

"Come Out With Your Hands Up"

Rev. Chip Blackshear

First Presbyterian Church of Corpus Christi, Texas

Philippians 2:1-11 • February 5, 2012

As you know, for the past month we've been studying the Apostles' Creed, which we say each week in worship. The Apostles' Creed is a statement of what we personally believe - "I believe" - and it's also a statement of what the church has everywhere and always believed. So when we say what we believe using those words, we are joining Christians all over the world, from all times, in affirming the basic truths about our faith.

We started this series talking about what it means to say *I believe* in God. Belief is more than just agreeing that a statement is true. Biblical belief or faith is an issue of trust. To say "I believe in God" is to say "I trust God and want to have a relationship with Him." The next two weeks we began to ask the question, "who is this God that I trust?" and we explored what it means to call God Father, Almighty, and Creator.

Today we have finally reached the *second* statement in the creed, "I believe...in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary." Our question this morning, then, is this: who is Jesus, really? And what is his relationship to God?

Of course this is not a new question. People have been arguing over who Jesus is for the past two thousand years. At one point Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered that some thought he was the prophet Elijah or one of the other prophets. Jesus then said, "Who do you say that I am?"

Today Jesus is asking you that same question. Who do you say he is? What do we really mean when we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord?" The way you answer that question will determine the way you live your life. So to help us dig in a little deeper I thought we'd take a look at the three main parts of this statement in the creed - first "Jesus Christ," then "God's Only Son," and third "our Lord."

When we say we believe in Jesus Christ, we are identifying a particular human being who lived at a particular time in history whose name was Jesus. Actually, there were lots of people named Jesus at the time. The Bible even mentions some of them. But we say we believe in Jesus Christ. We're interested in the Jesus who was from Nazareth whose mother was named Mary. In addition to the Bible there is plenty of evidence that Jesus really did live about two thousand years ago in Roman Empire-controlled Judea.

The Jesus that we worship and serve was a real person. We may take that for granted but it's something that has been argued about for years. One of the heresies that the early church faced was the idea that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. This stems from the idea we talked about last week that material creation is by nature evil and so the Son of God couldn't really be human.

But Scripture is clear that Jesus was fully human. He had emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger, just like us. In the gospels we read that Jesus was born as a human baby

and grew up through childhood into an adult. He got hungry and tired, just like us. Hebrews 4 tells us that Jesus "in every respect has been tempted as we are." As we heard from Philippians 2, "being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." One theologian has pointed out that the ultimate proof of Jesus' human limitations is seen when he died on the cross. His body ceased to have life in it, just as ours does when we die. In 1 John 4 we read, "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God." Jesus' humanity is an important part of who he is.

This is important because as sinful people we need a mediator between us and God, someone who can fully represent us to God and fully represent God to us. It's also important because it's the only way God could insert Himself fully into human history without destroying us. So he came as a real human person, Jesus.

We also confess that we believe Jesus is God's only Son. Another major heresy that the church has faced through the years is the idea that Jesus was merely a great moral teacher, someone who had a higher "God-consciousness" than most of us, and so he was a great example for us to follow. This heresy is still very popular today. You often hear people who believe this say something like, "Jesus never claimed to be God. His followers made it up years later."

But when Jesus asked his disciples, "who do you say that I am," Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Now if Jesus

didn't truly believe that he was God, he would have said something like, "Peter you're out of your mind!" But he didn't. Instead, Jesus said, "blessed are you Simon. Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven." In other words, Jesus says, "Peter you're absolutely right." In Matthew 11:27, Jesus says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." He is clearly equating himself with God, which is what the Jewish leaders were so upset about. As John 5:18 says, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Over and over again the gospels portray Jesus doing things that only God can do, like miraculous healings, walking on water, calming storms, and forgiving sins. The picture we get of Jesus from the New Testament is that he really is God. That's the point the Apostle Paul is making in our passage this morning in his letter to the Philippians. He says that although Jesus was "in the form of God," or more literally that he was already God, "he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped or held too tightly, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." The God who created the universe and everything in it willingly became a part of that creation.

I think it's important for us to remember that God the Son was not created when Jesus was born. He has always existed, co-

eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. "Jesus did not *become* the Son of God" at his birth or at his baptism. Rather, he has always been the unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and he always will be. Jesus and God the Father are in "essence" one and the same. So we confess that Jesus was and is not only fully human but also fully God and these two natures can't be separated.

The third part of this statement in the creed is that Jesus is "our Lord." Before the Apostles' Creed started to take shape this was the statement of Christian belief - Jesus Christ is Lord. We don't use the word lord too much these days so we probably don't grasp what this means. First of all, for the early Christians this confession could mean death. The Greek word for lord is *kyrios* and it could be used as a title of respect, like we would say "sir," or it could be used for a slave's master. But it also had a much deeper meaning as well.

In ancient times the Jewish people held the name of God in so much reverence that they refused to say it out loud, for fear of mispronouncing it. So instead of saying *Yahweh*, they would use the Hebrew word *adonai*, which means lord. So when the Hebrew Scriptures, what we now know as the Old Testament, was translated into Greek, the word they chose to use was *kyrios*. So when the early Christians said, "Jesus Christ is Lord," they were saying, "Jesus Christ is God."

In the Roman Empire the phrase "*kyrios Kaiser*," or Caesar is lord, was used as a way of saying that the emperor was a god. This was even stamped on the Roman coins of the time. Christians who said that Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord were put to death.

So what does it mean for us to say that Jesus Christ is Lord? The idea of submitting to the authority of someone is not very popular right now. Our Postmodern culture says that our individual preferences are what's most important. For years psychology has been teaching about Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, with physical needs of food, clothing and shelter as the most basic and climbing through safety, love and acceptance, esteem culminating in what's called "self-actualization." You could call this "radical autonomy." My self-actualization is the most important goal in my life and the unforgivable "sin" is to get in the way of someone else's self-actualization.

But there is nothing biblical about that idea. In fact it's the exact opposite. Verse 3 of today's passage: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." Paul tells us that this is what it means to have the mind of Christ, to call him Lord. In another place Paul says, "You are not your own. You were bought with a price." As Robert Mills says, "the affirmation 'Jesus Christ is Lord' becomes an intolerable impediment to self-actualization."

Every one of us has some kind of lord in our lives. Our lord is whatever we pursue as

most important. For some it might be money or sex or power. For others it might be things we would normally consider good things like family or even charity. But anything that gets in the way of following Christ as the most important thing in our life is sin.

Hebrews 12:1-2 reminds us, "let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Following Jesus as Lord means a complete surrender of *our* will to *his* will. When we confess that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord, may we be secure in our knowledge that he is fully human and yet fully God and may we truly follow and serve him as our only Lord and master. As I was thinking about this I was reminded of the old police shows where they would have the criminal holed up in a house with the swat team outside. They would get a bullhorn and call out to the criminal, "we've got you surrounded. Come out with your hands up!" I think that's what Paul means when he says in verse 9, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We're surrounded, it's time to surrender every area of our lives to Jesus.

Amen.