

Sermon for October 26, 2014

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 103:1-5, Philippians 2:6-11

The chosen one

As we were planning for the service this Sunday the idea of showing that video came up and somehow it leaked that I had never seen Lion King. So I had no idea what people were talking about when they said we should show the Circle of Life, as an image of how Jesus was the chosen one, and then go from there. I do have a lot to learn. But today we better get ready to learn about the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to understand what we mean when we say that Christ is present, or when we feel Christ's presence. We have said so far that we believe, In God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, today we say and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. It is going to be all about Jesus today. Many of my sermons, I realize, offer helpful hints on how to live our lives as Christians, and focus less on how we can be better Christians. But not today. Today we focus on understanding what we believe about Jesus. Who is Jesus to us. And it basically comes down to one word. He is Lord.

We are going to look at two passages that describe for us very clearly what we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord. He is truly the chosen one, the one that even more than King of the Jungle, he is the King of Kings. In Philippians we will look at one of the earliest hymns that sings out Christ's Lordship and in Psalm 103 we heard an Old Testament description of our God being Lord. So today, by following this Scriptural example we will understand what we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord.

The statement, Jesus is Lord, is one of the earliest ways that Christians expressed their faith. In Romans 10:9 Paul states: because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. In Acts 2:36 Peter tells the crowd: Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

There is no doubt that Jesus is Lord according to our Christian faith, but what do we mean when we profess that? Paul gives us a clear definition of the Lordship of Christ when he writes to the church in Philippi. Now like any letter he was addressing a specific issue that was happening in the church. Apparently there were some people more

interested in their own interests than in the interests of the church. There were some who considered themselves better than others, there were those who enjoyed complaining and speaking about others in the church in a negative light.

The way Paul addresses these issues is not by giving a moral lecture of dos and don'ts but rather he writes a hymn that allows the church to turn their focus and attention solely upon who Christ is for us, so any of that pettiness is revealed as pettiness, in light of Jesus' brilliant light.

We are going to make our way through the Scriptures in Philippians, so make sure you have it in front of you. I want you to notice how this Scripture is divided into three sections vs. 6-7 pre-existence of Jesus with the lead up to the incarnation, then 8-9 is the existence of Jesus with his life, death, and crucifixion and resurrection, and then finally in 10-11 the glorification or the post-existence. See if you can pick that up.

Paul begins by saying, the only way to beat the temptation to put our interests ahead of others is to think like Christ thought. He begins: We have to have the same mind that Christ had. What is that mind like? Let me tell you and then the verses that follow tell us what Christ's mind was like.

First of all, even though Christ was God, he didn't take advantage of who he was but rather obeyed all of the laws of nature, he didn't step outside of the way things worked on earth but obeyed the way things worked. Have you ever dreamt that you were invisible, and you could do anything you wanted because of this special power? You could trip your enemy as they were walking, you could save someone from a robber. Basically you could do anything you wanted to do, everything is in your power. What would you do differently in your life if you were Christ, that is if you had the potential to literally do anything you wanted and make anything happen. By the smiles on some of your faces I don't think I want to know. But, would your first choice be to live a life of servitude, humility, suffering, death in a shameful fashion? I guess that if we were able to choose anything, that would be the furthest from our mind. But that is the mind of Christ, this defined for Paul the Lordship of Christ. It was his choice to live as he did.

Isaiah 14 gives us a picture of what happens when we try to live the opposite of the way Christ did, try to take advantage of whatever power and control we think we have in our lives. When we try to raise ourselves up instead of humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. Vs. 12-15

Christ's humility is then made clear in his incarnation, how he became completely and totally like one of us. Paul Tillich mentions that the central event in the drama of salvation is an act of humble service. In every turn of his life, humility marked who Jesus was. His birth, the humble manger and stable, his life, his humble living without a place to rest his head, his death with the humiliation and shame of the cross. Jesus chose to live this way. He chose this life of humility because it was only in this way that we could have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. Jesus wasn't taken advantage of, but he chose this life, it was his frame of mind. It is what makes him Lord.

What this hymn suggests is that God the creator has had from all eternity this outgoing self-giving disposition of mind, which became visible in Christ. The mind of Christ and the Lordship of Christ is seen in his humility. Remember, Paul is addressing a specific issue of gossip, self aggrandizement, negative attitudes toward others, and he tackles the problem by saying: you are supposed to be like Jesus the Lord. You may ask who is this Jesus, he was the most humble of all people, so pay attention and follow his example.

This humility found its climax in his death, even death on a cross. Jesus did not go to the cross thinking, that's okay, I'll be up and around in a couple of days. When Jesus died he was not buried in a tunnel where he could see the light at the end. No, he was buried in a cold, hard cave with a rock sealed over the entrance. On that good Friday, the story was over. This means that Jesus our Lord acted on our behalf with no view of gain.

This humility marks the lordship of Christ, but so does his exaltation. Paul states that Jesus' name became above every name. What does that mean? He goes on to explain that at the name of Jesus, our Lord, every knee shall bow: in heaven, on earth, all of creation will recognize Jesus' lordship. But what is this under the earth. Remember when we read that even the demons believe and shudder. When Jesus' name is mentioned they shudder to the point that they have to fall on their knees.

The Lordship of Christ is seen in his self-abasement, of his own choosing, not just allowing, but choosing to become one of us and not ever lifting himself up. He let God do that. Now what are we talking about is a very human desire to say, okay I'll be the last one on this earth, so that I'll be the first in the next. There is a danger in lifting up humility by saying the catchy slogan: Last Now, First Later and we can get pins for our ushers so that our humility has the ulterior motive of being first in the kingdom.

There is no corporate ladder to climb in our faith where we think the more humble and subservient and the more works we do then the closer we are to God. No, Christ's humility was genuine in that he expected nothing in return for who he was and what he did, except, as the last verse states, the glory of God the Father.

What do we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord? Psalm 103 tells us of a God who is Lord because he forgives, heals, redeems, crowns us with steadfast love and mercy, satisfies us, and renews. This Lord made himself known through Jesus Christ our Savior. You see, if Paul is writing to address the issue of self serving behavior, it is an issue that we deal with as well. If Paul is writing to a church, it could be our church. What church does not deal with negative voices of unwarranted criticism because someone's feathers have been ruffled. What church as they experience growing pains don't take missteps that cause grumbling? Who can say with honesty that they have always put the interests of others ahead of their own.

Only one person, Jesus Christ, and we are told to have his mind of choosing to die so that others might live. If we have the mind of Christ, then we will be able to end as Paul did in these verses, and say that all that we say and do truly is for the glory of God. Amen.