Jesus so deeply that he became a Roman Catholic priest and monk. He studied his Bible so diligently that he became a doctor of theology. He taught the Bible to others. Now, if you had asked him at this point in his life - “Dr. Luther, do you believe Jesus is God? Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins? Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead? Do you believe Jesus will come again in the future?” – Martin Luther would have responded with a loud, “Yes!” Nevertheless, at that point in his life, he had never truly surrendered his life to Jesus as the Lord. Jesus was Lord, but He wasn’t Luther’s Lord in a personal way. Jesus was Savior, but He wasn’t even Luther’s Savior in a personal way. All that changed, however, when Martin Luther received Jesus as Savior and Lord in a dynamically personal way. As a result, his life was transformed from top to bottom. There’s a thought! The clearest evidence of a truly personal experience of Jesus’ Lordship is observable transformation in your life.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, many people who warm the pews of America’s churches today have never experienced Jesus’ Lordship in a personal way. By the same token, some pastors and church leaders fit the same description. Someone might say, “You mean to suggest, Rick, that a man or a woman can go off to seminary, get formal religious instruction of some kind and then lead a church, but never truly have surrendered his or life to Jesus as Lord?” Sadly, that’s just what I’m saying. A group of friends enjoyed an activity called nature gliding or sliding. What on earth is that, you ask? They would go up in the mountains in winter and look for natural ice slides and just slide down. They thought it was great fun! New people to the group were sometimes reluctant to just slide down an embankment of ice because it looked like you would go shooting off into oblivion. But most of them would eventually try it and, when they did, most found it to be a lot of fun. Now, on one occasion, everyone in the group eventually tried it except one new guy. His courage failed him; he absolutely refused to participate. After the group had finished their adventure and went back to their camp, that same man looked back up the mountain and said, “Look, that’s where **we** slid down!” Within the span of one hour, he had begun to identify with an experience that he had never actually shared in personally. I believe many Americans Christians are in the same place. Our churches are full of people who identify with an experience – the Lordship of Jesus – that they’ve never experienced personally.

The Bible makes it quite clear that you must recognize the Lordship of Jesus in a personal way for it to do you any good. Let’s consider a second text just now. What’s the point? You must approach God by faith in a personal way. You put your personal trust in what Jesus did for you on the cross, not in your own supposedly good behavior and noble intentions. It comes from the heart. It’s a decision that changes you intellectually. You now think differently. It’s a decision that changes you volitionally. You act and behave differently. It’s a decision that impacts you emotionally. You even feel differently. It is, as we said earlier, radical, personal transformation at every level of your life. Has that ever happened to you?

Now, it can happen to people in a wide variety of ways. I can tell you how it happened to me. I had the great privilege of being raised in a home where both parents knew and loved Jesus. I don't recall the day or the hour I received Jesus as my personal Savior. I'm sure it happened when I was a relatively young child. By way of contrast, I remember clearly the circumstances that led to an understanding of Jesus as my Lord in a very personal way. I was in my sophomore year at a Christian high school and a kind of mini-revival swept the campus that fall. I realized with an incredible new depth and awareness that Jesus wanted to be involved in every decision, every goal, every plan and every ambition of my life. God showed me to a far greater extent than I had seen before my own sinfulness and distance from Him. I was both humbled and yet strangely lifted up all at the same time. God came in, broke up the inner parts of my life and put them back together again. Jesus became real to me in a way that was new, fresh, empowering and life-changing. I understood at a profoundly personal level that Jesus wanted to lead my life, direct my life and guide my life. I knew that I no longer belonged to myself – not as a theological point of doctrine – but as a living, personal reality. God owned me. Jesus was my Lord. Something was forever settled as a result of that experience.

Now, God has had to reinforce that experience many times in my life since. Meaning what? There have been many new occasions where I've had to make a fresh, new surrender to Jesus' Lordship. The fact is that there is still much in me that resists the Lordship of Jesus. My sinful nature still loves to sin. Parts of me still resist spiritual change. Parts of me still want to be independent of God. But God's faithfulness is relentless. He keeps knocking down the barriers I erect to shut Him out.

Has this kind of experience ever happened to you? Of course, it doesn't have to happen for you the same way that it did to me. The issue is whether it's happened to you, not how or when. You might say, "This is supposed to happen to pastor types like you, Rick." The fact I ended up being a pastor is completely irrelevant. Experiencing the Lordship of Jesus personally is something God wants for every one of His children. Any person can find Jesus interesting... intriguing... fascinating. God wants you to know His Son personally and experience His Lordship personally. A third thought:

## **JESUS' LORDSHIP IS PRACTICAL**

Consider with me one more Bible passage. It's something Jesus said. It's easy enough to look like a Christian. Here's what to do: start going to church with some regularity. You don't even have to do anything; just show up. Learn a few clichés and phrases – some good old "Christianese". Let people know you believe some of the same things about Jesus that they do. Quote a Bible verse or two. Get baptized. Give a little money to the church. Many people will look at you and conclude, "Yes, I'm pretty sure he or she's a Christian." Jesus' words are disconcerting. He says He will disown personally a lot of people who had no problem calling Him, "Lord." In fact, some of these folk will appear to possess some kind of spiritual power - prophesying, casting out demons, performing miracles. What's Jesus' point? Verbal confession of belief in Jesus' Lordship is not enough. Possessing some kind of interesting spiritual ability is

not enough. What matters is active, practical, everyday, somewhat mundane obedience to Jesus' words and will. Jesus knows only too well that we have a tendency to make believing certain truths about Him an alternative to actually obeying Him day in and day out. That won't work with Jesus.

Experiencing the Lordship of Jesus practically simply means that it touches every area of your life. If Jesus is Lord of your life, He is Lord of your time. You're accountable to Him for every minute of every day of every week of every month of every year. Jesus knows you need time for work, for sleep, for recreation; He doesn't begrudge you that. But He also wants you to worship Him, pray, study His Word, use your spiritual gifts to help build His Kingdom, take walks across rooms to reach out to those who don't know Him yet and find ways to serve the poor. Is Jesus Lord of your time?

If Jesus is Lord of your life, He is Lord of your talents. Too many people think that if Jesus is Lord of your life, you have to become a pastor, a missionary or be in full time ministry somewhere. Wrong! God needs His people in the marketplace, the corporate office, the halls of education, the legislature, in the neighborhood civic association, in the courtroom, in the hospital – everywhere! If Jesus is your Lord, then no matter what you do with the majority of your time, you offer up those talents to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, here I am at your disposal. I am available to be used to help build Your Kingdom." But your church does need your talents, too. We need your help to be lead a ministry, to greet new people visiting our church, to run the sound system, to teach a class for kids, to count the offering, to visit a shut in. Is Jesus Lord of your talents?

If Jesus is Lord of your life, He is Lord of your treasure. God is the owner of your financial assets – 100% of them. One way you demonstrate the practicality of Jesus' Lordship is returning at least 10% of your personal earnings to help fund ministries dedicated to His work in this world. I have heard that at least a dozen of the 38 parables Jesus told have to do with money and our use of possessions. I have heard that one out of every eight verses in the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – deals with the subject of money in some way. Why? God's got you and me figured out pretty well. Jesus Himself said, "Where your treasure is, there your hearts and thoughts will also be." (Matthew 6:21 NLT) You can't fake Jesus' Lordship in this area of your life. You either tithe or you don't. You either give your treasure or you don't. I can say without the slightest hesitation based on the Bible's teaching that if you're giving less than the tithe -10% - Jesus is not Lord of your treasure. You may love Jesus with all your heart. You may be a nice person. But in this aspect of your everyday life, Jesus is not yet Lord. Not practically speaking. Here's an important additional truth, however. Just because you do give the tithe doesn't mean that Jesus is automatically Lord of your treasure. God may want you personally to give far more than 10% to ministry of some kind. The tithe simply represents where you start not where you finish.

So, is Jesus Lord of your time, your talent and your treasure? Jesus' Lordship is practical. If it's practical, it will touch every area of your life. Don't settle for cheap grace, my friend. Don't assume that it's OK to accept Jesus as your Savior while you resist His Lordship over any area of your life. God wants better than that for you.

Because He loves you, He wants the best for you. The best is to allow Jesus to be both your Savior and your Lord in every way on every day.

Jesus' Lordship is permanent, personal and practical. You can add a fourth p-word there in your notes: passionate. Jesus' Lordship is passionate. At least it ought to be. I must bring up something deeply painful to many of us here – the Buckeye loss on Monday. I know some of you have just started the healing process and that I risk reopening a severe wound. Maybe this will help. Think again about January 2003 when the Buckeyes won the national championship in that game for the ages against the Miami Hurricanes. Cheryl and I were watching it again on the Big 10 Network this past weekend. Do you remember agonizing through that game, sweating and fretting, and almost having a nervous breakdown? And then came that moment of exultation – joy unspeakable and full of glory – when the Buckeyes pulled out the win in double overtime? Do you remember how you felt at that moment? Do you remember the sense of euphoria, the sheer delight, the incredible “wow” that you felt? It just sort of washed through you and filled you up there for a while, didn't it? Why? Because you were passionate about the game, about the team and about that great moment.

Have you ever felt that way about Jesus? I know that sounds like an absurd comparison, but have you? I'm not trying to trivialize being passionate about Jesus, but have you? Maybe it's not football for you. Maybe it's great music, great drama or a great business deal. Think of a time when you felt a tremendous surge of passion – a high moment of enjoyment and exultation. Have you ever felt that way about Jesus? Do you ever get passionate or excited about Him? I don't think real passion for Jesus means you have to have a holy glow or start acting super spiritual or something. For me, passion for Jesus means He's the central focus of my life – He's the hub of the wheel of my life. Think of a bicycle wheel. It has different spokes but all those spokes connect at the center – or the hub. You have different spokes in the wheel of your life – work, family, school, church, other activities and interests. But do all those spokes intersect, connect and meet in Jesus? Is He the central hub around which everything revolves? I have no doubt that many of us here today have indeed experienced Jesus as the Lord. But wouldn't be great if all of us – you and me included – grew in our passion for Jesus this year? I'm convinced if we do, we'll have the best year yet.