

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Jesus is Lord. This statement that's recorded for us in Romans chapter 10 verse 9 and 1 Corinthians 12 verse 3, this is probably the earliest Christian confession. Jesus is Lord.

This confession predates the Westminster Confession of Faith by 1600 years. It predates the Apostles' Creed that we're working our way through by a considerable margin as well. That is the earliest confessional statement, we're pretty sure, Jesus is Lord.

And it hasn't changed, has it? That declaration is still at the heart of the Christian faith today, as it was when Paul wrote it just a few years after Jesus died and rose again.

And therefore, because it is the heart of our faith, it is the centerpiece of the Apostles' Creed. The longest section of the Creed is concerned with the person and work of Jesus.

Friends, our faith is not in a cold, abstract doctrine. Our faith is in a person. Our faith is in the only Son of God, in Jesus Christ, who is our Lord.

[1 : 1 0] That the rest of the Creed kind of radiates out from this central thesis, Jesus is Lord. At the Heidelberg Catechism, another statement of the truths of the faith, it puts this centerpiece particularly well.

The first question it asks, what is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

We sang it earlier, Jesus is the name we honor. Jesus is the name we praise. Let all proclaim, Jesus is our God. I certainly hope that our worship each Sunday always focuses on Jesus, but I'm especially conscious of it this morning as we turn to this line in the Creed.

In Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. So let's remind ourselves of the Creed as a whole. Let's find a place within it. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

[2 : 2 7] He descended into hell. On the third day, he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

So having over the last few weeks of this series, having begun with God the Father, we turn then this morning to consider Jesus. Packed into this first line of this section, there are no fewer than four names or titles for us to consider.

Each of them fundamental to a right understanding of who Jesus is and therefore fundamental to a correct centering of our faith. Jesus, Christ, Son, Lord.

Let's take each of them in turn and we'll see what picture we build up. So first then, Jesus. On one level, Jesus, this is a name like any other.

- [3 : 32] Jesus is an English pronunciation of the Greek name Yesus. And that itself is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Yehoshua, Joshua to you and me. It's a name like any other.
- There are boys and men with the name Jesus running around all over Latin America. It is a name like any other. And even that itself is important. And even that itself is important. Jim Packer points out that this anchors him as a historical individual.
- This is not some construct. Jesus is his proper name. This is Mary's son. This is the ex-carpenter from Nazareth. This is the man who spent three years as an itinerant rural rabbi.
- This is the man who was put to death as a historical fact by the Roman authorities sometime around AD 30. This is the man whose ministry is described in some detail in the Gospels.
- This is the man who got tired and fell asleep even in the raging storm. Raging storm. This is the man who ate and drank and cried and laughed.
- [4 : 40] Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical person who lived and died. That has to be true or our faith is in a figment of our imagination.
- But the name Jesus also means more than that. In the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the angel said to Joseph, See, the name Jesus isn't just a name like any other.
- The name Jesus points to his coming task, points to the reason for his birth. He has the name Jesus because, said the angel, he will save his people from their sins.
- And that makes sense because Jesus, or rather Joshua, means the Lord saves. The J or Y sound at the start of the name, that's the Y of Yahweh, the Lord.
- Yahweh saves. And so his very name points ahead to his task. But do you see what's happened there? The name means Yahweh saves.
- [5 : 46] The angel says he, Jesus, will save. In other words, right there before he's even born, this little boy is equated with Yahweh. With the one sovereign God.
- The divinity of this child is proclaimed even before he's born. The angel's announcement says that hope of salvation in Yahweh, that hope established over the millennia, that hope of salvation, that hope is fulfilled in the person of this child.
- The Lord saves. He, Jesus, will save. Jesus. Jesus. Secondly, Christ. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord.
- Again, it's helpful to do just a little bit of linguistics here. It's helpful to know that Christ and Messiah are synonyms. Okay, Christ is an English pronunciation of the Greek Christos.
- Messiah is an English pronunciation of the Hebrew Messiah. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, they used Christos, Christ, to represent Messiah.
- [6 : 56] It's the same word, okay? The same idea. It's slightly unfortunate that when our first English Bibles were being translated, that they chose to transliterate each of Messiah and Christ into separate English words, rather than translating them both the same.
- And so we end up with a kind of a perceived disconnect between the promises of the Old Testament and the fulfillment in the New. But it is the same reality.
- The new NIV does use Messiah rather than Christ some of the time in the New Testament, but it's kind of fighting an uphill battle against the fact that we all have in our heads Jesus Christ rather than Jesus the Messiah.
- But we need to be clear that Christ is not Jesus' surname. It's not just part of his name. I mean, I suppose in the historical sense in which Smith was first a job description before it was a name, and Taylor and Butcher and so on, it's kind of a name used in that way.

Christ is a title, a job description. What does it refer to? It means anointed one. Anointed one. Now, more over time came to be considered under the same heading of the promised Messiah as the role came to be identified with the role of the servant who was prophesied by Isaiah, for instance.

[8 : 17] But at its root, Messiah, Christ, it means anointed one. And therefore, to apply this title to the man Jesus carries with it a huge baggage of freight.

Anointing was for prophets. Anointing was for prophets. Anointing was for prophets.

Elijah was instructed to anoint Elisha to succeed him, 1 Kings 19. Anointing was for priests. We've read about that in Exodus 29. And anointing was for kings.

That same verse in 1 Kings 19. Elijah is to anoint Jehu as king. And David was anointed by Samuel and so on. So anointing is for prophets, for priests, and for kings.

And Jesus, the Messiah, Jesus, the anointed one, he fulfills all three of these offices. A prophet, a messenger from God. A priest who mediates with God by means of sacrifice.

[9 : 23] And king, sovereign ruler. And Packer, again, is helpful. He points out that the impact of the fact that all three of these things come together in Jesus, the impact of that is seen in relation to what we as human beings need.

What do we need for a relationship with God? Well, first, we are ignorant about him. And we need to be instructed. A satisfying relationship is not possible with a person about whom you know little or nothing.

So we need a prophet to speak truth about God. Second, we are estranged from God and we need reconciliation. Otherwise, we end up unaccepted, unforgiven, and unblessed.

Strangers to God's fatherly love and exiles from the inheritance that is in store for those who are his children. Therefore, we need a priest. And third, we are weak and blind and foolish when it comes to that business of going and living.

Living for God. And we need somebody to guide and protect and strengthen us. And that is how the regal role, the role of king, that's how that role was understood in Old Testament Israel.

[10 : 35] We needed a king. So all three of these needs for prophet, priest, and king, all three of these needs that you and I have, all three of them are met in their entirety perfectly by Messiah Jesus.

By Jesus who is the anointed one. Jesus who is the Christ. Jesus who is our prophet, our priest, and our king. We press on.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. The his, they're his only son. That's a reference back to the previous paragraph to God, the father almighty.

So what is it that we mean by asserting our belief in Jesus as the only son of the father? Well, this is where that reading from John's gospel helps us out. Verse 18, no one has ever seen God, but the one and only son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the father, has made him known.

The language there of one and only son, or only begotten as some translations have it. The emphasis there on only. It emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus, doesn't it?

[11 : 49] There is none like him. If a young man is introduced to you as my only son, well, you know he is precious to his father, don't you?

There's a sense here of the preciousness of Jesus. As God's only son, Jesus enjoys the father's deepest love. That's what God the father emphasized at Jesus' baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, saying, This is my son whom I love.

With him I am well pleased. And therefore this line of the creed, it speaks of the closeness of relationship between father and son.

So to speak of Jesus as son guards against various potential heresies that would lessen or cheapen or remove Jesus' divinity.

To speak of him as the son means this is not only Mary's boy, but that whilst he is indeed Mary's boy, he is also the second person of the eternal trinity.

[12 : 52] John introduces the word in verse 1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

The word was God, and yet was also with God. Of one nature, and yet distinct. And then in verse 14, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth. Folks, this is earth-shattering news, isn't it?

The word of God, the eternal son, came and made his dwelling among us and revealed his glory. And so against the Jehovah's Witnesses and against Arianism, against Unitarianism, against a whole variety of other isms, against these things we assert Jesus is divine.

Jesus is God. Not just a divinely inspired man. Not kind of God as a kind of courtesy title. No, God with a capital G. Truly, fully God.

[14 : 05] God. In chapter 5, John records Jesus as saying, All will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

And that means that when in the next line of the Creed, it tells us that Jesus was conceived of the Virgin Mary, when we sang similarly in that song a few minutes ago, when we speak of Jesus' conception and birth, that this first line of the section, this makes it clear that we are not suggesting that there was a time when the eternal Son was not.

It is not being born of Mary that makes him Son. He was already the eternal Son. And his conception, a human nature, was added to the divine Son of God.

Another creed called the Nicene Creed, a little bit later on from the Apostles' Creed, it asserts that we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.

To speak, as the Nicene Creed does, of the Son as begotten before all worlds, in other words, begotten before creation, this doesn't mean that there was a time when the Son was not.

[15 : 49] In fact, it means the reverse. It is not that he originated after the Father. It is not that he is in any sense less than the Father. It is only for you and me as time-bound, limited creatures that momentary events exist in this sense and we want to kind of create an order to things.

Time itself is part of creation. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, made time. God is not bound by it.

So we are not saying that God the Son came into being. But when we speak in this language of Father and Son, when we speak in this language of begetting, what we are asserting is that, again, as Packer puts it, the Son lives his life in dependence on the Father because that is his nature.

He says in John 6, verse 57, I live because of the Father. Yet without in any way diminishing the inescapable fact that he is himself divine in and of himself, he is eternal, not a created being.

There is an extent, isn't there, to which the fullness of the implications of this title are beyond our ability to understand them. The Council of Chalcedon spoke of Jesus as one person in two natures, fully God and fully man.

[17 : 18] Now that's relatively easy to say. And we have to agree with it if we are going to be orthodox Christian believers. But for us to fully understand what that statement means is in some sense unfathomable.

A sense of mystery remains when we say that Jesus is one person in two natures, fully God and fully man, the only Son of the Father.

Mystery remains. But fortunately, fortunately, you and I, we do not need to know how God became man in order to know Jesus, in order to know the Christ.

Whether we understand it or not, the fact is still true that the Word became flesh. It was that supreme, mind-blowing miracle prompted by love and therefore our part is not to speculate about what it means, not to try and reduce it down and scale it into something that we can understand and wrap our heads around and encompass.

Our role is to wonder, to adore, to love and to exalt Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

[18 : 37] Hebrews 13 verse 8. And so we come on to the final title, Lord. I said earlier, this is probably part of the earliest Christian confession.

Jesus is Lord. And unlike Son, this is not, I don't think, particularly difficult to understand. But what I suspect it is, is more difficult to live in light of.

More difficult to accept as true. Easier to understand, harder to accept. Because to know Jesus as Savior is one thing. To know Him as Christ, at least in the sense of prophet and priest, is comparatively comfortable.

To know Him as King, in the sense of guide, protector, and the one who strengthens, well, that is a delight. To know Jesus as the Son of God.

To know Him as the revealer of the Father. Who amongst us would not want that? But here's the wrap. If He is going to be these things, then He must also be King in the sense of ruler, in the sense of having authority over your life.

[19 : 52] If He is to be Savior, He must also be Lord. Lord. And I think if we're honest, it's this which is much more difficult to say, isn't it?

Or at least more difficult to mean, more difficult to live. Because we're inclined to seek to be Lord in our own lives. Nobody gets to tell me what to do.

I'll do it my way. But the Apostles' Creed is unashamed. If you want the rest, He must also be Lord. The Bible is unashamed. If you want the rest, He must also be Lord.

Now that doesn't necessarily mean that if you want Him to be Savior, that you have to be at a point of full and perfect submission. And in fact, if you think you are at a point of full and perfect submission, if you think that you are perfect in your obedience, then you are deceiving yourself, and the truth is not in you.

1 John 1, verse 8. So we're not saying we need perfect obedience. But there has to be that willingness to seek obedience.

[21 : 04] That desire to submit. to say to ourselves, I will submit to King Jesus. Even if that is in its infant stages.

If that willingness to submit, that desire to submit is not there, then you are not a Christian. What you are is, at best, somebody who's taken out an insurance policy because they're scared of hell.

No, friends, Jesus must be Lord as well as Savior. On what basis? On what basis does Jesus claim this lordship?

What is His right? Well, His right to be lord on an individual basis, lord in your life, is, I suggest, a subset, an implication of His universal lordship.

He's lord in my life because He is lord over all creation. Colossians says He is first born over the church in the same breath as it says He is first born over all creation.

[22 : 13] Ben Myers says, I confess Him as my lord because I recognize Him as the lord. But that idea of the universal lordship of Jesus is not a terribly popular one, is it?

Sounds insensitive, even oppressive. How arrogant to claim that this one way is the only way. How dare we suggest that we know the one who has all the authority.

And I guess if you divorce this assertion that Jesus is lord, if you separate it off from all other information and content, then maybe it would be insensitive and oppressive if it stood alone.

But it doesn't, does it? It's true that you can point to times in history where that assertion, Jesus is lord, has been used in an oppressive manner.

the attempt through the crusades to spread Christendom at the point of a sword, it was not a highlight in the history of the church, was it? Where this doctrine is used to kind of bolster abuse in the church or in the home, it is insensitive and oppressive.

[23 : 30] But to use it in such a fashion, to separate it from all other content, is not to understand how it is used in God's word.

If it seems insensitive today, then I suggest we're not understanding this assertion, Jesus is lord, in light of these other assertions.

Because it's not a different Jesus who is lord. It's the same Jesus who is savior, who is the Christ, who is the son of the father. It's the same Jesus who has the right to reign because he is the creator, because of his very nature as God.

But also, we should delight that he reigns. It should be precious to us that Jesus is lord. Because we know him as a good and gracious king.

Because we know him as a benevolent lord who is seeking our best. Christ. Matt Chandler, he's got a series going through the Apostles' Creed and he's helpful on this point.

[24 : 37] He says, maybe you're nervous about that kingly rule of Jesus and you don't see him or don't want to see him as the Lord, the savior, the tender, loving king who ransoms and rescues and therefore you avoid him.

or you've chalked him up as being a tyrant, being cruel. Or you need to grow in your understanding that in his kingly reign he is a tender and loving sovereign.

And therefore, therefore we confess him as Jesus, as Christ, as son and as lord.

Remember, the center of our faith is not an abstract theory. It is not a doctrinal assertion. The center of our faith is a person. And as that Heidelberg catechism reminds us, this should be to us a comfort.

What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ.

[25 : 46] The full answer to that first question is longer but that much at least is well worth memorizing. What is your comfort in life and in death?

What a wonderful question to be able to answer. Folks, this is personal. This should be to us a comfort that we know this Jesus. That we know He has us.

He's got us. This Jesus should be a source of comfort. And it should be a source of clarity as well.

We already parted company with Hinduism and a huge swathe of Eastern faith in the assertion of God the Father as maker of heaven and earth. And now in this second paragraph when we define Jesus as the Son, co-eternal, equal to the Father, when we confess Him as Lord, well now in this we part company with Judaism and with Islam.

And so Christianity is left to stand alone. It is this identity identity of Jesus on which Christianity stands or falls.

[26 : 57] This is the distinctiveness. Our faith rests upon Him alone. And there are a huge variety of beliefs and understandings about who Jesus is because it's an important question.

The Koran talks about Jesus. Muslims believe Jesus is one of the greatest prophets God ever sent to humankind. Jews, well principally they see Jesus as a false messianic claimant.

One of the most successful at leading so many people astray from the truths of Judaism. Some Hindus view Jesus as an incarnation of Vishnu. Most atheists and agnostics see Him as a historical person but mostly wholly irrelevant to our daily life.

Maybe at best a good teacher, an example to emulate along with many other examples down through history. Some people even who claim to be Christians as we've considered already.

Some view Jesus somewhere between an insurance policy and a genie in a bottle. But Jesus rejects all of these understandings of Him, doesn't He?

[28 : 08] He cannot be just a prophet because He claimed equality with God. He cannot be just a teacher because He claimed the authority to forgive sins and so on and so on and so on.

Who you say Jesus is is the most fundamental question. Perhaps many of you will be familiar with C.S. Lewis and certainly with the Narnia novels.

Many of you will be familiar with this assertion as well. He says, based on the claims that Jesus made about Himself, He cannot be a good teacher. For that matter, He cannot be just a prophet.

But rather, says Lewis, He must be either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord. Or if you prefer brevity to alliteration, you can have mad, bad, or God.

Folks, He has to be one of those, doesn't He? Either He's an outright liar who has made it all up and has held on to this lie to an incredible degree of self-discipline as He was butchered on that cross.

[29 : 07] Either that or He's crazy. It is a fantasy. Or, or He is who He says He is. And if He is, then we cannot be indifferent to that claim.

We can't afford to ignore that claim. But we must respond to it in some fashion. We must see Him as Jesus, Christ, the Son of the Father, and our Lord.

So I don't know about you, but I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Let's pray. Lord God, thank You for revealing Yourself.

Thank You that we have in Your Word a sufficient explanation in order that we may know You, that we may recognize who You are and what You have done.

Thank You that in Jesus that revelation is fleshed out in the person of the Son who reveals the glory of the Father. And Lord, we thank You also for the wisdom of men through the ages who have taken those truths of Your Word and distilled and condensed them into this form that we can consider, that we can profitably memorize and take to heart.

[30 : 41] Lord, as we reflect on Jesus this morning, Lord, help us to grapple with the reality of who He is, where in one of these areas we have not fully understood, where we have been uncomfortable, perhaps where we have not wanted to allow Him to be Lord in our lives.

Lord, shape us, fashion us, guide us into Your truth we ask. Amen.