

Lord of All

Joshua 3:7–17, Acts 10:36

Today, we continue our examination of Peter’s sermon at the house of Cornelius, a Roman army officer based in Caesarea, a Roman city in Palestine. The prophet Jonah had earlier preached to Gentiles at Nineveh, but Peter’s sermon in the house of Cornelius was the first sermon of the Christian era preached to a congregation of uncircumcised Gentiles.

Our text today is a single verse: “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.” Clearly, Peter’s focus is Christ. Christ is the eternal Word, the bringer of peace, the Lord of all. First,

1. The eternal Word

Peter speaks of “the word which God sent to the children of Israel.” There is a double meaning here. “The word which God sent” is the *message* of his salvation. But the word for “word” in the original is *logos*, as in the first verse of John’s gospel, “In the beginning was the Word”—the *logos*, the word that was made flesh and lived among men for thirty-three years, died for our sins and rose again the third day. So here is the word that was sent to the children of Israel—that is, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. But Christ *himself* is that word, that *logos*. The word is the preaching of Christ, but the word *is* Christ. The church has no other message but Christ.

Unlike every other son and daughter of Adam, Jesus Christ is the preexistent One—the one who has existed from eternity as the eternal Son of God. There is one God, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father, in order to be a father, must have a Son. Since the Father is eternal, the Son must be eternal as well. God cannot change; it is impossible that the first Person of the blessed Trinity could be God without being the Father. It is impossible that God could have existed as God, and only later become the Father, for then God would have changed. God emphatically states, “I am Yahweh, I change not” (Mal. 3:6)—“I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Our very existence as members of the human race depends on the unchangeability of the Lord God. God the Father did not lately become God the Father; he was the Father from all eternity. The Son is the eternal Word who existed beside the Father from eternity past. The Father says to the Son, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Ps. 2:7). The Son was begotten of the Father from eternity past—the eternal day. This is “the word which God sent to the children of Israel.” How was he sent to Israel? Through the message of the prophets, through the written Scriptures, and through preincarnate appearances—Christophanies. When Daniel’s three friends were cast into the burning fiery furnace for refusing to bow down before Nebuchadnezzar’s image, Nebuchadnezzar asked his advisors, “Did not we

cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” His advisors answered him, “True, O king.” Then Nebuchadnezzar observed, “Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Dan. 3:24–25). The person who stood with the three Hebrew men as they were persecuted for their faith was “the Son of God,” what the heathen Nebuchadnezzar described as בַּר־אֱלֹהִים, *bar-elahin*, *son of the gods*, was actually the preincarnate Christ, standing with his people. *Christ* is the message of the prophets, of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the theophanies. He is the preexistent one, the one of whom the Bible says, “when the fulness of the time was come, God *sent forth* his Son” (Gal. 4:4). No purely human birth is ever described this way. Jesus is the Son of Mary—but he is God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who has existed from eternity past. He is the eternal Word. He knows the end from the beginning. He can do all his holy will. He does not lack for power. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. He is the eternal Word.

This is the message of the Bible. From the time of Adam’s sin it was announced that the seed of the woman¹ would “bruise”—that is, strike a mortal blow to—the head of the serpent. Sin had entered the world, sin would cause incalculable damage, but sin would ultimately be vanquished by him who would be born of a woman—the eternal word made flesh.

Here is the message of the incarnation. Every man, woman and child who has ever been born is a descendant of Adam, and has inherited Adam’s sin. “As in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). But Christ is the eternal Word made flesh—God in human flesh. He is sinless.

This was the word—the message—which was sent to the children of Israel. God had chosen Israel to be a light to the nations.² Israel was not to keep the light to itself. Israel was to spread the gospel to the nations. Israel failed, but ultimately the church—through the power of the Holy Spirit—will be effective. At the final day, men, women and children from every kingdom, tribe and nation will surround the throne of the Lamb, singing the praises of God through all eternity. What a day that will be!

Christ is the eternal Word; secondly, Christ is

2. The bringer of peace

As he preaches to Cornelius, his household and his invited guests, Peter says: “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, *preaching peace* through Jesus Christ.” Here, the word for preaching means literally *telling the good news*. There are two words for preaching in Peter’s sermon. This, the first, means *to tell the*

¹ “*Her Seed*,” Gen. 3:15

² Isa. 42:1, 51:4

good news. The second, in the very next verse in the words “the baptism which John preached,” is the word meaning *to declare authoritatively as a herald of the king*. But here, in the phrase “preaching peace through Jesus Christ,” Peter uses the more informal word: *to share the good news*. Yes, when Jesus came, he was the preacher *par excellence*, declaring authoritatively as a herald of God the Father. But as he went around the land of Palestine as an itinerant preacher, he shared the good news—the good news fulfilled in himself. In this way he is an example to all who follow him. Not every Christian is ordained to declare the gospel authoritatively as an official emissary of the King of kings, but every Christian, regardless of his calling, has divine authority to share the Good News. What is the Good News? It is the good news concerning Jesus Christ. As Jesus instructed the demon-possessed man whom he delivered from his miserable condition, whom the townspeople were amazed to find “sitting and clothed and in his right mind.” Jesus told him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” This is the Good News of Christ, and a person doesn’t have to be an ordained minister to share it. Yes, dear follower of Christ, you too, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”³ Go tell the Good News!

The good news is that Christ is the bringer of peace! Peace is an elusive quality in this sinful world. The nations rage. Oppressors extend their power over the oppressed. People can’t sleep at night because worry and the cares of life weigh down on their minds. Men and women vainly try to find peace in distractions, in substances, in entertainments. But peace eludes them. The reason is that they are seeking in the wrong places. The only true peace is Jesus Christ: “He Himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:14).

The peace of which Peter preaches is peace with God. Because of sin, man in his unregenerate state is at enmity with God. What is enmity? *Mutual hatred or ill will*. “The carnal mind is *enmity* against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8). God is good, he is holy; sinful men cannot stand in the presence of a holy God. But Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. He himself is our peace. He went to the cross to die for our sins. By faith, his perfect righteousness is credited to all who look to him. He tells us, “*Peace* I leave with you, my *peace* I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

³ Mark 5:19

Peace is the opposite of enmity. The apostle Paul would later write, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Christian, you have been justified by faith. You have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God calls you to be an instrument of his peace, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. Thirdly, Christ is

3. The Lord of all

Peter says to Cornelius’ household, “preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.” These words, “Lord of all,” are familiar to Christians. Sadly, we often mouth them glibly without giving full consideration to what they mean.

When the people of God stood on the bank of the River Jordan when the river was at flood stage, overflowing its banks, Joshua spoke to the people. In so many words he told them that God was about to perform a miracle. As soon as the priests stepped out into the roiling waters of the Jordan, God would stop up the waters, so that the people could march through on dry ground—clearly a miracle. Joshua told the people, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: Behold, the ark of the covenant of *the Lord of all the earth* is crossing over before you into the Jordan.” The Old Testament people of God foreshadowed the New Testament church. God dwelt among his people. The symbol of his presence was the ark of the covenant, carried by the priests. God would be among his people as they conquered all their enemies and took possession of the Promised Land, Canaan. In like manner now the New Testament people of God is the church. And God even now dwells among his people as we go forth conquering all his and our enemies through the gospel, bound for the heavenly Canaan.

But listen closely to the words of Joshua: “The ark of the covenant of *the Lord of all the earth* is crossing over before you. . . . as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, *the Lord of all the earth*, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off.” Twice Joshua refers to אֲדֹנָי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ, *adōn kol-ha-aretz*, “the Lord of all the earth.” These are the only occurrences of this term in the Old Testament.

But just before his ascension the Lord Jesus Christ made the stupendous claim, “All power is given unto me *in heaven* and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is Lord, not just of all the earth, but of heaven too! Clearly, this is a claim of deity. Jesus is saying, “I in my person possess all the authority of God Almighty. I am Lord, not just of all the earth, but of heaven too! I possess limitless authority and power. I am God Almighty, the Lord of all.” Peter, understanding this under divine inspiration, declared before Cornelius that Jesus is πάντων κύριος, *pandōn kyrios*—Lord of all!

There is nothing in all the created order that is outside the control of our Lord Jesus' Christ—nothing!

Christian, this is a truth that should bring great comfort to you in the midst of affliction. As we are taught in the Heidelberg Catechism, “What do you believe when you say: I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth? That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of nothing made heaven and earth with all that is in them, who likewise upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence, is for the sake of Christ his Son my God and my Father; in whom I so trust as to have no doubt that he will provide me with all things necessary for body and soul; and further, that whatever evil he sends upon me in this vale of tears, he will turn to my good; for he is able to do it, being almighty God, and willing also, being a faithful Father.”⁴

Yes, even in the midst of affliction, “Jesus Christ ... is Lord of *all*.” We who have been raised in the church are familiar with these words, “he is Lord of all.” But do not always stop to consider what these words mean. Yet the centurion Cornelius had never heard them before. When Peter said to the centurion, “Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all,” it was a positively revolutionary statement. Cornelius was an officer in the Roman army. He had taken an oath of allegiance to Caesar. He had sworn that he would faithfully execute all that the Emperor commands, that he would never desert his service, and that he would not seek to avoid death for the Roman republic. That oath was called *sacramentum*, the basis of our word *sacrament*. The *sacramentum* rendered the swearer *sacer*—*sacred*, *given to the gods*.⁵ The Romans considered the emperor a god. *Divi filius*, a Latin phrase meaning *divine son*, *son of a god*, was a favorite title of Caesar Augustus. The Roman Senate recognized Caesar as a divinity. Julius Caesar was referred to as *Divus Iulius* (the divine Julius). His adopted son Octavian styled himself *Divi filius* (*son of the deified one*, *son of the god*). The title was also applied to some of Augustus' successors, notably Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian.⁶

When Peter declared before Cornelius that Jesus Christ is “Lord of all,” he clearly meant that Jesus Christ is Lord even of Caesar! Peter was asking Cornelius, “Who is Lord: Christ or Caesar?” And if Cornelius was to be baptized into the church of Jesus Christ, he must renounce his oath to Caesar and declare his supreme loyalty to Jesus Christ.

And so it is for us as well. Christian, you have received the sacrament of baptism. In your membership vows you have declared your supreme loyalty to Jesus Christ. You have declared before the world that you “acknowledge Jesus

⁴ <https://all-of-grace.org/heidelberg.html>

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacramentum_\(oath\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacramentum_(oath))

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divi_filius

Christ as your sovereign Lord.” You have promised that you will “serve him, forsake the world, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life.” Jesus Christ is your Lord. That is your confession. You have enlisted in his service. Whatever you do, you are duty-bound to obey Christ.

This past week I stumbled onto a the website of a mainline Presbyterian church in Florida. This church has husband-and-wife co-pastors; that, of course, means that one of their pastors is a woman, contrary to the word of God. In pointing this out I mean no ill-will at all toward women: God loves women, the law of God protects women, the Son of God was born of a woman, the Lord Jesus Christ ministered to women, the church of Christ values the gifts of women; but according to the Bible, men and women have unique and different callings, and the Lord of the church has clearly ordered that women are not “to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12)—that is, are not to lead the public worship of the church. But not only does the church onto whose website I stumbled have a woman pastor, it also has what it calls a gay-straight “group of Christians who come together for worship, friendship and to share God’s love with all,” that educates the church to expand its “welcome of LGBTQIA+ people, to affirm their gifts for ordained office, and to uphold marriage equality for all.” Now faithful Presbyterian churches recognize that all men and women are sinners who need to be reconciled to a holy God. Faithful Presbyterian churches sincerely welcome *all* people to come hear the gospel. Faithful Presbyterian churches show the love of Christ to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. But loving gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people involves telling them *the truth*—that is, that their chosen lifestyle is *sin*, contrary to the word of God, and that they—like all of us—need to repent of their sin, and forsake it, and flee to Jesus Christ for mercy. Those who adhere to a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender lifestyle and refuse to repent of their sin are unqualified to be ordained as ministers, elders or deacons in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The true church of Christ follows the Lord of the church who said, “He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (Matt. 19:4–5). This is the infallible word of the Lord of the church. Jesus Christ is “Lord of all,” and faithful churches are duty-bound to obey their Lord in everything—even when it goes against the trend of popular culture. Sadly, the church whose website I stumbled across is an ostensibly Presbyterian church that refuses to obey Jesus Christ. Churches such as that one must hear the word of Christ, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). God has revealed his will in the Holy Bible. The most loving thing a church can do is to proclaim and teach the Holy Bible. A faithful church cannot be more loving than her Lord! Our Lord welcomed sinners but told them, “Go and sin no more.” The

Lord of the church never said to anyone, “It doesn’t matter how you live; you can follow me and hold onto your chosen sin.” It is most *unloving* to tell a person he or she can be a Christian and continue living a sinful lifestyle. God commands all men and women everywhere to repent.

The point is, as the apostle Peter put it, that Jesus Christ is “Lord of all.” That “all” is unrestricted; there is no aspect of life over which Jesus Christ is not Lord. Christ is Lord of all, and those who follow Christ must submit to his lordship in everything.

At the time of Cornelius there were statues of Caesar everywhere. On appointed days, feasts were held, and all the populace had to pass before the cast image of Caesar and bow before him as god. Cornelius had taken the *sacramentum*; he was dedicated to Caesar as god. Now, he learned the truth. Caesar is not lord; Jesus Christ is Lord! He is Lord of *all*. He is Lord even of Caesar. His church is his kingdom—the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The state is *not* lord of all; the state has no rule over the church. Civil governments that forbid the church from meeting are trying to lord it over Christ, and they will answer for their folly. God tells the princes of this world, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations” (Ps. 82:6–8). The Psalmist prays, “O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm. Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish, that they may know that You, whose name alone is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth” (Ps. 83:13–18).

O church of Jesus Christ, your ultimate loyalty is to Christ alone. *He* is Lord of all. The church’s message is the same throughout the ages: Christ is the eternal Word, the bringer of peace, the Lord of *all*.