

Phil. 2:5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

We Believe: The Lordship of Christ¹

Philippians 2:5-11

In Old Testament Hebrew, it is the word, *Adonai*. In New Testament Greek, *Kyrios*. The word they both represent is used over 7,000 times, the most-used noun in the entire Bible. It is the word, *Lord*. When we say we believe in the lordship of Jesus Christ, we are saying that he is the owner and has authority over all things – things seen and unseen; spiritual and physical, living and dead. As one theology dictionary puts it, to say that Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge “the authority and power of Jesus Christ over the cosmos, creation, and human life, especially the lives of those who believe in him.”² The whole world is under the rule, the authority of Jesus Christ.

The thing is, if we are honest about it, some of the things we say we believe...well, some of them you wonder if they are really true, and, maybe this is one. I mean, we see it everywhere; it's in our hymns, our prayers, it's even on bumper stickers and church signs. But, if you think about it, is it true? When you look around, sometimes it is kind of hard to believe.

Jesus is Lord? In a world where tyrants kill their own people, grown-ups rape and murder children, racism runs rampant...in what way do these things indicate that Jesus is Lord?

But it's there, in the Bible. Simon Peter says so in Acts 2 when he stands right up to the Jewish authorities and tells them they killed the Messiah. He says, “*Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.*” That's strong stuff for a man who just a few weeks earlier had denied even knowing Jesus because he was afraid of those same authorities. Peter says Jesus is Lord.

But still, there's so much happening, so much injustice and suffering that doesn't look like Jesus is Lord. Could it be true?

Doubting Thomas had his, well, doubts. “*Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in those nail holes and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.*” But then Jesus was there, and said, “Put your finger here...reach out your hand and put it in my side.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas said Jesus is Lord.

Well, that's true, but, still, children are starving, old people are left alone, poor people are getting poorer and rich people are getting richer. Is Jesus really Lord?

Jesus himself says so. After washing the disciples' feet, he says, “Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should do as I have done to you.”

Now, that's true, too. He did describe himself as Lord, but do we really believe he is Lord, owner, of our lives? Washing each other's feet, not lording it over the poor, hanging around with unpopular and unclean people. Are we really willing to say, “Yes, I'll live like that, because you are Lord of my life”? I mean, sure, it's fine to say it in church, but, at work – the mighty dollar is lord, right? The bottom line, the stockholders – they're really lord, aren't they? Or at school – are you really not going to cheat on a test when all your friends are doing it? At school, popularity is Lord, right? Getting the right grade to get into the right university – that's where the true lordship lies, for sure. In your neighborhood – is Jesus Lord when the gossipers start gossiping about so-and-so down the block? On the golf course...in the courtroom...on the ladder of advancement? Sure, Jesus is Lord for an hour on Sunday morning, but, Lord of our lives Monday through Saturday? I don't know if that's really true.

And then there's that thing called death. It constantly lurks out there on the fringes of our lives, and sometimes it gets so close you can feel its chill, smell its foulness. Where is Jesus then? When prayers don't work, doctors don't work, nothing works. Is Jesus really Lord over death?

And then I read Fred Craddock's story about a friend of his.

A friend and colleague of mine died last year. About five years ago she was at home in her apartment grading papers. She heard a knock at the door. She went to the door and there in the

¹ I want to acknowledge and express appreciation to Dr. Fred Craddock for the sermon “Sit at My Right Hand Until...”, from which came the inspiration and overall trajectory of this sermon. Further reference can be found in footnote 3.

² McKim, Donald K. (2014-04-21). *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition: Revised and Expanded* (Kindle Locations 2381-2383). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

doorway stood Old Death with his yellow face. She slammed the door, bolted it, and went to the doctor. He said, "It is malignant." There was surgery, medication, and she was back at work. She really looked good. Her weight was right, she was cheerful and hopeful.

About two years ago she was at home alone one evening. She heard a knock at the door, went to answer it, and there stood Old Death with his yellow face. She slammed the door, bolted it, and ran to the doctor. There was more surgery and chemotherapy. Her hair came out; she got a wig. She returned to work and we joked with her. "You should have been wearing that wig all along. It looks good." And her spirits were bright.

Last year she was at home alone one evening. She heard a knock at the door and went to answer. There stood Old Death with his yellow face. She slammed the door but the lock was broken. She was afraid; she could not keep him out. She called friends and family and we gathered from far and near. We took turns, twenty-four hours a day, leaning against that door. We could keep him out. We did it so well; we grew cheerful in the chore. We even joined with her in laughing and talking and remembering good times.

Once in a while one of us would go to the window and look out, just to see if he was still there. And he was, with his yellow face. But one day she said from her bed, "Back away from the door." Surprised, we did as she said. The door opened and there Death stood with his yellow face. But I felt sorry for him really; in his hands were not his usual poison darts of pain and fear. One hand now held peace and the other hand rest. It was evident as I looked at him that this once feared enemy was an angel of God. Christ is the Lord of death? Yes. But the friend is dead; she's no longer here to enjoy and to be enjoyed and to share life. That's true, but you should have heard us sing at her funeral.³

Maybe...just maybe...if Jesus can turn death into his servant, he can one day turn all of those other things into his servant, too. And maybe...just maybe...it starts with you and me believing he is our Lord; our owner; our master; our rabbi; our king. Maybe...just maybe...it starts with us living for him; living like him; letting him be Lord of our minds, hearts, and bodies. Just maybe, Philippians has it right:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore, God gave him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Maybe, just maybe, if we live as though Jesus is our Lord, our neighbors and friends will see what that means and begin to do the same, and before long their neighbors and friends, and theirs, and theirs and theirs, until the day every knee bends.

He's already got death on its knees. Maybe we're next.

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³ Fred Craddock, *The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, pp. 213-14.