



Christ The King Sunday
“Jesus is Lord”: The Supremacy of Jesus Christ”
Rev. Dr. Scott Field
Revelation 1: 4b-8
9:15 AM Service

Christ the King Sunday

Some of us think of this as just another Sunday.

Week after week, fifty-two each year. Seven days. Wash. Rinse. Repeat. Over and over and over.

Though much of the current edition of institutional Christianity behaves a lot like non-institutional and non-Christianity, there is actually a way Christians keep the calendar that is different from the world around us. It doesn't rotate around the twelve months of the year. It takes its markers from the life, teaching, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, along with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the waiting time, and the return of Christ. It is sort of an annual rehearsal of the whole sweep of history.

So, our New Year begins next week with the first Sunday of Advent.

It is the season that gives attention to waiting for the coming of God's redemption through a Savior.

Then we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Epiphany (January 6) when it becomes apparent to the representatives of other lands, cultures, and languages (the Magi) that something of global significance has happened in the birth of Jesus.

The baptism of Jesus.

Lent begins the focus on the conflict between the ways of God and the ways of the world, the opposition to the Savior, and our complicity in the suffering, betrayal, and death of Jesus.

We are surprised by the unexpected and miraculous resurrection of Jesus signaling God's victory over sin, death, and the devil.

We rejoice in the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Then comes long, wandering season "after Pentecost" while we are living the ways of God, seeking justice, doing mercy, and living in humility in the here and now.

Then – which is today – it all winds up with "Christ the King Sunday". It is a focus on the victory of Christ.

Perhaps you thought this weekend was for recovering from Thanksgiving, engaging the Christmas Shopping Marathon in earnest, or putting up with relatives.

I'm glad this year, because of the way the calendar falls, that we can clear our heads and hearts for a moment between the turkey and the start of Advent to get our bearings on who we are, who we worship, and where the world is going.

What kind of Christian are you?

Let's start, then, with a question that bubbles up occasionally, though usually not just as straightforward as this: What kind of Christian are you?

There are, of course, all of the brand labels: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Willow Creekers and Harvesters, NonDenom, Independent, EFrees, Congregationalists, and United Methodists.

You see the guy with the sandwich sign in downtown Chicago: "Repent or Go to Hell!" and you say to yourself, "Well, I'm not THAT kind of Christian"

Or you hear about a group that calls itself a "Christian militia", whether in this country or another, that claims God has sanctified the means of violence – guns, torture, terrorism – to overcome injustice, or overthrow oppressors, or make sure that God's justice is administered swiftly and effectively. (I'm taking my bearing on "sanctified violence" from an address by Anglican Canon Burgess Carr to the All Africa Conference of Churches in May of 1974. For further on this line of thinking in the context of Christianity, see *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* edited by M. Chabani Manganyi, Springer Publishing, 2016).

Perhaps within our own denominational family you feel pushed to declare as either a Progressive or Traditional Christian, a Liberal or a Conservative, a Reformed/Calvinist or Arminian/Wesleyan, someone who prefers the classic hymns or is drawn to Christian rap, one who seeks the life of simplicity and solitude or someone fully involved in the swirling of current events, a Christian who thinks through the complexities of faith or a Christian who acts without much thinking behind it – as the Spirit moves you.

There seem to be a bewildering array of types, styles, formats, preferences, and paths among Christians that it's hard, sometimes, to find the common thread.

So here it is.

The ancient creed, the primal confession of every Christ-follower everywhere for all time always has been just three words: **Jesus is Lord!**

Jesus is Lord!

The Bible includes abundant affirmations the Jesus is Lord.

John 13:13

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am." (NLT)
The disciples themselves realized that Jesus was more than a religious teacher only.

John 20:28

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. (NLT)
Realizing that the reality of Jesus' authority completely overwhelmed Thomas' criteria for credibility.

Acts 2:36

“So, let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!” (NLT)

God has determined the unique role and authority of Jesus.

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (NLT)

What does it mean?

This word, “Lord”, is used often in the ancient world. It can be a simple matter of polite and respectful address: *Good morning, my lord*. If you aren’t familiar with this, watch PBS – it’s often used in British historical dramas.

More specifically, however, in the world of the New Testament, it was used by some of the Roman Emperors, notably the Emperor Nero and Emperor Domitian, to refer to themselves not only as the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire, but the one and only with whom all authority, justice, and power was held. The well-being, safety, protection, and future of every person, every province, and every place was his alone to determine.

Even more, as the Apostle Paul put it, beyond the political and military lords of the world, the kings, the monarchs, the leaders, there are “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms and against the malevolent powers of this broken world.” In other literature from the ancient world, the grim reaper, the angel of death, is called the “Dark Lord of the World.” And the word used was *κοσμοκρατωρ* (see Ephesians 6:12).

The word we are using, along with Christ –followers through the ages, however, is even more superlative: not *κοσμοκρατωρ*, but *παντοκρατωρ*. Not the ruler of the world, but the ruler of ALL the worlds.

Not a king, but the KING OF KINGS.

Not a lord, but the LORD OF LORDS.

Not a spiritual being, but LORD OF ALL ANGELS AND DEMONS, THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH, THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF ALL THINGS.

Why is Jesus Lord of all?

“Well, that’s all great, preacher. But why does it have anything to do with me?”

Simply giving Jesus the title of “Lord of the Universe and Hope of the World” is sort of like saying Chen Siming of China is the World Women’s Nine-Ball Pool Champion (which, by the way, she is). That might be important if you follow Nine-Ball Pool, but for most of us, it doesn’t mean too much. Jesus is

Lord might be meaningful to the religiously inclined or the nominally Christian, but why should it make a difference to me?

You might have missed it – so let me be very clear.

The Bible ties the Lordship of Jesus to his resurrection from the dead.

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.... For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:9,13 (NLT)

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) provide accounts of the miraculous power of Jesus: miracles of his power over nature (calming of the furious storm on the Sea of Galilee for example), miracles of his power over disease (healing of blind Bartimeaus, for example), miracles of his power over the demonic (exorcism of demons in the synagogue at Capernaum, for example), and miracles of his power over death (the raising of Lazarus at Bethany, for example).

The Gospels also provide eloquent testimony to his winsome and powerful teaching in the parables and in direct confrontation to the religious authorities of his day.

And the Gospels record Jesus breaking down social barriers to welcome outcasts and undesirables, the unexpected and the overlooked, into the Kingdom of God.

And Jesus made extreme claims about himself.

Like he was a time traveler: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

Or though a physical human being, also divine: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

Or, when disease and death had snatched away the brother of his friends Mary and Martha (Lazarus), he said not to worry because "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25).

All of these can be dismissed as the overblown marketing of Jesus if the whole thing is just talk. The verification, however, is the fact, the event, the reality of Jesus being raised from the dead.

He had not simply fainted on the cross.

The Roman soldiers were expert in the practice of execution. They knew when a criminal was dead. And, in the case of Jesus, took a spear to his side to make sure that this trouble-maker had met death. Besides, how realistic is it to think that after being hung on a cross, after being speared in the side, after being laid in a stone-cold tomb, he would sort of shake it off, get up, have the strength to roll away a stone 5 or 6 feet across and a foot thick?

The women were not mistaken.

And the grief-stricken women who were his groupies, when they went to his tomb early on that Sunday morning, when they found it empty --- well, maybe they got it wrong, went to the wrong tomb, mistook what they saw in their emotional distress. But no, they had gone to the same tomb when the body of Jesus was placed there by a man named Joseph from Arimathea (Luke 23:55,56).

The body was not stolen.

The disciples didn't scam everybody by stealing the body of Jesus and disposing of it elsewhere. The disciples of Jesus, even under threat of death themselves, didn't alter their story. Nobody "spilled the beans" on what some have attempted to describe as the "greatest hoax in history."

The Ancients were wishful thinkers who couldn't deal with reality.

Ancient people didn't believe in resurrection in the first place.

The people of Jesus' time knew that dead people stay dead. They didn't have some ethereal notion of some sort of numinous living on like "the memory of Jesus keeps him alive among us" or "eternal life is carrying within us the love Jesus shared with us." Nope. They were straightforward. He died. And later he was alive. They had breakfast together on the beach. Poor Thomas, who demanded physical evidence, was completely overwhelmed when Jesus entered the room and asked him to examine the wounds in his body to make sure it was him – in person. (John 20:26,27)

Some of us might still conclude that all of this stuff about Jesus is fine *if the Bible is reliable*. But how can I know if the Bible can be trusted? We don't have time today for a full exploration of the trustworthiness and historical reliability of the Bible, but one simple recognition might help us.

You and I have grown accustomed to believing that historians write neutral history – just reporting the facts. So, we might think that the resurrection of Jesus needs to be explored like a Justice Department Special Counsel Investigation: extensive documentation, fact-checking, corroboration, and on and on. And the Bible isn't like that at all.

More recently we've become aware that any history of anything is written from a particular perspective. Authors cannot actually get beyond their own way of seeing and interpreting and expressing themselves. So, taken to extremes, this awareness might have us dismissing all historical accounts of everything anywhere because it is mediated through the perspective of others. It is certainly worth understanding the perspective of the author, but after all, unless they are making things up (like the Egyptian pyramids were designed and constructed by aliens who arrived in flying saucers), they are reporting on and responding to something that really happened at a particular time with particular people in a particular place. The Bible is kind of like that – not the flying saucers, but like "something really happened at a particular time in a particular place."

Nobody in the ancient world intended to write history like a Justice Department Special Counsel investigation. In fact, the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, didn't claim to write history or even think they were writing history. They were writing testimony. They were describing events they had observed personally or that eyewitnesses had reported to them. They related eyewitness details as correctly as they could within their human limitations. The authors' statements of intent were to present Jesus in accordance with the evidence (see Luke 1:1-4, for example).

It seems to me that this is like the reporting last Monday of the tragic shootings at Mercy Hospital in Chicago. Television reporters were giving their impressions and observations. They interviewed eyewitnesses and those who had gone through the terrifying experience. Though I personally did not see the attack and all of the aftermath – and neither did you, I have absolute confidence that it happened in something like the way the eyewitnesses and reporters testified that it did.

Similarly, I have absolute confidence in the testimony of the biblical writers. The reliability and historicity of the Bible is not actually in question.

What is in question to this wonderful news that JESUS IS LORD, however, is my response. It is one thing to say that "Jesus is Lord", but quite a different, though related, thing to say "Jesus is MY Lord."

When the Bible uses literary anthropomorphisms to indicate that the trees clap their hands or the rocks cry out in praise to God's redeeming action in history we know, don't we, that if the trees are clapping their hands or the rocks are singing, it is because they are doing something by instinctive response. For you and me, however, it is different. You have a choice. I have a choice. It is a foundational choice for each of us.

Burk Parsons observed:

"Saying you're a new kind of Christian with a new kind of Christianity is basically saying you're an old kind of heretic". Being a Christian, besides all of the variations among us, means, before anything else, that I confess the ancient confession and align my life with the ancient path of Christ-followers: Jesus is Lord.

Oswald Chambers (*God's Workmanship*) wrote, "The danger is that I praise Jesus Christ for all I am worth, while I evade the moral and essential necessity of surrendering to Him."

Jesus himself put it clearly in a question:

"So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say?
Luke 6:46 (NLT)

First Things First

The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not a doctrine, a dogma, or an ideology.

It is a love; it is a primary love.

- When we are touched by the grace of God
- When our eyes are opened to see how we ourselves, personally, contribute to the brokenness of the world;
- When we recognize we, too, have signed off on the evil, injustice, and oppression of the world;
- When we come to realize that the first rebellion in the garden, the rebellion of the first humans, is echoed in our own willfulness and waywardness;
- When we experience God's mercy to find us in our wandering, to deliver us from our obsessions, heal us from our addictions, wake us up from our sleep-walking kind of life, forgive our sins, and call us not "enemy", "rebel", or "renegade", but instead to call us "Friend of God".
- When these things begin to happen in our lives by the grace of God, we have a response to love God in return.

We come, over time and through many daily decisions, people who love the Lord our God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

This becomes our first love and devotion.

This love conditions and qualifies all other loves and devotions; all other allegiances and obligations.

If Jesus is Lord of my life, it means:

- My nation is not Lord
- My political party is not Lord
- My race is not Lord
- My language is not Lord
- My selfishness is not Lord
- My money is not Lord
- My time is not Lord
- My family is not Lord
- My career is not Lord
- My plan is not Lord
- My comfort is not Lord

We do not need a "new and improved Jesus".

If we want to connect our lives with what is really real and truly true, we must surrender ourselves and our secondary devotions to the primary allegiance.

Jesus is Lord!

Which means that the world in which we live:

Is broken, but worth redeeming

Is in need of generous friends

Is filled with opportunities to express God's hope

Is our responsibility

There is this breathtaking description of heaven in the last book of the Bible, The Revelation to John. The leaders and influencers have all gathered before the Lord. It says that they lay their crowns before him – the signs of their own power and authority, their influence and opportunities – all laid down before the glory and majesty of the One to whom all honor, glory, and worship is due.

Because He is King over all Kings.

Lord over all Lords.

Jesus is Lord!